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**Multilayered Subversion and Double-edged Subjectivity:
Chinese Avant-garde Literature of the Second Half of the 1980s**

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1 Introduction

Chinese avant-garde literature (xianfeng wenxue 先锋文学) of the second half of the 1980s has already been established as one of the most important literary trends and in a certain sense a culmination of literary development of the so called “New era” (Xin shiqi 新时期), a period in Chinese history between the death of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893 – 1976) and the violent results of Tian’an men 天安门 square protests in 1989. For the framework of this dissertation, the elementary definition of the Chinese avant-garde literature, partially derived from Yang Xiaobin’s formulation (*The Chinese* 247), is as follows: It is an aesthetically experimental literature – fiction that appeared after 1985 and as a specific product of its era basically ceased to exist after 1989. This is where my approach to the Chinese avant-garde starts from. We are dealing with a literary phenomenon with a firm place in literary history, defined by its overall “technique” (the experiment), background (the New Era and whatever social or literary context it brought) and quality (as a lively genre overshadowing the mainstream).

Although there is no representative anthology in Chinese defining the “canon” of the Chinese avant-garde literature published in its domestic environment, we are able to establish a relatively clear overview of authors and works on the basis of secondary sources (Chinese and Western alike), and also with regard to the early anthologies of translations (Zhao, *Lost Boat*; Wang J., *China's avant-garde*). This is not a definite corpus and there are nuances and variations in the secondary sources as well as the anthologies.

I choose the following seven for my analysis: Ma Yuan 马原 (b. 1953), Sun Ganlu 孙甘露 (b. 1959), Ge Fei 格非 (b. 1964), Yu Hua 余华 (b. 1966), Mo Yan 莫言 (b. 1955), Su Tong 苏童 (b. 1963), and Can Xue 残雪 (b. 1953). On the basis of my extensive study of secondary sources, I believe these writers are the most important, or typical representatives of this literary current, often mentioned by other researchers. It is important, however, to emphasize that the status of these authors as the representatives of the Chinese avant-garde literature is only valid within the framework of the second half of the 1980s.

China in the 1980s was going through a period of so called “Cultural fever” (wenhua re 文化热), “a boisterous avalanche of intellectual and cultural debate that unfolded in Chinese urban centers” (Zhang 3). It was an unprecedentedly liberal period. The legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (Zhongguo gongchandang 中国共产党) was shaken during the Cultural

Revolution (Wenhua dageming 文化大革命) and the Party was forced to deal with its own delicate situation in connection to the newly established course of the development of society. In Chinese theory of literature, the reevaluation of the theoretical framework of political utilitarianism of literature based on Mao Zedong's thought was combined with exploring, interpretation and more often than not critically unreflected implementation of Western literary theories. China's fresh openness also created new opportunities (and motivations) for Western scholars to research and reflect (the changes within) Chinese literature and ponder its position against not only Western tradition, but also in comparison to other literatures of the world.

In the West, Chinese literature was often discussed within theories of postmodernism and postcolonialism which were frequently applied especially in the case of the Chinese avant-garde. If we were to stay in the strict realm of an analysis of literary features, or literariness, and aesthetic values, we would have to turn to articles (not yet monographies) about the respective authors. Similarly in China, except for articles and discussions that reflected the avant-garde immediately after it emerged, we can only find reflections of this literary current among broader analyses of contemporary literature and culture or as critiques of specific authors and works. There is always some kind of prism in the approach to that phenomenon – be it cultural, political, social or historical (or a combination of these). What is missing, however, is an approach to the avant-garde as a *literary* phenomenon, a focus on the works themselves and the respective elements that constitute them.

This dissertation is not discussing the Chinese avant-garde literature of the second half of the 1980 *as something* but *as such*. I am also not asking if there is such a thing as Chinese avant-garde. What I intend to ask is how come there is something like the Chinese avant-garde and what exactly are the literary features (stylistic, syntactic, semantic) these works have in common that we can reflect upon on the background of the era of its production and literary theory in general. I believe that this is new about my approach and different from what has been written about the Chinese avant-garde so far.

In the analysis of the Chinese avant-garde works I am using established terminology and relevant ideas from Western literary theories. The most important authors and theories that served as a tool for my analysis are, including but not limited to, the following: Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh for theories of metafiction; Mieke Bal, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan and Tomáš Kubíček for theories of narrative and especially for analysis of narrative levels and voices; Fredric Jameson, Jean-François Lyotard and Matei Calinescu for theories of postmodernism.

I am also describing the contemporary literary discussions that provided background for the emergence and existence of the Chinese avant-garde literature. Within that chapter, I am discussing in detail the thoughts of four Chinese literary theoreticians: Liu Zaifu 刘再复 (b. 1941), Li Tuo (b. 1939), Wang Ning 王宁 (b. 1955) and Chen Xiaoming (b. 1959). Not only do I consider the ideas of these authors very progressive within the given era, but also very helpful in discovering certain aspects of the Chinese avant-garde that might otherwise stay hidden from our sight.

2 Refurbished Strategies, Bold Voices, Wishful Thinking: Contemporary Background of Chinese Avant-Garde Literature

I strongly believe that the Chinese avant-garde is, on the one hand, a result of the variably intense literary-political, discursive changes that symbolize the period between the years 1978 and 1989, and, on the other hand, a constituent of the atmosphere of the era, its integral part as well as its, in a sense deformed and detached, reflection. It is important to realize that the 1980s were an era of heated debates when some unprecedented opinions and ideas were voiced in the literary-political field as well as in the literary-theoretical circles (with these two organically merging and reacting with each other), and the contemporary development of literature that peaked with the emergence of the avant-garde was a natural part, product, passive as well as active reflection, and definitely also a building stone of the era. That is why this chapter is focusing on the literary-political discursive changes in China of the 1980s and at the literary discussions of that era that provide background for the emergence and existence of the Chinese avant-garde literature.

2.1 The Backbone of Literary Policy: Brief Overview of Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art*

Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art* (Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话) are the basic document that served as the theoretical basis for literary thought in China for some 40-odd years. This chapter gives an overview of the essential aspects of the *Talks* that were relevant for the literary debates of the New era and as such complement the contemporary background of the avant-garde literature. This chapter discusses the most essential and famous aspect of the thoughts presented

in the *Talks* such the relationship between literature and politics, pragmatism, the role and position of the audience of literary work., the question “should we devote ourselves to raising standards, or should we devote ourselves to popularization?” ‘努力于提呢，还是努力于普及呢?’ (Mao, 39; 38) and others.

The *Talks* laid out principles that shaped and influenced the official and as such the only accepted attitude toward literature for the next decades including the late 1970s and the 1980s. Although, as McDougall notes, the influence of the text itself, measured by the number of direct quotes, varied during specific periods of Chinese history (*Mao* 38-40), its overall ideological impact cannot be underestimated.

2.2 Careful Steps Toward Discursive Changes: Literary-Political Development, 1978-1985

As Perry Link observed in his “Introduction” to the collection *Stubborn Weeds*, the basic rules for literary creation and evaluation, as expressed in Mao’s *Talks*, did not change at the end of 1970s and the beginning of 1980s – literature was still meant to serve politics and the political criteria of its evaluation were put above the artistic ones (1). What was undergoing some kind of change, however, was the configuration of the system, the interpretation of how rigidly those rules should be applied and what role should the Chinese Communist Party play in this system. The discursive changes on the field of literature were something considered of utmost importance on the highest levels of political representation.

In this chapter, I am trying to give a very quick overview of the discursive changes within the literary-political between 1978 and 1985. I am describing the most important persons and events that contributed to those slight, but still essential changes, and the different waves of openness and closeness the literary-political atmosphere of that era brought. It was an era characterized by careful watching of every move on the literary-political scene, of bold sorties and not always timely fall backs. Perry Link talks about two basic terms that best describe the polarity of literary-political thought not only of the era mapped in this text. The terms, which Link deliberately does not translate, are *shou* 守 and *fang* 放,¹ the former meaning more restrictions and the latter more tolerance (*Stubborn* 9).

¹ Link only offers the words in pinyin, for the sake of completion I am adding the Chinese characters as well.

This chapter also describes the development and changes of the views on realism (xianshizhuyi 现实主义) and its different variants, especially socialist realism (shehuizhuyi xianshizhuyi 社会主义现实主义) and revolutionary realism plus revolutionary romanticism (geming xianshizhuyi he geming langmanzhuyi 革命的现实主义和革命的浪漫主义), in China as an important element for grasping fully the extent of the discursive discussions and changes.

2.3 From Modernist Techniques to Postmodern Elements via Subjectivity and the Disintegration of “Mao-Style”: Literary Discussions of the 1980s

If what is described in previous chapters constitutes some kind of practical aspect in the Maoist sense of the presumed social effect of literature – the intended one for the implied reader as well as the one of consequence for the writer – this chapter is paying more attention to theory and academic discussions about literature as a different aspect of the atmosphere of the era against which I will later analyze the works of the Chinese avant-garde authors.

I am opening this section from the 2000 Nobel prize laureate Gao Xingjian’s 高行健 (b. 1940) short but famous book *A Preliminary Discussion on the Art of Modern Fiction* (Xiandai xiaoshuo jiqiao chutan 现代小说技巧初探) published in 1981, because it was basically the first “practical” inquiry in the techniques of modernist writing (as Gao understood them at that time) in the PRC and its influence was maybe even more far reaching than it is being admitted in contemporary research. It opened the topic of formal experiment and the exhaustion of realism in Chinese literature and because of that it was criticized by some conservative literary-political circles in what became known as the “five little kites incident” (wu xiao fengzheng shijian 五小风筝事件), i.e. critique of the book itself and the letters between four writers Feng Jikai 冯骥才 (b. 1942), Wang Meng 王蒙 (b. 1934), Li Tuo and Liu Xinwu 刘心武 (b. 1942), which I am also analyzing in this chapter.

Other themes I am discussing in the in opening part of this chapter are the discussions about Westernization of Chinese literature and pseudomodernism as “a critique of certain literary works for being nothing more than “pseudoarticulation’ of Western modernism” (Wang J., *High* 165).

2.3.1 The Passive-Aggressive Master of History: Liu Zaifu and His Notion of Subjectivity in Literature

This chapter discusses the thoughts of a prominent Chinese literary critic of the area, Liu Zaifu, and his notions about the essential role of subjectivity (zhutixing 主体性) in literature. Liu Zaifu was respected from both the more orthodox part of the critics and the new young generation, and the Party saw in him somebody who could mediate the communication between the official line and the more progressive, free thinking group of critics (Liu K., “Subjectivity” 44). But his two-part article “On Subjectivity of Literature” (Lun wenxue zhutixing 论文学主体性) that was published in the last 1985 issue and the first 1986 issue of *Literary Review* (Wenxue pinglun 文学评论) raised much controversy.

Subjectivity is for Liu Zaifu the starting point of literature, be it its creation or (critical) reception. It is a position the writer takes against ideas that are imposed from the outside. Man has a central position in Liu Zaifu’s theory of literature. The very position of man in literature and arts is where Liu Zaifu more or less openly attacks the Maoist theory stemming from the *Talks*. Literature is for Liu Zaifu no longer a mere part of a machine of historical progress. Now it represents the master of the machine, the man that stands above all, politics, economy, class struggle etc., and influences everything through his subjectivity.

Subjectivity is also the basic nature of literary characters as well and as such it provides them with a certain kind of free will that must be respected by the writer. Their subjectivity is then translated into their lively nature, it establishes an inner logic of the work within which the characters can independently act.

From Liu’s approach toward characters, we can clearly see how important the writer is in his theory. As Mu observes, “in Liu Zaifu’s paradigm of writer, reader, and critic in 1985, the hero was still largely the writer who was the creator of literary works, the educator of readers, and the text provider for critics” (416). Within Liu Zaifu’s theory, the reader should be, however, also considered an important element; not only by the writer, but also by the critic who is supposed to take the work – reader approach, and thus make himself and the reader (as they are basically the same) an active element in the re-creation of the work (Liu, “Yanjiu”4-5). Liu says that a theory of literature should pay attention to two things in regard to the reader: How he is able to realize his self through literature and how it makes him aesthetically creative. These are basically the ultimate goals of literature, to strengthen the subjective position of the reader and help him to achieve limitless emotional freedom.

2.3.2 Change in the Coding Method: Li Tuo's Idea of "Mao-style" and Other Views on Transforming Chinese Literature

Li Tuo is a contemporary to Liu Zaifu and he as well played an important part of the modernization discussions of the 1980s. The main idea Li Tuo is usually being mentioned for is his concept of the so called "Mao-style" (Mao wenti 毛文体), a specific, mainly discursive phenomenon that was being gradually subverted during the 1980s. Li Tuo also emphasizes the fact that using the power of language to establish a firm social and political discourse is by far not Mao Zedong's inventions and that Mao was basically only constituting, developing and transforming something that appeared much earlier. Most of Li Tuo's explanations of "Mao-style" start with the development of various language movements in the pre-War era.

Li Tuo also ironically points out that Western research always sees Chinese intellectuals as victims of Maoist regime, as somebody oppressed and forced to collaborate on something that was imposed on them from the outside, i.e. from the ideological leadership of the CCP directed by Mao himself. But the fact is that due to the intellectual history that led to the authoritative establishment of the Maoist discourse and due to the revolutionary spirit in which it came into existence, the intellectuals basically willingly participated in the process.

During the late 1970s and then 1980s and especially in its second half, a discursive rupture came into Chinese literature that Li interestingly calls "a total change in the coding method" '编码方式完全改变了' (Li, Zhang, Wang 80). And that is when the dominance of Mao-style was subverted.

2.3.3 Postmodern Elements or Elementary Postmodernism: The Complementing Thoughts of Wang Ning and Chen Xiaoming

The last topic of the first part of this dissertation are the discussions about the question of postmodernism in Chinese literature. For the analysis I am choosing two authors, Chen Xiaoming and Wang Ning, whose voices have been in my opinion the most important within the discussions about Chinese postmodernism. They also were among the first ones to raise this topic in China in general. I am going to analyze their articles from the end of the 1980s and also from the 1990s and later to see what they identified during their quest for finding Chinese postmodernism and how their opinions evolved. I am not trying to answer or even

directly research the question about the existence or non-existence of Chinese literary postmodernism. I consider the discussions important because they revealed some characteristics of the era (in terms of theoretical background) and of the Chinese avant-garde itself that might have stayed hidden otherwise.

3 Seven Unique Branches on a Unifying Trunk: Analysis of Selected Works of the Chinese Avant-garde Literature

In this chapter, I am analyzing works of the most prominent authors of the Chinese avant-garde literature of the second half of the 1980s. I am especially focusing on those features that connect the works together, some of them more firmly and some of them rather loosely but still significantly and distinctively enough, and that represent the main characteristics of this literary phenomenon in general.

3.1 Metafiction, Metanarration, Subversion: Ma Yuan's Narcissism and the Semantic Torment of Sun Ganlu

Ma Yuan's works are typical with their metafictional character. Although he wrote most of his works in Tibet, the environment is not the topic of his stories. From the thematic point of view, the author's attention is focused into another direction – from the environment it shifts to the story itself that in many ways goes beyond the simple effect of its location, but then it does not even stay there and continues further to the process of constructing the story, to the language as a construction material and the general principles of ontology of the fictional world. The focus is continuously changing from one point to another and back, it moves freely within the narration, causing sudden breaks in the narration, lack of closure and obscurity of meaning. In my opinion, Ma Yuan's uniqueness as well as subversion lie in the achievement of an in a way absolute authorial freedom “only” on the basis of a creative method and at the same time of transplanting this freedom from the sphere of the author into the sphere of the reader as well. This makes his subversion much more sophisticated and complex than the other, more superficial elements in his fiction could suggest. By cleverly dismantling the discourse of straightforwardly utilitarian literature with a clear task and responsibility, Ma Yuan offers his reader a passageway into other discourses that might be only very vaguely defined, but they are not externally imposed on the reader and allow him to be a part of their construction. In his texts, Ma Yuan stresses the process, the possibilities of creating a story, more than the story

itself and the “reality” it reflects. This possibility is power. It is power in the defining sense of metafiction as Hutcheon puts it (*Poetics* 207), the creative freedom of both the reader and the writer. And it is the power Zhao talks about, the power “to induce the sense of reality” (“The Rise” 93), not as something reflected, but as something created. Ma Yuan cares about the audience more than a simple narcissist would, more than the hermeneutic reference of metafiction dictates, exactly because, on the discursive background of the era, he takes the power to create the fictional world as one wishes, and covertly and ingeniously hands it over to the reader.

While Ma Yuan constructs the meaning of his stories by stressing the metafictional and metanarrative elements in them. Sun Ganlu explores the semantics, the question of the generation of the meaning itself. That is what most of his stories revolve around. Sun Ganlu thematizes different ways of meaning construction from different points of view: the writer, the reader, the text. Language itself, not the narrator that uses it, and not the “real,” experiential referents, takes on the ontological role of constructing its own world. For Sun Ganlu it seems that language only constitutes itself (as a discourse) and that any value it has lies simply in this constitution.

3.2 Fragments of Fading Memories, Isolation, Violence: Ge Fei’s Unreliable Narrators and the Extreme Subjectivity of Yu Hua

(Re)telling history from a different, parodic point of view is something that has already been noticed in Chinese avant-garde literature by authors such as Yang Xiaobin (*The Chinese* 108-9). But in the works of the two authors in this chapter, I am less interested in subverting the historical and more inclined to see the personal, the subjective. I would like to point out the thematization of something Wang Jing calls “the marginal moment between the past and the present” and actually ascribes to Ge Fei (*High* 242). I am shifting the point of view from the “Grand historical” to the subjective, and even though the background of my analysis is the discursive transformation of the era, I believe that in case of these two authors, the personal, the subjective in the sense of (very much challenged) Liu Zaifu’s theory, is more important.

The fragmentation of the narration in Ge Fei’s works and the constant shifting of the focus from the generally historical to the personal, individual or subjective is, in my opinion, more important than the attitude towards the historical itself. In other words, I consider the fragmentation and the movement in the focus shifting themselves crucial elements in Ge Fei’s

stories, more essential than their relationship to the history as an abstract idea. Also, the question of the unreliability of memory plays an important part in Ge Fei's works.

Similar to memories, subjectivity can play tricks on an individual and detach him from society, from the outer world, instead of empowering him. It does not make one the master of history in Liu Zaifu's sense, on the contrary, it can make one lose control. This is a complex, double-edged concept of subjectivity that I think is typical for Chinese avant-garde literature in general and that I will further demonstrate in the works of Yu Hua.

Yu Hua's works are definitely the most "all-inclusive" of the Chinese avant-garde, implementing motifs, topics and techniques that can be identified across almost all the other authors. However, it does not mean that in terms of style his work is fragmented, that it is some uninspired motley crew of experiments. On the contrary, Yu Hua has a very distinctive, rather integrated, and moreover highly entertaining style that makes him one of the most readable authors of this period of Chinese literature. The unifying element of his works, I would argue, from which everything else starts, is the double-edged take on subjectivity.

Another significant element in the works of Yu Hua is the returning motif of violence. I believe the violence in Yu Hua's works is generally unmotivated by anything else than picturing the violence itself. But then again, violence is not an a priori phenomenon and on the diegetic level it is always a byproduct of something else. Chen is absolutely right that there is a correlation between violence and the detached way the narrator works very often in Yu Hua's stories ("Xiandaizhuyi" 16) – brutality strengthens the impact of this technique and in the end that might be its only motivation. There is definitely no didactic impulse for the brutality in Yu Hua's works. It might be interpreted as mocking the teleological discourse of history, as Yang seems to suggest (*The Chinese* 69), because brutality often seems to be the moving force of the story. I argue, however, that the moving force is subjectivity, with brutality being only a device of its stronger exposure.

3.3 Magical Brutalism and Rootlessness: Mo Yan's Violence on Poetic Background and the Subjective Dreams of Su Tong

Mo Yan is sometimes considered to stand somewhere between "root-seeking" literature and avant-garde literature. It is partially caused by the fact that he started writing already at the beginning of 1980s, which makes him in a certain sense a predecessor of (and thus an outsider to) the main wave of the avant-garde, and partially because of his habit of situating his stories to the countryside. I am arguing, however, that Mo Yuan is never really seeking for roots. He

is using remote, highly localized areas as a background for his stories to show a certain kind of rootlessness of his characters, their personal struggle with detachment from the world of others, their confusing subjectivity that makes them uprooted not as much geographically as psychologically or even sociologically. Similarly to Ge Fei, I believe that in Mo Yan's works, too, the focus very often shifts from the historical to the personal, to the subjective.

The feeling of not belonging – to the social class, to the world as it is – marks another manifestation of rootlessness in Mo Yan's works. As Mo Yan shows us often in his works, the harsh environment of the countryside is an especially suitable setting for stories of violence, detachment and tragedy. But the violence is described by a highly poetic language that puts a strong contrast between the events described and the language they are described in. Mo Yan's description of violence might be at times explicit and intensively brutal, but they are not naturalistic because there is a high degree of stylization that naturalism itself refuses (Nünning 541). It is exactly this stylization that uncovers the gap between language and the events narrated, and thus creates the feeling of detachment and, in extension, rootlessness. In other words, if Mo Yan was really looking for any cultural or social roots in the environment he describes, a completely different language would be needed in order to dig them out.

Su Tong can also be considered a representative of the first wave of the Chinese avant-garde literature, because he as well started publishing already in the first half of the 1980s. And as it is in the case of the other authors of the first wave, his works also possess qualities that hint their affiliation to the "root-seeking" literature. Similarly to Mo Yan, nevertheless, Su Tong is less looking for confirmation of (national, cultural or even personal) identity and more paying attention to a certain kind of uprooting caused by the multilayered distance of the past. Even in those works of Su Tong where the search for identity is actually happening, especially those dealing with coming-of-age elements, we would have to emphasize that what he discovers is not the identity itself, but rather the unstable and unsure process of its construction and its questionable nature that stems from such process.

3.4 Politics and / or Psyche: The Ambivalent Search for the Universal Values of Human Soul and the Latent Contradictions of Can Xue

Can Xue's short stories and novellas could be characterized as fantastic, anti-realistic (i.e. disrupting the mimetic ability of the text and defying the closeness to reality) or surrealistic. In these stories, rationality in the sense of referentiality to the natural logic of the world is obviously and intentionally suppressed. They often lack a straightforward plot, temporal and

spatial determination in the sense of historical background as well as the temporal limitation of the narration itself, and even an obvious conclusion, climax or point. A substantial part of the aesthetic effect of Can Xue's works lies in their obscure character, in the difficulty to decode those in a certain sense indecipherable texts. It also lies in the reader's hope to find something behind all the elusive madness and semantic uncertainty of her literary worlds, something that will rationalize her statements and bring the reader an answer to the question how these stories should be read and how to interpret them.

There are various approaches to the interpretation of the techniques and motifs in Can Xue's works, and two of them are the most significant, mostly used as well as most likely – the (socio-) political and the (sexually) psychological.

The impetus for rationalization is what naturally supports the view on Can Xue's stories as a kind of political allegory. But politics is a rational concept that in the Maoist sense pragmatically projects its discursive values on literature. Although there definitely is a certain dimension of Can Xue's works that invites more political reading simply from the point of view of their aesthetically experimental subversion and the intelligibility as a direct stance against the value of practice emphasized in the Maoist discourse, the allegorical reading is, in my opinion, too straightforward (i.e., indeed, rational) to not be oversimplifying.

Can Xue's fiction contains a lot of elements that are identifiable in the works of other avant-garde authors. Violence, is what connects her with Yu Hua, Mo Yan and Su Tong. There is a slight metafictional dimension in her stories as well that could draw the line between her and Ma Yuan and Sun Ganlu, but I would argue that is more in the way we read the story than how the story is actually written. In the end, which is something I have not mentioned yet, there is a similar feeling of rootlessness I have described in the cases of Mo Yan, Su Tong and partially Ma Yuan. The difference is that the environment in Can Xue's stories seems more like a place from another planet, like a fantasy world. The characters do not seem to be rooted in any particular place, not even in their inner worlds.

4 Conclusion

In the first part of this dissertation, I showed the literary-theoretical context and the discursive background of the Chinese avant-garde, the development that led to the period of the second half of the 1980s and that I believe strongly influenced some of the features of this literary current.

In the second part in which I analyzed the works of seven of the, in my opinion, most important authors of the Chinese avant-garde literature of the second half of the 1980s, I have tried to show the most striking features that I believe not only characterize the individual writers and their stories, but also this literary trend in general.

I have identified the following features in the works of the avant-garde authors and that I consider distinctive: Metafictional and metanarrative aspects. Memory as the expression of unreliability. Subjectivity as an underlying topic and the basic, if not the only point of view. Violence and general negativity as a technique. Rootlessness. Subversion as multilayered effect.

The above-mentioned features are the ones I consider common for the Chinese avant-garde literature of the second half of the 1980s as a whole. However, I was not limiting my analysis of the respective authors only to the features they have in common. On the contrary, I have tried to show them as unique authors with very distinctive styles and approaches. Based on my analysis in this dissertation, I dare to elaborate on my basic definition from the Introduction: Chinese avant-garde literature of the second half of the 1980s is an aesthetically experimental literature written in various distinctive styles by idiosyncratic secluded elitists with no roots, who liked playing metafictional games, questioned the values of memory and subjectivity, coldly utilized violence and ugliness and managed to singlehandedly subvert the official, the progressive and the own. It is a product of an unprecedented era as well as its important constituent and that is why it also ended together with the era.

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