POLITICS OF *XU*: BODY POLITICS IN CHINA

by

Peng Yu

A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Political Science

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2015

ABSTRACT
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Peng Yu

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015
Under the Supervision of Professor Kennan Ferguson

This dissertation examines body politics in the People's Republic of China. It first closely looks at Zhuangzi's idea of *xu* by analyzing the major aspects of the term—blandness, lack of substance, spontaneity, dispossession, incompleteness, and absurdity. It then argues that the concept of *xu* generates profound implication for politics by bringing up a particular mode of politics—politics of indeterminacy. In this mode of politics, power relation and power structure are never settled. Instead, they morph without being actualized. Examined in this context, the body for Zhuangzi is understood as an indeterminate entity whose political agency is attributed to its capacity in re-articulating power relation by constantly receiving and transforming a manifold of forces. That the body can be alternatively construed this way is crucial for our re-examination of the shaping of reshaping of identity in the contemporary Chinese society. In this light, the work investigates two cases—the Cultural Revolution and the state capitalism to find out in what specific ways the body, identity and politics are intertwined in manifesting the story of changing political relations in the everyday life of the ordinary Chinese people. The work contends that the making of the subjectivity is an indeterminate process in which one's identity is impossible to be fixed. It can never be composed with certainty. The construction of identity is a process of detachment by which one experiences the unexperienced without being settled around a center. The making of the political, to Zhuangzi, is thus founded on this indeterminacy to create new self and dissident political subject.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a farewell to an epoch—a decade of uncertainty and contradiction mixed with hope, effort, enlightenment, joy, inspiration, optimism, struggle, frustration, hesitation, fear, anxiety, loneliness, pessimism. I'm glad it's finally over, for better or for worse, and I'm glad I went through it. I'm pretty sure the guy who spent the last two years of his college dreaming about the other side of the world ten years ago had never envisioned such a story lying ahead of him. He began with Hemingway at Ningbo University and ends with Zhuangzi at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. No matter how temporally and geographically distant they may be, I believe he would be happy and proud to know that he eventually made it through. Life is never planned, perhaps. It is an encounter. What makes it most fascinating and worth living is we are fortunate enough to have someone to grow and live with, endure and appreciate together. The best part of life, as a journey, is less about its destination than about whom you will meet and share it with, expectedly or unexpectedly—those who come to your life and offer you their warmest company along the way. As important witnesses of my life in the past ten years, they shaped the person who I am, and without them, this dissertation is virtually impossible. Hence, some people must be mentioned here.

First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to my advisor, Kennan Ferguson. At an early point when political theory was no longer within my plan, Kennan re-inspired me. He encouraged me enormously and helped me retrieve my passion for theory. His brilliant works opened the door of political theory to me, rekindled my enthusiasm and taught me to think as a political theorist. His acute vision pointed a promising direction for my academic pursuit and helped me start my professional career. During all these

years, Kennan's inspiration, encouragement, tolerance and patience have firmly guided me through the thick and thin. His strong and persistent support is indispensible for the completion of my degree. Without Kennan, this would be an unimaginable journey for me.

I want to thank many people in the Political Science Department. I want to thank Shale Horowitz for being a good friend and being always available to help at every stage of my PhD career. He gave me enormous support with our Xinjiang-Tibet project. It turned out to be such an interesting project, and I was really excited to see it coming out in publication. I had a wonderful time with the 2013 United Nations Summer Program in the New York City as well. Shale showed his incredible trust and support of me during the organization of the event. To that, I'm also very indebted to him. I also want to thank Jennifer Smith with whom I took three graduate seminars in comparative politics. Jenny proved herself to be one of the best professors I ever had. I want to thank her for what I learned from all those inspiring discussions we had both inside and outside the classroom. I want to thank Natasha Sugiyama for the great seminar on democratization in Fall 2011 and her helpful advice for my campus visit at Earlham College. I'm also grateful for Ivan Ascher for his help with my preparations for the preliminary exam and the dissertation. Ivan is always there when I'm in need of help. I just can't thank him more. I thank Bob Beck and Barrett McCormick for consenting to join my dissertation committee and giving me invaluable advice. I also want to thank Dave Armstrong with whom statistics made so much more sense. I feel lucky to have Dave as such a knowledgeable and skillful professor. There are many colleagues in the department whose names deserve mentioning: Cho Wondeuk, Michael Hansen, Nick Davis, Kelly Gleason, Sky Ammann,

Shawn Fettig, Casio Muniz, Bernardo Vimpi, Park Jihye. Thank you all guys for giving me such a wonderful time at the department! Being polisci PhD students, we rock! I especially want to thank my students—they are the most incredible young people I have seen!

Finally, I want to acknowledge a few more individuals. My parents, Yu Daohua and Li Xinhua, have always stood by my side during good and hard times, giving me more than what I could ask for. I love you both. I want to thank Zhang Chen for her enduring love, encouragement, understanding, and tolerance. Her company made my life much easier. I'm also thankful for Zheng Jiawen and Feng Miao, with whom I shared all those high and low moments. Through our endless chitchats, we learn to understand what it means to be a PhD student. In all those discussions, complaints, laughs, we made our dark days shine forth as bright as stars! To Jiawen, Chunchun will be immortal as she always will :P To Miao, please tell Maomao I am a Leo guy, then as now :) Du Xiao, Wei Hang and Zhuo Li: how could I possibly live it through without the gang of four? You three have been the biggest source of joy and consolation during all these years. We grew together and we will always live on top of each other. Thank you all for being in my life. Last but certainly not least, I want to thank Zhong Ling, Guo Qun and Gong Ke for making my life different. I'm blessed to have you share my life, and I'm blessed with your love. Thank you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Just one thing: that denseness and that strangeness of the world is the absurd.
—Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

The Rising China, the Rising Paradox

China today is a country of paradoxes. On one hand, the world is amazed by China's rapid economic growth and modernization over the past thirty years. On the other hand, China is a country of mounting internal issues, as exemplified by its recent history of troubling topics, including human rights, freedom of speech, political corruption, environment pollution, and food insecurity. This juxtaposition of impressive economic achievement and grave internal issues begs serious questions of how China's paradox can be understood with respect to its particular form of rule. What is equally at stake, perhaps, is the controversial ramification of its politics founded on its distinctive form of governance. In this regard, the "China model"—combining state-sponsored economic mobilization with repressive authoritarian governance—is itself a paradox. As Fukuyama and Zhang note, the China model features "a centralized, bureaucratic and authoritarian government" and a state boosted economic system in which the country "has not been prone to rely on the market economy in its development" (2014: 62-63). Echoing Fukuyama and Zhang, Breslin also suggests "strong government and stability together form the political basis of a number of characterizations of the China model" (2011: 1330). Yet, this model comes with a high price. As a result of the China model, many internal issues are not addressed effectively, including various social, economic, political, historical and cultural problems within China. However, the paradox is not only an

academic concept, but one that affects the everyday life of Chinese citizens, including myself.

In 2008, I served as the president of the Chinese Students and Scholars Association at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (from here on, UWM). That year turned out to be a very special year for both China as a country, and Chinese students like myself who was studying in foreign countries at the time. That year was marked by a series of politically sensitive events that triggered national and international discussions, including the Tibetan ethnic unrest, the Beijing Olympic Games and the Sichuan Earthquake. These controversial events were intertwined in a way that made them virtually impossible to separate one from another. For example the occurrence and crackdown of the Tibetan ethnic riot in March (five months before the opening of the Games) triggered a massive wave of international boycott of the Beijing Olympics. Later, the extravagant opening ceremony of the Games was sharply contrasted with the "Tofu-Dreg Project" (*doufu zha gongcheng*, referring to the poorly constructed school buildings) that was linked with the local schools' corruption scandal unveiled in the tragic Sichuan Earthquake in May of that year. In response to the negative international reports on China many Chinese students around the world gathered together to organize various activities in support of their country. This wave of global Chinese patriotism was also felt in my community at UWM. Despite my initial reluctance, I eventually gave in to the growing pressure from fellow Chinese students and organized two events—a march at the state capitol to promote the Beijing Olympics and a fundraising event at my university to collect donations for the victims of the Sichuan earthquake. Our patriotism was supported by the Chinese government. In an email, a consul from the Education Section of the

Chinese Consulate in Chicago wrote to me, “Dear Peng, we are much moved by the students who want to express love and loyalty to our homeland. It is important that we express our responses when we are hurt…We are highly educated Chinese representatives, and we just want to let the public know that we are hurt.” A few days later, I received a package with many small Chinese national flags from the Consulate for the organized march along with a few copies of DVDs on the history of Tibet that were officially approved by the Chinese government.

Unfortunately, the march did not go well, as we were not only countered by a group of Tibetan activists loudly shouting “Shame on China!” at us but were also questioned by a few Americans on the Chinese government’s ethnic policy as well as our motivations of promoting the state-sponsored Games. Their confrontation caught many of us off guard, and some of us were very frustrated and disappointed. I still vividly remember how upset my friend, Bingying, was when an aggressive woman angrily listed the Chinese government’s human rights violations. Bingying was speechless and I pulled her away from the hostility without knowing how to comfort her. Many of us left Madison that day confused—a contradictory feeling about both our country, a rising power received by the international community with a love-hate attitude, and us, young Chinese students who may or may not be the “representatives” of the country but identify as Chinese citizens nonetheless. We felt disheartened once again when we were organizing the fund raising event for the Sichuan Earthquake victims at UW-Milwaukee. When approached and asked if interested in making a donation, one passerby stoically responded, “Your country is rich enough. It doesn’t need my money.” Although one cannot expect everyone to show sympathy toward the victims of the Sichuan Earthquake,

this individual's indifference again struck many of us with frustration. In both cases, the worst part of this experience was that none of us knew what to respond to such challenging reactions. We remained silent, upset and frustrated. This silence was an ironic indication of our inability to sufficiently defend not only the political acts of China but also the moral ground of our patriotism—it was virtually a moment of loss and frustration. This frustration was not simply about China's controversial image projected onto the world stage—a gulf between self-claimed peaceful rising and the tumultuous internal politics. Rather, deep down, it was more about how the China experience in any way affected us in terms of what it means to be Chinese—a concern (sometimes even anxiety) ultimately about our self-identity. In many ways, this shared and permeating experience of frustration among many of us spoke of the fact that we were caught in the unfathomable obscurity with respect to how we were viewed by outsiders, and more importantly, how we were viewed by ourselves. It is perhaps the latter that troubled us most—a result of the difficult choice between being "representatives" (as the consul suggests) of the country and who else we can possibly be. Being lost in silence meant that we were really not prepared to solve this dilemma. When our patriotism was seriously challenged, we apparently lost our ground in which we can firmly plant our feet to answer the questions of who we are and what we stand for.

The difficulty of this dilemma is largely due to the fact that disguised in the growing economic strength, China is gradually presenting itself as "pessoptimist," to borrow the terminology from William Callahan. A "pessoptimist nation" is the intertwined mesh of both pessimist and optimist feelings within China that account for the country's uncertain, and yet quickly changing, behaviors both inside and outside the

country. The term offers us a valuable perspective in viewing the contradictory feelings of today's Chinese people toward the relationship between the country's pride-humiliation ridden past, present and future. In his own words, "To put it simply, China is a pessoptimist nation. To understand China's glowing optimism, we need to understand its enduring pessimism, and vice versa. To understand China's dreams, we also need to understand its nightmares" (Callahan, 2010: 9). The term can be particularly useful for understanding the intermingling of both the positive and negative sides of the Chinese experience—a paradoxical historical development replete with contradictions—as well as how these experiences are written into the composition of each Chinese individual's identity today. In this regard, what the term "pessoptimist nation" is alternatively suggesting is that the country is identified with its complicated historical experience, which supplies the state and its people with enormous and yet contradictory materials to shape personal identity. For Callahan, the effect of "pessoptimism" is very much open-ended and unsettled. Although the state has been making efforts to flatten the vicissitudes of those historical experiences into a coherent narrative, fragments of deviation often escape the historical narratoracy to register the "pessoptimist nation" with a more diversely indeterminate image. While in the state's propaganda, being a Chinese means to bear the duty of standing with the state in rejuvenating the great country. However, its real meaning is often more convolutedly composed, as demonstrated in our experiences of being "overseas Chinese," thereby eventually alienating us from the official state line. In the case of the Beijing Olympics, for example, even though being chosen to host the Games was supposed to be celebrated as a national success, the political symbol of the fiesta was tampered by many of us as unconfident citizens in front of confrontations,

which turned this grandiose event into an oxymoron. We learned that we are not simply what we are told we are. But who else could we be?

This paradox generates profound political implication for the lives of the Chinese people. In fact, the strangeness of being a Chinese today unavoidably lends itself to a myth, one that is paradoxically interwoven by both the crying aspiration of belonging to a new power of the century on one hand, and the overwhelming sense of frustration over the state's politics that hinders the possibility for more social changes to come, on the other. Such moments of frustration penetrate into every ordinary Chinese person's daily life in which our identity is bound by the magnificence of the "China Dream," and yet simultaneously burdened with the cost of undelivered promises. From this perspective, the feelings of frustration not only engender but also proliferate the "pessoptimist" view among the ordinary Chinese individual toward how our relationship with the state is construed. That many of the Chinese today frequently share the common feeling of frustration, here and there, from time to time, is very much an unavoidable indication of our paradoxical "pessoptimist" attitude—invoked by a deep sense of uncertainty—toward the perplexing image of the "motherland" and ourselves as Chinese citizens imagined in our patriotism.

One Possible Perspective

This work is dedicated to these frustrations. It is a devotion to the unraveling of the political paradox that keeps frustrating not only myself and the fellow Chinese students but also those ordinary Chinese who share similar feelings with us, in search for identity. This research seeks to explore this frustration as a result of the indeterminate dynamics of the identity composition shaped in the context of Chinese politics. It aims to

investigate the root of the frustration in order to find out how it is formed, sustained, nurtured and inflected by the interpenetration between the top and the bottom. By interpenetration, I specifically mean a particular mode of engagement in which inter-embeddedness occurs in the exchange of forces between the state and its people. It happens when both sides receive and recycle each other's force in ways that are far from being pre-determined. When analyzing this interpenetration, the work tries to eschew the determinism-oriented approach by which either side is said to triumph over the other (e.g., the state as a power juggernaut keeps eroding the society or the organized social forces successfully push the boundary of the state's power for democratization). The problem of this approach is that it captures only one side of the "pessoptimist" view, reducing the complexity of the issue to a single-sided, overly simplified situation. Different from this approach, this research examines the interpenetration construed as a realm of unknowability, which emerges as a consequence of unpredictable spontaneity that escapes the control of both sides. In fact, this realm brings in a special kind of absurdity in the form of an enduring moment of incompatibility between the enacting and the enacted. Rather than viewing this interpenetration as an enclosure, this work treats it as an open field imbued with a variety of forces by a multiple of agents in a manifold of ways, in which actions can never be reconciled into one simplistic unity. Rather, they inaugurate spontaneous political events with unpredictable results.

The political significance of this realm hinges on its engendering of a particular mode of politics—politics of indeterminacy—as a means of redefining the political status of a subject within power structures, or rather as a radical re-articulation of how we refer to power relation in the first place in composing political identity. In this specific mode of

politics, indeterminate subjectivity has become the necessary pre-condition, rather than an undesirable consequence of politics. In other words, the sustaining condition of politics is inseparable from the incompatible power relations in the making of the political subjects, which helps bring about nomadic vis-à-vis situated subjectivity as the indispensible part of politics. The field of indeterminacy is a grey zone that witnesses the temporality and fragility of political power and political relation. In it, politics is no longer obsessive with institutional/organizational structure and actions; formal procedure such as voting and representative system never occupies the center. On the contrary, it stresses the de-politicizing process in which the realm of politics gets extended horizontally and attends to question such as how politics can possibly include rather than exclude more potential agents. In this circumstance, self-identity is about the creation of and sustenance through more incompatible contradictions as necessary components of identity composition. What matters for who we are is the very precarity retained in the power relation occurred during the interpenetration between the state and the individuals such that the answer can by no means be found at either side of the two ends alone. Although this precariousness undoubtedly leads to frustration, it nevertheless gives us the opportunity to reflect on more possibilities about ways in which the frustrating ambivalence of being a Chinese could in fact be more politically productive.

The work proposes to focus on the body as an example *par excellence* of this grey zone in elaborating this distinctive mode of politics in the specific context of the Chinese politics. Its theoretical framework relies on the ideas of Zhuangzi (ca. 369-286 BC) to explain how and why the body is an ambivalent and yet promising site that enacts the politics of indeterminacy. A prominent philosopher who spent his life in the chaotic

period of the Warring States era (ca. 475-221 BC), Zhuangzi follows the intellectual legacy of Daoism and writes extensively on a variety of topics. His writing is often studied for the distinctive skepticism and satire embedded in its characteristic metaphorical allegories. The project explores Zhuangzi's writing as a significant text of political theory—an often neglected aspect in the study of Zhuangzi's philosophy. Its focus here is how various forms of power relation is articulated in addressing different modes of politics. Particularly, this research proceeds its analysis with an eye toward the interrelation between Zhuangzi's political imagination and its implication for the body with both constituting the crucial segment of my analysis. That Zhuangzi sheds important light on the political meaning of the body not only offers us different perception of the body but more importantly enables us to find an alternative perspective in viewing politics in general—a valuable detour, perhaps, in showing us what else could be promisingly added to our discussion of politics.

From one perspective, to choose the body as a unity of analysis for this research means to understand it by rejecting the notion of essentialism that aims to reduce the body to a set of pre-given roles as consequences of fixed historical/cultural/political production and reproduction. Rather, we must take the body as an indeterminate site constructed without fixed forms and permanent actors. In fact, it morphs in conjunction with the changing interaction of a variety of forces that cannot be settled in a static morphology. That means, we should regard the body as a grey zone, forever unknown and alien to the interior and exterior environment in which it lives. This perception of the body invites the political import of Zhuangzi who recognizes, values and promotes this mode of indeterminacy. In general, Zhuangzi opposes a deterministic approach to politics

that aims to tie politics to essentialized structural ground (e.g., morality). To Zhuangzi, politics is composed of a multitude of indeterminate modes in which political relations are too nascent and variable to be finalized. This particular mode of politics, as Zhuangzi calls it, is *xu* (虛). In Zhuangzi's writing, *xu* is a very vague term whose elusiveness mainly comes from its changing connotations in different contexts. Zhuangzi uses the term to evoke a sense of uncertainty in which all things are intertwined without boundaries.

Thanks to its theoretical and methodological fluidity, this term is particularly helpful for understanding the frustrating instability of the Chinese politics whose particular existing condition often defies the explanatory power of any universal framework. Therefore, in this light, the political idea of *xu* is as much a theoretical issue as it is a methodological one. For one thing, the term itself institutes a system of theoretical/conceptual innovations to refine our ability in capturing those nuanced political differences emerged in the complexity of the changing Chinese society. For another, it lends itself to the improvement of the methodological approach so much so that one finds transcending theory/methodology of universality untenable. The exploration of Zhuangzi's idea of *xu* allows me to engage comparative political theory in a different way—one that is different, at least, from that of Fred Dallmayr. To Dallmayr, the purpose of comparative political theory "is precisely to move forward toward a more genuine universalism, and beyond the spurious 'universality' traditionally claimed by the Western canon and by some recent intellectual movement" (2004: 253). The key point of this approach, in Dallmayr's view, is to "take otherness seriously and hence not pretend to speak for all others universally" (2004: 254). Yet, although Dallmayr is aware that a

comparativist should not proceed from "a presumed self-righteousness or hegemonic arrogance," the problem of his approach is that it still fails to recognize the cultural-embeddedness that is inlaid in the specificity of a given culture, inherent to its socio-political context. Hence, Dallmayr's proposal does not solve the fundamental issue of comparative political theory. Rather, it only deepens the already-consolidated culture of otherness, an issue that has been bothering postcolonialists such as Edward Said. The fact is that the complexity of the contemporary Chinese society has already debunked and will keep defying the simplicity of all kinds of universalism. Is China going to be a responsible democracy or will it become another powerful autocracy? These are more or less clichéd questions which lack intellectual freshness. Although this is not to deny the legitimacy of the questions, they prove theoretically insufficient in addressing the rapid changing patterns of the Chinese society over the decades. They share similar function and destiny with the China model debate, at best. The problem of these questions lies in their inherent incapacity to go beyond this dualism (which is also a source of illness that troubles our politics today) of democracy vs autocracy. Instead of choosing a side between the two, what about a third possibility—that is, the country is moving toward a direction that resembles neither? This is very likely to be a route that can be neither envisioned by our experience in the past nor captured by our limited political catalogue at the present. If so, we are perhaps too early to conclude with our optimism or pessimism. The particularity of the China case urges us to find diversely different space and time in which politics can be alternatively conceived and operative. Put it another way, the experience of China is presenting us a third way as a frustrating puzzle to challenge our political wisdom. This is particularly important for our understanding of the identity

politics occurring in China. The ways in which the Chinese people are struggling with their individual and collective identities in a politically convoluted society indicates that theorizing politics from a new tradition is completely possible and necessary, even though its particularity may not be shared by outsiders in the first place. The absurdity of the Chinese case provides us with a good opportunity to reexamine the comparative methodology of political theory by exploring how different modes of politics can be reexamined via the particular experiences of the Chinese people in their daily lives. Fortunately, in dealing with this frustration, Zhuangzi's concept of *xu* can make sense of a variety of seemingly contradictory concepts. *Xu* is a strange term that resists and exact English equivalent. And yet, when applied to the conceptualization of the body, it may be powerful in helping understand China, the monster country that frequently morphs between its indeterminate statuses of human and beast, as well as its politics from a new perspective. In the following two sections, I further map out my specific points of this theoretical and methodological choice.

Zhuangzi, *Xu* and Politics

Zhuangzi was writing at a time when China was divided into eight separated states after the fall of the Zhou Dynasty and its politics were growing radically intractable and chaotic. The 250 years' history of the period was marked by frequent wars and conflicts among those individual states, and the country was torn apart into a turbulent state in which the states fought wars in order to conquer each other. And yet, on the other hand, the time also witnessed a famous golden era for Chinese philosophy (aka. pre-Qin philosophy) during which "a hundred schools of thought" blossomed and contended against each other. A new social class—the scholar class (*shi*)—began to rise along with

the flourishing intellectual movement. Philosophical thinkers from different schools competed against each other in order to influence the ruling class. At that time, for instance, Mencius was touring among the states to promote his reformed Confucianism while Mohism had its disciples everywhere preaching its thought (Fang, 2010). However, Zhuangzi was a noticeable exception. In many ways, Zhuangzi was a stranger to this mainstream intellectual movement. Not only did he opted for staying away from the mainstream by living a hermitic life, Zhuangzi also proposed "no-rule" and "uselessness" as a critical response to the celebration of the movement's common goal that aimed to improve the monarch's rule. However, Zhuangzi should by no means be considered as apolitical. In fact, his writing is so permeated with insightful political ideas that his dissonance with his peers has made his writing even more promising to look at.

In this research, Zhuangzi is read with an focus on his idea of *xu*. The term proves critical for two main reasons. First, the elusiveness of the term effectively embodies the very ambiguity it describes and thus necessitates a manifold of interpretations of it, virtually making it impossible for us to settle the concept on one and finalized meaning. For example, *xu* may denote the meaning of weakness in *xuruo* (虚弱), the meaning of fictitiousness in *xuni* (虚拟), or the meaning of emptiness in *xukong* (虚空); it could relate to the meaning of mirage or illusion as in *xuhuan* (虚幻), the meaning of formlessness in *xutai* (虚态), or the meaning of incompleteness as in *xushi* (虚实). That the term produces different nuances and connotations in varying contexts is suggestive of its fluidity. The amorphousness of *xu* is particularly interesting in Zhuangzi's writing. Throughout the *Zhuangzi*, *xu* has been described more as a living and existing condition under which "the ten thousand things" (*wanwu*, all things in the

universe) relate to each other in indeterminate relations. *Xu* has been used as an encompassing term to describe a variety of changing modes of existence. In other words, the use of the term, in Zhuangzi's writing, has moved beyond a monist sense by which a concept loses its ability to stretch and morph. We can further understand *xu* by contrasting it with Sartori's "ladder of abstraction." Reflecting on the problem of "conceptual stretch," Sartori writes, "a major drawback of the comparative expansion of the discipline is, then, that it has been conducive to indefiniteness, to undelimited and largely undefined conceptualization" (1970: 1035). The goal of "the ladder", thus, for Sartori, is to solve this issue (by moving up and down the ladder) so as to obtain the definiteness of a given concept. Yet, for Zhuangzi, *xu* is radically different. It relies on the stretchy part of it to denote its ambivalence.

This emphasizes *xu*'s elasticity and its political implication. It argued that what is political about the term comes from its very indeterminacy—a mode of politics in which power gets extended horizontally to include more relations before it defines itself in a set of presupposed structures. *Xu* is thus a political grey zone. Rather than demarcating for the purpose of categorization, it engages itself in blurring the boundaries such that power is no longer territorialized and hierarchically structured. In this sense, *xu* should not be confused with *yin* (阴). While *yin* only represents one end of the *yin-yang* balance, *xu* stresses the dynamic of the whole power spectrum. The difference is: *xu* refers to the dynamic in-betweeness between the two extremes—an approach through which the effect of the *yin-yang* equilibrium is retained. Thus, *xu* can be viewed as a political means by which the power contestation between the *yin* and *yang* is constantly maintained at its balance. In addition, the crucial part of this *xu*-ed grey zone is that it values agency. In

this grey zone, more agents are cordially invited to make the change. In the sense that *xu* keeps maintaining a notion of incompatibility precisely means that the actants relate themselves to each other while not being reduced to a singular unity. They act politically under various changing conditions out of weakness, incompleteness, emptiness, formlessness, etc. The substantive chapters (Chapters 2, 3, 4, & 5) further investigate in detail the meaning of *xu* in each aspect of the term to find out how specifically the concept lends itself to its political making.

The second reason has something to do with the ordinary, with each bit of the mundane, everydayness in it. The idea of the ordinary has captured the interests of many political theorists. For example, in *A Politics of the Ordinary*, Thomas Dumm sees the ordinary as an agent that "expresses and mediates politics, understood as a capacity and yearning" (1999: 5). What matters politically for Dumm is that the ordinary shifts our attention from norms and events to "processes through which a kind of constitution and amendation of human existence unfolds" (1999: 5). The ordinary, even in the form of boredom and loneliness, alludes to moments of uncertainty what engenders the fecundity of pluralizations of human actions. For Kennan Ferguson, the ordinary refers to a sense of incommensurability within everyday family life. With incommensurability, Ferguson outlines the condition of politics that is dependent on incommensurate familial relations: "the family is where people have the highest level of identification with one another, but also where their differences and distances seem most important" (2012: 27). That power relations thrive on indeterminate mutuality among family members implies that politics unquestionably lives on family. For Bonnie Honig, people's everyday activities shape the way politics is, not just vice versa: "every day, after all, new citizens are born, and still

others emigrate into established regimes. Every day, already socialized citizens mistake, depart from, or simply differ about the commitments of democratic citizenship" (2007: 3).

As shown in these writings, the ordinary is already saturated with its political connotations. What this research attempts is to add another layer of meaning to the political narrative of the ordinary. By focusing on *xu*, it unfolds Zhuangzi's depoliticizing approach to politics to re-explore the seemingly "apolitical" embedded within the Chinese people's everyday life. In this regard, the work launches a detour around the institutional/organizational/structural analyses of the country's politics by shifting my attention to how people's lives are lived in a political way, for Zhuangzi's political theory is virtually dead if left out of the everydayness. In fact, Zhuangzi encourages the discovery of politics in such areas as aesthetics, memory and body that tend to be neglected (or even ignored) by many political analysts. In Zhuangzi's writing, the concept of *xu* makes these realms so politically interesting that they can also get integrated into the people's ordinary life for the making of the political. According to Zhuangzi, aesthetic judgment, for instance, is dependent on the mode of *xu* to be formed. As Fang Yong rightly observes, Zhuangzi's aesthetics believes that "the beautiful is based on *zhen* (真, being true)—spontaneous inaction that restores the truthfulness of things," and that it is "a form of spiritual aesthetics that transcends all physical forms" (2010: 19). In this particular mode of *xu*, all forms recede back to emptiness in order to make room for indeterminate mutual transformation to happen among the ten thousand things.

In this process, Zhuangzi also proposes a particular kind of visual as a useful wedge into the political meaning of the blankness. That the emptiness should be visually

contemplated as such demands the collapse of traditional preying visuality by which the division between subject and object is fortified in relation to their statuses as the seer and the seen. Zhuangzi underlines the inner cultivation of people's aesthetic judgment through every day's visual appreciation of this *xu*-*wu* (nothingness). The political stake of the *xu*-ed aesthetics is its visual breach of the boundary between there-is and there-is-not. It declares the collapse of the walls that separate thing from each other. The politics of the ordinary, to Zhuangzi, hinges on the blurring of lines that demarcate boundaries. It is an orientation and outlook that eventually transcends oppositional dualism. So are the cases of the memory and the body. In the similar vein to the aesthetics, what matters most to the memory and the body is their existing conditions of indeterminacy. Like Zhuangzi's emptiness, both are formed and function in spontaneous ways that defy presupposed routes such that the past is blended into the present and formlessness is embodied in our everyday bodily practices. And both require this particular mode of visual as well to enact the making of the political.

Here, Zhuangzi resonates with Nishitani in terms of the creation of the space of randomness in which a preying subject's "tunnel vision" gets dissolved (Bryson, 1988: 87). To both Zhuangzi and Nishitani, this space must be formless to cast off the rigid frame created through the tunnel vision in embracing a universal field. For the latter, the universal field is by flinging ink onto the paper to bring in the force from outside to dissolve the zoning of the inside. For the former, the field of randomness is immersed in the permeating emptiness that defies the fixity of structure. What is at stake for both *xu* and Nishitani's *śūnyatā* (emptiness) is the composing of zones of indeterminacy where relations can break free from the subject who wants to exercise control over them. For

Zhuangzi, the stake of the "politics of vision" does not merely lie in the purpose of de-powering or decentering the subject (the making of a frustrated subject). Rather, it rests on the collapsing of the subject as well as the entailed knowledge possessed by the subject (the making of no subject). In other words, Zhuangzi's politics of the ordinary is also partly concerned with a transcending visual force-field developed in our everyday life through which "the ten thousand things" are seen to transform themselves via ceaselessly changing power relations. Visuality is therefore of special importance to this project, as the work will use paintings and films as good examples to illustrate how *xu* functions politically. This, in turn, justifies another vital part of the methodological choice: to examine *xu*, this research relies on those visual media to help me clarify through their special visual representations—the bland emptiness of the traditional Chinese landscape painting and the unique cinematic styles of the chosen films. In the following section, I explain another crucial part of the project—the body—in explaining its political stake for our understanding of the identity politics in China.

The Body and Politics: A Chinese Story

The body is political. With its political orientation, the body provides us with a particularly interesting perspective in viewing Chinese politics during the era of the People's Republic. The body shapes and is shaped by politics of the country. Throughout the country's turbulent political history, the body has not only been bearing the imprint of the state's political enactment but also intervening the politics in ways that may or may not be aware by the state and its people. The body has been so politically intertwined with the country's social/economic/political development that no serious student of Chinese politics can afford to ignore it. In this regard, what is more important is the fact that the

body actually embodies the political life of ordinary Chinese people. Its political wedge penetrates into almost every corner of Chinese people's lives from public health policy to family planning. Among others, the widespread food insecurity issue, the worsening environment pollution and the forced abortion and sterilization of women's body are good examples of how the body affects people's ordinary lives because they are profoundly influenced politically. The body is both a crucial symbol of and an indispensible participant of the political story.

In the state's official account, the national humiliation of the past 150 years or so has always been affiliated with the image of the "Sick Man of East Asia," which suggests the close link between China's deteriorating politico-economic condition with the poor physical health of its people. In the state's line as Callahan points out, "the Chinese body politic, which was disintegrating in the face of foreign aggression and domestic corruption, could only be strengthened through the robust health of many individual Chinese bodies" (2010: 8). The symbolism of individual Chinese person's body is politically significant. Callahan continues that to "'rejuvenate China' therefore means both strengthening Chinese people individually and strengthening China's state power" (Callahan, 2010: 5). As early as in 1952, Mao wrote the following words as his general policy for the country's sports development: "promote sports culture, build up the people's physiques (*fazhan tiyu yundong, zengqiang renmin tizhi*)." For Mao, the body not only ensures the socialist production in a continuous and sustainable way, but also represents China as a young vigorous and promising socialist country. My earliest encounter of this politicized sporting culture dates back to my elementary years in the early 1990s. Every day, when the eye exercise was broadcasted at school during break

time, the announcement always began with: "for the revolution, protect the eyesight and prevent myopia, let's now begin the eye exercise." Obviously, even for a group of ten-year-olds who had the least understanding of politics, the indoctrination of the idea about the political body still mattered. In fact, the words left us with such an ineradicable impression (through repetition, mostly) that they have become part of the collective memory of my generation. In some ways, they have even marked the collective identity of us.

Susan Brownell presents a helpful insight in this respect. In her anthropological study of the relation between sports, the body and the nation in China, she brings up the terminology of "somatization" in approaching the Chinese politico-social culture. By "somatization," Brownell refers to "the way in which social tensions are often expressed in a bodily idiom, so that calls for their resolution often center on healing and strengthening the body" (1995: 22). In the specific context of the Chinese society, "somatization" points to an intimate interdependence by which the tension between the individual, the family and the state is routinely expressed in its bodily metaphors. The fluidity of the term, as Brownell stresses, captures the very permeable boundaries of the relations among the individual, the social and the state. In the area of the sporting culture, for example, Brownell writes:

> Because of their bodily dependency on others, Chinese athletes do not perceive their bodies as entirely their own. Their interconnectedness with their families is primarily expressed through concerns about their reproductive organs; their interconnectedness with their work unit, and by extension the state, is expressed through an obsession with food. Somatization is a way of coping with the stresses of everyday life. For athletes, the main sources of stress are their relationship with their families and with the state (Brownell, 1995: 239).

In the Foucaultian sense, this interdependency is produced by the "dispositif"—a set of intertwined policing social apparatuses—to which the state and the family belong. In

Michael Shapiro's exploration of the ontology-apparatus relation in pursuit of a politics of life, he refers to Giorgio Agamben's re-inflection of Foucault's notion of "dispositif" as a concern about the division between two groups or classes. One is filed with living substances and the other is replete with apparatuses "in which living beings are incessantly captured" (2013). The powerful "dispositif" produces the conditioning discourse for interdependency by which the Chinese athletes' bodies exist and live. Their bodies undoubtedly bear the mark of tension that is somatized during the intermingling of a variety of social forces. The body is hence trained, disciplined and policed to ensure that the state's politics is able to penetrate into the people's everyday lives by influencing its very basic material foundation. The identity of the Chinese athletes is thus collectively owned by both the social and state apparatuses. Eventually, it deprives those men and women of their own bodily autonomy by shaping their personal identities.

Yet, the body is also capable of intercepting politics via its enactment of disruptive modes of politics. One case in point is demonstrated in Jie Yang's research of informal surrogacy in China. In addition to her discussion of how the Chinese young surrogates' bodies reflect an embodied "biopower" that is manufactured by various agents such as the state, the family and the market, Yang also asserts that the significant ways in which the "surrogates use their bodies to transform codes, forces and reform the self," ultimately "interacts and shapes local affective and political economies" (2015: 90). According to Yang, the agency of the surrogates' bodies is found in their capacity to converge and transform diverse social, political, economic forces that are acted upon them in order to trigger the infrastructure of the given community. As Yang writes:

"through their subjectivities and their bodies, surrogates engage or shape their own lives, as well as the lives of those involved in surrogacy and the local community" (2015: 98).

Here, the body is viewed and functions as a self-initiated actant whose political agency is evident in its power of recycling and reusing the imposed forces from the external. More importantly, in this recycling process, the surrogates' subjectivities become transformed as a result of their bodies' inherent political agency that enacts a mode of politics and disrupts the intermingled external forces of exploitation.

This work combines the legacy of both perspectives with my own study of how the body acts politically amidst the rapidly changing social/economic/political Chinese climate. It examines the body in relation to the interpenetration between state politics and ordinary Chinese people's everyday lives. It not only investigates how the body is formed as a consequence of the state's political/economic discourse but also addresses a way in which the body is reshaped due to its inherent agency. What should be noted here is that the re-instituted political meaning of the body is defined during this very process of interpenetration. It discusses how the body's political meaning works in connection with the identity politics in China. The work is particularly interested in how the body turns out to be a frustrating grey zone in which personal identity becomes more and more ambivalent and fluid rather than clarified and situated—a significant marker of the political inherent agency. It approaches the body with the goal in mind, that with ambiguity it should project more indeterminate power relations in the making of the political. The body should be thought of as a mediating force by which individual Chinese people find more possibilities in their everyday lives to engage in politics in ways that previously have not been undertaken. They find themselves owing to the body

for the open space it created and therefore makes policing politics more difficult to enforce.

The work focuses on two specific cases—the Cultural Revolution and the state capitalism. The primary reason for this case selection is simple: both cases share one fundamental similarity—that is, they begin their political projects by engaging the body with established purposes and end up with indeterminate results. For Mao's Cultural Revolution, the body is aesthetically projected onto its propaganda fronts, and yet, as will be shown in the later part of the thesis, it escapes this discourse and finds itself in unsettled conditions. The story of state capitalism is not any different: the state executes its power based on the particular form of governance that combines both its authoritarian rule on the political side and the state sponsored "free market" on the economic side. This model of governance aims to shape the migrant peasants' body into submissive politico-economic instrument. However, the body keeps resisting this political rule by turning itself into an ambiguity.

The work will methodologically exploit this indeterminacy embedded in both cases. It will unveil how the body inaugurates new political actions in re-structuring the state's politics. This analysis does so by engaging the visual experience of three films—*The Red Lantern* (1971), *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) and *Beijing Bicycle* (2003). Films, with their unique techniques such as lighting, soundtrack, mis-en-scène and camera movement, produce different cinematic styles that enable us to imagine and reimagine politics in ways that other forms of art cannot. All three of these selected films are commonly studied as classical works with respect to the topic of the Cultural Revolution and state capitalism. The value of the films lies in their enduring reputation for diverse

interpretations regarding both cases. This thesis will thus closely look at the visual presentation of the body undertaken by the three films to explore how the body is shaped and reshaped in the convoluted political context of the country. In this regard, I can find no better media in studying the topic than these cinemas.

The theoretical methodology comes from Zhuangzi's idea of *xu*. It explains the sense of frustration over the question of who we are among Chinese people. The breakthrough point is found in the ambiguous body, by which Zhuangzi defines as a morphing and amorphous entity formed by both material and immaterial forces. To understand the indeterminacy of identity politics in China exactly means to recognize *xu* as the very foundation of the making of the body. The *xu*-ed body is not an enclosure. Rather, it is an open ensemble of the dynamic interchange of various forces, from inside out. It receives and transforms. It has the capacity to take in, recycle and transform diverse forces in the process of mutual interpenetration and turn the ensemble into an indeterminate grey zone. The key point of the *xu*-ed body revolves around its political agency in making politics unsettled beyond pre-established structures and without pre-designated results. To a certain extent, it is akin to empathy understood as a heightened skill or state of awareness in sharing the in-betweenness among each other. But the *xu*-ed body goes beyond that. On one hand, it is a necessary and inevitable process of internalization through which one incorporates and integrates the outside environment into his consciousness by sharing and living the experiences of others. But on the other hand, Zhuangzi is even more ambitious. Zhuangzi proposes that while empathy is certainly necessary, it is insufficient in helping us realize our bodily potentials, as it is perhaps still not radical enough in surpassing the structure of dualism. For example,

becoming a butterfly (see chapter 2), as will be discussed more in detail in the ensuing chapters, is a medium through which the body becomes imperceptible, no matter how fragmenting, fleeting and provisional the moment might be. The Zhuangzian body thus produces a particular mode of politics, namely, the politics of indeterminacy, which, understood from this perspective, is more than ethics. It is a mode of political engagement by which power is not to be perceived as a function of enclosed political hierarchy. Rather, it should be conceived as a capacity or skill to extend the horizontality of diverse political relations. Therefore, in this mode, the identity can never be composed in the ways of certainty; and in this sense, the frustration over the identity is not an obstacle to, but a preparation for an emerging political awareness. The fact that Chinese people, including myself and fellow Chinese students, often get frustrated about who we are and what home is, indicates that we are prepared to be political more than ever. Being political precisely means to retain rather than to eliminate this frustration. With this awareness, we *are* becoming political. And, this is just the beginning.

Breakdown of Chapters

This work is structured into six chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion The four central substantive chapters deal with four major aspects of the central theme, with each substantive chapter tackling one aspect of *xu*, respectively. The second and third chapters serve as the theoretical chapters, and the fourth and fifth chapters discuss concrete examples of Chinese politics, namely the Cultural Revolution and the state capitalism.

The second chapter concerns the aesthetics of Zhuangzi's *xu*. By looking at the use of emptiness (*liubai*) in traditional Chinese landscape paintings (*shanshui hua*), it

adresses how the aesthetic idea of *xu* is manifested in its meanings of lacking in substance and blandness. It argues that the fluidity of blankness diffuses the boundary of all natural things such that they become intermingled with one another. Due to the indeterminacy of nothingness, nature has thus become perpetually unknowable and impenetrable to human knowledge. It then discusses the idea of the body influenced by *xu*. To Zhuangzi, what is vital is a bland body that is incapable of subjective judgment and devoid of sensory sensitivity by integrating itself into the world without presupposition. The abandonment of sight and hearing constitutes the important process of unlearning and unperceiving, which is a crucial step for the body to experience self-transformation, according to Zhuangzi.

The third chapter deals with another important aspect of *xu* in relation to the body of creating the self. It shows the *xu*-ed body as both spontaneous and dispossession. In so doing, it focuses on Zhuangzi's philosophy of the grand *Dao* to understand how the *xu*-ed body is conceived. The chapter argues that the body is not a representation of *Dao*. Instead, it is the *Dao*. The body as dispossession means it is detached from a hierarchical center and acts with its inherent agency. In addition, the body should also be considered as a form of spontaneity as a mode of indeterminacy and intuitiveness, whose trajectory cannot be pre-determined. Having argued the *xu*-ed body, the chapter then proceeds to Zhuangzi's theory of the heart-body dynamics and discuss the self as "creative transcendence." It contends that Zhuangzi proposes a transcending self that not only frees itself from an ingrained mind-body dualism, but also aims for creation in new living experiences. This notion of the self matters as it brings up the Zhuangzian freedom—

xiaoyao—referring to a state in which one is able to make the self through intuitive spontaneity.

Chapter four focuses on the case of the Cultural Revolution to provide a theoretical critique of the political event. It explores how the central theme of the Revolution, that is class struggle, is mnemonically deployed in order to underline its politics of dualism that is founded on the division between friend and enemy in shaping revolutionary political subject. It argues that memory is a forbidden field policed by the state to enforce its political control. This political domination is further enforced by the state's institutionalization of a revolutionary body to be linked with the construction of memory. However, Zhuangzi's *xu* debunks the rigidity of the connection between the body and memory, leaving both areas persistently indeterminate. While the state aims to construct revolutionary subjectivity through the consistency between the two, political identity is itself a *xu*-ed area in which body and memory rival each other without ever being settled.

Chapter five concerns the critical analysis of contemporary China's state capitalism. It addresses the paradox between modernization and the state capitalism in the context of contemporary Chinese society. It aims to capture the tension between the state and society (especially the migrant peasant workers) arising from this paradox. The chapter argues that modernization is essentially a rhetorical instrument being utilized by the state to form and sustain its particular capitalist form of governance. Under this governance, the body has been exploited to the degree that it serves the interest of state sponsored market. Nevertheless, the body demonstrates its deviant trajectory by turning itself into modes of unconformity. Our understanding of the body can be enhanced by

Zhuangzi's idea of *xu*. On the other side of this tension, there lies another mode of the body—one that escapes the state's zoning of homogenization and engages itself in making the marginal periphery where the body finds and retrieves autonomy. The chapter concludes with an explanation that the agency of the body lies in its power of making dissident territory. Furthermore, the state-imposed moral regime falls apart with its fragmented elements being recycled and reused for new political ends.

The last chapter wraps up the whole work. This chapter outlines the conceptual implications for a larger scale for related studies. It talks about its implication for both the study of Chinese politics and the study of political theory (especially comparative political theory). It proposes that the importance of Zhuangzi's *xu* lies in its potential of bringing up a different mode of politics—namely, the politics of indeterminacy. This political mode not only clarifies China's identity politics as being based on indeterminate frustrations but also approaches the political theory by way of suggesting that power relation can and should transcended conceptual delimitation by re-locating politics at different time and space.

Chapter 2: Zones of Indeterminacy: Art, Body and Politics in Zhuangzi's Thought

Introduction

For many, the major purpose of politics is to clarify and to divide. Politics is largely predicated on explicit binary oppositions along lines of us/them, friend/enemy, center/periphery. That politics is assumed with a normative function and our political prescription serves the end of classification seems to buttress many people's understanding of politics today. The search for sameness at the cost of excluding otherness appears to be necessary in forging our unanimous political actions. Such binary oppositions usually view politics as a result of hierarchical arrangement of power relation, produced by domination versus subordination. The aim of these dyads is to cast politics into specified, immobile shapes so as to place the latter under strict scrutiny and management. Yet, politics does not have to, nor should it be, conceived this way. The pluralist dimensions of politics can be extended as we change our view of politics—a shift of attention from its hierarchical to horizontal structure in order to find more areas for new and unsettled power relations. Body, art, and nature, for example, are such zones of indeterminancy that are widely discovered with profound political implications. Theorists like Panagia, Rancière, Grosz and Bennett, for instance, all explicitly or implicitly shed light on politics through their respective discussions of body (sensation), artwork and nature. What these theorists share in common is a similar task—an effort to re-discover the power of various intensifications of the interior that have been neglected or ignored in the political world for long. Their studies mainly aim to discover the missed

intensifications that were previously excluded from our attention. Yet, this chapter seeks to show a different approach brought up by Daoism. Instead of focusing on interior intensifications, the Daoist approach closely looks at nothingness in engaging the making of the political with respect to body, art and nature. Here, my focus is Zhuangzi.

One of the most prominent Daoist philosophers, Zhuangzi is famous (and infamous) for his elliptical and metaphorical writing of philosophy. The notorious elusiveness of Zhaungzi's philosophy lies not only in its discursive form but also in its seemingly disconnected arguments. What is more noteworthy, thematically, is Zhuangzi's favor over ambiguity. As Robert Allinson points out, "The *Chuang-Tzu* (*Zhuangzi*) is a treasure trove of philosophic wisdom. At the same time, it is a most obscure work. There is no apparent linear development of philosophical argument. In addition, many of its internal passages seem to be non sequiturs from each other. To make matters worse, it is replete with internal passages which are themselves so obscure that they defy any kind of rational analysis" (Allinson, 1989: 3). The idea of ambiguity is prevalent in Zhuangzi's writing and theoretically underpins his philosophy. This idea has much to do with the philosopher's theory of ambiguity put in an ambiguous way. Due to the obscurity of his writing, Zhuangzi has multiple interpretations and he is diversely labeled as a moral skeptic, relativist or even agnostic. The large volume of research on the meaning Zhuangzi conveys is a good testimony of the controversial nature of Zhuangzi's thought.

This chapter proposes to read Zhuangzi differently—a reading that seriously takes him as a political thinker, one who boldly challenges our traditional understanding of politics. For him, politics mystifies. Politics is a chaos that is all about persistent power contestations. It is an enigmatic realm, muddy, flowing and morphing without being fixed

and predetermined. In Zhuangzi's view, politics is an ambiguous myth to be explored and experimented, but it can never be dominated and ruled. It is an open process that concerns not so much about the construction of the center as about the expansion of the horizon. For Zhuangzi, clarification of politics through prefixed division is no more than terminating the life of politics.

In an attempt to unfold Zhuangzi's understanding of politics, this chapter focuses on his concept of *xu* (虛)—a very important concept that forms a significant part of Zhuangzi's idea on politics. The chapter aims to examine the theoretical content of *xu* as well as the representations of *xu*-generated politics. I contend that, comprised of blandness and lack of substance, *xu* is a tenacious vacuity that concerns relationality. Born in turbid vortex, *xu* produces a cluster of indeterminate relations to structure and restructure power relations. *Xu* is vital to Zhuangzi's politics as it enriches a political sphere that is too obscure to be determined. The politics of *xu* is a politics of indeterminacy, a particular mode of politics that underlines the continuous dynamics of changing power relations. To achieve this goal, the chapter discusses in detail how *xu* is illustrated via *liubai* and body. The aim of this chapter, at last, is far from drawing a conclusive remark on Zhuangzi's political thought. Instead, it hopes to call for more future attention to Zhuangzi's writing as a profound work of politics.

Xu in Zhuangzi's Philosophy and the Politics of *Xu*

In Zhuangzi's philosophy, *xu* is an important and yet difficult concept. References to *xu* appear frequently throughout Zhuangzi's writing. It constitutes the core foundation of ambiguity in the Zhuangzian Daoism. *Xu* is in fact not exclusive to Daoism. Both Zen

Buddhism and Confucianism also elaborate on this idea. Yet, *xu* has become a very distinctive concept in Daoism that helps bring about the conceiving of the unique Daoist cosmos, especially by way of underpinning the infinite revealing of ambiguity. In the Zhuangzian Daoism the concept of *xu* encompasses and denotes a very particular mode of ambiguity. The difficulty of translating *xu* is attributed to its pluralist philosophical connotations that include—but certainly not limited to—blandness and lack of substance. Rooted in *xu*, ambiguity in the Zhuangzian sense constantly unfolds itself to transformation without being reduced to a concrete manifestation of actualization. The Zhuangzian ambiguity, in one word, is an indeterminate relational process. The synthesized concept of *xu* thus entails an overflowing of ambiguity over relationality. The philosophical flavor of *xu* is savored through a rich mixture of meanings in producing a multiplicity of diverse and yet indeterminate relaitons. *Xu* is a generative, transformative and relational idea whose fecundity lies in its inexhaustible production of blended ambiguity that animates the engendering of new relations. In this process, the incompleteness of substance and blandness provide the necessary site for the idea of ambiguity to evolve, transform and illuminate under the enrichment of *xu*. In what follows, I further examine the ideas of lack of substance and blandness to analyze Zhuangzi's concept of *xu*.

One of the key components of *xu* is lack of substance. For Zhuangzi, while it is true that absence of substance entails nothingness, it differs from no-thing-ness. It is understood as a blend (not even a combination) of both the existent and nonexistent. A *xu*-ed lack of substance necessarily involves processes of detachment from the absolute that concretizes via actualization. In addition, this is also a process of mutual

engendering—by way of bypassing substance—of tenuous and yet innate relations of new creation. The relational oneness of the existent and nonexistent consists of the flowing of *qi* (气). In Zhuangzian Daoism, *qi* is understood as the "matter energy" or "vital energy" that invigorates the constitution and reconstitution of the "ten thousand things" (a Chinese term referring to all things in the universe, both existent and nonexistent). *Qi* is by no means an abstracted ontological being. Rather, it is an enlivening and nurturing force that holds together the *formlessness* of nature. "As death and life are together in all this," writes Zhuangzi, "All the forms of life are one…All that is under Heaven is one breath (*qi)*" (Palmer, 2006: 188). Life and death, for Zhuangzi, is the consequential effect of the movement of *qi*. Where life is the convergence of *qi*, death is the diffusion of *qi*. In Zhuangi's philosophy of cosmology, *qi* is flowing and amorphous energy, serving as the fundamental constituent of the cosmos. The birth of the universe starts from a fluid and formless void, a void of oneness. As Zhuangzi continues to point out, "at the great origin there was nothing, nothing, no name. The One arose from it; there was One without form…The forces worked on and things were created, they grew and looked distinct shapes, and these were called bodies" (Palmer, 2006: 97). The oneness of *qi*, as Jian Xu rightly observes, is "protomaterial, a vital creative force that gives 'form' to everything in the universe" (Xu, 1999: 967). An all-pervading force, *qi* de-ontologizes natural substance through its indeterminate fluidity. It disintegrates and congregates the bodies of "ten thousand things," which inevitably renders them formless. The occurrences of constitution and reconstitution transpose between there-is and there-is-not, leaving behind the reductionist actualization of substance for its exclusion of variation and becoming.

We need not look very far to find a good example in Zhuangzi's repudiation of Gongsun Long. For Gongsun Long, the pertaining attributes of whiteness and hardness, independent of each other, belong separately to a stone. A stone is either white or hard without being both white and hard at the same time. In this division of white stone and hard stone, Gongsun Long's dualism of either-or is elevating the stones to the level of ontological substance, rendering the two attributes immutable and inert. Yet, questioning Gongsun Long's *jianbai lun* (on white and hard)，Zhuangzi despises arguments like these as "pointless nitpicking debate about similarity and divergence" (Palmer, 2006: 67). In opposition to Gongsun's 'petite knowledge' about precise demarcation, Zhuangzi stresses his idea of ambivalent and vague substance. Lack of substance, in Zhuangzi's theory of *xu*, seeps across the dualist border between whiteness and hardness, disavows the essentialist territorialization of the attributes as given, unchangeable and passive, and makes their unexpected encounter not only inevitable but also productive. Zhuangzi's idea of substancelessness is devoid of preinscribed, intrinsic attributes of any kind and embraces an ambiguous and yet grand fullness of countless merging from within and in-between, a profusion of indeterminate and vague there-only-is. It is about the fusion of both-and via a primordial emptiness—a living emergence of manifold—that renders the 'ten thousand things' of nature uncontainable.

Xu also denotes the meaning of blandness, a Daoism-influenced Chinese aesthetics that is dull to intensifications. A taste of insipidity, blandness in the Zhuangzian aesthetics speaks of a bland detachment from flavor—an inert inclination toward intensification, a state of ambiguity that is not readily excited by flavor. For François Jullien, this blandness is explicated in his terminology of *fadeur*, a concept that Jullien uses to

interpret the Chinese idea of blandness (*dan*,淡) (Jullien, 2008). In illustrating the meaning of *fadeur* (blandness), Jullien insightfully observes, “when no flavor is named, the value of savoring it is all the more intense for being impossible to categorize; and so it overflows the banks of its contingency and opens itself to transformation” (Jullien, 2008: 42). For Jullien, blandess is an enabled process, a ceaseless course of mutual transformation without being treated as pregiven. Often used in the word *xu dan* (*xu*-ed blandess), Zhuangzi’s blandness is a philosophical approach to achieve the *yinyang* balanced state of serenity so as to savor the flavorless. “Resting, they are empty; empty, they can be full; fullness is fulfillment. From the empty comes stillness; in stillness they can travel; in travelling they achieve,” writes Zhuangzi (Palmer, 2006: 106). Implicating emptiness, a *xu*-ed blandness turns into an unstable, bland flavor, a balancing affect that remains indifferent and inert to completion. It is a critical point beyond which fullness comes into being while completion never meets its termination as yet. Mediated by the blandness, completion is always on the go, forever to be attained. Bland tenuousness permeates it all over and isolates it from dependence on intensified flavors, leaving it all the more porous to change and becoming. In this sense, the Zhuangzian concept of blandness is vital to an obscure and dull taste of flavor. Thus, the stake of the *xu*-ed blandness lies in its persistent strive for inception, an inchoative stage that is always about to digress from the already forged in order to experiment the new. For Zhuangzi, the appreciation of the blandness is thus all about those tasting experiences that are diffusing, disseminating, distorting and elusively ambiguous. It is notable to mention that this part of *xu* is bodily registered. The savoring of this blandness, according to Zhuangzi,

requires a decentered body, bland in its interiority and diffusive in its exteriority without center:

> A hundred parts and nine orifices and six organs,
> are parts that go to make up myself,
> but is any part more noble than another?
> You say I should treat all parts as equally noble:
> But shouldn't I also treat some as better than others?
> Don't they all serve me as well as each other?
> If they are all servants, then aren't they all as bad as each other?
> Or are there rulers amongst these servants (Palmer, chap 2, 2006:10-11)?

Zhuangzi's body is a self-detached life, a flowing, unsettled and fused energy, alienating itself from a structured hierarchy, blurring the encircling of a center, expanding and proliferating the uncertainties among the relations between the organs. In this sense, the body is no longer associated with a privileged heart that structures it as such. Rather, it is a body both with and without organs—a bland surface that orients itself inwardly and outwardly, consistently morphing so as to find *the* organ that cannot be precisely specified with clearly demarcated interior and exterior. The bland body, for Zhuangzi, is alien to a formally structured entity as pregiven. It is, instead, a balance forever in attaining that distances itself from intensified flavors. It is a product of divergence and coincidence. It would be interesting to compare Zhuangzi's bland body with Deleuze and Guattari's "Body without Organs" at this point. On the one hand, Zhuangzi may agree with Deleuze and Guattari with respect to the stake of immanence in conceiving the BwO, a plane of cartography that opposes organizational structure and stratification and instead embraces substantial mappings and remappings. The bland body shares similarity with the BwO in the sense that they both renounce the internal and external structural

imposition of preordained relations and oppose organized, centered body. They are a moving surface that is not yet definable by its hierarchy but by its horizontality. However, on the other hand, Zhuangzi's body also differs from the BwO noticeably in that while the latter stresses the consistency of desire and intensity in activating the circuits of the BwO, the former talks about a process of infinite fusion—a mutual engendering that does not rely on the multiplication of the intensities of the circuits. For Zhuangzi, the *xu*-ed body is not a "desiring machine," indulging in teeming the BwO with intensified desires. Rather, it is *the* body of neutrality that absorbs the interchange of opposite energies (*qi*) into its insipid unity, dissolving and recreating the relations among different types of the BwOs. It is the surface where desire evaporates and the BwOs bump into and experience each other. The bland body is post-BwO. Thus, compared with Deleuze and Guattari, Zhuangzi is even more radical: it is Body without Body—a body with neither center nor parts! Thus, Deleuze and Guattari's observation is not entirely accurate by saying that Dao is immanence. Immanence, or circuit fields, instead, is just one precondition of Dao—the dynamic transposing between *yin* and *yang*.

Xu is political. The politics of *xu* is deeply rooted in the concept's core content of relationality. The political potential of *xu* hinges on its vigorously persistent investment in in-between-ness as *xu* itself arises from the muddy relatedness. *Xu* is political in that it constantly finds itself in tension with organizational, situated hierarchical structure that aims to permanently settle power relations. Through the lack of substance and blandness, *xu* distances itself from political ontology that threatens to base politics on a variety of entrenched divisions. The politics of *xu* revolves around the breach of the walling of politics via its deployment of indeterminate and blurring connectedness. It is, essentially,

a politics of indeterminancy—a politics driven by undetermined relations and change. In this mode of politics, *xu* produces a vacuity of mega-authority that prestructures the flow of relations.

One empirical example of *xu*'s politics can be found in the political development of the early Chinese Han Dynasty. The beginning of the Han Dynasty witnessed the flourishing of Daoism as the ruling political ideology. In the beginning of this dynasty, the Chinese intellectuals were striving to construct a legitimating ideology for the political elites, as the demise of the preceding Qin Dynasty was very much a result of its harsh and ruthless rule. Daosim eventually gained its ascendency among the ruling elite class. The political leaders accepted the Daoist idea of light rule and abandoned the imposition of harsh taxes and military oppression. The ruling ideology in the early Han Dynasty followed the tradition of Huang-Lao school—a combination of the mythical Yellow Emperor and the legendary Lao Zi—which proposed 'a ruler in touch with the *Dao* who rules by emptying his mind and limiting his and his subjects' desires' (Rapp 2012: 99). In following Lao Zi's core idea of "rule through inaction" (*wuwei erzhi*), the rulers of the early Han Dynasty implemented the policy of rehabilitation (*xiuyang shengxi*) to relax the relation between the central authority and its subordinate. The monarch's hands-off approach exerted considerable toleration over cultural and political differences across the nation. Unlike the Qin Dynasty's forceful pursuit of homogeneity, the early Han leaders favored the co-existence of heterogeneity among its peoples (Zhang, 2013). This policy clearly reflected the value of *xu*. What lay in the heart of the early Han politics was its unsettled power relation between the ruling and the ruled classes in a hierarchical structure. Given that the nation's political and economic

recuperation became imperative after the overthrow of the old regime, a bland, indeterminate relation granted more autonomy to its people to experiment and create new ideas for social development. What is more at stake for the early Han rulers to adopt a *xu*'s rule was the urgent project of nation-state building. In order to popularize the recognition of the new regime, the politics should be constructed horizontally rather than hierarchically. That means, the assimilation of more members into the new political body through non-coercion was more important than building up the hierarchy of a central power. As Francis Fukuyama points out, "the initial Han equilibrium was based on a balance between the interests of all parties…"(Fukuyama 2012: 138). Without repressively filling up the substance of a unified national identity, the political cohort in the early Han Dynasty got tremendously extended. Yet, as the Han regime became more stabilized in its later period, the rulers (particularly since the Emperor Wu) abandoned Daoism and embraced Confucianism as its ruling ideology to strengthen the country's hierarchical power structure under its central monarchy.

In explicating the political meanings of silence, Kennan Ferguson (2003) combs through different approaches to silence's social roles. Despite similar forms, silence, or lack of language, is understood with divergent ends. Symbolizing denigrated, resistant, and constitutive political power, silence resists any reductionist political role. 'It must be rethought', writes Ferguson, 'as not only a site of repression but also a nexus of resistance or even as a potentiality for creation' (Ferguson, 2012: 65). Silence suggests a politics of indeterminacy. This particular mode of politics is tethered to the pluralist dynamism of silence that "makes singular interpretation of silence's function problematically simplistic" (Ferguson, 2003:62). The politics of indeterminacy, put it

another way, indicates an open political process where power cannot be fixed and preordained. If politics is understood as an ongoing process of contestation, its open possibility lies in a vast array of indeterminate negotiations in more than one way and by more than one means. In this regard, the *xu*-inspired political rule of the early Han Dynasty is exemplary of this indeterminate politics—an unsettled open political process that does not structure politics upon hierarchical organizations. Rather, it extends the horizon of politics to include more rejuvenated political participants in the absence of a dominating central power. In order to justify Daoism as the legitimate ruling ideology, *Huainanzi*, another Daoist *magnum opus*, a book evocative of anarchist sense as Roger Ames suggests, was presented to the Han ruler at that time to propose less overbearing rule. *Xu*-generated politics (in the case of the early Han politics, e.g.) indicates that political power itself in this period of China's history is transformative and cannot be fully contained. It was a result of multi-directional communication and exchange that evades the determinative top-down classification. Embedded in the flowing multiplicity of relations, power dynamics was explored and experienced without being stabilized. Politics of indeterminacy, after all, is eventually about the perseverance of the vacuity—*xu*—that always exists within the network of power relations.

However, to what extent can we broaden our understanding of politics via the idea of *xu*? How do lack of substance and blandness specifically forge the *xu*-ed politics? In what ways can this *xu*-generated politics help us conceive of a different political sphere? I will now turn to these questions in the following sections.

Liubai, *Xu*, and Politics

This section introduces the relation between the emptiness of *liubai* and *xu*'s lack of substance in illustrating how a politics of indeterminacy comes into being out of this relation. *Liubai*, or leaving blankness in its literal meaning in Chinese, is a painting strategy popularly applied in traditional Chinese landscape (*shanshui hua*) ink painting. Heavily influenced by the teaching of Daoism, *liubai* is popularly used as an important strategy in creating sparseness to help painters not only structure the space of the paintings but also achieve a particular aesthetic effect that centers on the theme of nothingness.

The motif of *liubai*, or nothingness, arises from the aesthetics of Daoism. A *xu*-inspired emptiness is the origin of "ten thousand things:"

> "There is the beginning, there is not as yet any beginning of the beginning; there is not as yet beginning not to be a beginning of the beginning. There is what is, and there is what is not, and it is not easy to say whether what is or, is not; or whether what is, is" (Palmer, chap 2, 2006: 15).

These infamously confusing words of Zhuangzi in fact allude to the noneness of the cosmos, a perpetual inceptive condition of ambiguity that allows things to emerge and merge into one another. "The 'that' is on the one hand also 'this', and 'this' is on the other hand also 'that'" (Palmer, 2006: 12). That what-is and what-is-not are both in and of themselves the beginnings suggests a cosmos that is far from being stabilized. We can take a look at Guo Xi's (ca.1000-1080) *Zaochun Tu* to savor the taste of *liubai* (Figure 2.1).

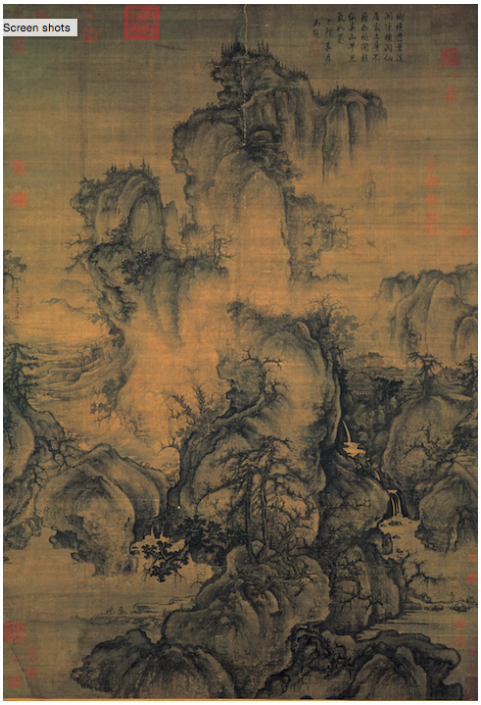


Figure 2.1 Guo Xi, *Zaochun Tu*. The Collection of National Palace Museum.

This painting is a close follower of Zhuangzi's theory of emptiness. In this painting, nature is not imitated. Rather, it is conceived through the interplay of there-is and there-is-not. Structured by blankness, nature is portrayed as a *xu*-ed matter (*xuwu*) with a void core. Washed ink is so immersed in the blankness that *liubai* intermingles trees with mountains, mountains with mists. The emptiness hence is characterized of an indirectional fluidity of relations that defies ontologization and predomination. Embedded in the imagination of nature, the nothingness of *liubai* is both the producer and catalyst of relations. It emptifies so as to catalyze and revamp relations. It is flowing, changing, and most importantly, constructive and constitutive. "Like notes from an empty reed, or mushroom growing in dampness…we cannot know more about the Origin than this" (Palmer, chap 2, 2006: 10). In Wang Hui's (1632-1717) *Taohua Yuting* (Figure 2.2), we see another example of how *liubai* conceptually structures the space of nature.

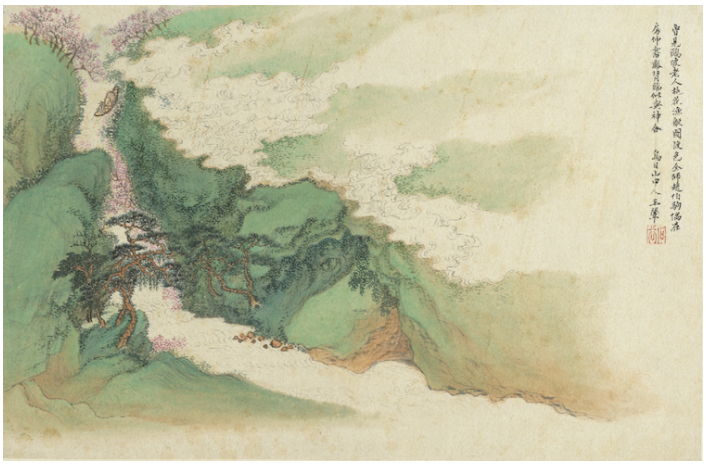


Figure 2.2 Wang Hui, *Taohua Yuting.* The Collection of National Palace Museum.

Noticeably, blankness winds through the painting's space from its forefront all the way to the far back, extending infinitely beyond. For Wang Hui, nature's liveliness lives on the space that is left blank as if it breathes through the winding blankness. In this light, *liubai* is also understood as flowing emptiness (流白), a fluid stream of blankness that runs through the "ten thousand things" of nature. It helps the force of *qi* to channel through the material world and renders it into formless fluid to morph into each other. *Liubai* is an idealistic expression of the conceived rather than a realistic representation of the seen. *Liubai* is not the representation of the *xu*-ed ambiguity, it is part of the idea itself. Absent *liubai*, things exist in fixed relation to each other and are hence sequestered from the opportunity for mutual encountering.

To better demonstrate its distinctiveness, this chapter compares *liubai* with Paul Cézanne's works. In so doing, it relies on Merleau-Ponty (1968)'s rendition of Cézanne to explain how *liubai*'s ambiguity is distinctly different from Western art forms. Technically, the use of color poses distinctive difference between the two. For Cézanne's

scenery painting, color is an important means through which natural objects' immanent vibrancy is revealed (Figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3 *Mont Sainte-Victoire*. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

> "Doing away with exact contours in certain cases, giving color priority over the outline—these obviously mean different things in Cézanne and for the Impressionists. The object is no longer covered by reflections and lost in its relationships to the atmosphere and to other objects: it means subtly illuminated from within, light emanates from it, and the result is an impression of solidity and material substance," (Merleau-Ponty,1964: 12).

For Merleau-Ponty, the meaning of Cézanne's color is two fold. First, it highlights objects' interior vitality from within. Through his unique use of color, Cézanne attempts to present an object that is full of depth and reserve, "an emerging order, of an object in the act of appearing, organizing itself before our eyes" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 14). In Merleau-Ponty's eyes, Cézanne's paintings make objects swell. Cézanne's objects are encircled by contours, not outlines. The difference is this: while the latter limit objects in continuous lines that sacrifice depth, the former allows an apple to spread out inexhaustibly from within. Second, the vividness of color separates the objects from their

surroundings. From Cézanne's painting, according to Merleau-Ponty, we see living, self-centered objects that radiate from its density. Cézanne's apple has a fresh smell. It is a production of an intensified brushstroke "with an infinite number of conditions." It is depth and density, not horizontality, that is highlighted in Cézanne's work. Cézanne abandons himself to the instantaneity of permeating color to achieve the intrinsic energy of objects in nature. The obscurity in Cézanne's works is attributed to the portrayed externalization of this interior illumination that estranges objects from their surrounding environment. Cézanne's purpose is to introduce a knowing vision: an epistemic sensation capable of acquiring and producing knowledge. It is his contention that science is not independent of nature and thought cannot stand above sensation. Rather, they must be reconciled. An intensified vision is perhaps the best way for Cézanne to substantiate the incompleteness of our mind.

Yet, *liubai* has different take on ambiguity. At technical level, the fusion of ink and emptiness replaces the function of color in Cézanne's works, leaving the realization of object-vibrancy to the effect of *liubai* in the Chinese paintings. The blankness of *liubai* is suffused into the space of the paintings and animates the painted natural objects through the creation of a *xu*-ed wholeness. The use of non-color, in the form of emptiness and washed ink, enacts the transformation between there-is and there-is-not. Unlike Cézanne's color, the emptiness of *liubai* pervades through nature's whole body and renders all natural objects in their flowing interrelation with one another. This wholeness, as Shi Tao (1642-ca.1707), a prominent Chinese art theorist and painter who closely followed the teaching of Daoism, suggests, "could prevent the dangers of destabilization and mediocrity. If the wholeness is not perceived, then inhibitions will arise in the

depiction of things. But if it is thoroughly understood, then all things can be comprehended" (Shi, 1989: 72). Dong Qichang's (1632-1717) *Xiamu Chuiyin Tu* (Figure 2.4) illuminates Shi Tao's point. *Liubai* is vital to his painting in terms of achieving this wholeness.



Figure 2.4 Dong Qichang, *Xiamu Chuiyin Tu.* The Collection of National Palace Museum.

Blankness in this painting is the undertone of the whole space as if 'the ten thousand things' grow out of it and thrive on its abundance. In this regard, *liubai* "brings about a complete metamorphosis" by "transforming 'one' into a state of fusion" (Shi,

1989: 71). What is at stake here is that *liubai* functions as "a single, pervasive energy" of flowing *qi* that diffuses the boundaries of 'ten thousand things' such that 'mountains and oceans take on each other's characteristics' and hence "mountains are oceans and oceans are mountains" (Shi, 1989: 80). "Nothing exists which is not 'that,'" teaches Zhuangzi, "nothing exists which is not 'this.'" Via this interconeectedness, "this" and "that" have become fused into each other so much so that "'this' comes out of 'that' and 'that' arises from 'this'" (Palmer, 2006: 12). Without the other, one's existence is impossible. Thus, if Cézanne's obscurity is identified with an isolationism-based vibrancy through the fullness of pulsating color, the ambiguity of *liubai* is characterized by its dynamic interrelationism through vacuity. *Contra* Cézanne who relies on the cultivation of intensified vision for us to understand nature, Zhuangzi proposes to blur our vision to marginalize human agency. For Zhuangzi, nature is not seen; it is conceived and imagined as such. Where ambivalence for Cézanne is a tool to gain knowledge, ambiguity itself is wisdom, according to Zhuangzi, when our eyes are shut and our minds closed. Nature is absent of substance, it is a perpetual impermeability that cannot be penetrated by vision.

Thus, growing out of *liubai*'s ecology, a tree may not be a tree and a mountain might perhaps become more of a mountain. In Ni Zan's (1301-1347) *Rongxi Zhai Tu* (Figure 2.5), clear visual distinction between the foreground and background is challenged as the blandness of mist and water permeates the whole scene to arrange everything at the same horizon.



Figure 2.5 Ni Zan, *Rongxi Zhai Tu* (Partial). The Collection of National Palace Museum.

The "invisible" river, lake and mist in this painting are seen as limitless extension of each other's body—a ceaseless and unexhausted changing of existence that has transcended a Heiddegerian 'ontic' through a process of becoming. As Guo Xi rightly points out in his famous *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, "thus views of a single mountain combines in themselves the changes and significances of thousand mountains" (Guo, 1935: 38). In a nutshell, the emptiness in *liubai* alienates itself from the nothingness of nihilism. Rather, it speaks of a fullness of ambiguous relations.

Liubai shares commonality with the new materialism. For example, at the forefront of this field, Jane Bennett brings up the important concept of "thing-power" in her book *Vibrant Matter*. The project of "thing-power," for Bennett, as Mel Chen insightfully observes, is "an interest in the animal that hides in animacy"—an intellectual investment in discovering vital materiality or materiality with life (Chen, 2012: 11).

Thing-power deals with the intrinsic energy of the material world. “Vibrant matter” is the name that Bennett gives to them. Vital to the vigorous energy of such vibrant matter is its own immanent forces in intervening the making and shaping of our natural world as active actant or operator. Bennett would agree with Zhuangzi in seeing *qi* as the vital force of energy that energizes the “the vibrant matters.” Understood as transcending force, Bennett’s “thing-power” is also the power of *qi* intrinsic to “ten thousand things” in nature and turns them into actants. For both Bennett and Zhuangzi, the powerful force of thing-power and *qi* emerge and operate in the absence of form, structure and order. They encircle and permeate through the materiality of the nature and protect it from the intervention of human agency. Despite the similarity, however, Bennett’s theory of “thing power” lacks the characteristics of *xu*. Similar to Cézanne’s ambition in finding the intrinsic vitality of things, Bennett also focuses on the inherent liveliness of the material world from within. The effect of the “thing power” is the rich fullness of natural objects filled up with energy both internally generative and outwardly expansive. Nevertheless, for Zhuangzi, a *xu*-generated world retreats from full substantiation, morphing between materiality and immateriality, transposing freely across the fixity of things, matters, or objects. Evaporated by *qi*, the void of the “ten thousand things” is a commitment to an unknown world, a strangely ambiguous one whose existence is a multiplicity of accidents and coincidences.

Liubai’s ambiguous emptiness is political. *Liubai* creates an ecological space suffused with profound political meanings—a site imbued with open and dynamic relations between nature and its political environment—that extends itself from human society to nonhuman entourage. It is a politics of indeterminacy that suspends the fixity

of human-centered power structure. It not only rejects a human-centered understanding of agentic capacity but also counts in the affect of nonhuman agency. What matters about this political ecology is that it introduces more possibilities for new power relations. Political ecology as such consists of a series of indeterminate relations that transcends beyond human political ideology—discourses of power regime that only flow toward the "centric" of the "anthropo." A bee is as effective a political actant as is the flower that feeds it. The political agency of the bee is based on its capacity in introducing new relation through this enacted connection between the flower and itself. The instance of touch is the very moment when two strangers void out their formed identity and become each other's life—a new life of relation that makes the world different. This relation is thus the unexpected result of the bee and the flower's becoming-each-other in enacting and sharing the relation. Since the politics of *xu* is the politics of indeterminacy which essentially concerns the discovery and rediscovery of excessive relations, *liubai* provides us with alternative ecological imagination in obtaining the goal. This tenuous excessiveness, forever unsettled, is exactly the characteristic of nature, lack of predetermined relations and meanwhile productive of new relations. They change and transform among themselves. As Zhuangzi reminds us in his most well known chapter "Working Everything Out Evenly" (*QiWu Lun*), "everything has what is innate, everything has what is necessary" (Palmer, chap 2, 2006: 13). The "innate" and "necessary" constitute the political agency of "ten thousand things" to act and to be acted upon. It is not about *the* initial; rather, it is about *every* initial, each, in its own way. In this particular mode of politics, the divisions between men/animal, subject/object, positive/inert, us/them get inevitably get dissolved.

Body, *Xu*, and Politics

Democracy, as Davide Panagia (2009) sees it, is essentially about how to deal with the visual. For Panagia, politics necessarily involves the participation of body. Panagia's analysis of *The Ring* centers on his conceptualization of the "haptic visuality" as the vital regulative that guides the viewing relationship between the film and its spectators. The idea of "haptic visuality" revolves around the collapsing of the gap between the theatricality inside the film and the visual outside of it. As a result, the audiences are cordially invited to participate in the proceeding of the film through their experiences of the "haptic visuality." More importantly, such participation is not only upfront but also inseparable to the making of the film, which successfully overthrows the predominant rule of theatricality buttressed by traditional reign of narratocracy. The disruption of a predetermined vision contributes to the democratic making of the plural. In visuality, Panagia finds a way to address the relation between democracy and body.

So does the project of Jacques Rancière (2010). Arguing that politics ultimately concerns the 'distribution and redistribution of the sensible', Rancière holds that politics are embodied in human's bodily sensation and to what extent those physical sensations are allowed to operate and function. Politics of consensus, according to Rancière, builds its regime around policing the judgment of bodily experiences. Anything beyond is disavowed. For Rancière, the politics of dissensus, however, aims to overthrow such presupposed partition of sensation by supplementing a gap in sensible itself and redistributes the latter in search of the "unfeelable" (Rancière 2010: 38). Challenging consensus politics that partitions the counted from the uncounted, the politics of dissensus extends the making of the political to include he excluded. In this light,

Panagia's "haptic visuality" resonates with the "disensus politics" in breaking through fixed divisions of the visual. Rancière shares his view with Elizabeth Grosz. For Grosz, what resides at the core of art is the excessiveness that invites the intensive participation of a variety of sensorium. This process of sensorium intensification involves the magnified and active functioning of such receiving organs as ears, eyes, and nose, "resonating with colors, sounds, smells, shapes, and rhythms' to find out intact sensory" (Grosz, 2008: 66). In Grosz' view, sensation is the effective intermediacy that draws the connection between human body and art. It prepares an emptied body to be enriched by artwork for sensational intensification from within—interior revival through the body's encounter with various forms of art. What matters about the aestheticized politics is a political force of dissenssus that distorts the distinction between the seeable and unseeable, the hearable and the unhearable, the speakable and the unspeakable to remake the potentiality of our pluralist bodily sensation. Thus, for Grosz, the political meaning of women's body is predicated on its intensified experiences of the corporeal volatility that ultimately express sexual difference (Grosz, 1994).

For these theorists, body ventures into the unknowable and becomes explorative rather than the explored. The political, in this light, lies in the dissident bodies that were previously uncounted and untrusted. Thanks to erratic sensations, the discursive body is now turned into a political arena in which we begin to experience the unexperienced and experiment the unexpriemented. Zhuangzi may agree with these authors to the extent that the digressive body trumps the supremacy of rationality. In echoing Panagia, Rancière and Grosz, Zhuangzi would once again heighten the latter's political capacity to act and change. However, Zhuangzi's theory of body is more ambitiously and radically

transcending. Zhuangzi does not find the seed of politics through the excitement of the sensorium and the redistribution of sensations. Instead, his political body is conceived through the blandness of *xu*.

Zhuangzi proposes a bland and dull body in making the political. If Cézanne relies on color to highlight the perceptive capacity of vision and indicate that thought cannot work independent of vision, Zhuangzi is suspicious of such sensational capacity itself. Wisdom and knowledge, what traditionally separate human from animals, are now turning against us and hurting our potential as political being. For Zhuangzi, men are deprived of their political agency because of their attachment to being a knowing subject, their obsession with knowledge and perception. Instead of using our mind and body to learn and perceive, we should use them to become, to transform, and most importantly, to retreat into the primordial void—the indeterminate and yet vibrant oneness above all knowledge. "I can sit down and forget everything…My limbs are without feeling and my mind is without light. I have ignored my body and cast aside my wisdom. Thus I am united with the Dao. This is what sitting right down and forgetting is" (Palmer, 2006: 58). Sit-down-and-forget (*zuo wang*), for Zhuangzi, is to dwell in a *xu*-ed body, an insipid body that protracts itself into the noneness, a fusion of self and other and an exchange of a conscious body for a void body. It is about an absence of a preconceived body and a body of balanced and bland void. Here, *xu* distinguishes the Zhuangzian body from Merleau-Ponty's body. For the former, body is animated in its alienation from self and achieves vitality to become. For the latter, body's energy awaits our recognition of its capacity to perceive. Compared with Merleau-Ponty, Zhuangzi's conceptualization of

body is characterized by its tenuous part of that which is always to be fulfilled by others. Zhuangzi's bland body is a body that becomes animal：

> "Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi), dreamt that I was a butterfly flitting around and enjoying myself. I had no idea I was Chuang Tzu. Then suddenly I woke up and was Chuang Tzu again. But I could not tell, had I been Chuang Tzu dreaming I was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming I was now Chuang Tzu? However, there must be some sort of difference between Chuang Tzu and a butterfly! We call this the transformation of things" (Palmer, chap 2, 2006: 20).

This is Zhuangzi's theory of becoming-animal. It is a process of becoming butterfly—a bodily invitation from a butterfly for self-alienation and self-transformation—a process of unlearn and becoming. What matters here is not a simple question of subject/object interchange: it goes beyond identity and subjectivity, it is about freeing up our bodies to encounter, experience and become part of each other. Becoming animal, for Zhuangzi, is a medium through which the body becomes imperceptible, no matter how fragmenting, fleeting and provisional those moments might be. In this light, I find Fraser (2008)'s understanding of *xu* limited. For Fraser, the idea of *xu* is only expressed within the sphere of psychology and ceased with the argument that "the epitome of *xu* is the mirror-heart of the perfected person, blank and empty of any content of its own, which merely reflects what appears before it" (Fraser, 2008: 136). While Fraser might be right that Zhuangzi uses *xu* partially to mean interior self-cultivation, he does not adequately capture *xu*'s meaning by neglecting the blank and empty body.

> "Your mind must become one, do not try to understand with your ears but with your heart. Indeed, not with your heart but with your soul. Listening blocks the ears, set your heart on what is right, but let your soul be open to receive in true sincerity. The Way is found in emptiness. Emptiness is the fasting of the heart" (Palmer, chap 4, 2006: 29).

Palmer's translation here is not entirely precise as the original text uses the word *qi* instead of soul. What Zhuangzi emphasizes is a bland body that is devoid of sensory

sensitivity and flows with *qi*. The abandonment of hearing and seeing constitute the important process of unlearn/unperceive, which is a crucial step for Zhuangzi's body to experience self-transformation. Unlearn prepares our body not for the purpose of perceiving but for the end to become and to transform. No-knowledge, the effect of unlearn, hence necessarily entails a dull human sensation—a feeble sensorium without penetrating power of knowing. The ambiguous effect of *xu* brings a blind date between our body and the world—an indeterminate encountering that is tenuous and yet enlivening. Nature lives us: our obsession with knowledge about nature and inquiry of knowledge from nature leads us astray in understanding the true political meaning of body.

The political force of body resides in the ambiguous and bland body, forever impervious to external objectification. As Jullien (2009) observes, "it cannot inquire into the existence of emptiness because it is constantly experiencing it, prior to any constituted knowledge, prior even to any 'question of knowledge,' which emptiness is *in the process of bringing about*" (Jullien, 2009: 81). The seed of politics, for Zhuangzi, is found in body's potential in persistently nourishing the unsettlement of the power relation. Power is indeterminate and indefinite, for body is an ambiguous void, empty of knowledge. True knowledge is unspoken. It can only be bodily experienced in the process of unlearn. The reason for which the Confucian sages are deceptive, according to Zhuangzi, is their preaching of misleading ways of hearing and seeing in pursuing knowledge. "Throw away the six tones, destroy the pipes and lute, block the ears of Blind Kuang the musician, then every person in the world would for the first time be able to hear properly" (Palmer, chap 10, 2006: 78). As Zhuangzi sees it, the danger of the sages

arises from their inculcation of knowledge through disciplined and tamed body. Crucial to the Confucian moral regime, for example, is exactly the ritualization (*li hua*) of human body, an organized and structured body taught to hear and see. Under this regime, power is defined in the form of bodily domination. It prepares body for the purpose of learning knowledge. Yet, for Zhuangzi, such a training of body not only eliminates more possibilities for power relation, but worst of all, it terminates politics, for the incompleteness of body is replaced by the fullness of body, an absolutism that inhibits body from becoming and being political. For Confucius, politics is rectification; but for Zhuangzi, politics is contestation. The Zhuangzian *xu*-ed body demonstrates a "force-field," to borrow the terminology from William Connolly, that displays a capacity to morph in unsettled patterns in the making of a world of becoming. Within this "force-field," S*hi* or efficacy, is the driving force in rendering the metamorphosis of body. It is dynamic and that vitalizes the propensity of things to reach maximum efficacy. The withdrawal of knowledge is crucial for *shi* to perform. "Allow the propensity of things to operate outside you," writes Jullien, "as their own disposition dictates; do not project values or desires on them but adapt constantly to the necessity of their evolution" (1995:39). Agreeing with Jullien, Bennett defines *shi* as "the style, energy, propensity, trajectory, or élan inherent to a specific arrangement of things" in describing her conceptualization of "thing-power" (Bennett, 2010:35). That *shi* concerns more about efficacy than *telos* precisely speaks of the essence of the Zhuangzian body. It is animating force that makes Zhuangzi's politics of indeterminacy come into being.

In conclusion, Zhuangzi has a very different vision in conceiving politics. Instead of embracing a substantiated politics predicated on settled power structures, he proposes

a *xu*-ed politics—a particular mode of politics that defies simplistic determinism. Evident in his understanding of emptiness and body, Zhuangzi's theory of *xu* aims to explore more possibilities to extend the development of politics horizontally. For him, politics is never solved. Its organic development receives its best vitality when it remains inchoative and ambiguous.

Chapter 3: The Making of the Self: the *Dao* and the Body in Zhuangzi's Writing

Introduction

Rosi Braidotti points out in *Nomadic Subject*, "I see modernity as the moment of decline of classical rationalism and the view of the subject attached to it" (1994: 97). In her line, the crisis of modernity involves the collapse of a dominant rational categorization as well as the ensuing phallocentric structure that is built upon it. What is also noticeably dissolved along with the decline is the specific configuration of the subject that co-exists with such identifications of rationality. For Braidotti, changing historical, social, economic, cultural and political conditions have substantially challenged not only the meaning of reason but also the extent to which rationality can play a role in schematizing the making the self. Therefore, the project of "nomadic subjects," to Braidotti, is to develop a consciousness which is "a form of resisting assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self" (1994 25).

Braidotti's observation suggests that the purpose of the political is about finding a nomadic style or relation whose core content is about "transitions and passages without predetermined destinations or lost homelands" (Braidotti 1994: 25). This is to say, politics concerns the ways in which those moments of indeterminacy, passage of transition, and epics of difference can be located in the making of nomadic subject. The politics of the self, in this sense, is therefore about the search for places where the composition of self is never settled as a consequence of unsettled power relation. In this regard, Zhuangzi is helpful. A renowned Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi is often considered as a moral skeptic and a nihilist, and is less known as a political theorist. And

yet, Zhuangzi's writing is saturated with serious political thinking that provides us with interestingly alternative perspectives in viewing politics. In particular, Zhuangzi challenges our traditional understanding of politics by conceiving of it based on unsettled power structure. For Zhuangzi, such a political process necessarily involves body, a space without borders or enclosure, empowered and animated by its own intrinsic agency in connection with its living environment. Yet, in this regard, an important question should be raised. That is, in what ways does Zhuangzi's body contribute to the construction of self? In addition, how specifically might this Zhuangzian selfhood lead to a different making of the political? What kind of politics does this connection bring forth?

What will be described and analyzed in this chapter contains four major aspects: 1) the idea of the *Dao* in Zhuangzi's philosophy, 2) how body may possibly be understood in relation to the *Dao*, 3) the concept of self in Zhuangzi's conceiving, and 4) the implication of the self for freedom. The purpose of this chapter is to figure out how body may be reconceptualized to explore its political implications. In so doing, the chapter continues to investigate the idea of *xu* in order to examine its affective force on body as well as its political making of the Zhuangzian self. I argue that rather than a dominating idea characteristic with its ontological supremacy, the *Dao* in Zhuangzi's philosophy is a living force that possesses the capacity of enlivening interelations among "the ten thousand things" (a Chinese philosophical term that refers to all things in the universe). The body, for Zhuangzi, is not a representation of the *Dao*, but on the contrary, it is the *Dao*. It is composed of a multitude of animating forces that make up and turn the body into a morphing plateau. The indeterminacy of *xu* renders the body as both dispossessed and spontaneous. The body as dispossession and spontaneity means it

should be perceived as an indeterminate and morphing entity whose centrality lies in a manifold of changing relations. Such a Zhuangzian body also suggests that the making of the self is never structured and pre-organized. The composition of the self always entails an ongoing process wherein *I* is never perpetually positioned and centered. Thus, freedom, as Zhuangzi may envision, pertains to the capacity by which one is able to recognize his living environment to the best of his/her knowledge and enjoy freely the mutual transformations between him/herself and the surrounding context. As Braidotti insightfully writes, "the political is a form of intervention that acts simultaneously on the discursive and the material registers of subjectivity; thus it has to do with the ability to draw multiple connections" (1994: 35). Echoing Braidotti, the politics of Zhuangzi's self speaks of an ability concerning spatio-temporal rearrangement whereby changing power relations keep extending the horizontality rather than hierarchy of politics.

Zhuangzi and The Grand *Dao*

To begin with, the idea of the *Dao* (generally translated as the Way) is not exclusive to Daoism—it has also been widely addressed and talked about in the tradition of Chinese philosophy. However, this philosophical concept has an original and distinctive root in the Daoist thought. Laozi, or "The Old Master" of Daoism, laid down his seminal theory on the grand principle of the *Dao* in *Daodejing* (especially in the first part of the book—"Daojing," or "On the *Dao*") that has been influencing numerous Daoist followers including Zhuangzi for over a thousand years. For Laozi, the *Dao* is both generative and grand. "Way-making (*Dao*) gives rise to continuity, continuity gives rise to difference, difference gives rise to plurality, and plurality gives rise to the manifold of everything that is happening (the ten thousand things)," writes Laozi (Ames

and Hall 2003: 142). The grand *Dao* is generative producing, animating and enlivening "the ten thousand things" in the Daoist cosmos. The *Dao* is empty (*xu*) in the sense that it does not come with concretized and determined predominance as a transcendent and supreme entity such that the rest of the world has to be only a derivative of its hierarchical structure. Rather, nothingness is the origin of life—a state where a variety of energies are just at the beginning of waking up from their dormancy, nascent and yet eager to meet the burst of a new world. The fullness of the *Dao*, on the other hand, emerges from its fertility in persistently producing countless in-betweenness and the affective dynamics that empower the world to reach its infinity of change and becoming through interrelations among "the ten thousand things"—both as distinctly created particularities and as inseparable parts of the whole, the unity of the Daoist cosmos. In this respect, Tang Junyi regards this Daoist cosmology as "the inseparability between one and the many, of continuity and multiplicity" (Ames and Hall 2003: 143). Tang's characterization of the *Dao* is an accurate observation of a Laozian pluralism—one that relies on the *Dao*'s proliferation to bring forth a constantly changing universe.

Rather than a supreme idea or a unitary unity that dominates at its ontological level, *Dao* in Laozi's cosmology is instead a dynamic field—a field of multiple flowing energies and forces, located in its permanent engendering of vitality. An energy field, the *Dao* is indeed an assemblage of relations, creating contexts and environments, inducing the liveliness of each life and providing parity for them to emerge and thrive in co-relative connections with each other. In the *Dao*'s energy field, relations are never presupposed; rather, they are characteristic of their inventiveness and spontaneity in

bringing about the new. The grandness of the *Dao*, for Laozi, is thus found in the infinite intertwining of relations. In the opening chapters of *Daodejing*, Laozi writes,

> Way-making being empty,
> You make sure of it
> But do not fill it up.
> So abysmally deep—
> It seems the predecessor of everything that is happening (*wanwu*).
> It blunts the sharp edges
> And untangles the knots;
> It softens the glare
> And brings things together on the same track.
> So cavernously deep—
> It only seems to persist.
> I do not know whose progeny it is;
> It prefigures the ancestral gods (Ames and Hall, chap 5, 2003: 83).

The grand *Dao* is empty (*xu*) exactly because of its inexhaustible capaciousness that continuously revitalizes itself in making more relations come into being. "It blunts the sharp edges and untangles the knots" as the *Dao* precludes any inclination toward extremity—the ultimate end for alterity—in order to maintain its healthy energy to keep producing changing relations. Ames and Hall's (2003) comments are insightful regarding the inexhaustibility of the grand *Dao*: "The processive and fluid character of experience precludes the possibility of either initial beginning or final closure by providing within it an ongoing space for self-renewal" (83). As Laozi would see it, the *Dao* neither comes with a beginning nor with an end—it is a persistent circle between the emptiness and fullness, a forever ongoing process of self-renewal.

Inheriting Laozi's inspirational teaching, Zhuangzi also sees a world elevated by the spirit of the *Dao*. For Zhuangzi, the grand *Dao* is the root of the "ten thousand things," driving the engendering of all things in the universe: "Death and birth are fixed. They are as certain as the dawn that comes after the night, established by the decree of Heaven. This is beyond the control of humanity, this is just how things are. Some view

Heaven as their father and continue to love it. How much more should they show devotion for that which is even greater" (Palmer chap 6, 2006: 49). Alluding to the great force of the *Dao*, Zhuangzi considers the *Dao* as the ultimate source of all transformations in the world—the alternation between night and day, the change between life and death. They all escape the territory of mankind as the follower of the grand *Dao*. For Zhuangzi (also for Laozi), *Dao* cannot be simplistically reduced to a dominating ontological Being that predates and pre-arranges the world in conjunction with a settled order. The *Dao* is neither a Kantian principle *a priori* nor a Platonic idea in its world-making; instead, it is born simultaneously with the world, with its animating force and guiding principle embedded in the world itself, rather than standing above and overseeing the lives of "the ten thousand things." In fact, in studying the philosophical idea of the *Dao*, too much attention has been paid to its ontological possibility as well as whether or not the *Dao* is ontologically real. One obvious shortcoming of this approach is that it is prone to the pitfall of reductionism and absolutism such that the *Dao* has become the sole provider of a pre-established structure upon which the world is founded, or an ultimate truth understood at its highest metaphysical level, from which derives a variety of ontics. For example, Shen Tao's "One *Dao*" theory suggests that "while there are many ways to do things, there is only one way the world is—one actual world history, one way things actually take place" (Hansen 1983: 34). This view is exemplary of how the idea of the *Dao* can be mistakenly reduced to an absolutist idea at ontological level that aims to dominate rather than animate the world. Against this misunderstanding, Chad Hansen rightly points out the plural content of the *Dao* to the extent that "the actual tao consists of taos, that is, the way the world is includes the many contending systems of discourse"

(1983: 35). The *Dao* may even be chaotic, as Frank Stevenson sees it. Stevenson borrows the chaos-theory model from physics and makes the argument that "*Dao* as a disorder that self-orders (into bodies/systems) and then decays and dissipates into disorder…" (Stevenson 2006: 303). Distinction without difference—the *Dao* in Zhuangzi's philosophy is both holistic *and* pluralist. It allows "the ten thousand things" to grow and develop in their own ways to maintain distinctions while retaining similar attributes shared by all. The *Dao* is a significant approach through which all things in the universe get animated and transformed in a variety of relations to the surrounding environment.

Zhuangzi further elaborates the *Dao* in the following words:

> The great Dao has both reality and expression, but it does nothing and has no form.
> It can be obtained, but not seen.
> It is rooted in its own self, existing before Heaven and Earth were born, indeed for eternity.
> It gives divinity to the spirits and to the gods.
> It brought to life Heaven and Earth.
> It was before the primal air, yet it cannot be called lofty;
> It was below all space and direction, yet it cannot be called deep (Palmer, chap 6, 2006: 51).

This paragraph implicates the contradictory meaning of *xu*—the seemingly oppositional statuses between form and formlessness, possession and dispossession, loftiness and humbleness, shallowness and unfathomableness—that presents the *Dao* with opposing properties. *Xu*, in this sense, refers to a mode of indeterminacy where two polarized ends of contradiction engage each other in a reciprocal relation through mutual transformations such that a kind of interdependence is established and always functions effectively between them. According to Zhuangzi, the *Dao* is an infinite and unlimited force of contradiction by which contradictory phenomena are constantly generated and introduced into the growth and development of all things, giving birth to them and nurturing them. Things are not only contradictory in themselves but more importantly found in contradictory relations with others: "When the springs dry out, the fish are found

stranded on the earth. They keep each other damp with their own moisture, and wet each other with their slime. But it would be better if they could just forget about each other in rivers and lakes" (Palmer, chap 6, 2006: 50). This famous allegory of dying fish is illustrative of the inevitability of contradiction in Zhuangzi's philosophy of the *Dao*—life vs death, self vs others, none of which could possibly evade the *Dao*'s unavoidable contradiction. The force of the *Dao* creates a field of *xu* where things find themselves not only in contradictions intrinsic to themselves but also in contradictory relations with others. Here, *xu* indicates a persistent condition of indeterminacy under which we, just like the fish, are always entangled in such contradictory issues as life and death. Nevertheless, unlike Hegel who tries to solve contradiction through dialectics, or the Greeks who find destiny as their solution to tragic contradictions, Zhuangzi has no intention to solve contradiction. The *Dao*, or the force energy that animates, is by no means a solution to contradiction but instead, a producer of even more contradictions in fleeting changes! For Zhuangzi, contradiction is exactly the power that keeps driving the incessant process of transformations among "the ten thousand things." Contradictions are not to be solved—they are to be preserved. Zhuangzi's *Dao* relies on its productivity in impregnating the world with endless chains of creative transformations. In this sense, the aim of the seemingly bipolarized ends of life and death, for the fish, is not defined as definitive status of permanent fixture. On the contrary, what is more important for Zhuangzi is to reach out beyond either status *per se* as a singular position and embrace a multiplicity of relations. Thus, both contradictory ends of the fish's dilemma is reconciled into Zhuangzi's *Dao* by way of forgetting about the obsession with living for living's own sake in that life becomes even more vitalized through experiencing "the opposite." Here,

Angus Graham's observation is not entirely accurate when he suggests that, "Chuang-tzu writes sometimes of the withdrawal from the many into the one as a detachment from the entire world change and multiplicity, one's own body included, into a solitude beyond the reach of life and death" (Graham 2001: 23). While he is correct about Zhuangzi's transcendence, Graham wrongfully takes Zhuangzi's world of transformation as a matter of teleological being. Conversely, it is not through the withdrawal from but an entry into a world of change and multiplicity does one transcend his/her solitude to encounter the many. As one breaks out of his/her predetermined conditions by transmuting into others, he/she thus reaches beyond the finite and limited boundaries of life and death.

Dao's Body, Body's _Dao_

This section attempts to unfold Zhuangzi's theory of the body from another perspective—one that traces Zhuangzi's conceptual root of the body in his philosophical origin of the *Dao*—in order to explore how the body is theoretically connected with the *Dao* and what its major attributes and properties would possibly consist of with respect to the *Dao*. The chapter introduces spontaneity and dispossession, derived from the *xu*-ed principle of the *Dao*, as two crucial attributes of Zhuangzi's body. In so doing, I compare Zhuangzi with Deleuze and Guattari as well as Judith Butler to find out the distinctiveness of the Zhuangzian body.

Zhuangzi's idea of *xu*-ed *Dao* certainly has profound implications for his theory of the body. The body, for him, is neither a representation of the *Dao*, nor an effect of the *Dao*. It *is* the *Dao*. By this, Zhuangzi is to mean that body is exactly the textualizaiton of the *Dao*, a complex bodily assemblage of affective energies, through which there runs a multitude of forces of the *Dao*. The Zhuangzian body is composed of immaterial

materialities, a state of evaporation. For Zhuangzi, the body is an organic architecture, a field or plateau, with tens of thousands of *qi* channeling through it and making up of it. It extends multi-dimensionally toward all directions in expanding both its spacial and temporal spheres. The body is visible and touchable but is also transparent; the body morphs and transmutes, but it never gets settled. In Zhuangzi's view, the body is a perfect example of "Hiding the World in the World" (*cang tianxia yu tianxia*): "if you take everything under Heaven and try to store it under Heaven, there is no space left for it to be lost in" (Palmer, chap 6, 2006: 50). What Zhuangzi means by this is that by storing the world within the world, with nowhere else left to escape or hide, everything in the world has become the world itself without being reduced to an outside particular that needs to be hidden from us. Everything is us, and we are everything. As Zhuangzi himself writes, "To have happened only on man's shape is enough to please us; if a shape such as man's through ten thousand transformations never gets nearer to a limit, can the joys we shall have of it ever be counted?" (Graham, chap 6, 2001: 86). The body thus transforms, and transformation is its action, with distinctions being the affirmation of this action. According to Zhuangzi, we should be rejoined by not only the body that hides the world but also by the mysterious world that is hidden inside of it. Deciphering the body precisely means decoding the animating force of the grand *Dao* and the world that is enlivened by it.

How might this Zhuangzian body be approached? In what specific ways can we further understand the body, particularly in its relation to *xu*-ed *Dao*? In this regard, two key attributes stand out, both derived from *xu* as crucial constituents of Zhuangzi's body: dispossession and spontaneity. Both properties are crucial factors in helping maintain the

indeterminacy of *xu*. First, to Zhuangzi, the body is dispossession, it is always an ongoing event of dispossessing. The body comes and goes; it forms and escapes; it deludes us and is never possessed by us; it constitutes us but also alienates us. Thanks to the force of the *Dao*, the body is not only dispossessed but also dispossessed of itself such that it becomes experiences of all forms of transformations that make up of the whole universe. The dialogue between Shun and Cheng in the *Zhuangzi* is most evident of the body as dispossession:

> Shun asked Cheng, "Is it possible to obtain the Tao and have it as mine?"
> He said, "As you aren't in control of your own body, how could you hope to obtain and hold the Tao?"
> Shun said, "If I don't control my own body, then who does?"
> He said, "Your shape is given by Heaven and Earth. Life is not yours to have, it is the combining harmony of Heaven and Earth. Your innate nature and destiny are not yours to have, they are constructs given by Heaven and Earth. Grandsons and sons are not yours to have: they are the sloughed-off skins bequeathed to you from Heaven and Earth. You should walk, therefore, as if you don't know where you are going; remain where you are without knowing why; eat without knowing what you're tasting. All this arises from the yang breath of Heaven and Earth. How can it then be possible for you to obtain and hold anything? (Palmer, chap 22, 2006: 190-191)

Here, body as dispossession has two meanings. First, it means that the body is detached from a center, a hierarchy that aims to structure the body and makes it bound by certain orders. Zhuangzi's body is centerless in the sense that it does not act in accordance with any centralizing power that separates head and body into a knowing subject and an object known, with the former informing the latter of injunctions. Body as dispossession in this sense exactly means the collapsing of a center upon which the body is dependent. Here, when Cheng tells Shun that he does not own his body, Cheng is saying that the intention to possess body is exactly an equivalent of drawing up a clear boundary between the thinking and the led, the subject and object. This is doomed to failure in that as the grand *Dao* is in no ways to be obtained and held but lived, so is the body. Like *Dao*, the body can never be owned as a whole unified entity; rather, it is a derangement of ordering and

reordering, or a fissure, so to speak, among strata ran by the energy force of *qi*. The body is thus less concerned with structure than with process in which organization and structure experience and re-experience their indeterminate *ad hoc*s.

Second, to recognize body as dispossession also means that body performs and acts as the *Dao*. Shun's puzzle of "who owns my body" in fact comes from his unawareness of the permanent metamorphosis of the body in the spirit of the *Dao*. In Shun's presumption, body is a static entity, a foreclosure depleting with its own intrinsic agency. Yet, the body keeps renewing itself just as what the grand *Dao* does to "the ten thousand things." The body does so without requiring to divide up the interior and exterior—the interior finds itself as motivated by the exterior and the exterior is dislocated in the interior. In this sense, Zhuangzi's dispossession resonates with that of Judith Butler. For Butler, dispossession refers to a status whereby "we are dispossessed of ourselves by virtue of some kind of contact with another…The experience itself is not simply episodic, but can and does reveal one basis of relationality—we do not simply move ourselves, but are ourselves moved by what is outside of us, by others, but also by whatever 'outside' resides in us" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 3). Dispossession, in Butler's view, is a measure of contact between the inside and outside, perhaps a blind encounter between two dimensions of space or time, that calls into question an atomized and self-sufficient individual. Thus, arguing against Athanasiou, dispossession, for Butler, is not necessarily an effect of abjection and vulnerability inflicted by the normative and thus speaks of the damaging power of the latter upon an independent self. Instead, dispossession suggests that "we are moved by various forces that precede and exceed our deliberate and bounded selfhood" (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 4). Akin to Butler,

Zhuangzi would also endorse that selfhood is an effect, rather than a pre-condition, of the external-internal exchange. Zhuangzi would certainly agree with Butler with respect to the exterior-interior dynamics and propose that through dispossession, the body reveals its interdependence with its living environment by forming a dispossessive rather than possessive self.

As its second important dynamic, the Zhuangzian body is also characteristic of spontaneity. Spontaneity is a particular mode of indeterminacy, a moment of pervasiveness when the body is being permeated through by energies of vitality in forging and reforging its shape and rendering the body formless. Spontaneity can also be viewed as a kind of intuitiveness that is fully invested with fleeting moments of unprincipled change and unplanned transformations. Being spontaneous precisely means that one has to abandon prefilled body and instead delve into an empty body, or *xu*-ed body, a body of inaction (*wuwei*) that relies on unregulated hypostasized exchange among "the ten thousand things" in making the world a world of pluralist becoming. In this regard, to say the body is spontaneous is to say the body act without action. As Zhuangzi writes:

> Self-forgetful right down to the liver and the gall, leaving behind their own ears and eyes, they turn start and end back to front, and know no beginning-point or standard. Heedlessly they roving beyond the dust and grime, go rambling through the lore in which there's nothing to do. How could they be finicky about the rites of common custom, on watch for the inquisitive eyes and ears of the vulgar? (Graham, chap6, 2001: 90)

"Nothing to do" means to forget about "my possession of body" and leave the body to its insistent transcendent transformation and becoming. "I sit and I forget"(*zuowang*) enables the body to be alienated from not only a knowing subject but also body itself, which brings about a body without body—a body that acts through inaction. *Wuwei*, or inaction, entails autonomy for the body to act and perform, in a process that unfolds spontaneously

on its own through the inherent vitality and resilience of the body. As Ames and Hall accurately observe, inaction refers to "actions uncompromised by stored knowledge or ingrained habits are relatively unmediated: they are accommodating and spontaneous" (Ames and Hall 2003: 39). The spontaneity of the body thus exactly means the body acts out in a variety of intuitive ways without being interfered and regulated by forces that aim to possess it.

In contemporary philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari reiterate a similar conception of the body, especially as it emerges from their concept of the rhizome. This is to demonstrate how Deleuze and Guattar could engage with Zhuangzi in helping us understand the latter's idea of body. For them, rhizome is multiplicity; it is a thousand plateaus interwoven together. A rhizomic state is a site where the center gets deconstructed and the structured uprooted. A rhizomic moment is a point when interconnections and interactions are enacted to produce empowered assemblages for becoming to take place as continuous and ongoing events. Things do not resemble each other, they never do. Strangers meet each other in the terrain of rhizome to create something new: in Deleuze and Guattari's own words, rhizome is a principle of connection and heterogeneity"—"any point of rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order" (1987: 7). Like the *Dao*, rhizome is an approach that decenters hierarchy and breaks its center into dimensions, rearranges them for more incessant multiplicities. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines" (1987: 8). Chaotic lines weave up a thousand plateaus and make the movement of the latter unpredictable and amorphous.

Lines are like the energies of the *Dao*, penetrating and pervasive, engendering invisible and yet vigorous rhizomes. This is "Hiding the World within the World" in Deleuze and Guattari's way: there are constant forming and reforming inside rhizome, but the metamorphoses of rhizome in fact create even more rhizomes to come. What is equally important for rhizome is the idea of deterritorialization. To them, deterritorialization is a process of metamorphosis between two entities. Deterritorialization takes place as a mode of interdependence in which the unexpected and the new emerge out of mutual encountering. It should by no means be viewed as a procedure of duplication, through simple rearrangement of segments, in order to create identical things in different way. In Deleuze and Guattari's own words: "reterritorialization must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality: it necessarily implies a set of artifices by which one element, itself deterritorialized, serves as new territoriality for another, which has lost its territoriality as well" (1987: 174).

Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatics help clarify Zhuangzi's body, just as dispossession and spontaneity parallel deterritorialization. The Zhuangzian body is rhizomic in the sense that it is transient and fleeting without being fixed as the *Dao* never gets settled in any particular moment. Body, for Zhuangzi, is an embodiment of provisionality in both registers of spatiality and temporality. It morphs and becomes through dispossession in similar ways as rhizome does via deterritorialization. In Grosz's insightful reading of Deleuze and Guattari, "becoming is the way each of the two series can transform: becoming is bodily thought, the ways in which thought, force, and change invest and invent new series, metamorphosing new bodies from the old through their encounter" (1995: 134). Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome is hypostatized—it is bodily

registered, in other words. The occurrence of deterritorialization through the encounter between a wasp and orchid is exactly the moment when wasp bodily becomes the orchid and orchid the wasp. Rhizome is amorphous, and it transcends and reorganizes time and space. So is the *Dao* and Zhuangzi's body. What is more important, however, is the urgency shared by both in tackling the making of self. As Braidotti suggests, "the challenge to which Deleuze is trying to respond is how to think about and account for changes and changing conditions: not the staticness of formulated truths, but the living process of transformation of the self" (1994: 100).

The Self as Creative Transcendence

This section aims to examine Zhuangzi's theory of self. Having explored the Zhuangzian body, I want to further introduce Zhuangzi's heart-body theory (*shenxing guan*), which is a fundamental concept that structures Zhuangzi's philosophy of self. In explicating this theoretical framework, the chapter attempts to address in what ways mind and body form a dynamic relation between each other and how specifically Zhuangzi's idea of self emerges out of this dynamic interrelation. It makes the argument that Zhuangzi is proposing a transcending self that not only frees itself from an ingrained mind-body dualism, but also aims for creation in new living experiences. In addition, the chapter explores why Zhuangzi's self is political by explaining how it is connected with the idea of freedom in Zhuangzi's theory.

The heart-body relation constitutes the core of Zhuangzi's Daoist cosmology and is frequently visited and revisited throughout the text. It is fair to say that one major purpose of Zhuangzi's writing was to restore the Daoist understanding of heart-body relation as an alternative prescription to cure the corrupted politics that had been

rampaging throughout the country. First, for Zhuangzi, the term "mind" possesses a rather peripheral position and is reduced to a derivative of the more important concept of heart (*xin*). Put it another way, what matters here is not a knowing mind that always aims to pursue and capture the outside world; rather, it is the heart that is truly of central concern for Zhuangzi. According to Zhuangzi, the heart is a sense of intuitiveness that helps us maintain a balanced relation with the grand *Dao*. What is noteworthy here is that the heart cannot be understood simply as a human organ with significantly important physical function to sustain our lives. Instead, the heart is a central hub where physiological, psychological, sensational and emotional forces within our body converge and conflate into one major stream of energy. It includes but is certainly not an exclusive equivalent of mind. For Zhuangzi, the heart has its intrinsic agency as an intuitive sense of balance. It receives and congregates the energy forces flowing through the whole body and responds with its intuitive adjustment and regulation. The heart acts in a way that is comparable to how the traditional Chinese medicine nurtures our health. The similarity shared by both is their holistic view in approaching life as life is most fruitfully nourished when all forces running through our body (physiological, psychological, sensational, etc.) are taken together as an inseparable whole. Unlike the western medicine that pinpoints certain specific parts in our body for treatment, the Chinese life-nurturing (*yangsheng*) emphasizes the wellbeing of the whole, whose stake is held at the balance of the heart. Reflecting on this respect, Farquhar and Zhang (2012) interpret life and life-nurturing in the traditional Chinese sense as a process, an emergence both manifold in its diversity and rooted in a nature that is dynamic" (12). In this sense, no one single force should predominantly prevail to take over and disturb the balance of the heart as it is maintained

by the both its diversity such that each energy force earns an equal share with other forces in a dynamic relationship.

As Zhuangzi puts it, “Rather than listen with the ear, listen with the heart. Rather than listen with the heart, listen with the energies. Listening stops at the ear, the heart at what tallies with the thought” (Graham, chap4, 2001: 68). Zhuangzi relies on the agency of the heart to gather the energies from every part of the body and processes them with its intuitiveness. “Listen with energies” means listen with close attentiveness to a multitude of forces within the heart without it being distracted by only one particular kind of sensational organ (e.g., ears). Being the intersection of various flowing energies, the heart, via its intuitiveness, enables the senses to run into each other so as to make up a synthesized and yet constantly changing oneness. Nevertheless, being tallied with thought does not in any sense mean that Zhuangzi endows the heart with privileged position of any kind such that it dominates and controls the whole process. Here, thought in fact only refers to the intuitive activity of the heart, its ability of spontaneity in receiving and congregating a variety of energy forces into an indivisible wholeness. In one word, the Zhuangzian heart acts but never predominates. In Ma Yun (2008)’s interpretation, Zhuangzi’s heart is even a capacity, a rational capacity that oftentimes leads to its own judgment. While Ma is certainly correct that the heart is a kind of capacity inherent to itself as an active agent, he inevitably falls into the pitfall by claiming that this capacity is inherently rational as for Zhuangzi the heart does not act without presupposed rationality. In fact, the Zhuangzian heart is actively spontaneous, coordinating across a manifold of energy forces in its balance without determining the patterns and directions of their flow. It should also be pointed out that the heart acts like the grand *Dao* whose life is invested

in all sorts of continuous and ongoing processes, it is persistently dynamic such that each energy force is appropriately enlivened to its full vitality while never being predominant at any given moment. Should its balance and amorphousness be disturbed, the heart would unavoidably end up with malfunction. In Zhuangzi's terminology, *chengxin*, or completed heart, is in fact the result of an unbalanced heart that is formed with static and inert shape and that starts to discriminate. "But if you go by the completed heart and take it as your authority, who is without such an authority," writes Zhuangzi (Graham, chap 2, 2001: 51). For Zhuangzi, *chengxin* means a biased heart that has already deviated away from its balance, indulging itself in ingrained prejudice. It is a form of intensification that aims to create authority and breaks apart intuitiveness. Therefore, Graham's interpretation of the heart as "an organ of thought" is not precise (Graham, chap 2, 2001: 51). The Zhuangzian heart is not a willful thought but a kind of intuitive awareness intrinsic to the agency of the heart—a blandness of *xu* which, instead of intensifying, balances out various flows of energy across the body without conscious thinking. With this understanding of the heart in mind, we can now have a better knowledge of Zhuangzi's mind-body theory. As mentioned above, the heart, in Zhuangzi's philosophy, is a concept fundamentally different from the mind for the former comes with a more holistic view as a contrast to the latter.

In Zhuangzi's heart-body relation, the body assumes a quite distinctive role. For Zhuangzi, the body of the *Dao* should never be viewed as an obstacle for the heart to surpass and overcome. The body *per se* is not an intrinsic disturbance to the balance of the heart. Instead, the heart needs the body with both its spontaneity and dispossession to be the provider of necessary energy force. What is key to this interrelation between the

heart and the body is that the latter must remain bland by being deprived of divided and intensified bodily senses because they can disturb the balance of the heart. As Zhuangzi writes, "Remain sure in actionless action, and all things will then transform themselves. Reject your body, throw out hearing and eyesight, forget that you are anyone, become one with the Vast and the Void" (Palmer, chap 11, 2006: 88). What Zhuangzi rejects is not body itself but rather a body that is distracted by certain intensified senses such that it no longer roams with spontaneous amorphousness—it is trapped in concretized forms. As Zhuangzi suggests, this happens when body begins to discriminate, judge and favor, which is exactly how *Hundun* (Chaos) dies:

> The Emperor of the South Sea as Fast, the Emperor of the North Sea was Furious, the Emperor of the centre was *Hundun*. Fast and Furious met from time to time in the land of Hundun, who treated them very generously. Fast and Furious were discussing how to repay *Hundun*'s bounty.
> "All men have seven holes through which they look, listen, eat, breathe, he alone doesn't have any. Let's try boring them." Every day they bored one hole, and on the seventh day, *Hundun* died (Graham, chap 7, 2001: 98)

The division of *Hundun*'s body into various organs with each responsible for one particular sensation in fact corrupts a body of grand *Dao* as the body no longer retains its unity as an intuitive, indivisibly changing plateau. Forgetting about the body, for Zhuangzi, does not mean a permanent alienation of the body itself. Instead, it means an estrangement of a self-centered body that indulges itself in certain intensified pleasure and is indifferent to the dynamic interrelationship with the heart so as to make it difficult for the heart to achieve constant balance. Forget-the-body is a mode of transformation, through which both the heart and the body get elevated in a balanced mutual relation. Therefore, Zhuangzi's heart-body theory is not so much a reproach of the body as an adjustment of the reciprocal relation between the two. The heart and the body are thus in a horizontal relation with each other.

Zhuangzi's heart-body theory is fundamentally different from the mind-body dichotomy of Descartes. In Descartes' framework, the mind-body dichotomy consists of two aspects. First, in *Meditations*, Descartes is positing a mind that is complete and substantive. The Cartesian mind is above and beyond all that senses (e.g., body) as an idea that doubts, understands, wills and thinks to its full capacity. Descartes' mind is not only cognizant of the outside to ascertain that it thinks but also ensure the existence of the thinking mind. For Descartes, the mind cognizes the outside through chains of causality—the former being the cause of the latter, or *vice versa*. As Rozemond rightly observes, Descartes is suggesting that "An adequate idea of the mind contains knowledge of everything pertaining to it; a complete idea only enough to see that the mind (as a thinking thing) is a complete things, a substance" (Rozemond 2012: 138). The mind is an intellect, as Descartes himself would see it, capable of assuring its existence by being perceptive. Therefore, body in this relation to the Cartesian mind resembles an unavoidable alienation, unanimous in all areas of its presence. Body is a confined enclosure: "by 'body,' I understand all that is capable of being bounded by some shape, of being enclosed in a place, and of filling up a space in such a way as to exclude any other body from it; of being perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell; of being moved in several ways, not, of course, by itself, but by whatever else impinges upon in" (Descartes 1993: 19). In this Cartesian mind-body dualism, the body is dependent, and its existence is even in doubt absent the thinking mind. Contrary to the thinking mind as an intellect, the body is passive and at best responsive to "what else impinges on it." Thus, the essence of this mind-body dichotomy is located in the dualism between mind as enlightenment, body a limit.

However, on the other hand, there also exists a unity between the mind and body in the Cartesian framework. That is, as a dependent, the body is subsumed under the mind to be both the interior and exterior extensions of the thinking mind. In Descartes' example of wax, the wax is by no means perceived through senses, in a way that Hume and Locke would perhaps see it. Instead, it is perceived through the particular kind of "sensing" of the body that is nothing but thinking. Put it another way, without thinking, there is virtually no sensing. In Descartes' own words: "But I need to realize that the perception of wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been, even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone" (Descartes 1993: 22). For Descartes, the unity is precisely formed by a privileged mind that understands and leads all senses by empowering the bodily sensing through its ability to think. The implication of this Cartesian mind-body dualism for the creating of selfhood is that self is constituted by a thinking *I* who is not only self-standing but also self-sufficient, capable of reasoning—"I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing, that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason…" (Descartes 1993: 19).

Contra Descartes' hierarchical structure of the mind-body dualism, Zhuangzi's heart-body relation is horizontally based in its composition of self. The difference of the two is illustrated in the following figure.

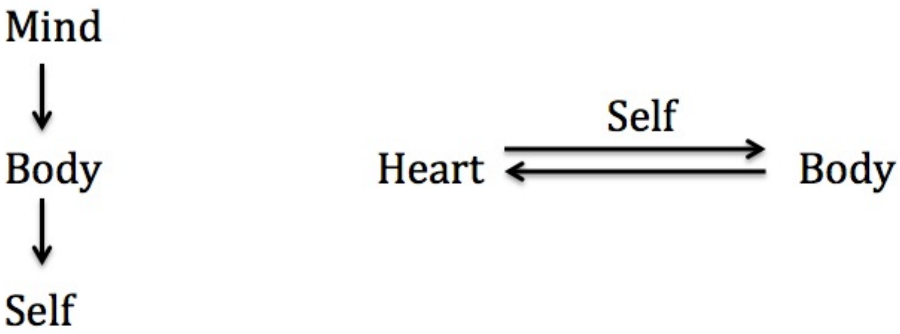


Figure 3.1 The self-body dimensions

Clearly, for Descartes, the self is a consequence of a perpendicular continuation of the mind in this hierarchical relation. In this relation, the mind penetrates the body and assimilates it into its realm of thinking, making the Cartesian self a metaphysical concept of being. It exists only as an extension of the thinking mind. It is a self that thinks, doubts, questions, and distinguishes. Hence, a relation of causality is very distinct in Descartes' structure. But Zhuangzi's self is very different. The Zhuangzian self is a creative transcendence through dynamic interrelation between the heart and the body. As demonstrated in the figure, this process of interaction involves a two-dimensional proceeding. First, Zhuangzi emphasizes that instead of dominating the body, the heart listens to the body, and it feels the impulse and rhythm of the body when the energy force, *qi*, choreographed in a variety of ways, runs through it. As mentioned earlier, "listen with energy" exactly means that the agency of the heart gets activated by listening to the energy of the body. In addition, the body, in its mode of blandness and indeterminacy, is also cultivated by the balanced heart in return. Being dispossessed and spontaneous suggest the inherent agency of the body in getting the most out of its interrelation with the balanced heart. Therefore, it is important to stress at this point that, for Zhuangzi, the self does not emerge in either side of the heart or the body. In other words, neither can determine the composition of the self alone. The Zhuangzian self is a result of the

perpetual relation between the heart and the body rather than an effect of either side. Put it another way, the self is born out of the dynamics of this reciprocal relation, a product of the ongoing in-betweenness. The self is creative and transcending. In the following paragraphs, I want to continue to explain how Zhuangzi's self is configured through the dynamics of this in-betweenness.

Prior to a further examination of Zhuangzi's self, there are two important concepts that need to be clarified—*I* (*youwo*) and no-*I* (*wuwo*). First, for Zhuangzi, the *I* is always an illusory consciousness, constructed as a result of one-way flow of power relation between the heart and the body. In this case, instead of a mutual two-directional exchange, the heart either dominates the body in its full capacity, or *vice versa*, turning the process into a singular enclosure. Under this circumstance, the *I* is formed in this unilateral relation with itself alone—positioning the selfhood solely upon the outward expansion of the *I* and hence rendering any exchange of energies unworkable. This self-expansive *I*, according to Zhuangzi, shuts itself off to a changing, morphing and positional environment and pumps its complete energy out of either a static, supreme idea or a lonely, isolated body that is fully steeped in sensational intensifications. Thus, the heart and the body no longer converge. Deriving from this *I*, the self begins to know, to judge and to distinguish. It is a close-off that rejects mutual becoming and transformation; and it is instead fond of constructing all sorts of lines and boundaries between us and them, friend and enemy, good and evil, men and women, citizen and terrorists, police and criminal, patriot and traitor, or heterosexual and homosexual. Zhuangzi's example of "the praying mantis" is an example *par excellence*:

> Don't you know about the praying mantis? It will wave its arms furiously and stand bang in the middle of a rut, it doesn't know that the weight of the wheel is too much for its strength. This is because the stuff it's made of is too noble. Be alert, on guard! If you

> confront him with something accumulating in you which takes pride in your own nobility, you won't last long (Graham, chap 4, 2001: 72)

The tragic praying mantis is an excellent example of how a dislocated and fractured *I* would be destructive. For Zhuangzi, the problem of the praying mantis is the intensification of a closed self that has been swelling in the heart and the body of the insect. The reciprocal communication between the heart and the body is disrupted as each engages in the world of its own. The heart is no longer a balanced state while the body is obsessed with the conquering heart. The mantis' self is a self that wills and conquers in the fate of relentless destruction. It is thus ultimately invasive and would without doubt inevitably meet its doom. "The praying mantis here could be a Promethean figure," as Perkins insightfully observes, "asserting its own power to defy he gods while inevitably being crushed for that defiance…These figures of defiance are undeniably attractive, even the soon to be flattened praying mantis, but in the *Zhuangzi*, they are not heroes but tragic fools, both stupid and comic" (Perkins 2011: 80). As Perkins continues to point out, the contrasting figure of the praying mantis is the flying butterfly who "goes happily with even the most radical transformation" (Perkins 2011: 81).

Contrary to the praying mantis, the butterfly dispossesses itself as no-*I*. In Zhuangzi's philosophy, no-*I* is an ideal state of chaos (*hundun*) wherein energies of vitality flow freely and spontaneously between the heart and the body in maintaining their status of *xu*. This is a bland, incomplete and indeterminate state where every encounter among the energies not only helps the heart to achieve a prolonged balance but also enables the body to morph and transform in ways that are not yet determined. In one word, no-*I* is the condition by which both the heart and the body are retrieved back into the state of *xu* where the self, born in this reciprocity, is structureless and aimless, like an

amorphous and chaotic vacuum, unfilled and yet all-inclusive at the same time. In Zhuangzi's words:

> The essence of the perfect Tao is hidden in darkness, lost in silence. Nothing seen; nothing heard. Embrace the spirit in quietness, the body with its own rightness. Be still, be pure, do not make your body struggle, do not disturb your essence. All this will result in a long life. The eyes do not see, the ear does not hear, the heart knows nothing, yet your spirit will guard your body and your body will have a long life (Palmer, chap 11, 2006: 86)

Here, the heart and the body are no longer ambitious in being externally invasive. Rather, they withdraw themselves into a pluralist wholeness, a vigorously vibrating whole that is made up of countless interdependent relations that connect "the ten thousand things." The self produced by the no-*I*, therefore, is a dilution of a cluster of enclosed and self-centered *I*, rendering them scattered, discrete, formless and unworkable. To say the no-*I* is an ideal state of chaos is exactly to mean it is such a pluralist cosmos, both spatially and temporally, that positioning the self in any fixed location is virtually impossible. Thanks to the no-*I*, the heart and the body successfully elude forms of essensialization, for they can be no more defined with concrete substance. However, Zhuangzi's no-*I* must not in any respect be read as an example of nihilism. Commenting on the no-*I*, Wang is certainly correct in saying that, "While it transcends the closure of self, it does not attempt to annihilate all individual lives. It merely opens their closure and leads them to the authenticity of life that precisely lies in the absence of the distinction between self and other" (Wang 2000: 355).

Zhuangzi's statement that "all things live as one" (*wanwu qiyi*) entails the perception of the no-*I* as an ideal state in which the chaos has reached a perfect balance of transformation. This process of transformation is called de-*I* (*quwo*), which is a perpetually recurring course by which the *I* gets deconstructed and dissolved. Here, the story of Cook Ding is illustrative. The Lord Wen-hui was deeply impressed by the cook's

very fine skill in carving and dissembling an ox. In replying the Lord's compliment, Cook Ding says:

> "What your servant cares about is the Way, I have left skill behind me. When I first began to carve oxen, I saw nothing but oxen wherever I looked. Three years more and I never saw an ox as a whole. Nowadays, I am in touch through the daemonic in me, and do not look with the eye. With the senses I know where to stop, the daemonic I desire to run its course. I rely on Heaven's structuring, cleave along the main seams, let myself be guided by the main cavities, go by what is inherently so. A ligament or tendon I never touch, not to mention solid bone. A good cook changes his chopper once a year, because he hacks. A common cook changes it once a month, because he smashes. Now I have had this chopper for nineteen years, and have taken apart several thousand oxen, but the edge is as though it were fresh from the grindstone (Graham, chap 3, 2001: 64)

The very fine skill that the cook employs is a demonstration of the course by which he learns to integrate himself into the oxen through repetitions of practice until he eventually finds that "at that joint there is an interval, and the chopper's edge has no thickness; if you insert what has no thickness where there is ample room to move the edge about" (Graham 2001: 84). The moment when the cook finds the intervals inside the oxen's bodies, he disassembles without looking at them: he has successfully grasped the *Dao* of the body, his movement guided by the bland heart. This is a state of no-*I* whereby the cook wanders freely inside the body of the oxen. But what truly matters here is the process of de-*I*, through which the cook gradually learns to deviate from a conquering self that forms an outwardly invasive subject in order to possess and control. The reason why the ordinary cooks change their chopper every month is because they are overwhelmed by the conquering self that is only fond of going against the body. They are essentially the parallel of the tragic praying mantis who is ignorant of the fact that the body should never be treated for the joy of conquering.

For Zhuangzi, de-*I* is a repetition, an ongoing practice; in one word, it is a habit. It is a habitual act that renders the processes of deconstructing the *I* and becoming the no-*I*

perpetually incessant. What occurs during this process is a creative Zhuangzian self that takes apart the *I* and transforms its fragmentary segments into the constituents of the no-*I*. Due to the pluralist nature of the latter, the dissolved *I* has now engaged in act of multiplying itself by a variety of ways and in a variety of new forms. The *I* has become formless because it is already endowed with a manifold of forms and shapes; it has become unrecognizable because it has already been deconstructed into numerous new and different faces. This habitual act of de-*I* is a limitless and autonomous event that does not come with definite origin and end. It is an infinite process of change and becoming without spatial and temporal boundaries. The habit of de-*I* means I (as a transformed self) am not a butcher whose only goal is to smash the oxen into pieces against all odds, but rather an artist who, by forgetting myself, listens to the rhythm of the body and create something new. Against essentialized notion of selfhood, Zhuangzi proposes that it is habit who occupies us, rather than we them. It is by no means a form of mechanism. On the contrary, it is a process about the creative, the new through action. Here, Zhuangzi resonates with Grosz. In Grosz' line, "Habit marks our mode of engagement with and transformation by the real; and this is quite precisely a measure of the extent to which the real is itself transformed by living beings" (Grosz 2013: 218). Habit, in this sense, is a mutual engagement between the living things and their environment, or cohesion, as Grosz would put it, "between the living beings' activities and its milieu." The stake of this habitual reciprocity lies in its two-way transformation between I as a living thing and many other living beings such as plants and animals that surround us. Not only do we affect the surrounding environment, but we are also internalizing what the environment has to offer for us such that a fixed and firm *I* is untenable. Therefore, Grosz would call

the process of de-*I* an intuitive and organic habit of transformation and becoming. Thus, the Zhuangzian self, emerged in the process of de-*I*, is a flowing and transforming self that can never be settled into pre-organized structures.

The Zhuangzian Freedom

Zhuangzi's idea of self has profound implication for our understanding of freedom. Through the configuration of the self, Zhuangzi brings up his very distinctive concept of freedom. For Zhuangzi, freedom is deeply implicated in the process of de-*I*, wherein the self is composed spontaneously as the heart maintains its balance with the dispossessed body. The self constantly forms and re-forms as a creative reaction to the changing environment. It immerses itself inwardly in new experiences and engages a process of involution to internalize those experiences obtained through its becoming of the outside world. Outwardly, the self is also affective in rearranging without organizing the world in its very chaotic state. Therefore, freedom in Zhuangzi's view is precisely a capacity in maintaining this spontaneous course in which the self is constructed. It is not defined by how much liberty one can enjoy in exercising his/her free will in satisfying the egoist desire but by the extent to which one is able to keep and make the most out of this spontaneity. In this sense, freedom does not necessarily mean being free in a very literal sense of the term. On the contrary, it refers to a kind of unfreedom through which we are bound by "what should I do" rather than "what I want to do." The difference is that while the latter indicates a certain unencountered self that wills and acts independently in its absolute freedom, the former can be considered as a form of obligation that understands to be self-restraint.

Zhuangzi opposes the self that is immanent to Mill's sovereign individualism. What comes as most important in constituting Mill's freedom is "the inward domain of consciousness; demanding liberty of conscience, in the most comprehensive sense" (Mill 2008: 16). For Zhuangzi, such rights-based self is problematic, confining individuals in bubbles of self-enclosure so as to create defensive separation between individuals and their living environment. Thus, as Zhuangzi may see it, Mill's liberty is a unitary involution whose centrality is located in a self that is unencountered. In the same vein, John Dewey reflects on the crisis of the *laissez faire* liberalism by pointing out that liberalism is particularly weak in accounting for collective actions and organizations: "the beliefs and methods of earlier liberalism were ineffective when faced with the problems of social organization and integration. Their inadequacy is a large part of belief now so current that all liberalism is an outmoded doctrine" (2000: 37). We as social individuals, argues Dewey, need organizations because they give us inner fulfillment and enrichment that cannot be satisfied by inalienable rights alone. Democracy as represented by universal suffrage lacks an education of the spirit of democracy and freedom (e.g., the purpose and process of voting rather than voting itself), which is essentially another form of enslavement and mechanization. What Dewey is calling for is a sense of interdependence in conceiving of liberty in the context of history. Like Dewey, being free for Zhuangzi also means that no one is completely free in standing above and beyond everything; being free for Zhuangzi means the recognition of the self that is composed as a result of interdependence rather than a self-standing and self-sufficient "free will." In other words, the self is contextualized. It is an awareness of the fact that not only does the self transform "the ten thousand things," but it is also transformed by them. Even though

the Zhuangzian self is spontaneous and intuitive, it is so in a manner that appreciates mutual becoming such that I am also obliged to "the ten thousand things" that make up of me. I am, therefore, not myself. To certain extent, Zhuangzi's self reflects that of Alaistair MacIntyre who proposes that self should be understood in a set of various and interconnected narratives which positions the composition of the self in a manifold of interrelations between my story and others' stories. As MacIntyre writes, "I spoke earlier of the agent as not only an actor, but an author. Now I must emphasize that what the agent is able to do and say intelligibly as an actor is deeply affected by the fact that we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives" (1984: 135). Echoing Zhuangzi, MacIntyre rejects the idea that attempts to break the construction of selfhood into pieces of separate and isolated events of fracture so much so that the self is only reduced to unconnected episodes. In this regard, Zhuangzi is proposing a de-politicizing way to approach politics. Politics, for Zhuangzi, should by no means be confined within its traditional milieu of institutional procedures—voting and representative democracy are, put it another way, far from enough in cultivating a healthy and diversified political self. Rather, politics should be extended beyond its conventional realm of institutionalization to include more excluded fields, events and actants to enrich the indeterminate reciprocal relations between political agent and their living environment. The Zhuangzian freedom means not only the recognition but also the enactment of those ever-changing new political relations in the making of the selfhood in a multitude of related contexts.

Zhuangzi has a specific name for this freedom—*xiaoyao* (roaming free). In his praise of Liezi, another renowned Daoist thinker, Zhuangzi writes, "As for the man who

rides a true course between heaven and earth, with changes of the Six Energies for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends on? As the saying goes, the utmost man is selfless, the daemonic man takes no credit for his deeds, the Sage is nameless" (Graham, chap 1, 2001: 44-45). For Zhuangzi, Liezi is a man of *xiaoyao*, who learned to dissolve himself into the changing vicissitudes of "the ten thousand things," abandons the ingrained and narcissistic *I* through the process of de-*I*, and transforms himself into the energies of all things between the Heaven and the Earth. As Carl Dull puts it, this free roaming is applied to "both the wellbeing of the *xin* as well as the manner in which people (or animals) should learn to navigate the changing patterns of a world in constant flux" (2012: 223). What should be further emphasized here is that Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* is by no means an ideal state which represents just the opposite side of the *I*. Rather, it is a continuous event, highlighted in a manifold of interrelated incidents that concern the in-betweenness in the self's transformation from *I* to no-*I*. It is infinitely close to, and yet never able to reach the ideal state of the no-*I*. In other words, unlike many previous interpretations who approach Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* as an ideal daemonic state, my examination focuses on the concept's dynamic nature as a process on the go—a never ending and repetitive occurrence of transformation and becoming.

In this light, Zhuangzi's *xiaoyao* shares similarity with Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence." Isn't the "eternal recurrence" a mode of Nietzschean self-transformation? Isn't bodily permanent transformation the incarnation of Nietzsche's principle of the Way (the *Dao*)? "Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally.

Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally" (Nietzsche 2006: 175). For Nietzsche, eternal recurrence is an infinite extension of occurrence wherein selves turn themselves into strangers from previous selves and start to probe into each other. It is not an eternal return of the same. Rather, it is perpetual recurrence of something new, something different, through a cluster of occurrences whereby things "break and are joined anew" with themselves. Like *xiaoyao*, it is also a process of creative transformation. Freedom for Nietzsche means a self who wills freely to intensify itself and the power it possesses in enforcing this self-transformation. However, Nietzsche and Zhuangzi also differ from each other. For the former, "I myself belong to the causes of the eternal recurrence" (178). But for the latter, this cause of mutual transformation relies more on its interdependence with others. Thus, looking from this perspective, the Zhuangzian freedom is a self that roams freely among "the ten thousand things" without being constrained and limited by a determining *I*. The body is no longer an obstacle but an opportunity, and the heart is free from intensifications. In Tao Jiang's interpretation, *xiaoyao* means "…all our sense organs are perfectly attuned to the way of the world such that it enables us to roam along the myriad creatures by acclimatizing ourselves to the world" (2012: 76).

In addition, it is equally crucial to underline that *xiaoyao* also entails the recognition of distinctions among various things. Mutual becoming does not in any sense mean the annihilation of heterogeneity so as to pursue a unified and homogenous universality. For Zhuangzi, this heterogeneity lies in the distinctive ways in which each individual engages its transformations, how the transformations may go through differently and what experiences it receives along the way. Violation of this rule of

heterogeneity will inevitably result in undesirable consequence: “A man of Sung who traded in ceremonial caps travelled to the Yueh tribes, but the men of Yueh who cut their hair short and tattoo their bodies had no use for them” (Graham, chap 1, 2001: 46). The embarrassment of the man indicates the tension of irreconcilability during the process of mutual experiencing—no two experiences are and should be alike. In this example, *xiaoyao* means to embrace the world while respecting its various distinctions. It means my freedom should not be forcefully imposed upon others as a universal ruling principle. Roaming freely, in Zhuangzi’s theory, eventually leads to a very unique Daoist wholeness: on the one hand, it identifies itself with a chaotic cosmos in which things become each other spontaneously in their own ways and with different and unexpected results; on the other hand, the wholeness sees itself with inherent unity that is also shared by all its individual members. Distinctions without difference—this is how Zhuangzi’s pluralism-minded *xiaoyao*, or freedom truly refers to. When it comes to politics, one of the key issues for Zhuangzi is how to deal with its plurality while on the other hand, retain a sense of unity. To him, the core of freedom (*xiaoyao*) concerns how likely one is able to get the most of his/her experiences in making the political in a multitude of living contexts through meaningful engagement with others.

For Zhuangzi, the making of the political does not necessitate the state. The political happens at substate level in everyday quotidian life because for Zhuangzi, politics is ultimately about transcending various binary oppositions in all aspects of our lives that make cross-boundary transformation impossible. As Zhuangzi would see it, making the political means the unsettlement of assumptions, categorizations and schematizations, and it allows for further investigations into the mechanisms that cement

institutionalized boundaries and lines. It necessarily involves the self as creative transcendence in inviting for more possibilities of engagement. In the making of the political, Zhuangzi's freedom even carries certain moral implications, for one is obliged to take obligations as a member of a given community, a citizen of a state, or a caregiver of a family. It is a statement that we are not who we are, but who we become.

Chapter 4: Memory and Body: Reexamining the Politics of Mao's Cultural Revolution

> The more you want to tell the truth, the more disruption you will have. I desperately find it is just impossible to restore reality. Memory is always changed and masked by my emotion, betraying and making fun of me, leaving me frustrated and confused.
> —Ma Xiaojun, *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994)

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to re-examine the politics of the Cultural Revolution. It seeks to discuss the molding of Mao's revolutionary subject as such by closely looking at how the memory interact intimately with the body to reinforce the party-state's writing of the its grand historical narrative of class struggle. The chapter explores in what ways the political image of class struggle is projected by the state through the manipulated relation between the memory and body. It discuses the case of the Bo Xilai incident as an example to show how and why the memory is a forbidden area that is enclosed within the party's red line. The chapter also introduces Zhuangzi's idea of *xu* to explore how the memory and body may find themselves in alternative relations with each other to introduce new power relations. It explicates the concept to find out how Zhuangzi's philosophy helps us reevaluate memory and body as well as their political implication for a particular mode of politics—the politics of indeterminacy. Drawing on this idea, the chapter then proceeds to reinvestigate the Revolution by way of an analysis of the indeterminate relation between the memory and body to suggest that despite the party-state's red line, different modes of politics prevails and makes the Revolution itself even more ambiguous.

This chapter attempts to show that the politics of the Cultural Revolution is premised on the intimate interplay between memory and body where the project of

political identity composition was deployed mnemonically through physical embodiment of class struggle. The core of the Cultural Revolution is the molding of revolutionary identity as the constitutive of the unified revolutionary discourse through the mutual compliance between the memory and body. In the Maoist revolutionary discourse, the memory is charged with political functions. The memory is by no means a result of fluid streams of remembrance that freely composes one's recollection of the past. Rather, it is molded as such under the strict surveillance of the state and bears the political duty of policing the boundary between what should be remembered and what should not. Its revolutionary function is particularly empowered when the body is no longer obscure in its absolute support of memory. The memory endorsed by Mao's revolutionary politics is greatly strengthened when in loyal compliance with the body—their close mutual reinforcement consolidates the foundation of the Revolution. The intermingling of the memory and body as such helps the state to distinguish enemy from friend by identifying the categories of their bodies. While one type of body takes on the role of ideal revolutionary body, its opposite is degraded as the deviant and cursed, condemned by the revolutionary discourse. The partition of the body is facilitated with the help of a recurring memory that is frequently invoked to reinforce the division. The division of friend versus enemy, where the essence of class struggle lies, is hence consolidated as a result of distinguishing one type of body from another through memory. Yet, Mao's revolutionary logic never goes unchallenged. The seemingly well-established political landscape based on the interplay between the memory and body can be alternatively approached from the perspective of Zhuangzi's theory of *xu*—a particular mode of politics based on indeterminate power relation and power structure. For Zhuangzi, *xu*

embraces incompleteness. It not only fragments the memory and body, but also disrupts the predetermined relation between them. *Xu* turns both parties into nomadic agents, changing and indeterminate as they may be, powerful and tenacious without ever being contained. As a result, the memory and body no longer cooperate; instead, they end up in relations of indifference and apathy, which leave them with many indeterminate possibilities for change. Previous cooperative relation then collapses and is ultimately replaced by tension. With the breakdown of previous intimacy, the memory and body, now caught in indeterminacy, transform politics from rectification to contestation. From this point of view, identity gets recomposed within an indeterminate zone—a political arena in which the memory and body are entangled in the absence of presupposition, a site where power contestation cannot be settled.

The Bo Xilai Incident and the Forbidden Memory

On September 22 2013, Bo Xilai, the former communist party secretary of *Chongqing* and a high-raking party official, was sentenced to life imprisonment as he was found guilty of corruption and abuse of power. The crackdown of Bo symbolizes the downfall of the recent revival of Maoism in China—a leftist movement that is largely based on the worship of Mao and the reminiscence of the Mao era. Ostensibly, the dismissal of Bo is a showcase of the party's determined fight against corruption. However, behind the veneer there is an intense political struggle over the memory of the red era—an era of Maoist social movement culminated at the peak of the Cultural Revolution. On the side of the state, the historical position of Mao's Cultural Revolution has been officially evaluated and allows for no alternation. The danger of Bo, for the party, is not so much his indiscretion but his rising popularity built on a mass social

movement of memory reconstruction that threatens the unity of the party-state—an issue of life and death the party learned from the crisis of the 1989 Tiananmen pro-democracy protest—by manipulating the public's memory of the Revolution. To further understand the grave danger of Bo, we need to look more closely at how the party-state views its relation with respect to history and memory.

In fact, the Chinese political elites have a long tradition of legitimizing their power through historical justifications. The writing of the official history of each dynasty not only records what is permitted to be passed down in the official account but more importantly grounds the power of the dynasties in the long stream of the country's political history. The official account of the dynastic history in China is so important that no ruler in the history can afford to pass it casually (one good example is the incarceration of Sima Qian, whose monumental work the *Records of the Grand Historian* enraged the Wu Emperor of Han for its low appraisal of the emperor). The Chinese Communist Party is no exception. It carries this political lineage with yet even more ambitious historical goal and task, which is that the party is a historically justified and progressive force to lead the country and its people to the glorious end of the history—communism. The official historiography takes a variety of forms in educating and reminding the people of the "approved" past. For example, Hung's study of the establishment of the Museum of the Chinese Revolution in 1961 suggests that the way in which the Museum is designed and built reflects the party's red line on how the writing of the history should be supervised. The Museum is not a mere artistic enterprise; rather it symbolizes the "an intricate amalgam of political supervision from the top, official historical interpretations, strategic display…" and "the attempt by the CCP to control the

collective memory of the nation…" (2005: 914). The state sponsored narrative of history penetrates into every aspect of the social/cultural life in China to assume the function of political propaganda. Besides rule legitimacy, more at stake, for the party, is the way in which the writing of history can be manipulated to censor the public's memory. This is particularly true in the post-Mao era in which value vacuum is pervasive, left by the demise of the Marxism. In order to retain its political effect of rally-around-the-flag, the state more than ever relies on the unification of the approved grand historical narrative to not only places itself at the helm of the country's progress but also exercise its surveillance upon the construction of the public memory.

The memory is an effective and powerful weapon in the party's repertoire of propaganda tools. Its political function mainly consists of molding political subjects that are submissive to the rule of the party-state's ideological regime. The rising Chinese nationalism against Japan in recent years is illustrative of the fact that the party's memory construction has successfully generated profound implication for the Chinese society today. Slogans like "*wuwang guochi*" (never forget national humiliation) and "*yiku sitian*" (recalling the bitter past to appreciate the sweet present) are frequently used tactics to be repeated in the state's patriotic education in order to breed generations of patriots who loyally subscribe to the party-state's political agenda. To remember also means to forget. The public memory is crafted by way of selection. In observing the party's memory control during the Mao era, Béja suggests that individual's memory is so politically charged that it is not even contestable in family life:

> "The Party was so keen on controlling the minds of citizens, especially the youths, that it made it quasi-impossible for people to transmit their personal ideas and memories to their heirs even inside the family. If the family head's political attitude coincided with the official one, he would encourage his children to become activists with all his strength.

> Otherwise, the great majority would adopt an attitude encouraging their sons and daughters to follow the official line, for the sake of their children's future, and in many cases, people were afraid that if they expressed their anti- official attitude, they could be denounced by their children. And in fact, there were many instances when children trace the line of demarcation from their parents (*huaqing jiexian*). Besides the fact that when a person became the target of a movement, his (her) spouse divorced him (her) so as not to be considered counter-revolutionary too. Those who refused to do so never talked about the husband (wife) who had been labeled a reactionary, and often sent to the countryside for re-education, if not to jail. They especially refrained from presenting his (her) ideas objectively to their children so that they could judge by themselves. Pressure was such that even inside the warmth of a home, family members resorted to official discourse when talking to each other. People would use newspaper language to refer to the 'crimes' of their spouses so that children would not 'make mistake' when going to school" (Béja, 2003: 8)

The dissolve of the boundary between the public and the private is enacted powerfully by the state's engineering of the memory. Under the surveillance of the state, the memory is statically pinned on the written history of the People's Republic and enjoys little room for change. The sole purpose of the memory, so to speak, is to place itself in seamless conjoining with the state's grand historical writing to both justify the legitimacy of the CCP's rule and hinder potential oppositional experiences of the history (especially at the individualistic level).

This is especially the case for the memory of such sensitive political event as the Cultural Revolution. When the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party was held after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, it critically assessed the legacy of Mao and denounced the massive destruction of the Cultural Revolution (xinhuanet.com). The conference is viewed as a critical turning point of the party as it helps the party unify the historical view of Mao's Cultural Revolution. In 1981, the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the party passed "The Resolution on Certain Issues of the Party Since the Founding of PRC," which determined the nature of Mao's Cultural Revolution. "The Resolution" states clearly: the

history proved "Mao's revolution neither conforms to the Marxism-Leninism nor accords with China's actual condition. These points regarding the estimate of our country's class and political conditions at that time were completely false…They eventually led to the gravest loss and setback of the party, the country and the people" (xinhuanet.com). "The Resolution" is not only the final nail of the coffin of the event but also the finalization of a unanimously collective decision on this particular period of history. As the party collectively put the final nail in the coffin of the Cultural Revolution, the message is very clear: the history of the Revolution should be selectively remembered as such in accordance with the state's account, and any deviation from the official line is subject to severe punishment. Thus, here comes the crime of Bo—his political ambition in reviving Mao's red culture is inevitably perceived as a threat to the unity of the party's historical discourse.

Apparently, Bo is politically shrewd about the importance of the memory. During his term of office in Chongqing, Bo launched the movement of "Singing Revolutionary Songs, Cracking Down Crimes (*Changhong Dahei*)." Against the will of the party's collective rule, the major purpose of this campaign was to revive and enshrine Mao's revolutionary legacy charismatic authority as a response to social inequality that is rampant in China today. As the campaign requested, *Chongqing* organized a large scale "red culture movement" featuring public performances of red songs, broadcasting red tunes and airing red dramas (Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1 Bo Xilai's "Red Song" Movement.

The city also stepped up its security measures against crime. As Bo himself claimed, "singing red is rectification and cracking down crime is eliminating evil. A city needs both material and spiritual civilization…without them, we will be lost in direction and led to corruption" (takungpao.com). Yet, his campaign was not well received by leaders outside *Chongqing*. Without the approval of a unanimous higher authority, Bo's ambition apparently threatened the baseline of the party's discipline—the memory of a particular history, especially one with hyper political sensitivity such as the Cultural Revolution, should be crafted collectively by the party as a unity and allows no individual deviation. More importantly, Bo not only broke the taboo but also challenged the party discipline by usurping the party's own traditional strategy against rivals—mass mnemonic movement. Where "Singing Revolutionary Songs" is a lure to publicly demonstrate the collective embodiment of Mao's revolutionary spirit, "Cracking Down Crimes" is the stick to be brandished in front of those who dare to say no. The sin of Bo, for his rivals within the party, is exactly his sophisticated knowledge and savvy skills in manipulating the production of the public memory and steer it defiantly toward his private desire for more political power.

As a matter of fact, Bo belongs to the "red generation" whose coming-of-age arrived in the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution. Bo himself was among the "red guard" zealots who were faithful followers of Mao's creed of class struggle and avid participants of *pidou* (violent public humiliation and persecution of class enemies) during the Revolution. Those who were denounced as the enemies of the people were physically and psychologically tortured to be displayed to teach the people about class struggle. *Pidou* was not a simple performance. Instead, it was a significant political ritual that aimed to repetitively invoke the recurring memory of the party's heroic past of revolutionary struggle through the public reminder of enemies' ugly, disgraceful bodies and the denunciation of their identity as class enemy. In Mao's revolutionary politics, the body and memory are political. The body is mobilized and policed under the state's control. And so is the memory, a similar area that the authority was not willing to loose its grip. Under the dominance of the state, the two interacted effectively to reinforce the state's project of "the great proletarian revolution." The boundary between the permitted and unpermitted was so unambiguously observed that any divergence would receive severe punishment. The memory, body and politics thus got tightly intertwined within each other during the era of the Cultural Revolution to produce the vitality of the mass social movement and ensure the safety of Mao's power. What Bo and his clique inherited from the legacy of Mao's Cultural Revolution is exactly the myth embedded in this relation—an enigma that structures the very foundation of the revolutionary politics that rumbled across the whole country almost fifty years ago. Although Bo's adventure did not pay off for him, the crackdown reveals the secrecy of the state's insistence on extracting political power from the memory and body, which lasts from Mao to today. However, on the other

hand, Bo's case also suggests that despite the state's tight control, attempts to breach the boundaries have never been ended. Bo was not the first and will not be the last both inside and outside the party. However, the boundaries are never impervious as agency is found in memory and body in the making of contentious politics. In this sense, the two fields are no longer to be politicized; rather, they are the agents that initiate and sustain politics—they politicize. The focus of the memory and body thus gives us an alternative and yet important perspective in viewing the revolutionary politics. In the following section, I further unravel the close interrelation between the body, memory and politics embedded within the politics of the Cultural Revolution.

Intensifying Class Struggle, Intensifying the Revolution

In 1966, Mao launched his Cultural Revolution. One major aim of the revolution was to re-impose the authority of Mao, but it eventually turned out to be a mass movement of purge that targeted those who were suspected of being unfaithful to socialism. The great purge spread rapidly across the country in the name of class struggle and led the country to tragic chaos. In Mao's own words, "class struggle, some classes triumph, others are eliminated. Such is history, such is the history of civilization for thousands of years…A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another" (*Selected Works*). For Mao, class struggle is a critical issue of life-and-death, a policing tactic whose aim is to distinguish enemies from friends. So is the logic of his revolutionary politics, the purpose of which is to identify and solidify the opposition between us and them. One of Mao's strategies was

to reshape the opposing political identities by setting up the aesthetic (and of course, also political) division between revolutionary and reactionary bodies. Where revolutionary heroes are embodied in their upright and heroic looking in propaganda, class enemies—landlords, rich peasants, reactionaries, and rightists—are portrayed in their disgraceful and abject bodies. If one major purpose of the revolution is the overthrow of an old aesthetic regime, its first task, as Wang Molin insightfully points out, is "a negation of the order built on the old world's besiege of body and the establishment of a renewed world for the mode of body's existence" (Wang 1996). The crackdown on the enemies' body is accompanied by the eulogy of revolutionaries' body. The politics of class struggle takes place in the tension between the two opposing bodies of which each is shown to represent its own class interest. Hence, the division of the body constitutes the heart of Mao's class struggle. In Mao's project, body is deprived of its private attribute as a lived corporeality, capable of self-initiating and self-illuminating. On the contrary, it is treated as pregiven, a raw material to be inscribed upon and a precondition for conscious political life. In this sense, body is not trusted with its inherent political agency. Rather, it is born to be political, produced and manufactured externally as such. Mao does not like the idea of the private body; for him, a privately operated body is unorganized, undisciplined, and worst of all, apolitical. It is energized by the undistinguished primitive and grows with the expansion of desire, posing threat to his well-structured revolutionary politics. In his eyes, the private body cannot be communicated politically, nor will it serve the end of the revolutionary politics. It only poses as a threat to the efficiency of mass social mobilization. That body comes under political scrutinization and should be subordinated

politically henceforth largely constitutes the material foundation of the Cultural Revolution.

However, the body alone is not enough. "Carry out revolution deep down the soul (*linghun shenchu nao geming*)"—it takes something beyond the bodily sphere to intensify the revolution. Class struggle cannot be sufficiently achieved in the bodily sphere alone; what is more important, for Mao as for his followers, is to find another terrain politically responsive to the partition of body. One area of such is found in memory. In fact, the party has a long tradition of engaging in "thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*). Of particular importance in this "thought work" campaign is the reconstruction of memory. While one vital part of "thought work" was anchored in the unified writing of the country's history and the persuasion of the legitimacy of the party's historical position, memory, however, often slips the hand of official account and dwells in temporal fragmentation. Unlike the incontestable official historiography, the memory usually hides beneath the collective historical discourse and is full of contradiction. As an important tool in justifying the communist revolution, the history is composed unanimously as a continuous project of nation-state building. The Cultural Revolution was counted as a sheer rupture with the country's backward tradition—a hurdle that stands in the way of the country' marching toward communist modernization. The rupture, as counted in official record, is a significant turning point from which China gains its historical motivation to move forward toward a brand new nation. Nevertheless, contrary to history, the memory is nevertheless different. It has its own temporal unfolding, and its historical trajectory refuses to be enclosed. The memory insists on its own route in consistently obtaining illuminations from the past, however discrete,

backward, or cyclical it may be. In writing the tension between history and memory in China, Ban Wang suggests that "In China historical discourse performs interpretations that are frequently antimemory and antitradition; these interpretations intervened time and again, in radical, revolutionary fashion, against the 'obsolete' tradition anchored in cultural memory" (2004: 6). Yet, in the eyes of the state, this tension must be eliminated for the purpose of the revolution. The memory has to be reconciled into the state's historical discourse to ensure the success of the revolution—it has to accept and endure the rupture as well. The state spent an enormous amount of efforts in engineering the public memory into a coherent and faithful supplement to the grand historical narrative. According to the study of Li Lifeng (2013), in order to effectively craft the revolutionary memory and lock it in the minds of the peasants, the party usually used *suku* (outpouring of bitterness) as a powerful technique in transforming and shaping the individual peasants' memory. As Li points out, the revolutionary memories "did not form naturally but resulted from purposeful shaping by the revolutionary party and the socialist state" (2013: 71). At the core of this memory molding is the transformation from the bitter memory to the revolutionary memory. The party-state selectively filtered through the peasants' bitter recollection of the past in the intermingling context of class, poverty and revolution to evoke the sense of shared, collective experiences of exploitation among the peasants. "By using such effective tactics as promoting anger, fostering activists, tapping into awareness of consanguinity, and condemning landlords, the party and the state emotionalized and homogenized rural public's memories of bitterness and integrated them into the grand narratives of class, revolution, liberation and nation-state" (Li, 2013: 71). The engineering of the public memory among the masses is thus a necessary political

strategy that the party-state has been skillful in utilizing. Reshaping the collective and homogenous memory turns out to be a necessary pre-condition for the CCP state to inaugurate the coming of the revolutionary subjects.

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, Mao proposed to destroy the "Four Olds" (*po sijiu*)—old thought, old culture, old custom, old habit—which, as he claimed, had been poisoning the minds of the Chinese for thousands of years (On June 1, 1966, Mao wrote in his famous essay "Sweep All the Ghosts and Monsters" that the "Four Olds" had been manipulated by all reactionary and exploiting class in the history to oppress the Chinese people). Confucius was harshly repudiated, monasteries were smashed, and archives of classics were burned. The political reason behind this movement is that, tradition, as Mao saw it, provides individuals with persistent illuminations in shaping the masses as nomadic subjects (without unity) through self-initiated recollection of various traditions of village, tribe, or family. In this process, collective identity is hindered by tradition and falls out of the hands of the state. Instead, it is a function of individuals' spontaneous self-reflection, a consequence of internal consciousness rooted in the traditional conventions of a set of given communities one is born into rather than external imposition from the party-state. Thus, erasing the intimate connection between the memory and tradition so as to facilitate the state's annexation of the former was a necessary part of the revolutionary politics. The state resorted to various forms of media to propagandize its project of memory re-construction.

For instance, in order to better integrate both the body and memory into the revolutionary discourse, the party created *yangban xi* (model opera) as an effective medium in developing and promoting this integration. This particular kind of theatrical

form is especially good at incorporating body and its performance into not only the reshaping of memory but also the modeling of a new revolutionary subjectivity. *Yangban xi* was an invention of Jiang Qing, Mao's wife, who was a fervent pursuer of power and one of the major initiators of the Cultural Revolution. Featuring glorified revolutionary heroes, *yangban xi* was a purposeful denunciation of traditional operas that were usually about emperors or kings and was condemned as feudalistic and bourgeois (there were eight major *yangban xi* produced during the Cultural Revolution, which, beside *The Red Lanter*n, also included *Shajiabang*, *Taking Mountain Tiger by Strategy*, *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment*, *Ode of the Dragon River*, and *On the Dock*). In this light, I take *The Red Lantern* (*Hongdeng Ji*) as an example *par excellence* to help illustrate.

The Red Lantern (1970) tells a story of a communist family's underground life under the Japanese occupation in the 1930s. Li Yuhe, the male protagonist, is a veiled communist whose job is to cover a local party communication station. After Li's execution, his mother Grandma Li passes the red lantern, the symbol of the party in the opera, to Li's daughter Li Tiemei as a symbol of passing down the family's revolutionary tradition. Like most of other *yangban xi*, *The Red Lantern* relies on a socialist realist portrayal of the division between heroes and villains, where class struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor undergirds the central theme. However, *The Red Lantern* is particularly interesting in terms of its depiction of the relation between the body, memory and politics. The composition of the identity of Li Tiemei, the young daughter, speaks of how the state's engineering of individual political subjectivity takes place. First, Li Tiemei's identity is manufactured through the bodily emblem of the state's historical narrative—a glorious history of the revolutionary past—that dominates the writing of her

family tradition, in which the fabrics of her individual memory get completely dissolved into a collective recollection of the state's historical account of class struggle. Reflecting on *The Red Lantern*, Wang (1996) suggests that "the red lantern is the totem of absolute authority…thus when Li Tiemei's face gently caresses the lantern which is a representation of phallic authority, we see an intercourse with feudal relation." Yet, there seems more than that. From a feminist point of view, Li Tiemei's body is neutral and indifferent to gender specificity. On the one hand, her role as a woman and daughter of the revolutionary family highlights the productivity of a female body whose fertility ensures the continuation of future revolutionary generations to come. On the other, seen in her logo-like manly gestures and antagonistic facial expression, the masculinity of Li Tiemei suggests that the materiality of her body is concretized in her desexualized identity as a loyal descendent of the communist revolution (Figure 4.2).

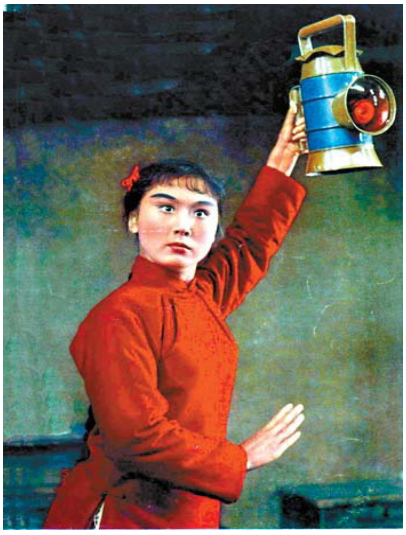


Figure 4.2 Li Tiemei holds the red lantern in her logo-like revolutionary gesture.

As Grosz rightly observes, "the specificity of bodies must be understood in its historical rather than simply its biological concreteness…the body must be understood

through a range of disparate discourses and not simply restricted to naturalistic and scientific modes of explanation" (1994: 19-20). The body should be understood as a contextualized enterprise. The inevitably contextualized body (especially women's body) speaks of the fact the body is by no means reducible to an absolute entity. It is not a result from the disintegration of what surrounds the body but a consequence of a mesh of a multiplicity of forces integral to the contexts to make the body as such. In her study of the political symbol of the Chinese footbinding tradition, Hagar Kotef (2015) examines the bound body in the context of the Western political thought and proposes that this erotic bodily immobility not only serves as the mirroring function to constitute the contrasting image of the other by way of sexuality, but more importantly it reflects the dynamics with respect to the interior-exterior relation that is not yet completely externalized in the context of the Western discourse with veiled political implication. As Kotef points out, it is exactly through the denied intimacy with the exotic footbinding convention does the west find a way to justify its universal standards so much so that the west should overcome this immobility by differentiating itself form the immobile both outside and inside: "it also means that the core of liberal political thought is articulated, and even constituted, in a fragmented manner that particularizes from the outset the 'universal' subject" to legitimize the policing politics in the form of gender inequality and imperialism (2015: 350). That the Chinese women's bound foot receives substantially different cultural/political treatment in its home environment and foreign context attests to the Grosz's insightful observation that the body should be understood in its irreducible specificity. In the case of *The Red Lantern*, Li Tiemei's body is tethered to the composition of a political subjectivity that is vulnerable to and captured by Mao's

revolutionary discourse of mnemonic, gender and political teleology. Evident in the example of Li Tiemei, the substantiation of the revolutionary political subject is thus consigned to the unanimous and absolute historical narrative repeatedly intensified by the memory of the family's revolutionary tradition to be inscribed upon the girl's de-sexualized body. Echoing the bound foot, Li Tiemei's body metaphorically represents a similar kind of immobile body—a body deprived of its gender specificity, a body lacks self-autonomy, and most importantly a body incapable of political mobility. The female body in *The Red Lantern* is a disabled body, rendered in the perfect agreement between the body and memory, that fails to enact the traversal of boundaries between the lawful and the unlawful, the legal and illegal, the permitted and unpermitted. However, as Grosz suggests, the corporeality of the body is full of potentials to be volatile and indeterminate. Might there exist any occasions where the mode of the body becomes less stable in the example of the Cultural Revolution? Might the body and memory be caught in alienation from each other such that they come to act as productive agent of tension and strangeness? If so, how might we reevaluate the important roles of the two such that Mao's Cultural Revolution can be possibly re-examined to unveil the hidden politics? To answer these questions, I now turn to Zhuangzi's theory of *xu*.

Dreaming of Butterfly: The Body and the Memory in Zhuangzi's Theory of *Xu*

A prominent Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi writes extensively in reference to experiences of ordinary life. In his writing, the mundane and quotidian is pervaded with a ubiquitous sense of impermeability that renders the ordinariness perpetually unknowable. For Zhuangzi, we, as humans, are intertwined in a manifold of indeterminate relations such that our accidental encounters with others in everyday life is replete with

unexpectancy and surprise. What undergirds this unknowability in Zhuangzi's writing is the idea of *xu*, which is an important and yet elusive philosophical idea in his Daoist thought that serves as the engine of various changing relations. For Zhuangzi, *xu* is a kind of reversibility that works as a repository of mutual relations by eliminating the gulf between "ten thousand things" (a Chinese philosophical term that encompasses all things in the universe). It promotes the proliferation of a multiplicity of diverse linkages, tangible or intangible, among all things. *Xu* entails various dimensions of spontaneous interacting relations and the breakdown of forceful integration, necessarily involving the defiance of normalization that is compliant with simplistic determinism. Politically speaking, *xu* is a terrain that refuses to be completed when it comes to the understanding of power relation. It decomposes the center and rejuvenates the marginal and periphery in shaping political subjectivity. It is the grey area that readily intrudes and permeates through the substantiated. *Xu* is the opposite side of fullness replete with presupposed power hierarchy—a challenger of an enclosed power nucleus that is only accessible to the few. Central to Zhuangzi's idea of *xu* is its denotation of incompleteness. In his cosmology, incompleteness is a receptivity sustained via new and reversible relations. Incompleteness in *xu* is always about the excess that escapes forceful annexation from the exterior. It is a persistent chasm between the dominating and the dominated. From this perspective, *xu* is registered with profound political meanings. It can be viewed as a radical re-articulation of power structure and power relation in the first place. In what follows, I focus on Zhuangzi's famous story of "Butterfly Dream" to further illustrate the concept of *xu* as well as its political implication as the "Butterfly Dream" is probably the most interpreted story in the *Zhuangzi* due to its mysteriousness:

> "Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi), dreamt that I was a butterfly flitting around

> and enjoying myself. I had no idea I was Chuang Tzu. Then suddenly I woke up and was Chuang Tzu again. But I could not tell, had I been Chuang Tzu dreaming I was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming I was now Chuang Tzu? However, there must be some sort of difference between Chuang Tzu and a butterfly! We call this the transformation of things" (Palmer, chap 2, 2006: 20)

The interpretation of this parable is diverse. Many mention the quest for and crisis of identity entangled in this story. For example, Zhihua Yao proposes that the butterfly symbolizes a human soul or self, a spiritual soul that is still capable of communication and transformation while the body soul is asleep. For Yao, the butterfly dream is interpreted as an evidence of a contradictory self, or a self against self, in a mutual objectifying relation with each other between Zhuangzi and the butterfly. Reflecting on the dream, Xiaoqiang Han suggests that being an image in the dream, the self is created by the butterfly, not the dreamer of *I*. In this relation, the self is not identified with the substantial, and it is the butterfly that essentially becomes the dreamer and "dreams of there being me" (Han 2009: 1-9). In Kuang-ming Wu's reading, the dream indicates that the belief of a fixed idea is doubtful. The awakening from the dream is in fact a release of ourselves from the obsession with objective realism (1986: 4).

Although the above renditions make good attempt at extrapolating the butterfly dream, a political reading of the famous story is very much omitted. The political meaning of this butterfly dream in fact hinges on its interesting conceiving of the memory and body, as well as their interactive relation. In this story, the confusion of Zhuangzi and the butterfly are not found in this seemingly puzzled dream; instead, it is actually in their perplexed recollection of the ambivalent and incomplete past do they find the encounter bewildering. The blurred boundaries of explicitly defined memory and body disturb Zhuangzi as a capable knowing subject. Politics occurs exactly when these perplexities

take place, gaining its life and endurance when the pre-forged boundary between the memory and body is breached and penetrated. In this regard, I propose that, thanks to the affect of *xu*, Zhuangzi turns the interlace of the memory and body into a site of contestation in his blind encounter with the butterfly—an area of power struggle that invites discursive modalities of the memory and body to compete and experience the unsettled and unanchored. During this course, the interaction becomes an active agent that takes its initiative to act rather than to be acted upon.

Palmer's translation is not entirely accurate as she omits to mention the panic Zhuangzi. In the original text, Zhuangzi becomes terrified right after he wakes up from the dream, as he is not able to distinguish from both dreams. Zhuangzi's panic in fact arises from the dissolved assertion between the past and the present. While he enjoys his metamorphosis as a joyfully flying butterfly, this enjoyment is abruptly terminated in his sudden awareness of a disturbing memory, a mnemonic moment where the pre-supposed temporal order falls apart. According to Zhuangzi, what happens before by no means determines what ensues after. There always exists a rift between the two, spanned by the discrete and fragmented attribute of the memory. However, this is not to say that Zhuangzi negates the effect of the past on the present. On the contrary, Zhuangzi views the past as a necessary component of the present, wherein the former keeps illuminating the later insofar as it is deprived of it absolutist power. Through a disparate memory, the present is far from being settled. The indeterminate, lived experience that links the two overthrows a teleological regime where future is predictable as it can be abstracted into the knowledge of the present. In this light, a comparison between Zhuangzi and Henri Bergson helps to make more sense here. For Bergson, memory is contracted into modes

of intuition that eventually gets integrated to the perception of the present. "...If there be memory," writes Bergson, "that is, the survival of past images, these images must be constantly mingle with our perception of the present, and may even take its place" (1911: 70). In Bergson's line, the memory acts on the past in order to prolong the perception of the present. It is, in other words, consistently absolved into the intellect of now. Yet, for Zhuangzi, the present is not the end of the memory, it is even foreign to the latter. The perplexed dream turns out to be a source of disturbance for Zhuangzi who wakes up in panic.

So is the body. Zhuangzi's *xu*-ed body is an incomplete body that retreats from full substantiation. It is a body that is detached from self-assertion and self-fulfillment. The *xu*-ed body is averse to solitude as it grows and functions in its exchangeability with other bodies. In Zhuangzi's theory of *xu*, the ideal body is weak, handicapped and even ugly; its incompleteness welcomes and requires the interchangeability with others to sustain it. Instability is the body's consistent state in finding opportunities to experience, to learn and to become, without which its life would inevitably meet its doom. For Zhuangzi, the disabled body broadens our accesses to the inaccessible of the world. For instance, *xu* is embodied in the unusual tree encountered by Tzu Chi—giant, twisted, snarled but is unuseful for any utilitarian purpose. Zhuangzi uses the example of the deformed tree to indicate that the incomplete body lengthens the tree's life as it is saved from the unusefulness of its trunk and branches (chap 4, 2006: 34). *Xu* is also represented by Crippled Shu's deformed body with his "shoulders higher than the top of his head and his topknot pointing to heaven, his five vital organs all crushed into the top of his body and his two thighs pressing into his ribs" (Palmer, chap 4, 2006: 35). Although these

incomplete bodies are usually regarded as useless, they enjoy their own life circle in experiencing the discursive, in their own ways and by their own means. Bodily speaking, the dream is the place where Zhuangzi communicates with the butterfly through his body and in his enjoyment of this unusual experience of transforming into the insect. Zhuangzi's trepidation comes exactly from his sudden awareness that he has already withdrawn from an incomplete body the very moment he wakes up. When Zhuangzi says "there must be some sort of difference between Zhuangzi and the butterfly," he is not referring to substance distinction between the two. Rather, he is confirming the different processes through which he and the butterfly undertake to experience each other. Put it another way, body, for Zhuangzi, is always found in incessant morphing—or, "the transformation of things" in his own term (Palmer, chap 2, 2006: 20).

As mentioned earlier, the politics of the butterfly dream takes place when the memory and body no longer work together as a solution to make up a knowing Zhuangzi. It happens when the memory and body do not cooperatively reinforce each other any more in forming ideological fixation. Incomplete memory and body are dissolved into self-alienation, causing trouble to the construction of a stable identity. Where the memory is engulfed with fabrics of the disparate and flowing memory that renders the linkage between the past and present difficult to comprehend, the body resides in its incomplete forms to be fulfilled by others. The two live in their own specific routes, making the interplay impossible to anchor. Here, the life of politics keeps being nurtured by *xu*-generated deformity such that unsettled power contestation is always on the go and can never be terminated. The instability of identity composition is continued in Zhuangzi's loss in self-affirmation. That identity is a myth to be imagined immanently but not

manufactured externally lays the foundation of *xu*'s politics—indeterminate identity is the precondition rather than obstacle of politics. Zhuangzi's theory of *xu* provides us with an alternative perspective in reexamining the politics of the Cultural Revolution, to which I will turn in the following section.

Distorting Memory, Distorting Body: The Cultural Revolution Re-experienced

Although Bo is cracked down for boldly trespassing the party's red line on memory, the implication of Bo's case still remains. That Bo attempted to re-manipulate the interplay of the memory and body to reverse the composition of political subjectivity attests to the fact that remembrance of the history is by no means impervious despite the policing boundaries set up by the state. It indicates that the alternative memory of this political event can never be dispersed away. The contestation over a mnemonic rediscovery of the past is itself a witness of different modalities of politics, fluctuating as a response to changing power relations. The fragility and instability of the memory suggest that it is far from being completed due to its intrinsic and unavoidable nature of incompleteness. The Cultural Revolution, as many other political events in the history of the People's Republic, has been experienced and re-experienced time and again in different occasions, at different times and by different means. The paradox of indeterminacy is inlaid in the already intertwined narratives of the history and is too unsettled to be reduced to one universal mnemonic experience. It is all about those experiences of particularity, indifferent and contradictory here and there, but impermeable at all times. The memory of the Cultural Revolution offers us a good opportunity to re-think how a political event can be alternatively conjured up, and more at stake, how new political relation can be re-invented. To further explain my point here,

I focus on Jiang Wen's film *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994) to find out how Zhuangzi's idea of *xu* plays out to deploy the critique of Mao's Cultural Revolution.

Directed by Jiang Wen, *In the Heat of the Sun* tells a story about the coming-of-age of a group of young kids who spend their teenagehood during the Cultural Revolution. Given its convoluted narrative and experimental film style, interpretations of the film are multiple. Yingjin Zhang, for example, considers this film as "nostalgia for the Cultural Revolution" (2002: 12). But it is certainly more than that. The story is recounted by the narrator, Ma Xiaojun, many years after he grows up, in the flashback of his teenage days during the revolution. The most interesting part of the film is its involvement in an intertwined configuration of subjectivity—an identity in question—unfolded in the account by a self-confessed lying narrator. The film develops its narrative in the intense contradiction between reality and fantasy in battling over a troubled past through memory. In this film, the body becomes an unrealistic fantasy embodied in a struggling and blurry memory. The configuration of Ma Xiaojun's identity is a process from self-assertion to self-frustration and eventually self-alienation. *In the Heat of the Sun* reflects a special mode of politics—a politics of *xu*, wherein memory becomes an untrustworthy liar, body a strange phantom. The core of this politics lies in its challenge to unequivocal divisions, as a result of the dynamics between the memory and body that is hardly finalized. That the project of identity formation, as the film shows, is an ongoing, dynamic and distorting intrusion into the unknown attests to the gist of *xu*—politics can never be settled.

Growing up during the Cultural Revolution, Ma Xiaojun, the male protagonist, is a bad-boy character who hangs around with other children of privilege (sons of high-ranking military officials), idling and obsessed with violence, in the absence of parental

guidance at the peak of the social upheaval. A son of a military family, Ma Xiaojun is a fervent admirer of communist revolutionary heroes. He bathes himself in revolutionary songs, salutes to military parade and enjoys throwing himself into the illusion of being a glorious soldier on battleground. In his own words, "I long for the war between China and the Soviet Union, because I firmly believe in the new world war, the iron fist of our army will surely smash the war machines of both the Soviet and U.S.A. A new hero will attract the attention of the whole world—that's me!" For Ma Xiaojun, his self-fabricated identity as an imagined war hero is tethered to the embodiment of Ma Xiaojun's imitation of revolutionary posturing, unmasked by a seemingly undisrupted narration in voice-over (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3 Ma Xiaojun is immersed in his illusion as a war hero.

Here, the memory matches perfectly in the narrator's recollection with his proud body gesture captured in a medium shot to reveal his indulgence in priding himself in being a revolutionary family's descendent. In this scene, the concretization of a Mao's political subject is undoubtedly casted and integrated into the young boy's childhood as part of his adult memory. Inheriting the "rebellious" spirit of the Cultural Revolution, Ma Xiaojun is fond of ridiculing authorities such as his teacher and the policeman, and

trespassing the prohibited exemplified by his hobby of picking locks. Up to this point, the red-guard typed young boy is self-portrayed as an unscrupulous hero, assertive and confident in his mnemonic experience closely associated with the revolutionary discourse of the era.

Yet, the appearance of Mi Lan changes all. Ma Xiaojun's first accidental encounter with the girl is through a telescope that provides him with a voyeuristic gaze of her sexualized body in photograph—chubby and attractive in a red swimming suit (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4 Mi Lan is found by Ma Xiaojun in the telescope.

The boy immediately becomes enamored of her body in the telescope. For Ma Xiaojun, Mi Lan is an embodiment of desire, both sexually and politically, of dominance and control. His craze for Mi Lan is in fact a forceful integration of sexuality (represented by the girl's female body as an ideal sexual symbol) into his dominating revolutionary subjectivity, an omniscient political discourse that is supposed to dissolve and assimilate all. However, his experience with Mi Lan triggers a frustrating trip of self-recognition, revealing memory as an inveterate liar. A stark contrast is set up between the time Ma Xiaojun enjoys with Mi Lan and the troubled memory that starts to get more and more

blurry. In a scene where the boy is holding the girl's hands and happily dancing with her, the long shot captures the warm picture of the two happy youngsters (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5 Ma Xiaojun enjoys a joyful moment with Mi Lan.

However, the scene is strangely juxtaposed with a perplexed voice-over which confesses in frustration: "it seems that there is something wrong with my memory. The reality is mixed up with fantasy…" For Ma Xiaojun, Mi Lan is mysterious. She is an emobodied myth that corrupts the consistency that structures the relation between body and memory established by previous revolutionary subjectivity. The closer he approaches her body, the farther away he is pushed in flashback. Even though Ma Xiaojun insists that Mi Lan holds him while he carries her at the back of his bike, next cut shows the abrupt disappearance of the girl in the forest, leaving the boy disappointedly frustrated. As Mi Lan's body is always distant and refuses to be annexed, Ma Xiaojun becomes more agitated and depressed—very much the similar reaction that Zhuangzi receives when he wakes up from his memory of the butterfly dream. "The more you want to tell the truth, the more disruption you will have. I desperately find it is just impossible to restore reality. Memory is always changed and masked by my emotion, betraying and making fun of me, leaving me frustrated and confused," recalls Ma Xiaojun. In fact, Mi Lan is Ma Xiaojun's butterfly dream, magically real and fantasized at the same time with similar experience:

once infatuated in it but awaken puzzled and desperate in the end. Her body is ironically both a desirable sexual object he wants to hold dear and an enemy he resents fiercely in the memory. But unlike Zhuangzi, Ma Xiaojun is even more radical in dealing with the ramification: his discontentment with Mi Lan culminates at the point when he kicks love-hate girl hard into a swimming pool. His later attempted rape of Mi Lan is another indication of the radical assertion of his waning masculine dominance over the girl's body. Commenting on this, Silbergeld insightfully observes, "the pure object of desire becomes an imperfect object of conflicted feelings, attraction and disgust, embodying both his longing and feeling of rejection, a woman sought after with increasing desperation yet increasingly ripe for abuse" (2008: 27). At this point, Ma Xiaojun's previously established identity as a revolutionary hero is completely shattered in his confused recollection about Mi Lan.

A contrast between Li Tiemei in *The Red Lantern* and Mi Lan in *In the Heat of the Sun* is also meaningful. Where the former represents the successful embodiment of the integration of a family's memory into the party's grand history, the latter emerges as a disturbing threat to the consistency and stability of the state's ideological writing. Ma Xiaojun's ambition in manufacturing himself as a true and loyal inheritor of the revolution is confronted again and again in his troubled memory of Mi Lan. The politicization of both women's bodies has fundamentally different effects in *The Red Lantern* and *In the Heat of the Sun* regarding the Cultural Revolution. The fullness of Li Tiemei's body is achieved in her complete memory as a heroic revolutionary soldier whose integrated subjectivity is smoothly accepted into the external environment—the undoubted family tradition. In Li Tiemei's case, the interplay of the body and memory

successfully represents the state's powerful ideological regime—a politics that rectifies. But Mi Lan's body is awfully incomplete and remote in Ma Xiaojun's eyes, making the latter's subjectivity replete with confrontational uncertainties from pieces of fragmented, unfaithful memory. Intertwined together, body and memory interact with each other to produce the *x*u-ed area, a grey terrain where political identity stubbornly defends its indeterminacy, a state Zhuangzi would call *xu*, by rejecting a presupposed cooperation between the memory and body. Unlike Li Tiemei's thorough revolutionary enthusiasm, Ma Xiaojun's hormonally charged energy fails to be recycled into the revolutionary passion. It bypasses Mao's ideology of class struggle as it is inevitably trapped in the blurred boundary between friend and enemy. In this sense, under the dominant authority of censorial culture in China, *In the Heat of the Sun* is itself a grey middle ground that engages in the making of Zhuangzi's *xu*-ed politics—a politics that mystifies, in contrast to Mao's politics that rectifies.

In conclusion, the relation between body and memory provide us with alternative perspectives in viewing the politics of the Cultural Revolution. First, as we see in the Bo incident, the memory is a politically forbidden area that is closed to contestation. The crime of Bo and his followers exactly lies in their unapproved intrusion, which is perceived as a threat to the authority of the party-state. That the memory is immune from autonomous individual specificity and is put under the strict censorship of the state in accordance with the latter's grand historical narrative indicates that the memory constitutes a crucial part of the party-state's political legitimacy based on how its past is remembered. In addition, the body also plays an indispensible role in this mnemonic experience. The body offers the corporeal foundation for the unified memory to be

shaped and consolidated in shaping political subject. However, while the state aims to construct revolutionary subjectivity through the consistency between the two, political identity is itself a *xu*-ed area in which body and memory contests each other without ever being settled and grasped. For Zhuangzi, *xu* is a state of incompleteness in which the mnemonic and bodily specificities are made possible via the unstable differences in their relations to each other. As demonstrated in *In the Heat of the Sun*, beneath the facade of the revolution that is seemingly organized and structured by Mao's ideology of class struggle, different modalities of politics prevails.

Chapter 5: Modernization in Doubt: The Body as Moral Critique of State Capitalism

Introduction

What is most distinctive about China's post-Mao era is perhaps the intermingling of the country's aspiration for modernization via fast capitalist growth and the state's ever-tight political control. On the one hand, China's economy is successfully spurred through large-scale privatization; on the other hand, the state still manages to maintain its power supremacy, largely speaking, in the wave of the country's economic re-structuring. However, the new era is also accompanied with rising social protests. The uprisings occur everyday, in ways large and small, publicly visible or invisible, throughout the country as responses to a variety of issues that include (and certainly not limited to) official corruption, illegal land appropriation, environmental crises, laid-off workers, etc. These protests are direct and indirect confrontations that disclose the tension hidden inside the contemporary Chinese society. This tension is an indication of the deeply entrenched gap between the state and the society—a paradox in a myriad of aspects—that permeates the country.

This chapter is devoted to the understanding of this tension. Its focus is the body and its aim is to explore the political implication of the body that speaks of this tension in the context of Chinese politics. The major purpose of this chapter consists of the following aspects. First, it describes and analyzes the paradox of the modernization by closely looking at its core content of state-led capitalism. Next, it introduces the idea of absurd body proposed by Zhuangzi, which lays down the theoretical foundation of the relation between the body and politics in the post-Mao era. Third, the chapter explores in

depth how the effect of state capitalism is unfolded and demonstrated on the bodies of the migrant workers. This includes ways in which the body is perceived and constituted as a function of the power nexus congruent with the logic of the state's capitalist political economy. Lastly, it closely investigates the body's inherent agency that engages the external politico-economic environment in the making of the political. Here, rather than being objectified by the state, the body turns out to be an active agent in creating dissident political subjects who, instead of being absorbed into the homogenization sponsored by the state capitalism, demonstrates themselves as constant moments of rupture *en route* to modernization. It ultimately attempts to unfold the body's intrinsic agency in the context of everyday life as a moral critique of the state capitalism. In so doing, the chapter relies on the film *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) to help me illustrate the embodiment of the tension and ways in which it reveals hidden power relation.

I argue that the rhetoric of modernization provides the growth of the state capitalism with a particular economic form of governance by which the state is empowered to re-organize the structure of the body in a way that facilitates its extraction of the instrumental value of the migrant workers. The state's expropriation of the body is attempted through a process of homogenization wherein forceful spatial arrangement of the body is implemented to normalize both the body's economic and political function on a par with the state's capitalist principle of pursing maximum profit. However, as indicated in the film, the structure of the body is far from being settled. For Zhuangzi, the body is an absurdity. It is a radical re-carving of space, not only of its own territory but also of the external environment into which the body is inserted as an incompatibility. This absurdity stems from the idea of *xu* as various stages of rupture that refuse to be

assimilated into the process of the homogenization of the capitalist political economics. Instead of normalizing and rectifying the body, *xu* deforms the body. It makes the body into multiple modes of unconformity that deviates the body from the outside center. This dissident body constitutes the very autonomous space where the migrants are identified with their individual desires, frustrations, and experiences that are present as too heterogeneous to be resolved into the metanarrative of modernization. Yet, its autonomy necessarily requires the existence of external power to be recycled by the body for alternative use. The political core of this type of body hinges on its persistent indeterminacy that keeps the tension between the state's reason of political economy and the stubbornly unsettled body from being eliminated.

Modernization, State Capitalism, and the Paradox

Since Mao's death in 1976 and the fall of the Gang of Four, China has embarked on a series of ambitious reforms under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and his successors. Unlike the Mao era whose political foundation was based on large-scale socio-political movements of class struggle, the Deng era was marked with its embrace of "the market economy with the Chinese characteristics." Abandoning Mao's ideology of planned economy, Deng adopted pragmatic policies toward economic reform. One of the most famous mottos of the Deng era was "it doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice" (Li 1977: 107). During the Deng era, the market economy was re-introduced to the country to jumpstart its economy. Although the essence of the market economy under Deng's leadership was still largely state-led, it successfully stimulated China's economy at a speed that was unprecedented since the Mao era. Despite a short period of setback following the crackdown of the Tiananmen

pro-democracy protest in 1989, Deng managed to resist the pressure from the hardliners within the party to re-institute his economic reform. Since then, China's economy has been undertaking a rapid growth, as the increase of GDP constitutes the center of the economic reform.

What should be noted in this post-Mao reform era is the state's re-engineering of the fundamental politico-economic discourse of "modernization." Modernization has perhaps been the most underlying metanarrative in the course of China's political history since the mid-19th century. Since its first major violent encounter with the modern West during the Opium War (1840-1842), China started to embark on a series of self-strengthening (*ziqiang*) projects of development in order to modernize the country and catch up with the West. These projects spread across a wide array of fields in areas of politics, economy and military, etc. The road to modernization during the late Qing Dynasty marked the country's very first encounter with modernity. Yet, since its historical debut, the account of modernization has always been a seed of tension between new ideas and traditions that keeps insinuating itself into the relation between the state and the society in the country. The outbreak of a series of both peaceful and violent social movements such as the Boxer Rebellion (1900) and the May Fourth Movement (1919) all speak to the fact that the road to modernization is as fuzzy as is the meaning of the term itself. And this ambiguity, as well as the entailed tension, continued throughout the history of the People's Republic.

After Mao and his colleagues established the communist regime, the state attempted to resolve this ambiguity into the grand political discourse of Mao's communist revolution. Modernization, during the Mao era, became a crucial segment to be woven

into the grand historiography of the communist regime. As Mao himself pointed out, "we can't follow the old track of technological development in other countries, crawling behind one step after another. We should break convention, in a short period of time, turn our country into a modernized and powerful socialist nation" (Mao 1964). For Mao, modernization serves as both means and end in structurally transforming the Chinese society into a revolutionary political entity that sets itself radically apart from its predecessors.

However, in the post-Mao era, the term has been re-invested with new and different content—economic growth has replaced class struggle in composing the core of the new era's project of socialist modernization. "Make economic development the central task, uphold the four cardinal principles and reform and opening up policy, and turn China into a prosperous, democratic and civilized modern socialist country" (*Xinhuanet*). In this era, the state places economic growth at supreme position and adopted a series of ambitious reform policies to re-invigorate the country's economy. Under this new political/economic guiding principle, the state aims to re-direct the path toward modernization by increasing average material gain. The juxtaposition of economic development and modernization attests to the state's ambition in modernizing China's economy by taking whatever approach that will help the state achieve this goal. Modernization, in this sense, has now become considerably substantiated by its goal of material pursuit in the new post-Mao era.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, the state is also deeply concerned with lesson from the fall of the Soviet Union and keeps alert about the potential grave consequence of mishandling the relation between economic growth and political liberalization. For the

Chinese leaders in the post-Mao era, one critical and yet risky task is ultimately: how can the growth of the economy be spurred while retaining the political grip of the central state? Such a dilemma comes as a particular threat to the Chinese state for two major reasons: 1) after the demise of communism as a legitimate political ideology, the state urgently needed alternative discourses to restore and justify its political legitimacy; 2) with economic liberalization, how might the state continue to remain its tight political control without losing the benefit of economic growth? Hence, in order to secure its powerful political influence over the society, the state has to find out new strategies to consolidate its hierarchical power structure in the face of changing economic relations.

The new strategy embraced by the state is coined "socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics" (*you zhongguo tese de shehui zhuyi shichang jingji*). The term is invented to reconcile capitalist economic relationship into the paradigm of the Chinese socialist economy. The true content of this term, however, is about resolving the contradiction that while China's modernization is inseparable from capitalism, the supreme role of the central state in restructuring the country's political economy must be retained. As Du Yanhua points out, "in contrast with the Soviet model, China's modernization model is characterized by the choice to cast aside the concepts of traditional socialism, so as to avoid the errors that emerged in the construction of socialism in the former Soviet Union; this primarily involved learning how to exploit capitalism" (2013-14: 49). On the one hand, this newly defined "socialism with Chinese characteristics" separates itself from traditional Maoist communist modernization that heavily relied on a rigid planned economic system and is hostile to free market. On the other hand, it refrains from implementing westernized free market by re-organizing and

re-structuring the distribution of resources produced by the market toward the benefit of the privileged few. The former indicates the will of the state in re-appropriating social resources with different approach and in different context whereas the latter suggests that any possible social autonomy generated out of the new economic relation should be closely checked for its potential challenge to the authority of the state. In addition, what is also noteworthy is that this particular form of state capitalism also renders accessibility to power rather limited. In this system, power is intertwined with the distribution of material gain in a mutually reinforcing relation. Money and power are so intimately tied together that one cannot exist without the other.

"Socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics" is exactly a statement which highlights the key features of China's state capitalism: "this represents the correct management of the relationship between socialism and capitalism: thus China's modernization may exploit capitalism to the fullest extent but can also avoid the disastrous consequences of capitalist modernization" (Du 2013-14: 50). This is, therefore, essentially a manifestation of China's distinctive state-run capitalism, one that pursues the maximum accumulation of capital in the hands of the few, and yet in the meanwhile, bases itself on a fixed and closed power structure secluded from the rest of the society. Accessibility to the power hierarchy is strictly limited as a privileged resource. Modernization, in the post-Mao era, plays a critical role as the ally of the state capitalism in China in helping strengthen the latter's zoning of its dominating power. Modernization fortifies the formulation of the state-capitalism by supplying it with necessary knowledge, discourse and rhetoric. It radically re-shapes the Chinese people's view of the relation between the past, present and future of both their lives and the country they are living in.

Slogans such as “Let some people become rich,” “To be rich is glorious,” and “Poverty is a shame” are frequently seen in every corner of the country to remind the people that economic development is not just an individual choice but a compulsory moral obligation—a form of loyalty to the state, a patriotism. Modernization, in other words, is moral rectitude. In Kim’s observation, “the glorious past of China with its advanced scientific knowledge, and its losses to the western-dominated modern world, stimulate Chinese people and authorities to hold on to the development of science in promoting patriotism…” (2011: 689). In this light, modernization “with the Chinese characteristics” assumes the important political function of nation-state building. As Chun Lin insightfully observes, the hybridization of a shameful history and modern development makes the Chinese government “look simultaneously moralistic and pragmatic, patrimonial and professional, and patriarchal and socialist” (Lin 2006: 29). By its commitment to “modernizing,” the state projects another national allegory and itself being a historically progressive and advanced force in unifying and leading the country. The state, now equipped with new ideological innovations, is confident again in re-asserting “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu de weida fuxing*) and convince its people to rally around the flag.

To further look at the Chinese state-capitalism and its politico-economic form, I focus on a particular group of people—the migrant peasant workers—who constitute a crucial segment of China’s transformation into state capitalism. The emergence of the migrant workers is coupled with the rapid development of urbanization in China. This population mainly consists of millions of workers who originally come from rural areas of the country and move to the cities to sell their labor. These rural-to-urban workers

assume very special roles in the changing Chinese society. During the Mao era, peasants were strictly prohibited from moving to the urban areas mainly due to limited resources that were retained as a privilege to urban residents. Yet, in the post-Mao era, despite ever-present limited openness for the peasants to permanently settle in the cities, the mobility of these workers has been greatly enhanced. Leaving their rural home and family far behind, a large population of peasants chooses to move to the urban area to find jobs. By 2012, this number had reached 260 million (*Chinanews*). The country's fast-paced industrialization and commercialization not only need the peasant workers as cheap labor to ensure its advantageous productive force in the world market but also views them as a large group of potential consumers. Nevertheless, on the other hand, the migrant workers are confronted with the imperviousness of the cities and have hard time being accepted and assimilated. As Jian Xu comments, "the state, however, has an ambivalent attitude towards this new subaltern class. On the one hand, it recognizes the migrants substantial contributions to national economy; on the other hand, it sees the mobile people as a potential problem for social stability on account of the difficulties involved in regulating and transforming them into a new kind of subject" (2005: 434). The chain of attempted suicides occurred in recent years by Foxconn's (the world's largest contract electronics manufacturer) employees suggests that this tension must be real and sharp. Struggling with their ambivalent identity as being both wanted and undesired, the migrant workers have become an important phenomenon to study the power nexus generated in China's pursuit of modernized state capitalism. This irreconcilability between the peasant workers and the impenetrable metropolis tells of a compelling story of how the state capitalism unfolds itself in the political context of the Chinese society.

The Body as Absurdity

One interesting and useful point of entry into the understanding of China's post-Mao modernization is from the perspective of the body. The body has been playing an important role in the history of the country's political life. It functions as both political symbol and agent in the practice of the country's everyday political experience be it the body as a critical source of physical labor during the Great Leap Forward, the body as a sign of political classes in the Cultural Revolution or the body as a site of political dissent for the students who launched hunger strike during the Tiananmen protest. The body not only exemplifies the dynamic formation of political power as well as its struggle in the concrete Chinese social context, it also functions as the agentic site that keeps spawning the making of the political. What is particularly interesting, in this regard, is the very narrative concerning the relation between the body and the external power composed through the positioning and re-positioning of the former in the circulation of everyday mundane life. Following Michel Foucault and in relating sovereignty and "bare life," Giorgio Agamben describes the life of *homo sacer* (sacred man) and its inevitable fate bound by state politics. According to Agamben, *homo sacer* refers to those "who may be killed and yet not sacrificed" as a necessary form of inclusive exclusion that plays a crucial role of testimony to the absolute sovereign power of the state" (8). Via the convergence of both the realm of bare life and the realm of politics, inclusion and exclusion, the sovereign exception successfully unveils its mask of supreme power. This is the irreversible paradigm secretly embedded in the foundation of human politics that transcends the realm of religion. From Agamben's perspective, biopolitics has shifted the location of politics to the site of everyday life. In this respect, the body assumes a vital

role in weaving the narrative of life politics. The body not only bears the mark of power imposed from the outside but also acts out as agent (or the "outside-in" vis-à-vis "inside-out," in Elizabeth Grosz' terminology) from within. Placed in the context of the Chinese society, it is a modality of tension that necessarily requires the linkage between the state and the body that lives or is made to live as both object and subject. This persistent tension is meaningfully illustrative of the formation and reformation of power and its structure in the changing Chinese society during the post-Mao era.

To provide a meaningful theoretical background for the agency of the body as well as its political implication for understanding the tension, I focus on Zhuangzi's writing of the absurd body to investigate the underlying ground on which the body is conceived in his theory. A renowned Daoist philosopher, Zhuangzi writes extensively on the body. Zhuangzi is particularly famous for writing bodies that are deformed and useless. Crippled and ugly-looking bodies that are considered to be of little value always receive enormous favorable evaluations from Zhuangzi. These bodies are never viewed as valuable by the majority and usually tend to be ignored for their uselessness. Throughout his writing, Zhuangzi devotes substantial portion of his writing to examples of bodies that are caught in shapes alien to the aesthetic and utilitarian norms of the society. More interestingly, these bodies, as indicated in Zhuangzi's writing, make up the significant segments of rupture that annoyingly interrupt the consistency of the structure of a given society organized by bodily indoctrination. They constitute areas of inconsistency, grey zones, that spontaneously emerge from and permeate through the society. For Zhuangzi, these bodies are the bodies of *xu*—indeterminate as they are, and yet find their way to constant tension with the external orders and values. On the one hand, they reject forceful

imposition from the outside; but on the other hand, they internalize the outside for its reuse. They retain their internal vitality in outwardly re-structuring the space that attempts to absorb it in the first place. They are strange and absurd, connecting themselves with the outside in ways that are hardly captured by external power. This absurdity comes out of a kind of dislocation that is bodily registered and operated in misplacing and misorganizing the operating space of power. This absurdity is also a form of persistence whose existence is only found in its co-existence with the power that tries to tame it. Therefore, the body as absurdity exactly means that the body is a creative incompatibility which yields frictions with the center while keeps rejuvenating itself by harnessing the latter. More importantly, to Zhuangzi, the body as such is also morally charged in questioning and critiquing established forms of power that are easily bypassed without being checked. Zhuangzi's *xu*-ed body is a zone of unsettlement where stored values are inescapably revoked and suspended for critical reevaluation.

Two major properties are primarily associated with Zhuangzi's body of deformity: formlessness (*wuxing*) and uselessness (*wuyong*). Formlessness refers to the spontaneous spatialization that helps the body escape from the confinement of any given form. Uselessness means a radical insertion of an unprincipled knowing that ultimately disrupts the deeply entrenched regime of discriminating knowledge that distinguishes one thing from anther. Both usefulness and uselessness serve as accommodating force that mediates the reshaping of the indeterminate zones of the body in relation to its outside environment. For example, in the story of the oak tree, Zhuangzi talks about a grand and old oak tree venerated by its local people as their home of the spirits of the land:

> The tree was so vast that a thousand oxen could hide behind it. It was a hundred spans round and it soared above the hill to eighty feet before it even began to put out branches. There were ten such branches, from any one of which an entire boat could be carved. Masses

of people came to see it , giving the place a carnival atmosphere…(Palmer, chap 4, 2006: 33).

A carpenter comes across the tree and comments that the tree is uselessly old: "make a boat from it and it would sink; make a coffin and it would rot quickly; make some furniture and it would fall to pieces…this wood is useless and good for nothing" (Palmer, chap 4, 2006: 33). Apparently, the carpenter's indifference to the oak tree is derived from his unfamiliarity with the formlessness of the tree which is foreign to someone who only subscribes to the bodies that are of particular shape and use value. In the carpenter's eyes, it is a world of static and unchangeable objects that compose a final and complete inventory of furniture without unexpected surprise. To the carpenter, the world is made up of the bodies as fixed layers of constituents settled in a variety of predetermined forms for a multiplicity of instrumental values, in serving for the power of his knowledge as a skilled and professional carpenter.

The carpenter's prejudice is sharply contrasted by the wisdom of Nan Po Tzu Chi:

> Nan Po Tzu Chi, wandering amongst the mountains of Shang, came upon a great and unusual tree, under which could shelter a thousand chariots, and they would all be covered. Tzu Chi said, "what kind if a tree is this? It surely is a most wondrous piece of timber!" However, when he ooked up, he could see that the smaller branches were so twisted and gnarled that they could not be made into rafters and beams… "The tree is certainly good for nothing," said Tzu Chi. "This is why it has grown so large. Ah-ha! This is the sort of uselessness that sages live by (Palmer, chap 4, 2006: 34).

Unlike the carpenter, Tzu Chi is able to the tree's inability to settle in one form and wind up in practical utility. The formless and useless body of the oak tree, for Tzu Chi (and also for Zhuangzi), forges a mode of uncontained otherness that cuts across the field of the carpenter's knowledge and decenters the carpenter as a powerful knowing subject. All claim to the universal center of the carpenter is hence renounced when the body of the oak tree creates an irresolvable tension between there-is-form and there-is-no-form, and between usefulness and uselessness. When the tree extends and grows its body in ten

thousand different ways for ten thousand different purposes, it brings about a kind of randomness that marks the surrender of the fixed and discriminating knowledge of all kind. In the oak tree's own words (in response to the carpenter):

> What are you exactly comparing me with? With ornamental fruit trees? Their fruits are knocked down when they are ripe and the trees suffer. The big branches are damaged and the small ones are broken off. Because they are useful, they suffer, and they are unable to live out the years Heaven has given them. They have only their usefulness to blame for this destruction wrought by the people (Palmer, chap 4, 2006: 34).

This is a Zhuangzian statement of absurdity. It belies the tyranny of knowledge in authoritatively structuring bodily space as dependent appendix to its power regime. This absurdity is an irruption of variegated spontaneous forces to overthrow the enclosure of forms. The grandness of the oak tree speaks of its objectless desire (*wuyu*), or to borrow the term from Ames and Hall, "deferential desire," which is "based upon a noncoercive relationship (*wuwei*) with the world and a 'mirroring' understanding (*wuzhi*) of it," and "is shaped not by the desire to own, to control, or to consume, but by the desire simply to celebrate and to enjoy" (2003: 42). The spatial understanding of this observation is that formlessness exemplifies an indeterminate spatial relation wherein the body morphs in a myriad of dimensions in re-constructing space without owning, possessing and controlling it. In one word, Zhuangzi's absurd body is a grey area of *xu* that is not only difficult to be circumscribed by boundaries but is also disruptive to well-established outlines.

Zhuangzi's formless and useless body is radically different from that of Confucius. For Confucius, the body is by no means an end by and of itself. Rather, it is a means through which the moral transformation of both individuals and the society gets enabled; and however, the ways in which it is utilized is dependent upon the established moral codes and principles of a given society to fulfill its maximal social value. The Confucian

body, to put it another way, is a dependent entity, disciplined, tamed and trained as such. It is a crucial social instrument in the sense that it is obliged to resolve the tension between individuals and the state so as to help the former to reconcile itself into the order of the latter. For Confucius, the state is the highest form of ethical code which demands the subsumption of all social beings into its supreme moral enclosure through the repeated practices of bodily performance that are socially meaningful.

Two crucial aspects constitute the Confucian process of bodily cultivation—*ren* (humanity) and *li* (ritual), with the former being the moral core of Confucianism and the latter serving as the mediatory process in which the body becomes moralized. *Ren* is the cardinal value to Confucianism. To Confucius, *ren* entails a series of moral values that ultimately aim for human elevation. As Confucius says, "to devote oneself earnestly to one's duty to humanity and, while respecting the spirits of the departed, to avoid them, may be called wisdom…The man of virtue puts duty first, however difficult, and makes what he will gain thereby an after consideration—and this may be called virtue" (Confucius 1995: 31). What underlines the foundation of *ren* is its anthropocentric focus on reciprocal duties to human relations (e.g., father-son, ruler/ruled, husband-wife, elder-young). Questions such as how to become a better human being or what distinguishes human from animals are the top concern for the Confucian moral principles. It is not exaggerating to say that the teaching of Confucius is exactly about elevating human above and beyond the nonhuman world by fulfilling a set of constant social relations. In this regard, *ren* dictates a set of moral codes that men should devotedly engage in dealing with their relations with other people. As neo-Confucianist scholar Tu Wei-Ming suggests here, "surely, 'love' remains a defining characteristics of *ren*, but as the scope of

ren becomes qualitatively broadened, it is no longer possible to conceive of *ren* merely as a localized value" (Tu 1985: 84). Although changing contexts render *ren* a multiple form of meanings (love, faith, loyalty, filial piety, etc.), it is regarded as the guiding principle in cultivating men's behavior in relation to both the outside world and their inner heart.

Ren has profound moral implication for Confucius's understanding of the body. The vital process through which the Confucian body is transformed into human body of *ren* is called *li* (ritual). In Confucius's teaching, *li* is a bodily expression of the moral paradigm of a given society. Or in Bockover's phrase, "*li* is the body language of ren or the authentic expression of our humanity" (Bockover 2012: 177). *Li* is invested with a system of social intelligence invented and indoctrinated by the state as an overarching moral order. *Li* is so important that it is considered as the social enshrinement of *ren* via the process of ritualization: "Tzu Kung wished to dispense with the live sheep presented in the Ducal Temple at the announcement of the new moon. The Master said: 'Tzu! You care for the sheep. I care for the ritual" (Confucius 1995: 14). Since the act of ritual is sanctified to enact the moral empowering of *ren*, the life of the sheep is certainly not to be spared. An acute moral sensitivity is required to be cultivated through *li*. In addition, the teaching of *li*, according to Confucius, requires the bodily participation of social rituals in everyday life as a critical intermediary to transform social individuals as well as human condition in general. Through ritual, men undertake a course of self-transformation to cultivate themselves to act as a noble man (*junzi*). As Gier correctly points out, "*li* is essentially a discipline of the body, and the literal meaning of teaching by example, which is to be preferred over teaching by words, means body teaching" (Gier 2001: 384). Therefore, in Confucius's teaching, the meaning of the body is dependent

upon a variety of dynamic relations as a way of both externalization and internalization: on the one hand, it outwardly expresses the cultivated moral value of *ren* embedded from within; on the other, this inner cultivation necessarily involves the attempts to internalize the exterior moral order.

Yet, while Zhuangzi may agree with Confucius to the extent that self-cultivation requires everyday practice, he radically disagrees with Confucius's conceptualization of the body as such. For Zhuangzi, the Confucian body is too dogmatically contextualized to "wander free." As Tu observes, "our bodies, for instance, are not our own possessions pure and simple; they are sacred gifts from our parents and thus laden with deep ethnicoreligious significance" (Tu 1985: 118). The body, in this sense, does not have its self-standing virtue as an organic being in transforming and creating the world on its own. Instead, its capacity rests upon *li* as its proxy in manifesting its social meaning and value. There is no such thing as the body in and of itself; rather, there is only body language orchestrated into semiotic systems of social linguistics. This, for Zhuangzi, is utterly wrong. The problem of Confucius exactly lies in his revocation of the body's intrinsic agency. Instead of eulogizing Confucius's noble man, Zhuangzi praises the true man (*zhenren*), the venerated Daoist sage, who abandons the moral training of the body and gladly loses him/herself in the indistinguishable chaos of "the ten thousand things" without moral distinction:

> The true man of old did not hold on to life, nor did he fear death. He arrived without expectation and left without resistance. He went calmly, he came calmly and that was that. He did not set out to forget his origin, nor was he interested in what would become of him. He loved to receive anything but also forgot what he had received and gave it away. He did not give precedence to the heart but to the Tao, nor did he prefer the ways of humanity to those of Heaven. This is what is known as a true man (Palmer, chap 6, 2006: 48).

The obliviousness of the true man refers to a kind of de-moralization in conceiving of the body. Rather than a social instrument loaded with moral obligations, the body of the true man is a mode of randomness and intuitiveness that follows his spontaneous body in transforming and becoming the world. The true man cherishes his/her body as an unorganized and yet capable agent in opening up a world of opportunities to him/her, even though it may look rather absurd in many ways looked down upon in a Confucian society. As Chong suggests, the true man is true because he "could refer to what is natural as opposed to human artifice and falsity, and it could be used to refer to a true, original nature, whether of things in general or of human being" (2011: 337). For Zhuangzi, the spontaneous body of the true man is not only a bodily denial of Confucius's disciplined body, it is also Zhuangzi's critique of Confucius's noble man as a limited moral paradigm. Zhuangzi's body provides a fundamental ground for the moral critique of the Confucian body.

In his comparison between Kierkegaard's attack of Hegel and Zhuangzi's challenge of Confucius, Daniel Johnson (2012) points out that both Kierkegaard and Zhuangzi provide a "social misfit" critique in undermining the irreducible ethical life deeply entrenched in Hegel's and Confucius's moral politics (365). According to Johnson, Kierkegaard takes issue with Hegel regarding the latter's notion that "there is no criterion fro morality external to the social norms realized in a community, and no one exists and can exist in abstraction from their roles in their community…" (2012: 365). In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard suggests that Hegel can neither justify the value of Abraham's faithfulness to social morality, nor can Hegel provides hope for those who find themselves unable to fulfill this social morality, which turns Abraham into a moral misfit

of the Hegelian community. Johnson continues to argue in the same vein that Zhuangzi's "social misfit" critique lies in its account for those unaccounted ways of living that are uncounted in Confucius's moral system—"there must therefore be value in valueness, usefulness in uselessness, a perspective on value that lies beyond human society" (Johnson 2012: 366). The "social misfit" critique, to Johnson, is essentially a moral attack of pre-imposed socialization of ethical life that aims to provide a universal accountability for human relations and human existence. According to Johnson's "social misfit" theory, such moral universality "cannot do justice to the value of those beings and actions which simply cannot meet social norms" (2012: 367). The key element of the "social misfit" critique is found in its capacity in disrupting pre-established moral order by making visible the unaccounted as the unanimous and yet irreducible rift—the misfit—that refuses to be assimilated into the overarching moral system. In the specific case of Zhuangzi, what is more important in understanding the power of the moral critique is the awareness of the absurd body. For Zhuangzi, the absurd body itself is a misfit of the moral norm in a given Confucian society. The existence of the ugly oak tree or the deformed body of Crippled Shu is indicative of Zhuangzi's view that the body is absurdity, generative of disrupting forces in Confucius's moral regime. It betrays the didactic core of *ren,* as it goes against the socialization of *li*, revealing the vulnerability of the Confucian society. To Zhuangzi, the critiquing power of the absurd body comes from its stubborn insistence on creating the deviant, the marginalized, the new, the misfit. It is an agentic site that breeds spontaneity and intuitiveness. It is a long-lasting process of practice, through which men shun away from pre-given moral roles and turn themselves into *zhenren* (the true men).

Dissidence Rearmed: The Body as Moral Critique of the State Capitalism

Yue Minjun is a renowned contemporary Chinese artist famous for his works in the "laughing-face series." The series features self-portraits of wide-mouthed laughing faces with identical, exaggerated facial expressions of hysteria (Figure 5.1 & 5.2):

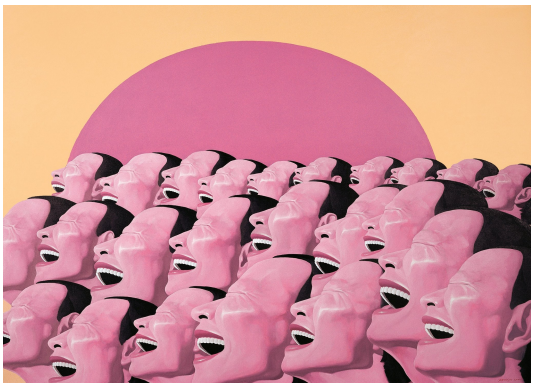


Figure 5.1 *The Sun, 2000*



Figure 5.2 *The Soldier*

Yue Minjun, among other Chinese artists (e.g., Zhang Xiaogang and Fang Lijun), is associated with the artistic movement of Cynical Realism, which expresses disguised discontentment toward harsh political repression and permeating social illusion in post-Tiananmen era in China. Yue's works are characteristic of contextual dislocation, which entails the processes of re-juxtaposing the background contexts with their subjects. By re-investing familiar everyday contexts with strange and abrupt subjects, Yue is able to lend

his audiences an opportunity to escape from their familiar environment and lure them into uncommon experiences. What is key to this experiential recreation is Yue's distinctive portrayal of the body. In one sense, Yue creates a form of irreducible body—or bare body—that refuses to be absorbed into the storytelling of the context in a pre-given way. The context alone does not occupy the body (not even the laughter), as it is unable to reduce it to one singular element of its narrative; on the contrary, the absurd bodies act as agent in orchestrating the varying contexts into new rhythms and new stories. Put it another way, for Yue, the pre-established political structure carefully inserted in a given context is eventually found unable to effectively exert its dominating control. The absurdly gestured bodies, with their repeated effect of intensifications, now act as powerful actant in reshuffling power relation and carving out new political dissidents. The political stake of Yue's dissident body hinges on its witty and cynical recreation of unfamiliarity out of familiarity—an irresistible and bold re-structuring of existing contextual space that gives birth to the making of the political through the creating of the new in everyday life.

The aim of this section is to highlight the political significance of this everydayness in ways that reveal the logic of the state capitalism that penetrates into the Chinese people's everyday life. It also intends to explore how the making of the political takes place in a bodily sphere as a critical moral response to the exploitative nature of the state capitalism. Modernization is a bodily project that aims to re-organize and re-possess the migrants' body by turning it into *prosthetic body* in serving for the state's goal of economic growth. Yet, the body is far from being settled; it actively engages in re-shaping politics by creating a zone of indeterminacy, a perpetual area of irreconcilability.

The visual representation in *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) illustrates this tension. The film depicts the state capitalism as a closed enclosure in which power is produced in its strong adherence to the logic of free market, with the state centralizing the distribution of both political and economic resources. Disguised under the veil of economic growth, modernization is essentially an instrument by which the state capitalism executes its dominating power. In *Beijing Bicycle*, the state capitalism is represented in the filmic portrayal of China's mainstream urban culture—an emblem of social hierarchization with a high degree of homogenization—that fetishizes modernized life as well as the social relations that it "promises" to deliver. By setting limits on the extent to which and the form through which a more plural living conditions can be alternatively achieved and expressed, the state capitalism, as represented by both the narrative and style of the film, extends its political dominance via its powerful rhetoric of economic modernization to every segment of people's mundane life. Yet, as will be described and discussed in the following analysis, the juggernaut of the state capitalism inevitably encounters the resistance of the body—a sphere of indeterminacy that refuses to be incorporated into the state's dominant discourse.

Directed by Wang Xiaoshuai, *Beijing Bicycle* tells a story about a young rural migrant's search for his lost bike in the city of Beijing. The opening scene registers a strong sense of documentary realism: while a group of boys are being impatiently interviewed for a courier job, Wang uses a series of close-ups to capture the rustic faces of the boys who emotionlessly answer the questions of the offscreen interviewer (Figure 5.3):



Figure 5.3 Guo is undertaking a job interview for a bike courier position.

One by one, the boys identify themselves in a seemingly unrehearsed interview. Their accents, attire, and manners all indicate that they come from the rural areas from outside the city. This is the very first framing of rural bodies from the perspective of urbanites—they are clumsy, rough-looking and raw. The awkward faces rendered in the close-ups reveal the gaze of the interviewer who finds the bodies of the boys uninteresting, unattractive and undifferentiated. For the impatient interviewer, these untamed and undisciplined bodies represent the rural culture of the country that is too barren and uncultivated to be accepted into Beijing's modern life. For the express company, the transformation of the rural boys necessarily has to involve the "modernization" of their primitive bodies operated on the logic of the city's frenetic wave of commercialization by recreating their bodies. Not surprisingly, the boys are soon to be found in the next scene lined up and dressed in the company's uniforms, being instructed by the manager. The manager tells the newly employed boys that "the bikes provided by the company are supposed to enhance your delivery efficiency and they are not free. The company will deduct partially from your earnings to compensate the bike's cost until you have earned enough to fully own it. This is a new model of management. From now on, you are the Camel Xiangzi of the new era!" The manager is reminding the boys of Lao She's famous

novel, *Camel Xiangzi*, which is about the story of a Chinese peasant rickshaw man, Xiangzi, who spends all his savings from three years' hardworking on a new rickshaw but only finds that his rickshaw is destroyed in the war. By being called "the Camel Xiangzi of the new era," the migrants has been unquestionably reduced to their dependence upon a working body that finds its position only in a production relation enclosed within the particular politico-economic milieu of the highly commercialized city.

The film then cuts to a street scene of Beijing, where hundreds of bike riders are shot with a wide-angle lens in slow motion (Figure 5.4):



Figure 5.4 Bikers on Beijing's street.

In this scene, Wang intends to slow down the pace of the bikers, making each of their pedals heavy and strenuous. The street is teeming with migrant workers who keep pedaling hard enough to struggle for their lives in Beijing without realizing the danger and allure of the city. "The new management model" is exactly a state-imposed economic/political paradigm through which the burdened bodies on the street are turned into prosthetic body whose meaning is twofold. On the one hand, its existence is accounted by the extended portion of its body—bicycle—as an indispensible auxiliary to produce its liveliness. On the other hand, the body of the migrants is itself a prosthetic protrusion transformed and instrumentalized by the state's economic form of politics. The

implication of the prosthetic body consists of two major aspects. First, it introduces an inseparable relation between the migrants' body and their prosthetic body, namely the bikes, without which, the former's existence will be seriously challenged. The bikes are not only the necessary tools for the migrants to make a living in the city but also testify to the bare existence of their bodies. In this sense, with the assistance of the prosthetic body, the body has now an isolated enclosure that shuts itself off from chances of being different—they are becoming homogenized (in collective form as manifested by the swarm of identical cyclists in the street) in ways to live and act. In addition, the body is prosthetic also means that it is deprived of its intrinsic agency in making the change. Rather, the body is being instrumentalized for the wellbeing of the state's economic and political operation. The process of prostheticization is ultimately a process of politicization by which the absolute power of the state is being proclaimed.

In his insightful reading of Judith Butler's meditation on the politics of legibility, Michael Feola explores some urgent questions that include "how do forms of meaning and discourse render certain agents illegible as the kind of bodies that demand protection," and vice versa, and what are the "mechanisms through which some are differentially subjected to violence" (2014 : 132)? For Feola, Butler's politics of legibility is also a politics of sensibility that enriches and consolidates juridico-insitutionalist models that screens the visibility of the violence to certain population. In reflecting on Butler's "frames of war," Feola convincingly points out that what matters to this political discourse is the enactment of the norms that produce differential structure of vulnerability. That is, some are permitted to receive full treatment of humanity while others are consigned to "extra-human" and are hence more readily exposed to

surveillance, correction and without doubt, violence. This is, in Feola's terminology, an "unseen condition of seeing," which refers to a particular form of norms through which "some agents pass unmarked and others show up as problems to be solved, cured, disciplined or mastered" (2014: 136). In one word, Butler's politics of legibility, as Feola finds out, indicates a mode of politics that bears its very foundation on entitlement.

In the context of the Chinese state capitalism and as demonstrated in the film, this heightened politics of sensibility hinges on the creation and sustenance of the prosthetic body as an entitlement of legibility for the migrants to be both economically and politically "modernized" (compliant). It is a process of both differentiation and undifferentiation in the sense that the system not only screens out the migrants' bodies as deviants in its close-ups but also attempt to prostheticize the bodies as homogenous appendix to the gigantic machine of the state capitalism. The migrants' bodies are made as such to receive their social visibility granted by the supreme power of the state. In this light, Jie Yang's anthropological study of informal surrogacy in China is a case in point. According to Yang, the state-led restructuring of the country's economic structure has produced "surfeit of bodies," "a surplus of reproductive labor including rural migrant women, female university students, and women laid off from state enterprises whose bodies and reproductive potentials are devalued" (Yang 2015: 93). The fluidity of the boundaries between the patriarchal state, the male-dominated family and commercialized society has placed women from the lower social class in very disadvantageous position that subjects their bodies to harsh exploitation: "the bodies and emotional and psychological labor of underprivileged women have increasingly become sites of capitalist production; single women are becoming vulnerable to the exploitative desires

of a male-dominated market around sexual relations" (Yang 2015: 93). The country's secretive industry of surrogacy reduces the women's bodies to reproductive instruments—or prosthetic bodies—to ensure the vitality and stability of the market's labor force and consumption. Thus, the surrogates' wombs are exploited for their instrumental values in birthing more than simply children—they are forced to produce a hierarchical economic relation as well as ensuing political relation that separate the ruler from the ruled. It is exactly a politics of differentiation that pre-determines power distribution by differentiating types of bodies.

However, *Beijing Bicycle* shows another kind of body that is worth our attention. It is a neglected site where a hidden power relation secretively lurks. In the film, the body is portrayed as a discursive narrative, a storytelling that emerges out of the trunk of the state's metanarration and yet, eventually manages to escape its presupposed relation with the state by growing itself into an estranged offshoot that goes astray (very much similar to Zhuangzi's useless trees). The body as a deviant narrative finds itself in a strange relation to the universalist discourse produced by the state. On the one hand, its existence is inseparable from the normativity espoused by the state and its capitalist economic form of reasoning; on the other hand, it recycles the materials provided by the dominant discourse for its own reuse. Here, the migrants' body in fact resembles Zhaungzi's absurd body which transforms itself from there-is-form to there-is-no-form, returning itself from usefulness to uselessness. Politics happens exactly when this duality starts to unravel itself. Yang's research also describes this agentic body. In her observation, the surrogates' bodies possess "subjective, experiential dimension" in their affective lives that cannot be captured by the state and its form of governance (2015: 90). While being

exploited by the state's capitalist system, the surrogates' bodies communicate with and transform social, moral and political codes, which eventually lead to the transformation and awakening of the women's political self-consciousness.

This is most evident in a scene when Guo, the rural boy and the protagonist of the film, is found lying on the ground, surrounded by a group of city boys who try to take the bike away from him. Guo holds onto the bike, refusing to loose his tight grip of the too-precious tool. The near background is set against the glamorous night view of the metropolitan Beijing (Figure 5.5):



Figure 5.5 Guo and the gangster boys found in dilemma about the bike's ownership.

The scene is preceded by one in which Guo's limbs are being pulled in the air by the urban boys to separate him from the bike, yelling painfully at the top of his lungs (Figure 5.6):



Figure 5.6 Guo refuses to let go the bike.

In both scenes, Wang creates a meaningful closed film form in re-aligning Guo with the city that the rural boy firmly believes to promise his livelihood. The urban boys are no longer ordinary thugs who are deprived of their political meanings. Rather, in the cinematic rendering of the scenes, they have become the indispensible ally of the state to help constitute the gigantic exploitative system whose frenetic adherence to the norms of economic development takes the form of violence against whoever is against it. As mostly evident in Figure 5.5, the specific cinematic arrangement of the urban boys' positions in relation to the background neo lights of the city alludes to the fact that they are already part of the oppressive force to circumscribe Guo, the poor migrant peasant. The suffocating space of the scenes, cultivated at the peak of the boy's cry, speaks of the intensified pain that bodily occurs out of the latter's persistent and painful incompatibility with the state's forceful reconciliation into its designated economic/political machinery. Such pain is not unfamiliar to Elaine Scarry, for whom it is a consequence of torture that aims to proclaim the yielding of the torturer's power in relation to the prisoner's suffering: "within physical events of torture, the torturer 'has' nothing: he has only an absence, the absence of pain. In order to experience his distance from the prisoner in terms of 'having,' their physical difference is translated into a verbal difference: the absence of pain is a presence of world; the presence of pain is the absence of world. Across this set of inversions pain becomes power" (Scarry 1985: 37). In this sense, the violent interrogation inflicted upon Guo is a way to "induce the pain so intense and inexpressible as to isolate individuals—alienating them from their language and values, aborting them from the common world an deducing them to a pre-linguistic state of noises and cries"

(Tambornino 1999: 179). Or simply put, the rural boy is singled out for violence to strengthen his tie with the bike, the prosthetic body of the migrant worker.

Yet, this pain has another important layer of meaning—it is a statement of an absurd body as a discursive narrative abruptly inserted into a pre-organized discourse with ensuing moments of rupture. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau describes a special kind of narration, a storytelling of the ordinary, which is analogous to what we have seen in *Beijing Bicycle*. For de Certeau, narration creates a fictional space where it escapes from the real and the present circumstances by manipulating and displacing the arrangement of the setting such that it creates an ambience, an effect rather than object. As de Certeau writes, "narration does indeed have a content, but it also belongs to the art of making a coup: it is a detour by way of a past ('the other day,' 'in olden days') or by way of a quotation (a 'saying,' a proverb) made in order to take advantage of an occasion and to modify an equilibrium by taking it by surprise" (1984: 79). It essentially concerns "the style of tactics." For de Certeau, the difference between tactics and strategy is that while the latter entails the rationalization of a delimited boundary between its own place as the possessed and the exterior as the threat, the former concerns "the absence of proper locus" that plays upon an imposed terrain owned by a foreign power. Yet, tactics vigilantly takes advantages of the changing locus by creating unexpected surprises (coup) within the system. Therefore, in de Certeau's own words, it is "an art of the weak" (1984: 37). To say the narration is a political tactic is equivalent of saying that it is capable of reproducing new and surprising power relations out of an existing narratocracy—both denied and demanded at the same time—that bases its power structure upon pre-determined regime of narrative relations.

From this perspective, the body as tactical narrative means its interplay with the surrounding environment is capable of bringing about unexpected effect, or unknowable knowledge, in overthrowing predestinated way of storytelling, which is another important aspect of Zhuangzi's absurd body. In its interrogation, Guo's obstinate body has become an irreducible place that unexpectedly re-organizes the spatial relation (including power relations) of the subjects involved. The absurdity of the boy's body stems from spontaneous manipulation of the presupposed context into which it is inserted so much so that it not only changes the configuration of itself but also changes the contextual setting. Akin to the ways in which Yue places his warped laughing bodies under varying socio-political context to compose new political allegories, the process of manipulation rendered in the film is a re-juxtaposition of both the contextualized setting and its involving subjects. Guo, the rural boy, is no longer a sufferer; instead, he re-invents his role as a doer, a political agent who is actively engaging the making of the political in ways unseen and unexpected before. Manifest in his prolonged and stubborn insistence on the bike, Guo and his body compose a different story that can never be envisioned by the state. In this process, the authority of the state is both denied and required. On the one hand, the body has become an alternative locus of discourse that accounts for the moments of rupture found in metanarration, making the city's glamorous neon lights meaningless and lackluster. On the other hand, the story of rupture exercises its power out of the dust of what is already known—reinvention of new story off of the old. *Contra* the old story, the new story empowers the previously marginalized the subject by turning him into an unknowable enigma that looks frustrating and alien to its exterior power.

The last scene of the film is also compelling and illustrative in this regard. After a violent fight with the street gangsters who wreck the bike in the end, the all-bruised Guo struggles to his feet, painfully picks up the wrecked bike and loads it onto his shoulder, dragging his heavy feet out of the scene. In the following scene, the boy is captured walking on the street, slowly but assertively, with the bike on his shoulder, passing through an intersection before the stopped traffic. The director uses another slow motion shot to locate the scene in which the frenzied city looks static and quiet, watching the rural boy finishing crossing the road (Figure 5.7):



Figure 5.7 Carrying the wrecked bike, Guo walks across the street.

At this point, Guo and his bike seem useless and abandoned by the city. This time, nevertheless, the pre-fixed meanings of the prosthetic body have been permanently revoked. In this scene, the bike is grown into the body of the rural boy to create a new political ensemble—a body of betrayal that has been described by Milan Kundera in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. For Kundera, the body is most interesting when it turns itself into a private and personal space, however absurd it may look to the public realm, in exercising its power of transforming. To Kundera, the initiation of the body's agency is found in its sensual relations (as seen in Tomas, Franz and Sabina's secret and

intertwined erotic relations with their lovers) that may be perceived obscene to the state-sponsored public. The political power of the body, for Kundera, lies in its ability in distorting the moral organization of public space backed by a totalitarian regime and blurring the already-thin boundary between the private and the public. Joining Kundera, Wang also sees the potential of the body in enacting moral critique of the state. In this final scene, the new ensemble is re-affirming the uselessness of the body—traumatized and loaded with a piece of wreckage as such. More importantly and interestingly, the body induces a sense of new political subjectivity—a new nomadic identity that bases itself upon its indeterminate corporeal reality. It is an unsettled identity that successfully escapes the enclosure of the state's political/economic governance and orients itself toward a multiplicity of possibilities. Bypassing the hustle and bustle of the city, the boy, for the very first time, both reclaims his useless body as a territory of autonomy and finds himself as a political dissident that crowds out the moral indoctrination of the state by alienating its universal, all-encompassing discourse of economic growth. The dissolving of Guo's prosthetic body dovetails with the arrival of the Zhuangzian body, a spontaneous body, as represented by the country's primitive, uncultivated and yet stubborn rural culture, that powerfully rejects the disciplined and tamed body by the logic of the state's political economy. This bodily transformation is also transposed into a new mode of identity, which is not only concerned with how the body is made but also what the body does. The way the body acts as an agentic doer reflects how one, either consciously or unconsciously, sees himself as a political actant. That the body is an indeterminate entity debunks the illusion that the making of the political subjectivity can and should be essentialized in one singular way. The moral grounding of this Zhuangzian

body, as seen both in the film and Yue's paintings, exactly rests on this indeterminacy that is too precarious to be settled in any fixed metanarration. The country's zealous aspiration for modernization, in its form of frenetic state capitalism, is therefore doomed to failure when this absurd and dissident body is at work.

In conclusion, the unfolding economic restructuring in China can be viewed as an event taking place in the sphere of the body. The reign of the capitalist form of governance engenders profound ramification in reshaping the politics of the contemporary Chinese society. On the one hand, the body is reduced to a lucrative tool to be exploited in reinforcing the new production and consumption relations, and its political function is hence abstracted into the new moral paradigm backed by the state. It is both included and excluded from the preaching of the moral system in order to consolidate the state's supreme power. However, on the other hand, the body is also characteristic of its pluripotentiality, fully invested with indeterminate and strange forms that are irreducible to normativity. The absurd body, as proposed by Zhuangzi, is a body of indeterminancy that can hardly be settled in any given form and with any given value. Such a body confronts the moral system that exploits it by creating stubborn ruptures that keeps disrupting the consistency of the state's politico-economic order. In the meantime, the agency of the body lies in its power of making dissident territory in which the state-imposed moral regime falls apart with its fragmented elements being recycled and reused for new political ends. Modernization, in its form of state capitalism, is therefore continuously contested and confronted when the absurd body is suffused with ambivalence and keeps reproducing itself with new, strange and unexpected power relations that are forever alien to the state.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In the opening chapter, I stated a dilemma that has been troubling many Chinese who live in the era of the People's Republic—a situation in which many of us are captured in the predicament about our identity. In many ways, the dilemma can in fact be boiled down to a central question—given the unstable and repressive political/economic/cultural environment, how can we, as Chinese citizens, find a way to deal with the paradoxical politics of the country in understanding who we are. The complexity of this question begs even more related ones: what else could we possibly do when democracy, free speech, fair election, deliberation, and most importantly, an open and tolerant social environment are virtually inaccessible? Outside of the state institutions, how might we deal with the ramification of the rapid economic growth that leaves the country a variety of serious social issues such as income inequality, low public political participation, environmental pollution, shrinking public sphere, etc? How can we still engage in dissent politics, in other words, absent favorable and necessary conditions to make the difference? If there does exist a way, what would it be? These questions are of significant importance to understand how the Chinese form their identities in this changing context and what political effect it entails in relation to the country's politics. And these questions are by no means easy ones. In fact, the frustrations we have indicate that no simple or definite answer can and should be given in answering who we are and how we are made of. Our personal frustrating experiences as overseas Chinese students suggest that the state itself is apparently not a sufficient answer at all. Being the representatives of the country is not the solution, either. The questions not only require us to look at the country's politics from a perspective that goes beyond the state but also

urge us to find alternative locations in which politics can still take place without effective and functioning socio-institutional procedures. As I make clear in this dissertation, this alternative realm can be found in individuals' ordinary life through their various bodily experiential dimensions. Here, focusing on individuals does not mean to study their behavior in schematized ways as proposed by, for example, rational choice theory. Rather, to theorize the politics of everyday life demands the awareness of the indeterminate dynamics between individuals' everyday practice and the external environment in ways that are open and pliable. This is to say that we should pay close attention to how the Chinese people's identities are formed in indeterminate ways as a result of the interaction between the internal and external without being simplistically reduced to either.

In answering similar questions, Leigh Jenco points at one interesting direction. In her study of Zhang Shizhao's idea of *weizheng* (making the political), Jenco suggests that Zhang is proposing a theory that tries to bridge the gap between individuals' internal struggle from within and the arrival of social change from the outside. As Jenco writes, "part of what makes this approach to social transformation credible is the very social embeddedness of individuals: existing within social and familial (if not political) frameworks, the work of singular actors can build to dramatic effect simply by influencing those closest to them" (2010: 15). By reading Zhang's writing in this way, Jenco attempts to propose that large-scale socio-political issues are not likely to be solved by collective actions, as many democratic theorists would emphasize. Instead, they should be better approached through individual efforts in a way that is termed by Zhang as "making the political." Zhang's "making the political," according to Jenco, ultimately "lies in persons" (2010: 227). In this sense, social change evolves through the cultivation

of the sense of self-awareness (*zijue*) among the individuals before functioning institutions become available. Although Jenco's reading of Zhang generates profound implication for our understanding of individuals' important political role, the theory is only partially convincing. I agree with Jenco in the sense that social individuals should be viewed as the pivot of politics, and to the degree that a sustainable politics requires the cultivation of the political awareness from within to make individuals shine forth as promising political participants. But I am suspicious of the Confucian solution about the extent to which internal cultivation can be automatically translated into effective and systematic social action in its plural form. In other words, the inherent social-embeddedness within individuals is by no means presupposed. In addition it is also unlikely for this embeddedness to have an end only reflected by external political/moral orders. Nor do I believe the Confucian way of making compatible the internal moral cultivation and external social construction is viable and realistic. What seems to be more likely, instead, is the possibility that social change emerges out of spontaneity. This spontaneity is an enduring gap between the external and internal conditions that can never be bridged. Internal cultivation undergoes a spontaneous process without being preconditioned at the very start such that the internal converges, negotiates and conflicts but never settles with the external. Politics thus unfolds as a result of a network of diverse intuitive actions, across space and time, by individuals who may or may not realize the political meaning of their everyday practice. Recognizing this political significance of everyday life is to reject the saying that the state represents a moral founding of politics in the first place.

Rather than contemplating on democracy as a systematic social evolvement, my dissertation emphasizes the political value of indeterminacy and argues that socio-political change emerges out of spontaneity. In answering the aforementioned questions, I first contend that in the context of China (perhaps in other societies as well), politics should be understood as a fluid process in which normative system founded on the dualism of either/or is questioned. It dissolves the moral/ sexual/political/ economic basis of this dualist structure and transforms power relation into a process of contested negotiation rather than domination. Understanding politics in this way alludes to a nomadic subjectivity by which one freely wanders (in Zhuangzi's term, *xiaoyao*) between sameness based collectivism and "sovereign individualism" based solipsism without winding up on either end. In this light, identity is no longer about a settlement. On the contrary, it is about the processes of diverse experiences that mark who we are through what we do. It is called the politics of indeterminacy—a political mode that orients toward the unknowability of spontaneity while estranging itself from the founding of normative politics. In addition, the internal cultivation of the self does not occur in order to influence the external so much so that external collective action is not a purpose but an accident of this selfhood cultivation. Put it another way, a given political society does not have a presupposed purpose inherent to its system. Rather, it is a consequence of the spontaneous interactions among a variety of forces that make it so. In the context of the Chinese politics, realizing the agency of every individual Chinese citizen in his/her everyday practices (even though they are purposeless) is far more important than the materialization of institutions. Here, this work does not talk about the predictability of the country's future (as many political analysts are fond of doing). Instead, it is interested in

how the randomness of the ordinary life is valued for its political significance in eventually transforming the politics in directions that are hard to be predicted. To conclude, in randomness lies the past, present and future of China's politics. This randomness goes beyond the dominant control of any involving party into an infinite range of choices and possibilities. At this point, what we do perhaps precedes who we are as the former breeds and nurtures the latter—we are what we do. Therefore, the forming of identity is no longer about finding an ingrained root but about using and reusing materials and opportunities provided by everyday life to experience the unexperienced.

The preceding chapters addresse each aspect of this central argument in the four substantive chapters. It relies on Zhuangzi's idea of *xu* and the body to look at how the ordinary Chinese may make the political in their ordinary lives. The second chapter brings up Zhuangzi's concept of *xu* and discusses how the political import of *xu* is manifested in the aesthetical and bodily realms. *Xu* denotes the meanings of lack of substance and blandness, both of which concerns ambivalent relationality. The third chapter examines the Zhuangzian body as both spontaneity and dispossession in understanding the creation of the self. It argues that the making of the self should be understood as an indeterminate mutuality between one's internal perception and the external environment. This indeterminate mutuality is achieved when the body is perceived as an embodiment of changing relations. The next chapter investigated the interaction between the body and the memory in creating a *xu*-ed grey zone in which the Cultural Revolution is reexamined. It proposes that Mao's revolutionary logic of class struggle gets questioned when this body-memory interaction becomes ambivalent and incomplete in bringing up ambiguous subjectivities. Chapter five talks about the state

capitalism in China as a homogenizing process where the body is rectified for its instrumental values. Yet, the body escapes this enclosing process and turns the composition of identity into a myth.

Each chapter points to one specific aspect of the theme; and read together as a whole, they address the questions I raised at the beginning by pointing at the central idea of the politics of *xu*—a mode of political indeterminacy in which power relations are never settled. With its promising political blueprint, this particular mode of politics presents a different perspective in approaching the Chinese politics by way of looking at how the ordinary Chinese can alternatively identify themselves. As I mentioned briefly earlier, the future of China's politics cannot be predicted. The complicated reality within the country defies any explanatory models that try to enclose the country's route into a set of fixed trajectories. The sixty years' turbulent history of the People's Republic suggests that absolutism only brings tragedy. The country's convoluted experiences of the past, present and future blend into each other in making the country a stranger to many political terminologies such as democracy, freedom, autocracy, equality. Instead of understanding its politics based on established political catalogues, we must decipher its myth through the recognition of change—an indeterminate state where the pliability of politics is demonstrated and underlined. In this circumstance, being a Chinese in a political way means not only to adapt to but more importantly make the best out of the rapid changes by embracing the condition of *xu* in dealing with the state. Realizing this interpenetration is not an impediment to but an opportunity of making the political is a prerequisite to the transformation of a political subject. In this making of the political, the political agency of the ordinary Chinese is found in their everyday life external to

institutions through their everyday practice. Here, the body plays a crucial role for this individual transformation. With every bit of its mundaneness, the body provides the individuals with valuable material and immaterial sources to engage politics. The body is a material site in which all sorts of political forces execute their power to gain influence. But it is also a convergence of a multiple of diverse energies that run through it and makes it formless. Via incompleteness, emptiness, spontaneity, the *xu*-ed body is an absurdity that challenges the principles of normative politics. The body bridges the gap between the everyday ordinariness and a broader political scope. It teaches us that we are what we do and we are what the body becomes. Thus, maintaining this indeterminacy is equivalent of maintaining the vitality of the ordinary Chinese, especially those from the most vulnerable group—the peasants, the workers, the intellectuals, the dissidents, the sexual workers, the disabled, the low income family members, the ethnic minorities, the homosexuals, the prisoners–in changing the country.

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Peng Yu

Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION

PhD, Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (expected May 2015).

Major Fields: Comparative politics, political theory.

Advisor: Kennan Ferguson

Committee members: Kennan Ferguson (Chair), Ivan Ascher, Barrett McCormick, Robert Beck, Shale Horowitz, Douglas Howland

Dissertation: Politics of *Xu*: Body Politics in China.

MA, Media Studies, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2009

Thesis: "Trauma in Four Chinese Films and the Fifth and Sixth Generations' Defiance of Party Ideology."

MA, Comparative Literature, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007

BA, English Language and Literature, Ningbo University, P. R. China, 2005.

Thesis: "Ernest Hemingway's Writing of Women in *A Farewell to Arms*."

TEACHING/RESEARCH INTERESTS

Comparative Politics, Contemporary Chinese politics and foreign policy, Chinese political thought, Modern/Contemporary Political Thought.

PUBLICATION (PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL)

Peng Yu. (forthcoming) "Zones of Indeterminancy: Art, Body and Politics in Zhuangzi's Daoist Thought," *Theory, Culture & Society* (an SSCI-indexed top journal in Cultural Studies).

Horowitz, Shale and Peng Yu. (forthcoming) "Holding the West: Explaining China Communist Party Strategies of Rule in Tibet and Xinjiang," *Journal of Chinese Political Science*.

WORK UNDER REVIEW

"Memory and Body: Examining the Politics of *Xu* in Mao's Cultural Revolution," currently under review at *Cultural Politics*.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

"Ambivalent Body: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality and Identity in Contemporary Chinese Society."

"Self and Identity: Zhuangzi's Moral Politics of Body."

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS & ACTIVITIES

Panel Organizer, "Asian Contingent Thought: Political Theory Under Pressure," American Political Science Association Annual Conference, 2014.

Peng Yu. "Body, Politics and *Xu*: Reexamining Mao's Cultural Revolution," American Political Science Association Annual Conference, 2014.

Peng Yu. "Representing the Unrepresentable: The Politics of Sensation in *Beijing Bicycle* and *Summer Palace*," presented at Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference, April 2013.

Peng Yu (with Shale Horowitz). "Holding the West: Explaining China Communist Party Strategies of Rule in Tibet and Xinjiang," presented at International Studies Association Annual Conference, April 2013.

Peng Yu. "Let it Be Empty: Visuality, Space and Ecological Politics of *Liubai* in Traditional Chinese Landscape Painting," presented at Western Political Science Association Annual Conference, March 2013.

Peng Yu. "Regime Security and China's Use of Force in Militarized Territorial Disputes: Insights from Prospect Theory," accepted by International Studies Association-Midwest Conference, 2011.

Peng Yu. "Proximate and Non-Proximate Factors: Accounting for the Ethnic Rioting Onset of Xinjiang since 1996," presented at Midwest Political Science Association Annual Conference, March 2011.

OTHER CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

U.S. Foreign Policy Colloquium, National Committee on United States-China Relations, Washington D.C., June 2011.

TEACHING EXPERIENCES

Instructor, Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013-2015.

Great Issues of Politics: Liberty (a political theory course taught independently, both in-class and online)

Chinese Politics and Foreign Policy (a comparative course prepared to teach independently, in-class)

Teaching Assistant, United Nations Summer Program (New York City), Center for International Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Summer 2013.

Teaching Assistant, Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2009-2013.

Modern Political Thought

The Politics of Sex

Classics of Political Theory

Contemporary Political Theory

State Politics

Comparative Political System

The Politics of International Economic Relations

International Conflict

Introduction to International Relations

Teaching Assistant, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007-2009.

Media and Popular Culture

Introduction to Media and Politics

Advertising in American Society

Independent Mandarin Chinese Tutor, Milwaukee, WI, 2005-2007. Taught individual courses of Chinese language from beginning to intermediate and advanced levels.

Teaching Assistant, Department of English, Ningbo University, 2003-2005.

Introduction to American Literature

GRANTS AND AWARDS

Graduate Student Travel Grant, Department of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013.

Graduate School Travel Grant, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013.

AFSA（Asian Faculty and Staff Association）Honorary Scholarship Award for academic achievement and community service, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2008-09.

Chancellor's Award, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005-2007.

Non-Residence Tuition Remission Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2005-2007.

Study Achievement Award, Ningbo University, China, 2004.

INVITED TALKS

"Values and Key Themes in Shaping the Behavior of Chinese Nationals," Cultural Café, Center for International Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, October 2008.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Manuscript Reviewer, *International Political Science Review, The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*

COMMUNITY SERVICE

President, Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2007- 2008.

Coordinator and Site Manager, Greater Milwaukee Area Chinese New Year Gala, Milwaukee, WI, 2006-2008.

LANGUAGE

English (near native)

Chinese (native)

French (basic reading)

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Member, The American Political Science Association

Member, The Association of Chinese Politics

Member, The Midwest Political Science Association

Member, Western Political Science Association

REFERENCES

Kennan Ferguson
Associate Professor
Department of Political Science
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
414-229-4254
kennan@uwm.edu

Barrett McCormick
Professor
Department of Political Science
Marquette University
414-288-6842
barrett.mccormick@marquette.edu

Shale Horowitz
Professor
Department of Political Science
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
414-229-2399
shale@uwm.edu