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**Mu Xin: A Double Recluse outside the
Tower of Chinese Literature**

Mu Xin: A Double Recluse outside the Tower of Chinese Literature

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Introduction

Mu Xin 木心 (1927-2011) is a man of letters, difficult to be classified, in the history of Chinese literature in the 20th century. Whether from the aspect of his real life or from that of his literary style, he is a real recluse. Because of this, he became an important writer ignored by our times. And that is why I would like to make a study of him and his literature.

Mu Xin was born on 14th February, 1927, in a wealthy family of industrial and commercial landlord class in Wuzhen (乌镇), a small town in Zhejiang (浙江) province. His real name is Sun Pu 孙璞 and his courtesy name is Yangzhong 仰中. He graduated from Shanghai Art College in 1948. He worked as arts and crafts designer in Shanghai Arts and Crafts Institute from 1950s to 1970s. He wrote poems, fictions, dramas, prose, essays and treatises in the 1950s and 1960s after work. Those unpublished handwritten manuscripts were bound in 20 thick volumes and were confiscated and destroyed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Between the mid-1950s and the whole period of the Cultural Revolution, Mu Xin underwent illegal imprisonment three times. He moved to New York in 1982 after the Cultural Revolution and began to continue his writing career. He published his works in Chinese newspapers issued in New York and Taiwan. From 1986 to 1999, the presses of Taiwan successively published Mu Xin's 12 books, such as: the collection of prose *Sanwen yiji* 散文一集, *Qiongmeika suixianglu* 琼美卡随想录, *Jixing panduan* 即兴判断, the collection of short stories *Wensha muyuan* 温莎墓园, and the poetry anthologies *Xibanya sankeshu* 西班牙三棵树, *Balong* 巴珑, *Wo fenfen de qingyu* 我纷纷的情欲. From 1989 to 1994, Mu Xin gave a course on the history of world literature to some Chinese artists living in New York. In 2006, for the first time

a book of Mu Xin was published by Guangxi Normal University press in mainland China, where Mu Xin began to be known in his native land. In the same year, he was invited by his hometown Wuzhen to settle down there. At that time he was already 79 years old. In 2011, the English version of his collection of short stories *An Empty Room* was published in America. In that autumn, he was hospitalized in the hospital in Tongxiang (桐乡) because of his lung infection and died on 21st December.

It is hard to introduce Mu Xin to a reader who never heard of him. This difficulty lies in that Mu Xin, as a man of letters, is difficult to be classified —— both from the aspect of his writing career and his works. Mu Xin doesn't belong to any stage of the history of Chinese modern and contemporary literature. His writing career began in the 1940s. However he had never published his works in his early life in mainland China and all his unpublished manuscripts written in that period had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. This is the first part of his writing career. It is in New York in the 1980s and 1990s that Mu Xin resumed his intensive writing. During this period he attained the belated literary reputation overseas. And until in 2006, when he was 79 years old, he had began to be known in his native land, in mainland China. The writing career of Mu Xin spanned more than 60 years. Both from the aspects of time and space, there is no literary writer in mainland China being on the same level with Mu Xin in these more than 60 years. In addition, Mu Xin's writing doesn't belong to any literary school and fashion in post-liberation China and he stands voluntarily outside his own era. His writing is not within the discourse system dominant in mainland China after 1949 and entirely distinct from the mainstream literature in today's China. There is no 'our discourse' in Mu Xin's works. His literary language, i.e. the written vernacular Chinese, is very pure and old-fashioned and considered as the authentic and traditional Chinese without pollution. Chen Danqing 陈丹青, a contemporary artist, a freelance writer as well as a public intellectual in mainland China, recognised Mu Xin as the only literary writer in our era who completely linked up the tradition of classical Chinese and that of the May Fourth

new literature.¹ When his works were published in mainland China, the readers there took him for a writer from Taiwan. And when his works were published in Taiwan in early 1980s, Mu Xin was taken for a rediscovered old writer of the May Fourth era. Hence Liang Wendao 梁文道, a columnist and a public intellectual in Hong Kong, considered Mu Xin as an outsider. He commented, “ He (Mu Xin) is so distinct that no one can know his derivation and era from his works.”²

On the other hand, Mu Xin’s writing is very modern. “ The characteristics of his thoughts and his art style belong to Western modernism and are related closely to the most profound humanistic thoughts, such as deconstructive philosophy.”³ He was the one who was not in the cultural gap resulting from the red regime in China after 1949. Besides the Chinese classical culture, as far as Mu Xin’s concerned, the worldwide literary prospect is also not interrupted. From 1949 to the end of the Cultural Revolution, the introduction and translation of European and American Literature nearly broke off. In this cultural blockade of the red regime, the only thing Mu Xin accompanied himself with was his literary reading in his early life, and he never stopped longing for the literary prospect outside the iron curtain. Early in the 1940s, Mu Xin had already known new literary fashions in Europe, such as Stream of consciousness, Imagism, Surrealism. However he could only talk about those things in secret with his friends, and imitate the writing style of Stream of consciousness secretly. During the late period of the Cultural Revolution, there were underground Chinese translations of Postwar literature spreading, such as Black Humor and Beat Generation. Of course, Mu Xin didn’t allow him to miss those versions. After settling down in New York, he retrieved the obstructed Western modern literary prospect through their Chinese translation by Taiwan scholars and writers, and he linked up the Western modern literary prospect to his literary reading in his early life. The Chinese literati from free China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, were all surprised that Mu Xin was

¹ Chen Danqing 陈丹青, “Wo de shizun Mu Xin xiansheng 我的师尊木心先生,” in Li Jing 李静, and Sun Yu 孙郁, eds., *Du Mu Xin 读木心* (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008), p.11.

² Liang Wendao 梁文道, “Wenxue, juwairen de huiyi 文学，局外人的回忆,” in *Wenxue huiyilu 文学回忆录* (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2012), p.XI.

³ Tongming Jun Liu, “ Mu Xin fengge de yiyi 木心风格的意义,” in *Du Mu Xin*, p.21.

so familiar with Western modernism. The era of Mu Xin was accompanied with intensive cultural ruptures. However he had always tried his best to put himself in the worldwide literary prospect.

Mu Xin is an oddity of Chinese mainstream literature and became the isolated case since the emergence of May Fourth new literature. He is an important writer ignored by our times. Because he is a double recluse. The first significance of recluse for Mu Xin lies in his real life and his destiny. Encountering turbulent times, he had continued to lead a life of a recluse just like Tao Qian 陶潜 (365?-427). Both in his early years in mainland China and in his years living in New York, he just wrote and wrote and always kept away from any literary community. He was willing to be unknown, completely isolated for a long time. The second significance of recluse for Mu Xin lies in the style of his writing. His style exists outside the political ideology, mainstream fashion and cultural ruptures. He insisted on his own literary stance as if he created literary works on an isolated island. He kept away from his times and various fashions in order to fulfil his own style. When Nietzsche spoke out, “Seine Zeit in sich zu überwinden”, no doubt he meant another thing and he didn’t know the context of his own words in the 20th century’s China, in which Mu Xin succeeded to defend his personal stance. As Chen Danqing wrote, “Outside the huge Chinese literary groups in recent 50 years, I saw this man defending alone the values, spirits and Weltanschauung enlightened in the May Fourth era from the start to the end, meanwhile he had never been restricted by them. By his own talent he had persisted to respond to the propositions that were not expanded by the generation of May Fourth, and that were cut off after 1949, such as: how can the vernacular Chinese get mature? What is the future and possibilities of classical Chinese in modern literature? What is the relationship between Chinese writing and world literature? How can we save literature through literature itself during the various changing of traditions and times.”¹ It is the second significance of recluse for Mu Xin that makes him elusive and be called as literary Robinson Crusoe or literary UFO.

¹ Chen Danqing, “Wo de shizun Mu Xin xiansheng”, p.14.

It was written by Thomas Eliot (1888-1965) in the essay titled “Tradition and Individual Talent”, “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism. The necessity that he shall conform, that he shall cohere, is not one-sided; what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.” Although Mu Xin was a double recluse and kept away from his era, he existed and his works will change the known tradition and order of Chinese literature, just as T. Eliot said. Through his seclusion Mu Xin fulfilled his literary style and the integrity of his literature, linking up the tradition of classical Chinese and that of May Fourth new literature, and making up for the ruptures of Chinese cultural tradition. This is the relationship between Mu Xin and the tradition and order of Chinese literature in my opinion. And I’d like to discourse on this theme in the dissertation.

Mu Xin has died, however the study of his literature has just begun and the comprehensive evaluation of him remains in the far future. Before his death, studies of his literature were very limited. The first symposium on his literature was held in May of 1986 in New York. In that year, Mu Xin’s first anthology *Sanwen Yiji* was published in Taiwan. So the editor of Chinese Newspaper in New York conducted and presided over a symposium on Mu Xin’s prose. This symposium is considered as the beginning of the study of Mu Xin. In that symposium, the critique titled “Comedy- the Further Shore- Intellectuality” (Xiju-Bi’an-Zhixing 喜剧-彼岸-知性) by Guo Songfen 郭松棻 (1938-2005), who is a novelist from Taiwan and a translator working in the UN, is considered as the most important interpretation to comprehend the works of

Mu Xin. In that critique, Guo Songfen pointed out the formula of Mu Xin's writing: subject (subject+object). This formula was also approved by Mu Xin himself. In the opinion of Mu Xin, there are two scholars whose criticism of his works are most profound. One of them is Guo Songfen, the other one is Tongming Jun Liu 童明, who is a professor in the Department of English, University of California, Los Angeles. In his article "The Significance of Mu Xin's Style" (Mu Xin fengge de yiyi 木心风格的意义), Tongming Jun Liu discussed about the renaissance of the Chinese literature through the world aesthetic thoughts in Mu Xin's literature. In his view, the significance of the style of Mu Xin is as follows: Chinese literature attains its rich worldwide connotation in Mu Xin's style.¹ Tongming Jun Liu is as well as the English translator of Mu Xin's works. He had ever introduced the English version of part of Mu Xin's works in his seminar on the history of world literature in the University of California, Los Angeles. This made Mu Xin attain his readers on the American literary website *Words Without Borders*. In mainland China, the most significant researcher of Mu Xin's literature is Li Chunyang 李春阳, who is a research associate in the Chinese Academy of Arts. She is the researcher and glossographer on Mu Xin's poetry. In addition, Chen Danqing, the friend and disciple of Mu Xin, is also an important figure on the study of Mu Xin. It is he who spares no effort to introduce Mu Xin's works in mainland China. It is he who published *Literary Memoirs* (Wenxue huiyilu 文学回忆录) based on his own notes from Mu Xin's lectures on the history of world literature between 1989 and 1994. This book presents a more comprehensive Mu Xin and offers the first-hand valuable materials for the study of Mu Xin.

I'd like to expound on the relationship between Mu Xin as a double recluse and Chinese literature in following five chapters based on those studies and materials above :

Chapter One: The Setting. As the setting, in this chapter I'd like to discourse on the cultural transmutation and the impact of cultural ruptures in the 20th century's

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, "Mu Xin fengge de yiyi", p.21.

China. The Chinese culture sequentially underwent ancient cultural tradition between Pre-Qin and Qing dynasties, the May Fourth new cultural tradition, the cultural tradition of red regime in Yan'an (延安), the tradition of the Cultural Revolution and the official discourse system in recent 30 years after 1978. Those five kinds of cultural tradition are not parallel. It is the process that the latter three traditions destroyed the former two, which results in the cultural ruptures in modern China. The rupture of the cultural tradition and the ineffectiveness of the cultural memories constitute the crisis and predicament of contemporary Chinese literary writing and reading. This is as well as the background of the integrity of Mu Xin's literature and the significance of him as a double recluse. He was not in the transmutation and a series of ruptures of the cultural tradition.

Chapter Two: Literature and Memories. As an important writer ignored by our times, the first significance of recluse for Mu Xin is his real life and his destiny. Therefore I'd like to recount the life of Mu Xin in this chapter from the aspects of his literary reading and his writing career. However it doesn't mean that I will reconstruct Mu Xin's bygone past or restore the details of his life within a historian's or biographer's penchant in this chapter. What I would like to do is discussing the relationship between Literature and Mu Xin, which means that the whole life of Mu Xin is the life to recall his past through literature, the life to be reclusive for literature, and the life to educate and perfect himself by means of literature.

Chapter Three : Literature and Times. The second significance of recluse for Mu Xin is that his aesthetic stance and his writing style are so different from the literary discourse and the way of thinking of modern Chinese literature. In this chapter, I'd like to discuss the features of Mu Xin's literary works from the following three aspects: aesthetic stance, writing style and literary language.

Chapter Four : Literature and Diaspora. Mu Xin still wrote in Chinese after he migrated to New York in 1982. As his literary works had been published in succession, he acquired an enviable reputation in the overseas Chinese literary circle. And part of his works were translated and published in English and then noticed by academia in America. In *The History of American Literature* compiled by Tongming Jun Liu, Mu

Xin was classified as ‘diasporic writer’. Through the semantic reconstruction, the word ‘diaspora’ has gradually become a kind of view of culture (literature) of the postcolonial and the globalized era since 1980s and its new meaning is that national culture (literature) acquires cross-national and worldwide connotation. In this chapter, I’d like to discourse on the diasporic characteristics of Mu Xin’s literary works in two aspects: on the one hand, Mu Xin had always held a kind of diasporic perspective that he considered that culture (literature) should be holistic and global. For Mu Xin, literature is an integrated world and his homeland. His writing can be regarded as a kind of self-diaspora in worldwide literary homeland. And Tongming Jun Liu raised that the significance of the style of Mu Xin is that Chinese literature acquired extremely rich worldwide connotation in his style. On the other hand, as far as Mu Xin’s concerned, ‘diaspora’ not only means a kind of social and cultural phenomenon and the way of cross-thinking, but also relates to the inner realm of the conceptual. Mu Xin called diasporas in the realm of the conceptual ‘wanderers with roots’. And he himself is a wanderer with roots. And his own spiritual roots are comprised of four kinds of significant perception he maintained all his life, and I will expound on them in the third part of this chapter.

Chapter Five : Literature and Reception. In this chapter, I’d like to give an overview of the process and the stage of the publication and acceptance of Mu Xin’s works; analyse the reason that Mu Xin was ignored by our times and academia in mainland China; elaborate on Mu Xin’s view of readers, i.e. his own view on the reception of his own works; put forward my own point of view of the historical position of Mu Xin’s literature.

Chapter 1

The Setting

There is no country in the world like the 20th-century's China who experienced such a cultural upheaval, by means of continuous revolution, holding anti-traditional cultural radicalism, that she finally lost her cultural memories and broke her cultural traditions in a short period less than a century. In the one hundred years, Chinese culture sequentially underwent a series of cultural traditions: the tradition of classical Chinese culture between Pre-Qin period and late Qing dynasty, the tradition of May Fourth new culture, the cultural tradition of red regime in Yan'an, the tradition of Cultural Revolution, and the tradition of post-cultural-revolution, i.e., the official discourse system in recent 30 years after 1978. Those five kinds of cultural tradition are not parallel, nor developed simultaneously. Rather, it is the process that the latter tradition denied and subverted the former one, in the name of seeking advancement and innovation.

The progress of cultural subversion and cultural rupture not only became the testimony and a reflection of a series of social transformation and political revolution that China underwent since late Qing dynasty, but also played an important role in those various historical changes. As Wolfgang Kubin mentioned in the preface of *Die chinesische Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, "Dank seiner Wandlung vom Weltreich (tianxia) zum Nationalstaat (guojia) ist China mit der Gründung der Republik 1912 offiziell und als aktives Mitglied in die Weltgemeinschaft und die Weltgeschichte eingetreten. Seitdem spielt es politisch, wirtschaftlich und bedingt auch kulturell international eine wichtige Rolle. Die Literatur war und ist ein wesentliches Zeugnis dieses Wandels, sei es, daß sie mit zur Transformation Chinas beitrug, sei es, daß sie

über diesen Wandel Auskunft gab. Diese Tatsache hat bis heute zu einer unverhältnismäßig eingehenden Beschäftigung mit der modernen und gegenwärtigen chinesischen Literatur geführt, hinter welcher längst alle anderen Epochen, so glänzend sie auch sein mögen, zurückstehen müssen.”¹ It is the double significance of the process of the cultural subversion and the cultural rupture that make us see clearly that a series of cultural movements and cultural reforms occurring in the 20th –century’s China were inevitably provided with factors of political utilitarianism and revolutionary ideology, and with the dualistic view of enlightenment and saving the nation (jiuguo 救国).

From the vernacular movement and new literature movement initiated in the May Fourth period, the popular language movement in 1930s, the discussion of the ‘national form’ of art and literature in the period of Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), to the literary movement based on Mao Zedong’s 毛泽东 (1893-1976) theory of popular literature and art in Yan’an in 1940s, the individualistic stance of art and literature was gradually replaced with the collectivist stance of art and literature, enlightenment was gradually replaced with patriotism, democracy was gradually replaced with nationalism, the dualistic view of tradition and modernity, of the West and China were gradually deepened. After 1949, the formation of totalitarian language of Mao’s style and the implementation of simplified Chinese characters exacerbated the rupture of Chinese cultural tradition. And the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution was the climax of the anti-traditional cultural radicalism since the May Fourth Movement and the final formation of the total rupture of Chinese cultural tradition.

The crisis and dilemma of contemporary Chinese literary writing and reading is the consequence of the total rupture of Chinese cultural tradition. And we are all facing this consequence nowadays. However, Mu Xin was the isolated case of this cultural background. He was not in the process of cultural subversion and cultural rupture. This is the reason why Mu Xin’s literary style is rather different from Chinese contemporary literature.

¹ Wolfgang Kubin, *Die chinesische Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: K.G.Sauer Verlag GmbH, 2005), p. VII.

1.1 The Binary opposition of Tradition and Modernity

Since the failure of the First Opium War, Chinese intellectuals have become gradually aware that the old China won't be the central empire any more. On the one hand, a series of national disgrace and national perils made saving and strengthening the nation gradually become the common consciousness of the whole nation. On the other hand, the nation's cultural identity and cultural confidence in the past converted to the denial of its own tradition, and meanwhile converted to identifying with the westernization and modernization. To establish nation-state and to fulfil modernization became the inevitable historical subjects in the modern China.

The transition from tradition to modernity and the process from the central empire's disintegration to the nation-state's establishment began with the forced opening to British Empire's invasion. This passive beginning of modernization decides that the establishment of modern China was related with the social crisis and with the political purpose of saving the nation from the very beginning. And it also decides the existence of the binary conflict between the nation and the West, between tradition and modernity, in later one hundred years. And the cultural radicalism resulted from this dualistic conflict eventually ended up with the rupture of, even the disintegration of, Chinese cultural tradition. Yu Yingshi 余英时 thought that the history of Chinese modern thoughts is the process of radicalization, whose climax is the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution.¹

Lin Yusheng 林毓生 and Zhang Hao 张灏, both of the two who are American-Chinese sinologists, agreed with Yu Yingshi. In his dissertation *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness: Iconoclasm in the May Fourth Era*, Lin Yusheng mentioned that the remarkable feature of the May Fourth Era is the wholesale

¹ Yu Yingshi 余英时, "Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi shang de jijin yu baoshou 中国近代思想史上的激进与保守," in *Qian Mu yu zhongguo wenhua 钱穆与中国文化* (Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong chubanshe, 1994), p. 201.

iconoclasm in culture.¹ And Zhang Hao considered that Chinese intellectuals, since the May Fourth Era, on the one hand, simplified the Western modern civilization as the two main points: science and democracy, on the other hand, they treated Chinese cultural tradition as a unitary entirety at the opposite end of the Western modern civilization. Zhang Hao pointed out that as far as Chinese intellectuals are concerned, the Western modern civilization represents advancement, brightness, and rationality, while the Chinese tradition represents backwardness, darkness, and irrationality. According to this simple dualistic view, if China wants to be advanced, rational, with a bright future, then she has to accept the Western modern civilization, and further, if China wants to accept the modern civilization of the West, then she must abandon her traditional culture thoroughly.² Gan Yang 甘阳, a prominent scholar from mainland China, held the similar views. He supposed that the intellectuals in modern China, especially in the May Fourth Era, identified modernization with westernization, therefore they treated Chinese culture with an iconoclastic attitude, which resulted in the rupture of Chinese cultural tradition.³

Hence, in this sense, the anti-tradition in culture advocated in the May Fourth Movement and even in the whole history of modern China is actually a kind of political tool in order to fulfil the purpose of saving and strengthening the nation. Its essence is utilitarianism. To identify with the West and to deny Chinese tradition are the two sides of the same coin of this utilitarianism. As Yu Yingshi said, “Suppose we Chinese can abandon our traditional culture thoroughly and can accept all the basic values of the Western culture. Then we must grasp comprehensive knowledge of the western culture in order to fulfil the suppose I mentioned above. How giant the project will be. But the view of science and democracy advocated in the May Fourth Movement had never transcended the phase of being only a slogan. As to the cultural

¹ Lin Yusheng 林毓生, “The Crisis of Chinese consciousness: Iconoclasm in the May Fourth Era,” Ph.D. diss., the University of Chicago, 1970, Chapter I, pp.1-11.

² Zhang Hao 张灏, *Zhang Hao zixuanji* 张灏自选集 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), pp. 233-234.

³ See Gan Yang 甘阳, “Bashi niandai wenhua taolun de ji ge wenti 八十年代文化讨论的几个问题,” in *Wenhua: zhongguo he shijie* 文化：中国和世界, Vol. 1 (Beijing: Sanlian Books, 1987).

factors behind the Western science and democracy, such as religious factors, philosophical factors, and historical factors, and so on, we almost had no knowledge in those aspects. But we shouldn't blame Chinese intellectuals for their superficialness, because the historical environment in this one hundred years didn't offer enough space to them to concentrate on studies.”¹

The extreme development of this kind of cultural utilitarianism under a special historical and social environment was the anti-traditional cultural radicalism that lasted the long period from the May Fourth Movement to the Cultural Revolution. Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962) considered that this kind of cultural radicalism made ‘enlightenment’, the main subject of the May Fourth New Culture Movement, be interrupted, and be replaced with ‘saving the nation’. Moreover, in Hu Shi’s opinion, the May Fourth Movement was originally the culture movement focussing on personal liberation and awakening, but the cultural radicalism made it convert to the nationalist movement and the communist revolutionary movement with anti-individualistic tendency.² Wolfgang Kubin’s views on this issue are as follows, “ Aus dieser Konfrontation von Alt und Neu hat sich die bis heute ungelöste „chinesische Frage“ ergeben, die etwas mit der oben angesprochenen Identitätsproblematik zu tun hat. Wer die Tradition verwirft, hat keinen Ursprung mehr, und wer den Westen sich nicht so zu eigen machen kann, daß er das Ziel einer Gleichheit mit dem Abendland zu erreichen in der Lage ist, hat auch keine Zukunft. Unvermeidlicherweise läuft unter diesen Voraussetzungen die „chinesische Frage“ auf das Verhältnis von Tradition und Moderne, Ost und West sowie auf das Problem einer tatsächlichen Vergleichbarkeit zwischen China und dem Abendland hinaus. Der unbedingte Wunsch, das feudalistische und imperialistische Joch der Vergangenheit mit Hilfe der Mittel und Waffen des Westens abzuschütteln, um mit den fremden Mächten gleichziehen zu können, verengt notgedrungen den Blick auf „die Rettung des Vaterlandes“ (jiuguo) und überläßt mit der Zeit dem Staat die Umwertung alter

¹ Yu Yingshi , “Lun wenhua chaoyue 论文化超越,” in *Qian Mu yu zhongguo wenhua*, pp.252-254.

² Hu Shi 胡适, *Hu Shi riji* 胡适日记, Vol. 11, the 22nd December, 1933 (Taipei: Yuanliu press, 1990).

Normen und die Prägung neuer Werte. Der Staat bzw. eine auf die Staatsbildung hinzielende politische Gruppierung wird zum alleinigen Ideengeber, die Basis ist mehr oder minder ein Voluntarismus, welcher einer Priorität des Geistes und der Gedanken des Wort redet. Alle Veränderung sei nur eine Sache des Willens und der Ambition. Dies ist ein Grund dafür, daß die Hochstimmung des 4. Mai und später der Enthusiasmus nach 1949 so schnell in Niedergeschlagenheit umkippen konnten. Das Neue läßt sich weder herbeiphantasieren noch herbeiwünschen.”¹

In conclusion, the modernity of China didn't arise from enlightenment and individual's awakening, but resulted from the realistic demands of social crisis and political reform. It was the consequence of external repression, rather than the consequence of internal evolution. The establishment of nation-state and the fulfillment of modernization were the two main historical subjects in 20th- century China, which were always accompanied by the binary opposition of tradition and modernity, of the nation and the West, of the new and the old, of conservatism and radicalism, and of advancement and backwardness. But the modernity won by the 20th –century's China through revolution and cultural ruptures was so fragile that it eventually became a hotbed of political and language totalitarianism. As Yu Yingshi said, “The Chinese revolution was a historical tragedy, because all those revolutionary thoughts introduced and advocated by those radical intellectuals became the harvest reaped by those anti-intellectuals who knew how to manipulate revolution and how to hold power. As to intellectuals, the fruits of revolution converted to their destruction.”²

What the conflict between tradition and modernity brought China was not new culture and ideas, but the unbridgeable cultural chasm leading to the cultural crisis of contemporary China. Mu Xin considered that the reason why there are no excellent literary works in contemporary China is that China underwent three sequential cultural ruptures in the 20th century. He said, “The first rupture results from the conflict between vernacular Chinese language and classical Chinese language since

¹ Wolfgang Kubin, *Die chinesische Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 27.

² Yu Yingshi, *Renwen yu lixing de zhongguo 人文与理性的中国* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007), pp. 14-15.

the May Fourth Movement. The turn from the classical to the vernacular was due to the historical trend. But this transformation employed the means of revolution and occurred so fast and so recklessly that people nowadays cannot understand and use classical Chinese language any more. The second cultural rupture was due to the contradiction between enlightenment and saving the nation during the Sino-Japanese War. Saving the nation achieved predominance, while culture and education were ignored. The third cultural rupture arose from proletarian revolution and obscurantism. Under the political totalitarianism, literature and art became maidservants, whose task was to praise the red regime and to obscure the masses's mind.¹ And Chen Fangjing 陈方竞, a scholar, considered that Chinese new literature arose from the rupturing transformation (断裂性转变) of language style, which constitutes the precondition and the core of the May Fourth literary revolution, meanwhile, this rupturing transformation became a kind of continuity of rupture (承续性断裂). He said: "this kind of continuity is the strengthening and the exacerbation of rupture, to fulfil the continuity in rupture."²

From the conflict between vernacular Chinese language and classical Chinese language since the May Fourth Movement to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, the three sequential ruptures of Chinese culture in the 20th century just appeared in the form of continuity of rupture, and eventually resulted in the severance of cultural continuity and the separation between tradition and modernity. I would like to elaborate on the three ruptures of Chinese culture in the 20th century in the next part.

1.2 The Three Ruptures of Chinese Culture in the 20th Century

Hu Shi was considered as the primary advocate for the written vernacular Chinese.

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 376.

² Chen Fangjing 陈方竞, "Duanlie yu chengxu: dui 'Wusi' yuti biange de zairenshi 断裂与承续: 对 '五四' 语体变革的再认识," in *Xin guoxue yanjiu* 新国学研究 1 (2005): 338-367.

In the fifth issue of the journal *New Youth* (Xin qingnian 新青年), his article titled “A Preliminary Discussion of Literature Reform” (Wenxue gailiang chuyi 文学改良刍议) was published, in the January of 1917. In this article, Hu Shi proposed eight guidelines of the literature reform and considered that the written vernacular Chinese should be treated as the orthodox form of literary writing. This article was considered as the beginning of Chinese new literature movement in the 20th century. Later Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942) published his article “On Literature Revolution” (Wenxue geming lun 文学革命论) in the sixth issue of *New Youth*. In the article, he emphasized three doctrines of literature revolution. A summary account of the three doctrines as follows: to subvert aristocratic, classical and scholarly literature, while to establish national, realistic and popular literature. Obviously, Chen Duxiu’s three doctrines had a fierce class ideology, which left no room for moderate reform but advocated radical revolution. This new literature movement was based on the artificial conflict between the classical Chinese and the vernacular Chinese from the very beginning, which questioned and denied the classical Chinese and advocated the vernacular Chinese meanwhile. In the third issue of *New Youth* published in 1918, Qian Xuantong 钱玄同 (1887-1939), who used a pseudonym Wang Jingxuan (王敬轩), together with Liu Bannong 刘半农 (1891-1934), made up of a fictional debate on the conflict of the classical Chinese versus the vernacular Chinese. This artificial debate provoked the protest of the so-called ‘cultural conservative’. The real conflict between the classical Chinese and the vernacular Chinese then broke out.

Lin Shu 林纾 (1852-1924), as the opponent of the faction of *New Youth*, first rose in revolt. He published a series of articles, such as “Discourse on the Ebb and Flow of the Classical Chinese and the Vernacular Chinese” (Lun guwen baihuawen zhi xiang xiaozhang 论古文白话文之相消长), “The Letter to Cai Yuanpei” (Zhi Cai heqing taishi shu 致蔡鹤卿太史书), to defend the classical Chinese, to oppose the abolition of the classical Chinese. Later the members of Xueheng School (学衡派), such as Mei Guangdi 梅光迪 (1890-1945), Wu Mi 吴宓 (1894-1978), Hu Xiansu 胡先骕 (1894-1968), who were editors of the journal *Xueheng* 学衡, also published articles to oppose abolition of the classical Chinese. In this debate, the advocate of the

vernacular Chinese used the written vernacular to state their views, while the defender of the classical Chinese used the classical Chinese to convey their opposition. However, as Li Chunyang said, “even if we publish the articles of both camp to public, in order for the comparison, today’s readers cannot understand the classical Chinese any more.”¹ If we regard the phenomenon mentioned by Li Chunyang as the success of the vernacular Chinese, it is better to regard it as the success of cultural radicalism in Chinese modern history, or as the tragedy of Chinese culture.

The history of the written vernacular Chinese can be traced back to Pre-Qin period, since when till the late Qing dynasty, the classical Chinese continuously coexisted with the vernacular Chinese. After Tang and Song dynasties, the vernacular Chinese gradually became the second written language and employed in novellas (huaben 话本) and Buddhist Sutra stories. In South-Song dynasty, some Confucian lecture scripts were also written in the vernacular language, such as *Classified Utterances of Master Zhu* (朱子语类). After Ming dynasty, the written vernacular became more mature, and there appeared long-length novel written in the vernacular language, such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三国演义), *Water Margin* (水浒传), *Jin Ping Mei* (金瓶梅), and *Dream of the Red Mansion* (红楼梦), all that were not only the classics of the vernacular literature but also the classics of Chinese classical literature. But the tradition of the vernacular literature since Tang and Song dynasties was treated as the old vernacular language system and was denied meanwhile in the May Fourth literature revolution. While the new vernacular literature advocated by the camp of *New Youth* was combined with a large quantity of Europeanized language. In the article titled “The Classical Chinese and the Vernacular Chinese” (Wenyan yu baihua 文言与白话), Lü Shuxiang 吕叔湘 (1904-1998), an illustrious linguist in modern China, pointed out, “the classical Chinese and the vernacular were two interdependent definitions. Previously, if there was no existence of the vernacular language, then there would be no such thing as the classical Chinese. If the classical Chinese will disappear one day, then the concept of the vernacular

¹ Li Chun Yang 李春阳, “Baihuawen yundong de weiji 白话文运动的危机,” Ph.D. diss., Chinese Academy of Arts, 2009, Chapter 1, pp. 36-37.

language will disappear as well.”¹

The vernacular Chinese language didn't arise from the May Fourth new literature movement, while the conflict between the vernacular Chinese language and the classical Chinese language was the consequence of that movement. In the 20th century, China, the ever central empire, converted into a member of modern nation-states in the world. The unified national language is one of the preconditions of the establishment of nation-state. Hence, in this sense, the turn from classical Chinese language to the vernacular is the inevitable historical trend. But this turn should not employ the means of radical literature revolution that made one language style subverted the other; it also should not employ the binary opposition of tradition and modernity to measure on the value of language; and it should not impose the ideology of class antagonism on the change of language and literary style.

In 1919, in the article titled “The Future of Chinese Language” (Guowen zhi jianglai 国文之将来), Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940) said, “I dare to assert that the vernacular Chinese language will achieve predominance. But there is still a problem whether classical Chinese language will be excluded absolutely. According to my observation, in the future, practical articles must be written in the vernacular Chinese language, while a part of literary writing might employ the classical Chinese language.”² Cai Yuanpei's view proposed an ideal and healthy ecology of language and literature. But ideal after all is the ideal. His view had never been a reality. The artificial conflict between the vernacular Chinese language and the classical Chinese language since the May Fourth Movement resulted in the rupture of Chinese language. After 1949, except for areas of expertise, the classical Chinese language and the old vernacular literature disappeared both in daily life and in literary writing and reading. It is the first rupture of Chinese culture in the 20th century.

In 1934, the popular language movement, whose subject was to ask the new

¹ Lü Shuxiang 吕叔湘, “Wenyan yu baihua,” in *Lü Shuxiang wenji* 吕叔湘文集 Vol. 4 (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2004), p. 67.

² Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, “Guowen zhi jianglai,” in *Beijing daxue rikan* 北京大学日刊, November 19, 1919, p. 490.

vernacular literature more colloquial, was initiated in Shanghai. The movement began with a dispute whether the classical Chinese language should be taught in primary schools. However it soon turned to the debate on cultural issues with political factors because of the participation of left-wing writers. In this discussion, Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899-1935), a left-wing writer as well as one of the founders of the Chinese Communist Party, considered that the May Fourth literature revolution was not completed. He considered the new vernacular literature initiated in the May Fourth Movement as a kind of new classical Chinese language, because he thought it was semi-vernacular and semi-classical, and combined with a large quantity of Europeanized language. He supposed that this kind of new vernacular literature was only created for Europeanized intellectuals, but estranged from the masses. Therefore, he said, “ we should initiate a renaissance movement led by the proletariat, a proletarian cultural and literary revolution, and a proletarian ‘May Fourth’.”¹ Qu Qiubai published a series articles to elaborate his theory of popular literature, such as “On Popular Literature” (Lun dazhong de wenyi 论大众的文艺), “The Europeanized Literature” (Ouhua wenyi 欧化文艺), “Who Are We” (Women shi shui 我们是谁) and so on. He considered that the development of literature should submit to the demands of social revolution and political struggles. As well he stressed the class nature of literature.

Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896-1945), another left-wing writer, agreed with Qu Qiubai about the class nature of literature so that he wrote the article “Class Struggles in Literature” (Wenxue shang de jiejidouzheng 文学上的阶级斗争). While Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋 (1903-1987) proposed opposite view. In his prose “Literature and Revolution” (Wenxue yu geming 文学与革命), Liang Shiqiu mentioned that the core values of either literature or revolution should be individualistic, and should be with the respect for genius, and has nothing to do with the ‘great majority’. He considered that appreciation of literature is a precious happiness and this kind of happiness is not exclusive to some class, because literature has no class nature. He also supposed that

¹ Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, “Dazhong wenyi de wenti 大众文艺的问题,” in *Qu Qiubai wenji* 瞿秋白文集 Vol.3 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1989), p.13.

literature is broad and eternal, while the revolution is temporary and abnormal. Thus to take literature as revolutionary tool is to cut the eternal values of literature into temporary and abnormal ones.¹ However Liang Shiqiu's view was criticized typically by Mao Zedong in Yan'an Forum on literature and art later in 1942.

The outbreak of Sino-Japanese war made the fate of the nation hang in the balance. The class contradictions existing in Chinese society were replaced with this unprecedented peril at that time. Consequently, the popular language movement was replaced with the discussion on literature's 'national form' (minzu xingshi 民族形式). In order to pander to the appearance of nationalist demands in culture, Mao Zedong proposed the concept 'national form' in a speech given on the sixth plenary session of the sixth central committee. He pointed out that Chinese culture should be presented in the national form, combining its own cultural characteristics with Marxism. In the beginning of 1939, the discussion on 'national form' was initiated in Yan'an and soon spread nationwide. In 1940, Mao published his article "On New Democracy" (Xin minzhu zhuyi lun 新民主主义论), in which he mentioned 'national form' again. He said, " Chinese culture should has its own form, i.e., the national form. Our new culture should combine the national form with the new democratic content."² The so-called 'new democratic content' means saving the nation and communist revolution led by the Chinese Communist Party. And the national form might not be the faith of the Chinese Communist Party, but more like their tactics under the new situation of Sino-Japanese war. As to the 'national form' proposed by Mao, Kubin's view are as follows, " Die Rückkehr zur Tradition der chinesischen Künste bedeutet zwar einen Abschied von der abendländischen Moderne, doch sind Mao Zedongs Ausführungen in den marxistischen Diskurs einer Mobilisierung und Aufklärung des Volkes eingebettet. Ganz gleich, wie man nun diesen definieren mag, ist die wiedererweckte Tradition nicht so ohne weiteres mit einem „ Feudalismus“ vor 1911 gleichzusetzen und dem kommunistischen China nicht eine Moderne zur Gänze

¹ Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋, "Wenxue yu geming 文学与革命," in *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shiliao huibian* 中国现代文学史料汇编 Vol. 1 (He'nan: He'nan renmin press, 1979), p. 488.

² Mao Zedong 毛泽东, "Xin minzhuzhuyi lun," in *Mao Zedong xuanji* 毛泽东选集 Vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1991), pp. 662-711.

abzusprechen. Der Einfachheit halber späche man am besten von einer formalen Rückkehr zur chinesischen Tradition und einer inhaltlichen Neuorientierung am Beispiel des Sozialismus. Um ein abgegriffenes Bild zu benutzen: Es wurde ein neuer Wein in alte Schläuche gegossen, wie Lao She einmal meinte.”¹

Through this discussion of ‘national form’, the subject ‘enlightenment’ of the May Fourth new culture movement and the individualistic stance of literature and art were eventually replaced with the subject ‘saving the nation’ and the collectivist stance of literature and art. Nation and state substituted democracy and individual. This cultural turn will presage a series of changes and disasters of Chinese culture in the future, and the turn itself was the essential link in the chain of the rupture of Chinese culture in the 20th century. Through this cultural turn, Chinese Communist Party successfully mastered the cultural leadership, walking from the edge toward the center. As to this cultural turn, Kubin said: “ Keine Periode der modernen chinesischen Literatur hat die Entwicklung Chinas für die nachfolgenden Jahrzehnte so tiefgreifend geprägt wie die dritte Phase, die Phase der Kriege. Dies war einmal der Krieg gegen Japan (1937-1945) und zum anderen der Krieg der Bürger untereinander (1945-1949). Von beiden Kriegen war der erste für die Herausbildung einer neuen politischen Kultur der wichtigere. Die kulturelle Wende der damaligen Jahre läßt sich mit den Stichworten Patriotismus bzw. Nationalismus, Hinterland bzw. Volkskultur, Popularisierung bzw. Sinisierung vorerst zusammenfassen. Das heißt, vieles, was am Rande stand, die Randkultur ausmachte, gerät nun ins Zentrum und wird zur Leitkultur.”²

In Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art held in 1942, the statement ‘national form’ turned to Mao’s theory of popular literature and art, “the literature and art should service revolutionary masses”. This turn was not only the sign of the final establishment of the proletarian revolutionary discourses, but also the beginning of the total change of Chinese literary ecology. As Kubin said, “Die Künste wurden nun nicht mehr durch die Künstler, die Politiker sein konnten, organisiert, sondern durch

¹ Wolfgang Kubin, *Die chinesische Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 190.

² Ibid.

die Politiker, die einmal Künstler waren oder sich gelegentlich künstlerisch betätigten. Dabei gingen die Organisationsformen weit über die Verbände und die Städte hinaus. Bis Ende des Bürgerkrieges hatten sie fast das gesamte Land ergriffen, so daß Radikalisierung und politische Organisierung gleichsam Synonyme sind. Mao Zedongs damalige Reden und Schriften zur Ausrichtung der Künste als gewichtiges Mittel für den Kampf um das Vaterland traten nicht etwas 1949, als das Ziel, die Errichtung einer Volksrepublik, erreicht war, außer Kraft, sondern sie behielten in der Praxis ihre Gültigkeit bis 1989, in der Theorie gar bis ins neue Jahrhundert.”¹

In his speech in that forum held in 1942, Mao pointed out that the purpose of the forum was to make literature and art become the part of the whole revolutionary machine, and to make them become the useful weapon to attack enemies and the useful tool to unite the masses. He said that literature and art should service the masses, including workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie. He considered that all literature and art belong to some class, the proletarian literature and art should be the part of the whole proletarian revolution. And the task of revolutionary artists and writers should be exposing enemies’ brutality and chicanery, and meanwhile praising people’s army and people’s party.

As to Mao’s theory of literature and art mentioned in Yan’an Forum and the cultural movement and literary practice based on his theory, Kubin commented, “ Mao Zedong versteht die Künste als eine Sache für die Arbeiter, Bauern und Soldaten (gongnongbing), die zunächst im Kampf gegen Japan, später gegen die Guomindang stehen und grundsätzlich das Land unter der Führung der Partei zukunftsweisend umzugestalten haben. Bei all diesen Veränderungen (gaizao), die physischer und auch psychischer Natur sind, steht die Konzentrierung der politischen Einheit (jizhong tongzi), der schichtenübergreifende Zusammenschluß (jiede), im Mittelpunkt. Die Künste sind so ganz im Sinne des Marxismus-Leninismus „Rädchen und Schraubchen“ im Werk der Revolution: In ihrem Dienst an den Massen dienen sie der Politik. Schreiben bedeutet folglich „das Zentrum beschreiben“ (xie zhongxin),

¹ Wolfgang Kubin, *Die chinesische Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, p.190.

Singen „das Zentrum besingen“ (chang zhongxin), das heißt die Leitung der Kommunistischen Partei Chinas verherrlichen und die tagespolitischen Reden der Führungsspitze künstlerisch gestalten. Erfolg oder Mißerfolg der Künste richten sich dementsprechend nach der gelingenden Umsetzung aktueller Parolen in die „Sprache“ der Massen. Dies hatte eindeutig und engagiert zu geschehen.[----] Nicht zufällig stellt Mao Zedong eine ähnliche Frage wie Carl Schmitt (1888-1985): Wer sind unsere Freunde, wer sind unsere Feinde? Es gibt daher nur Schwarz und Weiß. Die Künste werden zur Waffe gegen den Feind und zum Mittel der Erziehung der Freunde. Insofern gibt es keine Differenz zwischen Ästhetik und Politik, beide sind eines, da sie einander dienen: Die Ästhetik verpackt die Politik, und die Politik ebnet der Ästhetik ihren Weg. Beider Standpunkt ist eindeutig: Er ist parteilich, verfißt die Sache des Proletariats und sucht mit jeweils anderen Mittel die Einheit der chinesischen Welt zu befördern.”¹

This combination of aesthetics and politics made saving the nation substitute for enlightenment, made collectivism substitute for individualistic awakening, and made nationalism and totalitarianism substitute for the true democracy, meanwhile it resulted in the second rupture of Chinese culture in the 20th century.

Yu Yingshi ever said that in the last hundred years the ideological trend in Chinese society changed so fast that change itself became the highest value in China.² It is just in the name of this highest value that Chinese culture in the 20th century fell into the circle to replace the old with the new. The vernacular language movement initiated in the May Fourth Movement denied the classical Chinese language, and meanwhile defined the vernacular literary tradition since Tang and Song dynasties as ‘old vernacular’. While in the popular language movement in 1930s, the left-wing writers regarded the new vernacular literature initiated in the May Fourth Movement as the old vernacular, even as the new classical Chinese language; and the popular language became the vernacular of the vernaculars. During the following period of the

¹ Wolfgang Kubin, *Die chinesische Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, pp. 200-203.

² Yu Yingshi, “Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi shang de jijin yu baoshou,” pp.193-201.

8-year Sino-Japanese War, Chinese Communist Party successfully made the culture movement become the tool of revolution through the discussion on ‘national form’ and through Mao’s speech in Yan’an Forum on literature and art. With the establishment of the red regime in 1949, the proletarian revolutionary discourse represented by Mao’s style became the new vernacular that gradually covered the territory of Chinese language and culture.

Mao not only considered that language can be reformed, but also remained committed to treat the reformed language as the tool of political criticism. From the criticism on *Biography of Wu Xun* (武训传) in 1950 to the criticism on *Hai Rui dismissed from office* (海瑞罢官) in 1966, which is considered as the fuse of the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, Mao’s criticism became more and more fierce, and spread more and more widely. Meanwhile, Mao became the ultimate language maker, successfully getting unprecedented cult of personality. Till the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (毛泽东语录) became the public ‘Bible’ that should be recited daily nationwide, the scientific basis of the political parade and the political denunciation, and even the sacred decree to decide person’s life and death. The core of cult of personality that surrounded Mao is the worship of absolute power. Then language and power were combined together in Mao’s style. Therefore, Li Chunyang supposed that the combination of language and power comprises the internal and external structure of Mao’s style.¹ The combination of language and power is beginning of language totalitarianism which will eventually lead to the total rupture of Chinese culture.

If the language totalitarianism resulted from Mao’s style was the reflection of cultural and revolutionary radicalism under new historical environment in terms of ideology, then the simplified Chinese characters movement was its more specific and practical exemplification, which not only founded one of the cultural bases for the Cultural Revolution, but also was the key link leading to the rupture of Chinese culture in the 20th century.

¹ Li Chun Yang, “Baihuawen yundong de weiji,” p. 143.

From the compilation of the *List of Frequently Used Simplification of Chinese Characters* in 1950 to the official promulgation of *Chinese Character Simplification Scheme* in 1956, the reform of Chinese characters with two- thousand- year history was completed in just 7 years. While the implementation of Chinese character simplification was just treated as the transition of Chinese character Latinization that proposed since the May Fourth Movement. As early as in 1951, Mao Zedong pointed out, “ Chinese characters must be reformed, which must be in the direction of the Latin alphabet.”¹ The Chinese character Latinization plan was undoubtedly the continuity of anti-traditional cultural radicalism since the May Fourth era. Zhu Dake 朱大可, a contemporary culture scholar in Shanghai, considered that the Chinese character reform that was carried out in a new-established country contained complex political factors, “ firstly, it can fulfil the great unity in culture and show the red regime’s authority to the masses; secondly, it can present Chinese Communist Party’s determination to fulfil communism in Chinese character to Soviet Union; thirdly, it can draw the line with the culture of reactionary bourgeois regime in Hong Kong and Taiwan.”² Therefore, Zhu Dake called the Chinese character reform as ‘Cultural Great Leap Forward’.

The character Latinization plan ended up with nothing, but character simplification scheme was successfully implemented. Simplified Chinese characters became the basis of cultural cognition, and the two-thousand-year cultural code contained in and handed down by the traditional Chinese characters was completely unrecognizable because of the simplification. Since 1956, Chinese people who are called as ‘the generation of simplified characters’ began to get education through those incomplete text symbols.³ They didn’t respect their traditions anymore, and became increasingly estranged from their history. The chain of cultural continuity worse broke. Undoubtedly, it founded the cultural basis for the outbreak of the

¹ Wu Yuzhang 吴玉章, *Wenzhi gaige wenji* 文字改革文集 (Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1978), p.101.

² Zhu Dake 朱大可, “Hanzi geming he wenhua duanlie 汉字革命和文化断裂,” in *Nanfang zhoumo* 南方周末, April 15, 2009.

³ Ibid.

Cultural Revolution.

If the anti-traditional cultural radicalism since the May Fourth era was the mainstream of Chinese culture in the 20th century, there at least still existed opposition. But the cultural radicalism now became the unstoppable historical trend involving everyone under the totalitarian language of Mao's style and the prevalence of simplified Chinese characters. Therefore, the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1966 was not a historical accident. And all original cultural and social fundamental traditions and order were obliterated during the 10-year cultural catastrophe. As Yu Yingshi said, "not only the traditional Chinese culture and the mainstream of Western modern culture were totally denied, but also the mainstream culture of world socialism that was represented by Soviet Union encountered fierce criticism. In a word, all kinds of social order that ever existed in the world became the object of curse."¹

The 10-year cultural catastrophe is the climax of anti-traditional cultural and revolutionary radicalism during the past one hundred years, as well as the final completion of the rupture of Chinese culture. Since then, the Chinese modern culture was thoroughly separated from its tradition. The unbridgeable cultural chasm thence took shape.

¹ Yu Yingshi, "Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi shang de jijin yu baoshou," p.211.

Chapter 2

Literature and Memories

Who is Mu Xin? — This doubt has been continuously following him and puzzling his readers since Mu Xin began to publish his work in Chinese newspapers in New York in the 1980s. Wu Hong 巫鸿, a professor of art history of the University of Chicago, said, “ Mu Xin is the most elusive writer and painter I know. I call him elusive not simply because he has remained virtually unknown in China, where he spent his first 55 years, or because he has continued to lead the life of a recluse during his past 19 years in America. Nor is he elusive (though this is not entirely irrelevant) merely because he has assumed a long line of pseudonyms (Mu Xin being the most recent one) and few people even know his real name, Sun Pu. Rather, he has perfected an aesthetics of invisibility that crystallizes his existence as a writer and painter. In this aesthetics, his personal experiences are meaningless unless they are transformed into artistic experiences, and his artistic experiences cannot excel unless they transcend any conventional historical or biographical framework. His books and drawings are everything about himself that he wants to show to the outside world, but these works conceal , not reveal his historical specificity.”¹ When the Taiwan magazine UNITAS (Lianhe wenxue 联合文学) interviewed him in 1984, Mu Xin answered: “when there is a man who asked, ‘who is Mu Xin?’, my instinctive reaction is ‘which Mu Xin you ask for’. What Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) taught me that ‘Reveal art but conceal artist’, is still in my heart. There exists two Mu Xin. The one who signs ‘Mu Xin’ on his works is distinct from the one who signs ‘Mu Xin’ on the

¹ Wu Hong 巫洪, “Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past,” in Ray Furse, ed., *The Art of Mu Xin: Landscape Paintings and Prison Notes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p.40.

back of checks of author's remuneration."¹ Obviously, this reply from Mu Xin made the question fail to provoke an autobiographical account.²

Just As Roland Barthes (1915-1980) wrote in his book *Camera Lucida* that he publish his heart rather than his privacy, Mu Xin stated that an artist undresses his soul rather than his flesh. Undoubtedly, except for his works there is scarce information about Mu Xin's life left after his death. Even to a friend, Mu Xin had rarely mentioned himself. Wang Yu 王渝, a friend of Mu Xin, who was ever the deputy editor of *China Daily News*, told that when they chatted away Mu Xin seldom talked about himself, specifically his past in mainland China.³ Mu Xin has always believed that artists should know which thing should be left (works) and which thing should be taken away after his death. This is the virginity and style of artists.⁴ Therefore I have no plan to reconstruct Mu Xin's bygone past or restore the details of his life within a historian's or biographer's penchant in this chapter. What I would like to do is discussing the relationship between Literature and Mu Xin.

The one who signs 'Mu Xin' on his works had ever lived in reality in the political storm and the cultural catastrophe happening in his motherland, however he lived in obscurity like a recluse, "not participating in official life", and "studiously avoided the Communist Party art establishment".⁵ He did not have any motive to let himself be found.⁶ He did so only in order to maintain his literary heritage, the private library in his memory and a large number of his unpublished manuscripts which were eventually destroyed in the Cultural Revolution. He did so merely in order to keep his beloved writing secret, and not to fail to live up to what art had taught him. The one who signs 'Mu Xin' on the back of checks of author's remuneration carried along his only property, the memory of his destroyed literary heritage, to be an exile living in a foreign country after the calamity. He continued

¹ Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng 海峡传声," in *Yuli zhi yan 鱼丽之宴* (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), p.14.

² Wu Hong, "Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past," p.40.

³ Wang Yu 王渝, "Mu Xin yinxiang 木心印象," in *Jing Bao 晶报*, January 1, 2013.

⁴ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, pp. 502-503.

⁵ Alexandra Munroe: "Palimpsest: Nearby Mu Xin," in *The Art of Mu Xin: Landscape Paintings and Prison Notes*, p. 9.

⁶ Chen Danqing, "Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue 听木心谈文学," in *Wenxue huiyi lu*, p.1083.

writing through this memory and maintained Flaubert's words to hide himself behind his own works from the beginning to the end. In his published works, Mu Xin concealed the author deliberately. To Mu Xin, literature is not only his memory but also his reclusion. The memory derived from his destroyed literary heritage, no matter from the aspect of real life or from that of literary writing, helps him accomplish his self-perfection.

As Wu Hong said, "whether taking the shape of a private library or a multivolume manuscript, such a corpus stands for his self-identity as an author, and hence its destruction poses the danger of losing this identity at a particular moment in his life. Also, according to Mu Xin, he has never tried to reclaim or reconstruct a lost corpus in its original form, but has only ventured to create a new one to take its place. The significance of these cyclical losses and re-creations is not difficult to grasp: they constitute a narrative of a series of deaths and rebirths that Mu Xin has experienced in his capacity as a writer."¹ The whole life of Mu Xin is the life to be reclusive for literature, to recollect the past in literature, to fulfil self-perfection through literature. When Mu Xin was an adolescent, he had ever read the comments of Li Jianwu 李健吾 (1906-1982) on Gustave Flaubert, "Creation is his life, words and sentences are his joys and sorrows, and art is his whole anima."² When he read the comments as an adolescent, would Mu Xin have thought that it would also be the portrayal of his own life?

2.1 Mao Dun Library

The library in Mu Xin's memories is the beginning of the literary memories in his life. It always takes an important role in his memories and occupies the central stage of the cyclical losses and re-creations in his life. This library in memory had

¹ Wu Hong, "Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past," p. 41.

² Li Jianwu 李健吾, *Fuloubai pingzhuang* 福楼拜评传 (Hu'nan: Hu'nan Renmin chubanshe, 1980), p. 5. Li Jianwu is a writer, a critic and a translator of French literature in mainland China.

ever been located in Wuzhen, Mu Xin's hometown, which he called 'Mao Dun Library'. It was actually the study in the Shen family mansion, whose host is Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰 (1896-1981), one of the most illustrious literary figures in China since the 1930s and 1940s and better known by his pseudonym Mao Dun 茅盾. Mu Xin said, "as I have come to call it, but Mao Dun himself probably never promoted it as such."¹ Mao Dun was also born in Wuzhen and he was a distant relative of Mu Xin on his mother's side. Mu Xin recalled the relationship with the Shen family in the prose "The Reading Spot under a Pagoda" (Taxia dushuchu 塔下读书处), "I has never known clearly Mr Shen is which kind of relative of mine. My mother's family name is also 'Shen', but she had never recounted her pedigree. [……] I also did not know why I should call Huang Miaoxiang 黄妙祥 'grandpa Miaoxiang'. He is the man who was praised greatly by Mao Dun in his Memoirs. The friendship between Huang family and Shen family has already continued for generations. It looks as if that they were each other's immediate family. And my cousin is son-in-law of Huang family."² During the Sino-Japanese War, Japanese troops occupied the south of Yangtze, and Wuzhen, an old town in Zhejiang province, fell into occupation. "My hometown suffered from bombing, cannon fire, burning, killing, rape and robbery in the beginning and then it fell into occupation. At least the vigilante organized by Wang Puppet Regime dominate Wuzhen."³ In that period, Mao Dun's mother, the hostess of the Shen family had already died and Mao Dun with his family stayed away from Wuzhen, living in inland China. He entrusted the family's compound in Wuzhen to his old friend Huang Miaoxiang, the grandpa Miaoxiang of Mu Xin. It was then that the Huang family resided in the Shen family mansion where Mu Xin could frequent and discovered the 'Mao Dun library'. He wrote his discovery and impression of the library in "The Reading Spot under a Pagoda", "The Shen family mansion was an old and ordinary looking house, where I visited frequently. With only one level, the front hall was dark and gloomy. The floor was paved with thick bricks,

¹ Mu Xin, "Taxia dushuchu 塔下讀書處," in *Jixing panduan* 即興判斷 (Taipei: Yuanshen chubanshe, 1988), pp.7-20.

² Ibid.

³ Mu Xin, "Zhanhou jianianhua 战后嘉年华," in *Yuli zhi yan*, p. 111.

and the long and narrow windows were set in carved wooden frames. Passing the front hall, however the space suddenly became spacious and bright, as I entered an open and comfortable Western-style room, painted entirely light gray. This was the ‘Mao Dun library’. [……] It housed an exceedingly rich collection of books. This place became my secret haven when I was a teenager living in an isolated and remote village. There I enjoyed reading all of the masterpieces of world literature, when war and chaos ruled outside.”¹

Mu Xin had gradually become familiar with the collection of Mao Dun library . “ I am not familiar with the pedigree of Shen clan, however I have a good knowledge about the collection of Mao Dun library so that I borrowed the books of which I am fond back home batch after batch, being with them day and night.”² Mu Xin took good care of the collection of books in the library, thus the Huang family who were living in the Shen mansion at that time was quite willing to lend books to him. Mu Xin is proud of it. “With respect to the collection of books, there has been other relatives of Shen clan who often want to fetch them away. Because they are relatives of the Shen family so the Huang family have no reason not to lend books to them. However to let them fetch books away means to scatter the collection. Therefore grandpa Miaoxiang would like to lend books only to me and thought it was the way of appropriate preservation of the collection. He said, ‘the books you have read are tidier and neat than they were not yet read.’ What he said refers to my ability of book-repairing and bookbinding.”³ In that wartime, the Mao Dun library had actually become the private library of Mu Xin. “As the library’s only user he saw himself as its de facto owner.”⁴ Nearly the whole collection of Mao Dun library had been borrowed by Mu Xin. After the Sino-Japanese War, when Mu Xin had already been studying in Shanghai, he went to visit Mao Dun in his home in Shanghai with A Quan 阿全, the only son of Huang Miaoxiang. During that visit Mu Xin mentioned to Mao Dun the story between the collection of Mao Dun library and himself, and he recorded the

¹ Mu Xin, “Taxia dushuchu,” pp.7-20.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wu Hong, “Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past,” p.41.

dialogue between them in his prose “The Reading Spot under a Pagoda” (Taxia dushuchu):

“ A Quan said you are very fond of reading.”

“ Mr. Shen, nearly the whole of your collection of books in Wuzhen has been borrowed by me. When you go back to Wuzhen or when uncle A Quan return home I would ask my family to send those books back to your mansion. I did not carry any of them with me to Shanghai.”

“ I plan to repair the Shen mansion in Wuzhen. About those books we may talk about it later. It is said that you preserved them very well. That’s good. You did a good job.”¹

Today we could not know the collection state, neither the details nor the overview, of Mao Dun library during that time. All the books read and repaired by Mu Xin had vanished without a trace after various disasters in the Cultural Revolution. Mu Xin wrote with a lamentation at the end of “The Reading Spot under a Pagoda” that those books could no longer be read by, or belong to, future generations who love books.² Now we can only get the status of collection of books in Mao Dun library and that of Mu Xin’s reading in his memories. “ World classical philosophy and literature is the sort of books I read carefully and reverently. The books autographed by Gorky and Babisai, gifts presented to Mao Dun, makes me feel interesting. And there are still a great number of books of Chinese new literature after May Fourth Movement; many of this sort of books are hardcover and I thought the book design of those books were so exquisite to surpass in China. Up to now, I have not found such a case. [……] As for traditional Chinese texts, there were no rare edition nor unique copy among the collection. However, what I valued is Mao Dun’s handwritten comments and glosses on those traditional Chinese texts. And I found Mao Dun was well cultured in Chinese traditional literature. His mastery of traditional literature was

¹ Mu Xin, “ Taxia dushuchu,” pp.7-20.

² Ibid.

equally matched to that of Zhou Brothers (周氏兄弟).”¹ It is not difficult to find from the description of Mu Xin that he roughly divided the books he have ever read in the library into three categories: world classical philosophy and literature, 20th -century Chinese new literature, and traditional Chinese texts. And it also shows from Mu Xin’s memories that before he found Mao Dun library, Mu Xin had already been well cultured in traditional Chinese texts. Therefore he knew there were no rare editions and unique copy of traditional Chinese books in the collection of the library and he judged the literary predecessor’s accomplishment in Chinese traditional literature through the handwritten comments and glosses on books. And for the sake of those handwritten comments and glosses, Mu Xin read those texts again. For Mu Xin , this re-reading is joyful , because “ reading a long and unbroken literary tradition carried on by predecessors makes me feel so lucky and happy that it seems that the truth is now on the roof. ”²

As for the sort of books of world classical philosophy and literature, what Mu Xin read includes not only the Western classical literature and works of Continental philosophy but also Indian, Persian, Arabic and Japanese literature. This point can be seen in *Literary Memoirs* (Wenxue huiyilu 文学回忆录). From 1989 to 1994, Mu Xin lectured on the history of world literature for some Chinese artists who migrated to New York. In December 2012, Chen Danqing published his personal notes of Mu Xin’s lectures named *Literary Memoirs*. In the introduction of those lectures, Mu Xin explained, “ The history of world literature I will teach is actually my own literary memories. I plan to lecture both Western and Oriental literature from the origin of literature to 19th -century literature.”³ The course outline given by Mu Xin in the introduction is as follows :

The literature in the ancient times I plan to lecture includes: Greek mythology , epic and tragedy; the story and meanings of Old and New Testaments;

¹ Mu Xin, “ Taxia dushuchu,” pp.7-20. Zhou Brothers refers to Lu Xun 鲁迅 and Zhou Zuoren 周作人.

² Mu Xin, “ Taxia dushuchu,” pp.7-20.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilus*, p.2.

Indian epics; The book of Songs (诗经), The Songs of Chu (楚辞), the works of pre-Qin philosophers; the works of Fu (赋) writers, historian and critics in Han dynasty; works in Wei- and- Jin dynasty, especially the works of Tao Qian.

Then I would like to lecture literature in the Middle Ages: Medieval European literature, Persian poets and Indian and Arabic literary works. Of course I will lecture the poets in Tang and Song dynasties, and incipient Chinese plays and novels. And then turn to Medieval Japanese literature. Afterwards I will return to European literature: Renaissance literature, English and French literature in the 17th century. After that I will back to Chinese literature again to lecture the second phase of Chinese plays and novels.

Then I would like to go through the literature from the 18th century to the 19th century. What I plan to lecture are as follows: English, French, German, Southern European and Nordic literature in the 18th century; [……] then Chinese literature in Ming and Qing dynasties; then English, French, German and Russian literature in the 19th century (including poetry, novels and literary criticism), along with Polish, Scandinavian, Southern European, Dutch, Belgian, Irish and American literature. I will also refer to Chinese literature in late Qing dynasty and 19th-century Japanese literature. At last, I may give lectures of 20th –century literature. ¹

As Mu Xin cited in the course outline, among the 83 lectures given by Mu Xin in *Literary Memoirs*, excepting the lectures of Chinese classical and traditional literature and 20th –century literature, the table of contents of lectures referring to world literature are as follows : ²

Greek and Roman Mythology (the 1st and 2nd lecture)

Greek Epic (the 3rd lecture)

Greek Tragedy and others (the 4th lecture)

Old and New Testament (from the 5th to 8th lecture)

Oriental Testament — Sutra (the 9th lecture)

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilus*, pp. 3-4.

² Mu Xin, “Contents,” in *Wenxue huiyilu*.

Indian Epic (the 10th lecture)
 Medieval European Literature (the 20th lecture)
 Medieval Persian Literature (the 26th lecture)
 Arabic Literature (the 27th lecture)
 Medieval Japanese Literature (the 30th lecture)
 Renaissance and Shakespeare (the 31st lecture)
 17th-century English and French Literature (the 32nd lecture)
 18th-century English Literature (the 35th lecture)
 18th-century French and German Literature (the 36th lecture)
 Goethe , Schiller and 18th-century European Literature (the 37th lecture)
 19th-century English Literature (from the 39th to 42nd lecture)
 19th-century French Literature (from the 43rd to 47th lecture)
 19th-century German Literature (the 48th and 49th lecture)
 19th-century Russian Literature (from the 49th to 51st lecture)
 19th-century Polish and Danish Literature (the 52nd lecture)
 19th-century Norwegian and Swedish Literature (the 53rd lecture)
 19th-century Irish Literature (the 54th lecture)
 19th-century American Literature (the 55th lecture)
 19th-century Japanese Literature (the 57th lecture)

When Mu Xin lectured on Medieval Persian literature, he told, “during those three hundred years, there were so many geniuses of poetry born in Persia. I read a lot of Persian poetry in my youth. In fact, my literature is also affected by Persian literature.”¹ And when Mu Xin mentioned Persian poet Abusa’id Abolkhayr (967-1049), he stated, “the experiences of Abusa’id Abolkhayr come from ‘the world of soul’, his style is quite different from that of other poets and has remarkable depth. When I was 14 or 15 years old, I read him. But I cannot understand him. Now I understand him.”² Admittedly, the stylistic rules, layout and part of materials used in

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.312.

² *Ibid.* , pp.318-319.

Mu Xin's literary course are roughly on the basis of *Outline of Literature* (Wenxue dagang 文学大纲), compiled by Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 (1898-1958) in 1920s, and the section on world literature in the 20th century (from the early 1900s to 1970s) uses another reference.¹ But as Chen Danqing said in the postscript of *Literary Memoirs*, "At the end of 1930s, the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War, 13-or-14-year-old Mu Xin had read nearly all the books he could find in Wuzhen. Among those books, there were not only Greek and Roman epics and mythologies, European classical philosophy and literature but also Indian, Persian, Arabic and Japanese literature. It is impossible that in those days there had been existing Chinese versions of works of all the foreign authors cited in *Outline of Literature* compiled by Zheng Zhenduo. It is also impossible that Mu Xin could read all the works cited in *Outline of Literature*. Therefore when he gave the literary lectures in New York, he admitted honestly which works he had never read and which author he had only just heard of. He mentioned several times that the translators in those days had done a lot."² And in an interview, Mu Xin declared, "thanks to reading, I save myself. Books are most miraculous and greatest. When I was 13 or 14 years old, I had already read through *Outline of Literature* several times. When I lectured the history of world literature I taught it nearly all through my memories of reading in those days."³ In another interview, the editor of Taipei magazine *Unitas* asked Mu Xin to talk about his experience and phrase of learning. Because they were so impressed by Mu Xin's rich knowledge and admirable accomplishment of Chinese and Western classical culture and Western modern ideas appearing in his work and they were so curious about the reason behind. Mu Xin replied, "What I have is just common sense. [·····] In my youth, in the the home of an illustrious writer in my hometown, I found a room where was full of works of Western classical philosophy and literature. I read them so hungrily and eagerly that I got 'literary gastritis'. However I feel in later years that the common sense I have and the knowledge I attained are thanks to the reading in those

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.V.

² Chen Danqing, "Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue," p.1083.

³ Li Zongtao 李宗陶, "Wo shi Shaoxing Xila ren 我是绍兴希腊人," in *Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan* 南方人物周刊 26 (2006).

days. This shows that I should belong to ruminant and I am an expert in rumination.”¹ Thus it can be seen that whether Mu Xin’s writing in his later life or his literary lectures in New York is the result of his rumination on the reading memories of collection of books in Mao Dun library in his youth.

It is also the reading memories of collection of books in Mao Dun library that makes Mu Xin’s heart full of love for the whole literary world,² and that give Mu Xin an initial attitude to literature. As far as Mu Xin is concerned, whether literature or art should be holistic and global (cross-national). For Mu Xin, literature is not only an integrated world but also his kingdom, his homeland, his nostalgia. He said, “the relationship between artists and motherland is that an artist has no motherland or an artist decided his own motherland.”³ He said, “if you ask me the reason I leave China, I would say I came to the United States because I was taking a walk and, unawares, went too far.”⁴ He said, “A person has two sets of tradition, one set is mental roots and the other is blood roots. My ancestors dwelled in the Shaoxing (绍兴) region, thus I can speak Shaoxing dialect. However my mental roots are in Greek, in Italy, lying in Leonardo da Vinci. Hence I am a Greek born in the Shaoxing region.”⁵ He also states, “You could find your mental roots and your kith and kin in art from every era: ancient times, middle ages and modern times.”⁶ He said: “In my early years I had already felt that I have two literary uncles. The elder uncle is Balzac (1799-1850). He is fat, fervent and neurotic. The younger uncle is Flaubert. He is decorous, succinct and always speaks to the point. I frequented Flaubert’s home. As for Balzac’s home, I could only jump into the yard and watched him secretly through the rear window.”⁷ Mu Xin’s love for the whole literary world is derived from his literary memories and literary education endued by the collection of Mao Dun library. He wrote, “this kind of love is the realm of the conceptual integrated by the great many of printed matters

¹ Mu Xin, “Haixia chuansheng,” pp. 19-20.

² Mu Xin, “Taxia dushuchu,” pp. 7-20.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 576

⁴ Mu Xin, “Zhongxia kaixuan 仲夏开轩,” in *Yuli zhi yan*, p. 70.

⁵ Li Zongtao, “Wo shi Shaoxing Xila ren”.

⁶ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 566.

in that library. The realm of the conceptual gives me attitude.”¹ It is such attitude that made Mu Xin put himself into the worldwide literary landscape from the very beginning, being divorced from the limit of times, borders, schools and doctrines. Of course, Mu Xin had his own preference on literature in his later years. However the precondition for his preference on literature is attaining knowledge about the whole literary world and having extensive horizons and perceptions of it as much as possible. Hence, when Mu Xin had been asked about his favorite writers in an interview, he answered, “instead of having a ‘personal love’ for individual writers I had only a ‘universal love’ for literature. When I say my favorite writer is A, I would feel sorry for B. And it seems some kind of ungratefulness for literature.”²

Not coincidentally, Mu Xin traced the beginning of his writing career in *Untias’s* interview back to the year 1941, in which he was 14 years old. It was during that year Mu Xin was immersed in the collection of world classical literary works in Mao Dun library and started to compose new-style poems. In that year he wrote his first vernacular poem :

Time is pencil,	时间是铅笔,
writing many words in my heart,	在我心版上写许多字,
Time is eraser,	时间是橡皮,
erasing those words.	把字揩去了。
The hand both with pencil and eraser,	那拿铅笔又拿橡皮的手,
belongs to whom?	是谁的手?
Whose hand. ³	谁的手。

Mu Xin recalled that he composed poems every day from then. There was a pencil lying beside his pillow. The verses flickered in his mind when he was falling into sleep. In the darkness, he grabbed the pencil beside his pillow and wrote those

¹ Mu Xin, “Taxia dushuchu”, pp. 7-20.

² Mu Xin, “Haixia chuansheng,” pp. 33-34.

³ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

verses on the wall. The first thing he did when he woke next morning is to look for and read those verses. When he recognized his crooked handwriting on the wall, he set his mind at rest.¹ Undoubtedly, the library's holdings not only ended Mu Xin perception of and attitude to literature but also ended him courage and sincerity of literary creating. More importantly, Mao Dun library ended Mu Xin the belief to become a writer and to treat literature as his lifelong career.

In 1942, 15-year-old Mu Xin left his hometown and bade farewell to Mao Dun library, his literary heaven. He never saw it again. Those books which accompanied him to spend his boyhood hopefully in the war period eventually vanished without a trace after the war and later cultural catastrophe. However the lost Mao Dun Library always has special significance to Mu Xin. The collection of books which had already been lost but always stayed in his memories is the beginning of his literary career and his self-perception, internalized by him, and becoming part of himself. Just as Wu Hong said, "But to Mu Xin, these books had become part of himself; he had internalized the library. The consequence of this experience was fundamental to him: he could never depart from his self-perception as a man of letters."² Of course, Mu Xin went on to read many more books after leaving Wuzhen and he never gave up reading. "Art is so extensive to occupy a man." — this is what art taught Mu Xin and he never failed to live up to it all life long. In the process of being occupied by the extensiveness of art, the collection of books in Mao Dun library is the first light shining into Mu Xin's heart. This first light opened Mu Xin's eyes seeing the whole literary world. It is Mao Dun library that ended Mu Xin the first love for and perception of literature when he was 13 or 14 years old. Therefore Mu Xin stated, " My reading after my boyhood is actually a kind of revision."³ Perhaps we can comprehend the meaning of Mu Xin's words as follows : his reading and writing in his later life are both continued response and complement to the lost Mao Dun library in his memories. Unlike the author who conceals himself deliberately in his works,

¹ Mu Xin, " Haixia chuansheng," p. 16.

² Wu Hong, "Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past," p.41.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 1069.

the lost library has been always clear in Mu Xin's works, just like the signature 'Mu Xin' on his manuscripts.

2.2 The Postwar Carnival

Mu Xin was a real artist, or an 'artist-writer'.¹ This means that Mu Xin was a comprehensive artist. Mu Xin is actually a painter also. He wrote and painted. Wu Hong said: "he (Mu Xin) is arguably the most learned in both Chinese and Western literature and philosophy, and he fuses this knowledge with his writing and painting with equal mastery."² Besides this, Mu Xin was proficient in Western classical music. He could compose music and was especially good at playing the piano. Li Zongtao 李宗陶, a journalist of *Southern People Weekly* (Nanfang renwu zhoukan 南方人物周刊), still remembers the furnishings of the drawing room in Mu Xin's home in Wuzhen when she went there to visit him in January 2008. She wrote: "In the drawing room of Mu Xin's new house in Wuzhen, there was an empty area left to his old piano which had been sent to being attuned. Chopin's scores were stacked several feet long on the table, being covered with golden satin."³

We do not know how old was Mu Xin when he started learning music theory and playing the piano. He had never mentioned this in his works or in the interviews. However in "Carnival after the War", he recollected his time when he was still an adolescent just settling in Hangzhou (杭州). It was in 1943. He wrote: "every afternoon I practised the piano at Sicheng (思澄) Church under the direction of Priest Fan (范) from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.. I paid the tuition to him monthly."⁴ It may be inferred that in the year when Mu Xin started learning Western classical music was no later than 1943. In that year he was 16 years old. Imprisoned illegally during the Cultural Revolution, Mu Xin was not allowed to continue painting. However he drew the

¹ See Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilus*, p. 643. "Turgenev is an artist, an artist-writer."

² Wu Hong, "Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past," p. 40.

³ Li Zongtao, "Wentijia Mu Xin 文体家木心," in *Du Mu Xin*, p. 119.

⁴ Mu Xin, "Zhanhou jia'nianhua," p. 113.

piano keys secretly on paper playing Mozart and Bach silently.¹ After he migrated to New York he composed two works for violoncello, titled “ Sea Breeze No.1 ” and “ Sea Breeze No.2 ”, in order to cherish the memory of a friend of his youth. He wrote: “ many kinds of emotion can only be expressed affectionately by music rather than writing. Music is metaphysical and non-intuitional, thus it is suitable to be inscribed. Music is in fact a kind of benevolence of love and vast empathy. And farther away is there only the blue sky.”² There were two poems which were also titled “ Sea Breeze No.1 ” and “ Sea Breeze No.2 ” included in Mu Xin’s anthology *The Ever Snowing Flakes of My Desire* (Wo fenfen de qingyu 我纷纷的情欲). In the poem “Sea Breeze No. 2 ”, he wrote :

At the seaside	海边
there’s substantial breeze	大幅度的微风
from dawn to dusk	清晨到傍晚
full of my sense	都是我的意思
The sea breeze in the night is so sorrowful	夜的海风很悲伤
it is no longer my sense	不是我的意思了
or perhaps	或者
my sense before ³	我从前的意思

In this poem the sea breeze sways gently telling silently the benevolence of love and vast empathy in the poet’s heart. Just as in the other poem, Mu Xin wrote:

Beethoven was old, sitting on riverside to watch the sunset

贝多芬老了，坐在河畔观落日

¹ Chen Danqing, “Eulogy,” in *Wengu: Mu Xin ji’nian zhuanhao* 温故：木心纪念专号 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2013), p. 11.

² Mu Xin, “Tongqing zhongduanlu 同情中斷錄,” in *Tongqing zhongduanlu* 同情中斷錄 (Taipei: Hanyin Culture, 1999).

³ Mu Xin, “ Sea Breeze No. 2,” in *Wo fenfen de qingyu* 我纷纷的情欲 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), p. 203.

So metaphysical the second chapter of his quartet

四重奏第二乐章玄之又玄

which is adagio, his vast unfunded love.¹

那是慢板，茫茫无着落的慈爱

Mu Xin dates his literary career to the year when he was 14, while he began painting at his 8 years old.² He had painted plum flower, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum in the style of Chinese ink and wash painting since he was a boy.³ His paintings which were recognized as Chinese landscape painting by Chen Danqing when he first saw they were exhibited in New York in 2001 under the promotion of the curator Alexandra Munroe and Wu Hong. Soon afterwards these paintings were in the museum-level roving exhibition through the whole America. And thirty-three of these paintings had already been collected by museums and by private. The Chinese painter Li Bin 李斌 who had ever lived in New York for more than ten years knows the significance of this solo exhibition of Mu Xin. He told, “the level of this solo exhibition nearly means the highest honor to a Chinese artist.”⁴ It took five years to prepare this solo exhibition. Because Mu Xin had high requirements on the details of his own exhibition. He stated, “the requirements on the exhibition texts are at the peak. I hope all the details, whether a word, a sentence, or a punctuation of the texts would be pure perfection. When there was a dispute about some kind of conceptual or rhetorical problems of the exhibition texts due to the divergence between China and the West, I had never made a concession. Finally they always respected the artist’s own idea. Therefore I still felt delightfully during the preparation of the exhibition, although it was really a hard working.”⁵ Therefore when the journalist Li Zongtao asked Mu Xin how he obtained the pass of the Western art circles, because she thought it is too hard for a Chinese artist to acquire qualification of museum-level

¹ Mu Xin, “Laiyin He 莱茵河,” in *Wo fenfen de qingyu*, p. 148.

² Mu Xin, “Haixia chuansheng,” p. 15.

³ Mu Xin, “Zhanhou jia’nianhua,” p. 109.

⁴ Li Zongtao, “Wo shi Shaoxing Xila ren.”

⁵ Ibid.

roving exhibition in America, Mu Xin replied: “not a pass, what I received not a pass but an invitation.”¹

In 1947, Mu Xin transferred to Hangzhou National Art College to study oil-painting and once he visited Lin Fengmian 林风眠 (1900-1991) whom was the noted artist and the president of that college at that time. Lin Fengmian commented afterwards that Mu Xin is a painter, but more like a poet.² As Lin Fengmian put it, Mu Xin is provided with the synesthesia of art (yishu de tonggan 艺术的通感). He has ever said: “as for art, I choose a multi-directional route rather than a one-way route. I stand both side with literature and art.”³ Therefore, in Mu Xin’s literature and his literary lectures, we could often find that he explained literary skills or conception by analogy with that of painting and music. For instance, Mu Xin ever said: “I wrote prose in the way of Stream of Consciousness, which is perhaps somewhat similar to Chopin’s composition. When I listen to his piano pieces, Impromptu, Ballad and Etudes, I feel so moved. As if those works were composed by myself.” [……] Chopin is a musical stylist, a musical master of Stream of Consciousness.”⁴ When he introduced the French New Noval Group in his lectures on the history of world literature, he said: “they always prefer the way of writing detective to create their novels. They are so wise because they made their works abstain from being sentimental. Their style approximates that of Cubist Painting. Those cubist painters had never painted plants and flowers. They always preferred to express a kind of short and straight visual effect in their works rather than the curved visual effect of Rococo style.”⁵ Moreover the pictorialism and musicality are the two characteristics of Mu Xin’s literary works, which I would like to discuss in detail in later chapters. In a word, literature and art are inseparable to Mu Xin. He treated them as a mutual whole. Therefore the space of Mu Xin’s writing is vast and the self-cultivation of art

¹ Li Zongtao, “Wo shi Shaoxing Xila ren”.

² Mu Xin, “Shuangchong beidao 双重悲悼,” in *Wensha muyuan riji 温莎墓园日记* (Taipei: INK Press, 2012), p. 296.

³ Zeng Jin 曾进, “Haiwai zuojia Mu Xin dujia zhuanfang: wo bushi shenme guoxue dashi 海外作家木心独家专访: 我不是什么国学大师,” in *Waitan huabao 外滩画报*, March, 2006.

⁴ Mu Xin, “Chichi gaobai 迟迟告白,” in *Yuli zhi yan*, p. 17.

⁵ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 959.

contained in Mu Xin's literary works is abundant.

If we say Mao Dun library opened the door leading to the literary world for Mu Xin, then Mu Xin's synesthesia of art and his self-cultivation of art had gradually matured day by day on the way leading to his beloved literary world since he bade farewell to his hometown at the age of 15.

In 1942 Mu Xin betrayed his family and left Wuzhen. According to his own word, he began his aesthetic exile from since then.¹ The direct reason that Mu Xin left his family and hometown is that he was determined to study oil-painting and to be artist which betrayed his family's expectation. They wanted Mu Xin to study medicine or law and wished he would be a doctor or lawyer in the future. Thus Mu Xin chose to get away from his family and came alone to Hangzhou in order to apply to Hangzhou National Art College. However this college had already moved to Chongqing (重庆) due to the Sino-Japanese War. Thus Mu Xin missed opportunity for application. He decided to stay in Hangzhou waiting for the college's moving back. He lived for 3 years in Hangzhou. After the Sino-Japanese War, Shanghai Art College firstly moved back to its original location and started to enroll new students. In the spring of 1946, Mu Xin applied to Shanghai Art College and was accepted. Two years later he transferred to Hangzhou National Art College and was under Lin Fengmian's tutelage.

The underlying reason that Mu Xin left his hometown I think could be traced back to the collection of books in Mao Dun library. It was under the influence and enlightenment of that collection that Mu Xin finally preferred his aspiration of a career in art and literature. Mu Xin's hometown Wuzhen is an ancient water town in south of Yangtze River. In Mu Xin's impression Wuzhen is a remote spot. "There are so many this kind of water towns located in the area between Hangzhou, Jiaxing (嘉兴) and Huzhou (湖州). The area of Wuzhen was fairly large with flourishing population. However there was no motorway, not to mention railway. The only traffic between Wuzhen and metropolis outside was a kind of steamships which were very

¹ Chen Danqing, "Eulogy," p. 11.

small whistling pita pats. The countrymen in our area called it ‘steamboat’. —— That was around in 1930s. [……] Every time the people of our town heard the long whistle of those steamboats, everyone began to yearn for provincial prosperous scenes.”¹ Spending his childhood and teens in this remote old town, the collection of books in Mao Dun library expanded Mu Xin’s horizon. The new literature since the May Fourth Movement and Chinese translations of foreign literature let Mu Xin encounter other people’s life experiences which were richer than and so different from his real life, and make him discover and long for the outside world, which is fresh and full of unknown to Mu Xin and connects with his inner world, a literary and aesthetic world. In the prose “Carnival after the War,” Mu Xin wrote: “The more I read, the more I felt I was no good and I was a loser. Other people have studied abroad traveling to France, America, Red Sea, the Mediterranean, the Pacific and the Atlantic, but I have only seen calm lakes. Other people have ever participated in the war, roved, drudged and been imprisoned. However I led a sheltered and well-off life from birth. Moreover, I have even no experience of going shopping alone in my more- than- ten-years life. —— Although those books made me feel despairing, I still would like to read exquisite and uninhibited lives of other people. On the one hand I felt very jealous of those people, the writers and artists I knew from those books. On the other hand I really admired and respect them.”² It was with this kind of jealousy and admiration in desperation, Mu Xin desired to leave this ancient water town to make a living away from home and go wandering the outside world to expand his own horizon and enrich his own life experiences like those writers and artists he admired and respected. In the interview by *Unitas*, Mu Xin said, “My hometown is so secluded as an ancient Buddhist temple located in remote mountains. Meanwhile, books let me know the outside world is so broad where there are so many wonders. What I desired most at that time is rich life experiences. Thus I know my life will lie waste if I would not leave home.”³

¹ Mu Xin, “Taxia dushuchu,” pp. 7-20.

² Mu Xin, “Zhanhou jia’nianhua,” p. 111.

³ Mu Xin, “Haixia chuansheng,” p. 21.

It was aspiring to be artist and longing for the outside world knew from literary works that finally made Mu Xin left Wuzhen. During the following several decades, Mu Xin spent his life, in his own word, not hardly and not easily.¹ It seems he finally achieved his teenager's wish of enriching his own life experience like the artists and writers he admired. For his beloved literature and art, in his later life he had really drudged and been imprisoned (more than once); he had really crossed the Pacific and the Atlantic exiling to foreign lands and returned to his hometown at the age of 79.

Mu Xin thought that an artistic or literary genius will always leave home. In his literary lectures in New York, he talked about Shakespeare's leaving home to London and working in a theater at the age of 22, he commented, "curious to say, geniuses always know they should leave home and where they should go. From this point of view, you present here, the Chinese artists are all geniuses."² Of course his last words are a joke, but not only a joke. In his literary lectures, he reiterated, "an artist, a genius will firstly leave home to the world. Nobody teaches him to do that, but he does it. Like a fish, it will always swim to the sea."³ Mu Xin always believed that an artist who harbours initial affection and understanding of art should experience leaving and wandering during which he gains and loses and then he will be gradually mature to reach artistic perfection. As Guo Songfen commented, "Mu Xin has a kind of habit of philosophical thinking which is actually very similar with the metaphysical life of German style. In the masterpieces of those German writers, from Goethe to Hesse, written in their old age, they all wrote a man who began to travel to the world when he was a youth and experienced a long journey to be eventual mature. German writers and musicians are all experts in a kind of so-called 'Bildungsroman' or 'Bildungsmusik'. And the most successful moment of German artists is when they come back from 'the other shore'. [·····] Wagner's final returning to innocence in art is at the time when he completed his opera *Parsifal*. Then Parsifal is the man who comes back from 'the other shore'. However, when he returned to the real world, to

¹ Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 21.

² Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 392.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 937.

him which is no longer the one known by people who never left.”¹ Guo Songfen reviewed Mu Xin’s literary style as above. However, not only his style which I will discuss in the next chapter but also his real life experience is similar to the German ‘Bildungsroman’. As Parsifal, Mu Xin is also the man who returns from ‘the other shore’. In his later decades of his life after his leaving home, he travelled a long arduous journey to return to innocence relying on his self-education through literature and art.

The 7 years of living and studying in Hangzhou and Shanghai for Mu Xin is not only the beginning of his long arduous journey to return to innocence but also the carnival of his life. From 1942 to 1949, during the seven-year period in which China experienced the victory of the Sino-Japanese War, the painful blow of the Civil War and the eventual triumph of the red Iron Curtain regime by Chinese Communist Party, Mu Xin spent his precious personal adolescence in the chaos of the era. He told, “just after the end of the Second World War, followed the Civil War of China. How could there be a carnival at all. Instead, the personal adolescence was from one hand submerged by the ashes of wars; from the other hand it still flourished like the surviving spring. Now I am recalling that period of time, I cannot help but sign that it was a good time.”² As far as Mu Xin is concerned, I think what makes his personal adolescence still flourish in the ashes of wars is his affection and aspiration of literature and art.

Although Mu Xin bid farewell to Mao Dun library, he had never stopped reading. The bookstores in Hangzhou and Shanghai were the new paradise to Mu Xin. During the period that Mu Xin lived in Hangzhou waiting for Hangzhou National Art College moving back from Chongqing, the greatest pleasure to him was to visit the secondhand bookstores. “There had been so many secondhand bookstores in Hangzhou. As long as I hung out, I could always pick up a large bundle of books, which were so heavy that I had to take rickshaw to go home. At that time, my favorite

¹ Guo Songfen 郭松棻, “Xiju-bi’an-zhixing 喜剧-彼岸-知性,” in *Guanyu Mu Xin 关于木心* (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), pp. 11-12.

² Mu Xin, “Zhanhou jia’nianhua,” p. 105.

reading was a category of books narrating the anecdotes of European artists, especially the biographies of English, French, German and Russian writers, musicians and painters in the 19th century, which fascinated me particularly. I believed what narrated in those books. However I did really not realize that many stories narrated in those books were concocted to kid readers. Instead, I could bear each story of those artists in my mind. For me they were as familiar as my family tree.”¹

After the Sino-Japanese War, Mu Xin left Hangzhou to Shanghai. He studied oil-painting in Shanghai Art College. Life Bookstore, located at the corner of Avenue Joffre and Dubail, was the blessed spot for Mu Xin during studying in Shanghai. In his impression, “the bookstore was not in a small scale and it was bright and with a good sense of taste. You could always find latest issued books there. The rendition of books they sold was exquisite and the binding of them was elegant.”² At that time Mu Xin had diverted his interest from the books of anecdotes of artists into literary works implying Western philosophy of individualism. He recalled, “during the period from 1946 to 1948, the literary circumstance in the most areas of China was somewhat similar to that of Russia on the eve of the October Revolution. The literary works which imply Western philosophy of individualism were suddenly prevailing just at the juncture that the collectivism was about to approach, which was like swan song or the setting of the sun in an autumn wind. Under this situation, a lot of Western literary masterpieces were translated and published progressively.”³

In his lectures on the history of world literature, Mu Xin talked in detail about those books of individualism he read at that time. When he gave a lecture on Russian literature in the 19th century, he claimed that the social atmosphere of China around 1947 was so similar to that of Russia in the period of the defeat of the Russian Revolution of 1905. At that time what he liked to read was no longer Gorky (1868-1936) but Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919). He had no longer admired the impassioned Gorky, but was fond of the pessimism in Andreyev’s works. He referred

¹ Mu Xin, “Zhanhou jia’nianhua,” pp. 112-113.

² Ibid., p. 127.

³ Ibid.

to Andreyev's works *To the Stars* and *Black Masks* which he had ever read at that time and commented that Andreyev's works always involving the theme of death, the brutality of war, the meaninglessness of life and destiny about which the young people at that time happened to like to talk. Besides Andreyev Mu Xin also liked to read Fyodor Sologub (1863-1927), Mikhail Artsybashev (1878-1927) and Boris Savinkov (1879-1925). About Sologub, Mu Xin commented that he was a pessimist writing melancholy but beautiful lyrics. Mu Xin thought Sologub had more intense emotions than Andreyev. Because in his works he cursed both death and life. With regard to Artsybashev, Mu Xin assessed he was a strong individualist and anarchist. While Savinkov, in Mu Xin's opinion, was not only an individualist and a pessimism writer but also an assassin. At the end of this lecture, Mu Xin concluded, "when I was a student at art college, on my bedside bookshelf were all of their works. However they were all listed as reactionary writers in mainland China after 1949. Although they were not the kind of writers who write voluminous works, they all invited their sincerities and natural instincts to think, to express, to suspect, to be pessimistic and even to assassinate."¹

As a young man with an heart full of hope and love for literature and art, Mu Xin did not realize that the ideas and standpoint of art and literature endued by the works implying Western philosophy of individualism he read at that time would show what kind of significance in his later literary writing. He also did not know this kind of ideas and standpoint would bring him unpredictable and nearly unbearable catastrophes in his later life. He was simply immersed in the affection of his beloved literary works and felt the courage and strength endued by them, just as what he felt after the breaking up of every classical music concert. "I walked in a quiet street late at night, covered with notes which scattered into the dark cool breeze. Man will feel the slight swell and pain of tendon during the physical development. Likewise intelligence will swell and pain slightly when it is being enriched and fermenting. I would not know what other people gained from music. However I knew I gained

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, pp. 659-660.

courage and strength, what Beethoven had ever spoken out straightforwardly.”¹ The Lyceum Theater in French Concession was another significant chapel of art for Mu Xin when he studied in Shanghai and one of the shrines in his youth. Every weekend he went to the Lyceum Theater for concerts by Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. “The most members of Shanghai Symphony were European. The conductor was Arrigo Foa, a British. He gave a performance in the Lyceum Theater in French Concession every weekend. The Lyceum Theater had a classical style of French theater. In the theater there were checkroom, lounge and lavatory. The whole theater was an impressive building which looks tidy and elegant. [·····] Not only the conductor and performances by Shanghai Symphony Orchestra but also the audiences in Lyceum Theater attained a standard. On the one hand, the audiences were all well and neatly dressed with dignified and refined bearing. On the other hand, the repertoire lists of Shanghai Symphony Orchestra were arranged systematically. And this orchestra had ever accompanied for the internationally renowned conductor when he gave an performance in Shanghai.”²

In addition to Lyceum Theater, another blessed spot of art in Mu Xin’s memory which made him miss and thank for was the settlement of Japanese diasporas in Hongkou (虹口) district of Shanghai at that time. Mu Xin respected it as a paradise entering immediately without adventure. “The Japanese diasporas all returned to their homeland embarrassedly after the end of the Pacific War. They departed hastily so that they left numerous things which could not be carried away. Those mountainous piles of things were spread out on the square located in Qiujiang (虬江) Road after the rough sort-out by pedlars.”³ It was on this square where seemed like a small flea market that Mu Xin often picked out and bought art supplies which were cheap but fine joyfully after playing truant in the afternoon. The ‘trophy’ he got there usually included various kinds of art props, various styles of classical or modern book boxes, various genres of painting albums from Ancient Greek art, Ancient Egypt art to

¹ Mu Xin, “Zhanhou jia’nianhua,” p. 127.

² Ibid., p. 126. Arrigo Foa is in fact Italian. Mu Xin made a mistake that he is English.

³ Ibid., p. 128.

Renaissance art, from Romanticism, Impressionism, Fauvism to Dadaism, abstractionism, and some kind of big volumes such as *Collected Works of World Art*.¹ Surely, Mu Xin would not miss opportunities to buy gramophone records of classical music. From the great amount of old records in the ‘small flea market’, he chose the versions performed by his favourite orchestras, conductors or soloists. He described, “for example, I bought six different versions of Beethoven’s Symphony No.5 in C minor. So I could enjoy the contest between six conductors and orchestras. In the meantime, I compare the differences between their performance in according to Beethoven’s score in my hand. And then I knew basically what ‘Fate’ is it.”² In the afternoon Mu Xin went on a shopping spree in Hongkou district of Japanese settlement and returned to his dormitory with full of ‘trophies’. In the evening, he stayed alone in the library of Shanghai Art College to review quietly those painting albums he bought in haste during the day outside the college. On the walls of the library hang European professional copy paintings from Rembrandt, Gericault, Delacroix, Corot, Cezanne and Van Gogh. He recalled those evenings he spent in the library as follows, “The library rooms were tranquil in the lamplight. As my trophies, those painting albums were spread out on the desk. Outdoors was du Rue Marché (Caishi Lu 菜市路). Vintage tram hissed passing the street. The closed windows of the rooms made the city sound of the metropolis outside more soft and sweet. [……] The two dark rooms of the library in which stood full of bookcases were usually occupied only by me, in which case I was used to light only one lamp in the room and was accompanied by the copy paintings on the wall —— Rembrandt’s Hendrickje Stoffels and I look at each other when I leaned against the window. And I found that the treetops painted by Corot were like the bowing of violin, the apple painted by Cezanne had a kind of manner of a king and the raft painted by Gericault seemed like to sink but still float.”³

In 1947, Mu Xin transferred from Shanghai Art College established by Liu Haisu

¹ Mu Xin, “Zhanhou jia’nianhua,” p. 128.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 30.

刘海粟 (1896-1994) to Hangzhou National Art College which was in charge of Lin Fengmian. The reason of Mu Xin's transfer is that he much preferred Lin Fengmian's cult of art to that of Liu Haisu. Mu Xin felt that Liu's language of East-West polarity and the complexity of conflicting idioms (oil painting versus ink painting, traditional style versus modern style) were operating on a superficial level principle of medium and style with little of agreement on the principle of creative self-expression itself. Like Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian was consumed by the theoretical and practical challenge of achieving a synthesis of Chinese and modern European art, but Lin approached the problem from the inside out. He understood that a strong concept of self and individualism was critical to building any level of meaningful integration. For art to happen, Lin taught, the artist must first be born.¹ What Lin taught had a continuing impact on Mu Xin in his life. He maintained the private cult of self-expression throughout his life whether with respect to painting or to literary creating. He believed passionately in an inner-driven literature of self-expression. This is why Mu Xin reiterated in his literary lectures that literary and artistic works would be mediocre and even worse if they were restricted in some kind of doctrine. He had ever replied when interviewed, "I merge poems, short stories and literary criticism together to write my prose and essays. Jesus ever said: 'if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?' The taste of my proeses and essays is that kind of saltiness."² I consider that the kind of saltiness Mu Xin mentioned in that interview is the private cult of self-expression in art he always maintained. There is no doubt that Mu Xin's stand of art is some kind of result of the influence from Lin Fengmian. However the more significant and deeper reason lies in Mu Xin's self-education through literature and art. Every second Mu Xin ever spent in Life Bookstore, Lyceum Theater, the Japanese settlement in Hongkou district and the library of Shanghai Art College slowly and continuously revealed its significance and influence in his later life.

In his youth when he was with hopefulness and passion for art, he chose his

¹ Alexandra Munroe, "Palimpsest: Nearby Mu Xin," p. 12.

² Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 25.

stand of art; during the cultural blockade and political persecution in his later life, he remained committed to his stand of art and tried to overcome his era in his painting and writing and he had eventually done it. In this way, he requited and responded to what art taught him and those evenings he spent in his youth — “ the evening I stayed alone in the library of Shanghai Art College enjoying its desk and lamplight; the evening I stayed in a practice room with a broken lamp playing the piano with a litten candle; the evening I saw the film *Romeo and Juliet* for seven times in the cinema beside the church with blue roof located on Route Doumer; the evening I spent in Wanguo (万国) Cemetery gazing at the wings of marble angles in the moonlight; the evening I enjoyed borscht, steak and salad in Asia Western Restaurant when it snowed heavily outside; and the evenings I was immersed in the familiar landscape on the Solitary Hill (孤山) in the West Lake (西湖) when I returned to Hangzhou during summer and winter holidays.”¹ It is in those evenings that Mu Xin became gradually mature in art. Therefore he said: “ It seems that I grow up just in the evening.”² Owing to those evenings, owing to the happiness and benefits gained from those literary reading, classical music concerts and various genres of painting albums, Mu Xin said: “ I had never wasted my ‘carnival’.”³ He added: “ I hate the 20th century, although we belong to each other. How inglorious and undignified the century was. However it was eventually the long colourful period in which I spent my youth. I still love it.”⁴

2.3 The Destroyed Manuscripts

While studying oil painting in Shanghai and Hangzhou, Mu Xin never suspended writing. Since he wrote his first new- style poem at the age of 14, he has been writing afterwards. In 1949, Mu Xin, to recuperate at home at the West Lake, finished his first

¹ Mu Xin, Mu Xin, “ Zhanhou jia’ nianhua,” p. 131.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mu Xin, “ Chichi gaobai,” p. 100.

book-length treatise *A General Discourse on Hamlet* (哈姆雷特泛论) at his age of twenty-two years old. He wrote this treatise in order to give his own response to Turgenev's discourse *Hamlet and Don Quixote*. He wanted to discourses upon the two kinds of ideological trends in the European history in his treatise. In an interview in his later life he mentioned his first mind to write this treatise, "In 1949, because of my illness I dwelled at the West Lake to recuperate and got a lot of leisure. During that period I stayed in my dwelling rereading *The complete Works of William Shakespeare*. And I found that it seems I had never read it before, that it seems Hamlet is my brother, that Hamlet is such a natural contrast to Don Quixote, and that in his discourse Turgenev had made a distinction between Hamlet and Don Quixote only in respects of 'wisdom' and 'morals' so that his appraisal was improper and he had just criticized himself through the discourse. Hence I decided to reinterpret this literary case and as well extended its significance —— Hamlet represents the liberal and the Grecian trend versus Don Quixote the totalitarian and Hebrew trend. The one trend means a kind of wise skepticism; the other a kind of imperious faith. The one values mundane world, happiness and aesthetics; the other values the Promised Land, ascetic practice and duties. One wanes while the other waxes. These two kinds of trends are irreconcilable since the ancient times. —— I was young and ignorant at that time so that I really wrote something like *A General Discourse on Hamlet*." ¹

During the seven years from 1942 when Mu Xin left his hometown to 1949, his writing involved a variety of literary genres and styles —— long poems, sonnets, Chinese classical poetries, fictions, essays, proses, plays and literary critiques —— He tried all these types. He told, "I wrote for nearly ten years from fourteen to twenty-two years old. If I was wise and discreet, I should stop writing at that time. If I had the kind of talent which the French man Rimbaud had, my works would already be an immortal masterpiece. However I had nothing but rather a great affection for writing. What I had been doing is nothing but immersing myself in writing."² On the eve of the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, the handwritten manuscripts of Mu Xin

¹ Mu Xin "Haixia chuansheng," p. 17.

² Ibid.

could be bound in just twenty thick volumes. He never published those works openly and only around ten people had ever read them. “The number of my readers was just the same as that of Mr. Shi Nai’an 施耐庵 (1296-1372) during his lifetime”, he said easily in an interview in 1980s.¹ However the twenty-volume manuscript of Mu Xin were confiscated and destroyed in the meanwhile he was imprisoned illegally at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. Mu Xin would never see his works written in his youth and prime again. They scattered and disappeared forever. Fortunately, the list of those destroyed works survived through the author’s memories. We can only imagine the general picture of the disappearing manuscripts through this surviving list today. The list is as follows:

Criticism: A General Discourse on Hamlet

Notes on Icarus

The Subtle Meaning of Orpheus

Jiamikelis Brothers (a series of 9 essays)

Fiction: A Window above the Street

Wedding Vacation

The Pardon of Xiadi

Dangerous Houses

A Stone Buddha

Journey to the Crimea

The Singer van Aire’s Recital

Luo-er and Luo-a

A Small House on Raft

Essay: No.15 Fanlun Street (a collection of 100 essays)

¹ Mu Xin “Haixia chuansheng,” p. 17. Shi Nai’an ever mentioned in the perface of *Outlaws of the Marsh* that the work was the result of the talk between his friends and him. The number of the friends who frequently came to talk with him was also around ten. “If all my friends came together to talk with me, there would be sixteen people; however they seldom came together; the situation that they all would not come to talk with me in the days of bad weather was also seldom; normally there would be six or seven people coming a day.” (吾友毕来，当得十有六人。然而毕来之日为少，非甚风雨，而尽不来之日亦少。大率日以六七人来为常矣。)

Poetry: Like Smoke (a long poem)

Sonnets, in a Non-Sonata Style (a collection of 100 poems)

On Protein (a collection of short poems)

Half of the Cross (a collection of short poems)

Leftover Manuscripts from the Studio of Jade Mountain in Cold Air

(a large collection of traditional poetry and prose-poetry)

Play: Come in , Hero ¹

This surviving list of these vanished writings reflects their author's appetite for all-inclusiveness.² These unpublished but destroyed manuscripts written by Mu Xin from 14 to nearly 40 years old not only mirrored the destroyed 'Mao Dun Library' in its miniaturized comprehensiveness,³ but also were the witness to his gradual maturity in art from his youth to prime. They were as well the results of his self-education in art and the practice of self-perception as a man of letters. The period from 14 to 40 years old, the more than two decades, actually should be the first golden age of Mu Xin's literary creating. However his works written in this period could be no longer known and read. The only thing about this destroyed anthology we can find through its surviving list is just as what Wu Hong said that both the vast quantity of this anthology and the broad range of literary genres are impressive.⁴

I think there must be a question after the introduction of the surviving list of the destroyed anthology that why Mu Xin did not publish his twenty volumes manuscripts in his early years. In my opinion, we can find a partial answer in the interview with Mu Xin in magazine *Unitas*. "In the early years I had learned about that Stendhal had ever planned to publish all his manuscripts together after finishing his complete works. I agreed with him and would like to follow his example at that time", Mu Xin replied in the interview.⁵ Undoubtedly we can find Mu Xin's ambition

¹ Wu Hong, "Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past," p. 42.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 18.

that he must have an ambitious writing program which can be confirmed both through his reply in the interview and the surviving list. In addition, Mu Xin has an important characteristic that he was hypercritical about his own works just like Flaubert, the ‘literary uncle’ he respected. He had been always following the Flaubert’s principle that you should make a good writing and feared that an improper word would harm the harmony of writing. When Flaubert finished the novel *La Tentation de Saint Antonie* he did not publish it. He modified it and eventually published it twenty years later in its lasted modified version. Li Jianwu commented that Flaubert speaks for himself with his works.¹ Likewise, Mu Xin modified his works repeatedly and strived constantly for perfection. He said: “the first version is a shame, while the seventh is an honor.”² In the lecture *Mu Xin’s Predicament* in the 10th Shanghai Book Fair, Chen danqing gave an important detail about Mu Xin which I think is a good example of Mu Xin’s characteristic of striving for perfection in writing. Chen told, Mu Xin once telephoned him that he modified one sentence he wrote more than ten years ago. Mu Xin said he changed two words in that sentence and found it read more harmony that made him feel rather happy. It is easy to find that Mu Xin’s characteristic of striving for perfection in writing also plays a significant role in his decision that he would not publish his manuscripts until he would finish his complete works. I believe at that time Mu Xin is a man, with ambition and self-discipline in art, who really would like to follow the example of the literary predecessors he respected. He was keeping writing, in the same time he was waiting patiently for his maturity and perfection in literature. If this is the underlying reason that Mu Xin did not publish the destroyed anthology, then the direct and realistic cause is the Iron Curtain Politics and the overwhelming triumph of its red ideology in literature and art in mainland China after 1949.

In 1942, the propaganda department of central committee of the Communist Party of China held a symposium ‘Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art’. On the form, Mao Zedong gave his famous speech which is so-called “Talks at Yan’an Forum on

¹ Li Jianwu, *Fuloubai pingzhuan*, p. 5.

² Zengjin, “Haiwai zuojia Mu Xin dujia zhuanfang: wo bushi shenme guoxue dashi ”.

Literature and Art ” in Chinese modern history. In this speech, Mao put forward a standpoint that literature and art should serve the broad masses of the people, especially the workers, peasants and soldiers among them. This standpoint was regarded as Chinese Communist Party’s program on literature and art soon after it was put forth. After the establishment of the Red Regime in 1949, this standpoint was accepted forcibly as the only criterion of literary and artistic creation. Even more, the materialism and the theory of class struggle of Marxism became the only basis and truth of all the academic research. Literature, art and academic research were all taken as the tool of political propaganda of the proletarian revolution.

In late 1950s and 1960s, all the schools of thoughts and art, from school of Athens, Humanism of Renaissance, rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment to romanticism and symbolism were asked to get out of China. And the artists and intellectuals who had ever studied in Europe or America were treated as the communicators of the reactionary, corrupt and declining bourgeois ideology. From Shakespeare, Dante, Balzac, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, to Byron, Nietzsche, Gide, Rimbaud; from Bach, Mozart, Beethoven to Chopin, Schubert, Brahms; from Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Poussin, Velazquez, El Greco to Cezanne, Manet, Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso —— all those writers and artist who ever influenced Mu Xin and were admired and respected by him became political taboo. For they represented a kind of Bourgeois literature and art which was considered rather harmful to the workers, peasants and soldiers in a proletarian regime. It is forbidden to read, appreciate, study or copy their works. In the age when collectivism and political pressure were increasingly rampant and the proletarian literature dogmatism was pervasive, the world literature and art Mu Xin admired and focused on as well as his private cult of self-expression were dangerous enough to make him fall into jail even death.

I believe that Mu Xin knew well about his own situation under that kind of political environment. Thus he did not publish any of his works at that time. As well he did not participate in any official literary or art group. He even gave up his position of high school teacher. In the spring of 1949, Mu Xin ever taught in Hangzhou

painting and music in Zhejiang Provincial High School, the forerunner of today's Hangzhou High School. But he only taught for one semester. In that summer holiday he declined the appointment letter of next semester presented personally by the principal.¹ Afterwards, he began to earn his living by doing part-time jobs in Shanghai. "I did any job I could do, such like painting medical charts and scenery, or work temporarily as a substitute teacher. The rent in the downtown area was expensive. So I lived on the outskirts. Eating at street vendors with self-supplied pepper could be considered as a kind of extravagance"², he wrote in his prose. The reason that Mu Xin gave up teaching which can bring him good income and a stable life is that he cannot bear those rules and regulations of collectivism in an official work unit and would rather live a wandering but free life. He thought that Shanghai was distinctive from Hangzhou and would be comprehensive enough to allow him to live a life in his own way."³

After dwelling in Shanghai, Mu Xin often wrote to Lin Fengmian who was still the president of Hangzhou National Art College at that time. In the age of the Red Ideology prevailing, Lin remained resisting on his previous painting style. He did not depict revolutionary themes nor painted he workers, peasants and soldiers. In the middle of the night he painted secretly what he was fond of, still lifes, landscapes, nudes and opera characters. Therefore Lin not only was the master worthy to be respected to Mu Xin but also served as a kind of symbolic at that time. The significance of this kind of symbolic is that Lin's harmonious and peaceful still life paintings were so touching among those kitsch and exaggerated woodcuts and oil-paintings of revolutionary themes so that they were like the fresh fruits and vegetable in art to Mu Xin. In that crazy age, he sighed deeply: "Mr Lin is alive,

¹ See Mu Xin, "Tongqing zhongduanlu". It is written that he resigned from Zhejiang provincial high school in the summer holiday. And the school building at that time was located in the spot of Gongyuan (贡院), the imperial examination centre in ancient times. See also Mu Xin, "Qi San 其三," in *Xibanya sankeshu* 西班牙三棵树 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), p. 131. "In the spring of the Year Yichou (乙丑), I taught in the imperial examination centre in Wulin (武林)." (乙丑春, 余导学武林贡院). The Year Yichou is the year 1949. Wulin is the ancient name of Hangzhou.

² Mu Xin, "Shuangchong beidao," pp. 297-298.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

painting will be alive.”¹ In the correspondence with Mu Xin in the 1950s, Lin wrote: “ I am just like Sphinx, sitting in the desert. The great ages passed one by one, however I remain sitting statically.”² In his prose written in 1980s, Mu Xin commented: “ Mr Lin Fengmian was truly like Sphinx who sat in the desert of the red ideology storm, watching the pretentious great ages passing one by one, while he just painted day and night. That period was the beginning of his golden age of creating.”³ Just like his beloved Master Lin, Mu Xin was also the Sphinx sitting in the desert of the red ideology storm. While earning a living in Shanghai, he created literary works constantly and prolifically. That period was also his golden age of literary creating.

In a word, in the pretentious great ‘new society’ of Red China, Mu Xin completely concealed himself from the mainstream of the society. He made himself stay out the red ideology storm as much as possible and still stood by his private cult of self-expression accompanied by the literary memories in his youth. Under this kind of situation, for Mu Xin, writing could only be a kind of secret personal behavior so that there were no opportunities to publish, no criticism nor praise, no hope of success nor deserved fame. There was only around ten confidants to be as his readers. If we say that in his youth Mu Xin who harboured literary ideal and ambitions was willing to be unknown and to wait in self-discipline, then he who spent his prime under the red regime was still willing to be unknown in order to preserve and be loyal to his literary ideal and ambitions. This is his way to live as a man of letters and sacrifice for art at that time. And I believe that this is the whole reason why Mu Xin never published his destroyed manuscripts, in the meanwhile this is the reason why he led a life as a recluse in his earlier life in mainland China.

Even if Mu Xin kept a low profile and studiously avoid throwing himself into focus, however the misfortune befell him. How would he know at that time that what he needed to sacrifice for art was far beyond keeping himself unknown like a recluse. He eventually could not escape a common fate of artists and intellectuals in Mao’s era.

¹ Mu Xin, “Shuangchong beidao,” p. 290.

² Ibid., p. 297

³ Ibid.

From the beginning of the Anti-Rightist Movement in 1956 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1978, Mu Xin was imprisoned illegally three times, spending more than ten years incarcerated or at hard labour.¹ Besides his own terrible suffering, his mother and elder sister who were the only remaining family of Mu Xin died in the shock of political movements during this time.² It is definitely a painful blow for him. But the worse and the fatal blow to Mu Xin is the confiscation and destruction of his twenty volumes manuscripts. When a writer was just in his prime that he was already mature in art and his desire for literary creation was in full swing, then suddenly he was accused guilty because of his own standpoint of art and literary works. And he had to be separated from his own works, watching helplessly that they were all confiscated. For a writer, this kind of suffering is no doubt equal to murder. It is crueller than destroying his flesh.

Different from the scattering and disappearing of the collection of books in Mao Dun Library, the destruction of his twenty volumes manuscripts is the real beginning of the circle of destruction and rebirth that Mu Xin constantly experienced in his life. The lamentation for the collection of books in Mu Xin's memories is just like that for the lost childhood. Although those books scattered and disappeared, they were internalized into his memories, supplying him spiritual nourishment uninterruptedly and accompanying with his gradual maturity in literature and art. Truly they became his source of inspiration. The destroyed manuscripts are just the fruits borne and cultivated by the internalized literary memories of the library. Therefore those memories were advancing along with his life process without interruption. While the deprivation and destruction of his unpublished manuscripts were just the interruption to the process of life and literature. But Mu Xin did not give up facing the suffering.

¹ See Alexandra Murone, "Palimpsest: Nearby Mu Xin," p. 16. Mu Xin was incarcerated in state prisons in 1956 and 1968, for 6 months each time. He was in solitary confinement in a Red Guard people's prison from 1971 to 1972, after which he was sentenced to hard labor in a factory for 7 years including being under house arrest from 1977 to 1979."

² Chen Danqing, "Shouhu yu songbie 守护与送别," in *Wengu: Mu Xin ji'nian zhuanhao*, p.204. In 1956, Mu Xin was 29 years old and jailed illegally first time. During the half year of his imprisonment, his mother was so worried that she was heavily sick. She died before Mu Xin was released. She was younger than 60 years old in the year she died. In 1968, Mu Xin was 41 years old. It was in the beginning period of the Cultural Revolution when his elder sister was denounced to death.

He stated, “ You want to destroy me. Never!”¹ He struggled to survive from the destruction and kept on writing. He just wrote continuously wherever he was in solitary confinement or in exile. “ It seems I returned to innocence last night / what should I do today / I am still writing when / both God and rationality have gone / I am still writing when / both love and hate have gone / I am still writing when / both palms and fingers have gone.”² Mu Xin wrote those verses in his dwelling in New York many years after the catastrophe that brought him destruction. However he got rebirth from the destruction, like phoenix, and fulfilled what he said, ‘to sacrifice by staying alive’.³ He survived to write and got rebirth through writing. Writing and life integrated into the whole him. As he put it: “As far as humans are concerned, life and culture are synonymous. [……] If life should be antonymous with culture, life becomes destructive and self-destructive. Therefore, to destroy culture is to destroy life.”⁴

If the memories on Mao Dun Library endowed the initial love and faith for literature to Mu Xin, then the destruction of his manuscripts in the Cultural Revolution was the cruel baptism for this love and faith that made him conquered death from the cross of times, entering his rebirth of literary life.

2.4 Prison Notes

From 1971 to 1972, without trial, without sentencing, without a court of law, Mu Xin was confined in an abandoned air-raid shelter in Shanghai as a solitary prisoner for ten months. His so-called crime is ‘intellectual with dangerous and decadent thoughts’. During this ten-month illegal imprisonment, Mu Xin completed sixty-six literary manuscripts. It is said that those sixty-six pages inscribed recto and verso with

¹ A documentary film by Francisco Bello, 2012.

² Mu Xin, “Ze lu 择路,” in *Wo fenfen de qingyu*, p. 157.

³ Tongming Jun Liu, “A Dialogue with Mu Xin,” in *The Art of Mu Xin: Landscape Paintings and Prison Notes*, p. 139.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

some 650,000 characters.¹ In the English version of Mu Xin's anthology *An Empty Room*, Tongming Jun Liu narrated the case of his first time in New York seeing those manuscripts written in prison:

I first met him at his art opening in Boston in 1985. Then ten years later, under unexpected circumstances, I finally learned about his 'note'. He invited me to visit him in his apartment in the suburbs of New York one winter evening and brought me to his study. His manuscript was stacked next to his lamp on his desk — sixty-six handwritten pages on thin rice paper that had yellowed; the red-stamped letterhead indicating a certain work unit that existed during those times which I too experienced. Each piece of paper was filled on both sides with tiny, graceful words handwritten in blue ink. A feeling akin to religious awe washed over me, though I'm not religious, nor is the artist.²

As a prisoner who was charged of 'dangerous and decadent thoughts' in an underground prison flooded with dirty water, dwelling in total darkness save for a dim gasoline lamp,³ how was Mu Xin able to write and save his manuscript? It is also in that winter evening, Tongming Jun Liu learned about the whole story of the creation of the prison notes. He recounted, "Those who left him (Mu Xin) in this underground hole provided him with paper so that he could write down and submit his 'confessions'. He secretly used some of the sheets to write his book. He then carefully folded the manuscript and sewed it into his cotton-padded winter pants to avoid detection. Then, one day, he was released, and miraculously he walked out in those pants, with the manuscript intact."⁴ Mu Xin told Tongming Jun Liu that the manuscript was composed as a story in the style of prose-poetry. But when Tongming

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, "A Dialogue with Mu Xin," p. 139.

² Mu Xin, "Notes from Underground," in *An Empty Room*, tran. by Tongming Jun Liu (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2011), p. 51.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53. Those who imposed the illegal imprisonment on Mu Xin in the underground prison were rebels (zaofanpai 造反派) in his work unit in Shanghai. As I mentioned before, Mu Xin ever worked in crafts collective in Shanghai. Rebels is one kind of group of Red Guard People in the Cultural Revolution.

Jun Liu saw this surviving manuscript in his first time, “ It would be difficult to restore the story as a whole, considering the pages weren’t numbered in the first place and much of the writing was faded to a point that it was impossible to discern.”¹ And it is for this reason, Mu Xin called it his ‘notes’. He would not like to take it as a literary work anymore. However Tongming Jun Liu persuaded Mu Xin to let him transcribe a few selected paragraphs in those surviving notes, in which Mu Xin didn’t depicted his personal experience of suffering during those catastrophic period. Rather he still made a mental conversation with his beloved and admired writers and artists and continued to discuss painting, music, world literature and philosophy in his notes. St. Anthony, Lermontov, Rousseau, Turgenev, Flaubert, Wagner, Cezanne, Montesquieu, all are voices in his writings.

I’d like to cite below the fourth part of the excerpts from those prison notes, which was titled as “Who is Truly Fearless”. Then we would learn more clearly about what the author on earth thought and wrote in the most calamitous period in his life when he was in solitary imprisonment, losing all his manuscripts written before, and “his immediate family had died and his remaining relatives thought he was dead.”² The following is the fourth part of excerpts from Mu Xin’ notes:

“ I have not yet loved you in the way as it is expressed in music”—— suddenly I remember these words. Now that I am in prison, I cannot possibly find Wagner’s original text, although I believed that is more or less what he said. Music is a form of art constituted by its own vanishings. In its essence and depth music is thus closest to ‘death’. Before I turn forty I have no plan for writing memoirs, although I am quite impressed by Rousseau in his later work *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*. Turgenev’s *Literary Memoir* is so thin a book that I once thought that it was not a must read. But it turned out to be an engaging book. As for myself, I still follow Flaubert’s advice: “ Reveal art; conceal the artist.” When catastrophe befalls and affects you in your political life, economic condition, love life, or the

¹ Mu Xin, “ Notes from Underground,” in *An Empty Room*, tran. by Tongming Jun Liu, p. 51.

² *Ibid.*, p.52.

pursuit of art, you are reduced to a miserable and ridiculous state of existence. Your patience and endurance are not enough for you to overcome the adversity. Consequently, you are forced into the underground, which is to say, you have to fight even if you don't want to (as you have to live, to avoid death). Mayakovsky was forced to such a desperate situation that he had no other option than suicide. Before he took his own life, he had to fake the failure of love as his reason, saying that "a small boat of love runs up on the rock of life." He was neither a collectivist nor an individualist. A thorough individualist fears nothing. As far as my feelings about the world are concerned, I will say, in Wagner's words: "I have not yet loved you in the way as it is expressed in music."¹

This kind of expression in the notes is undoubtedly the spiritual announcement of Mu Xin whose signification is that he loves art more than the world. It is so ironic that Mu Xin expressed his true heart on the sheets provided for the purpose of the confession of his so-called 'dangerous and decadent thoughts'. And what Mu Xin did in that madness of Maoist China was enough dangerous to bring him more severe punishment and even let him lost his life. But Mu Xin did it. For it is his way to stay alive. Losing his family, manuscripts written before, freedom and suffering the deprivation of the right of pursuit of art, under this situation with no prospects for the end of the ordeal, it is the re-creation (the secret writing for those prison notes) that let Mu Xin go inner to his memories, staying with his beloved world literature and art which had been ever internalized in his lost corpus, the vanished library and his destroyed manuscripts. It is this re-creation that made Mu Xin manage to maintain the strength to stay alive and to avoid suicide, what Mayakovsky, the Russian poet under the later Soviet Regime, chose to do. To Mu Xin, his life and his memories of world literature and art are synonymous. To destroy his memories is to destroy his life. Although the catastrophe of the era can deprive him of his freedom and his right to create, destroy his works, it cannot massacre his memories, talent and his will to

¹ Mu Xin, "Notes from Underground," in *An Empty Room*, tran. by Tongming Jun Liu, pp. 56-57.

pursuit of art.

Mu Xin is the thorough individualist who fears nothing as he referred in his notes. When the real world he lived in became tyrannical, slaughterous and crazy and forced him to an extreme desperation, Mu Xin managed to stay alive in his own memories of literature and art. In the later conversation with Tongming Jun Liu in New York, Mu Xin told, “ An artist is someone who, at some time in the past, made a choice. He chose art, but that does not necessarily mean that art also chose him. An artist must be prepared to sacrifice for his choice. In that catastrophic period, many died and through death made their sacrifice; they deserve our utmost sympathy and respect. Yet, I chose to sacrifice by staying alive and to seek immortal life by enduring hopelessness. [……] When I say that I chose to seek immortal life by enduring hopelessness, I mean that I would not fail to live up to what art had taught me, even when deprived of the right to create, [……] I never abandoned my will, or the endless manifestations of my will.”¹

When his destroyed manuscripts forced Mu Xin to struggle for maintaining his self-identity as a writer and artist between life and death, his prison notes really provided the evidence of his victory in this struggle and saved both his real and artistic life from the massacre imposed by the crazy era. As what Alexandra Munroe said, the significance of Mu Xin’s prison notes lies in their record of one artist’s ability to do just that by a rigorous exercise of will and self-expression.²

In 2001, as the artist’s private document, the surviving prison notes were displayed in Mu Xin’s solo art exhibition *Tower in Tower* in America. Although Robert Rosenkranz, the patron of this exhibition, considered that the prison notes constitute a highly individual but nonetheless universally resonant response to the Cultural Revolution,³ Mu Xin had never planned to get it published. Because Mu Xin believed that art has its own principle. When Tongming Jun Liu asked him for the reason, Mu Xin answered: “ This manuscript, what we’re calling the ‘Prison Notes’, is not unequivocally a literary work. It is not calligraphy, or painting, or a semiotic

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “ A Dialogue with Mu Xin,” pp. 139-140.

² Alexandra Murone, “ Palimpsest: Nearby Mu Xin,” p. 14.

³ Tongming Jun Liu, “A Dialogue with Mu xin,” p. 143. Robert Rosenkranz is the founder of Rosenkranz Foundation, a graduate of Yale College , class of 1962.

system of divination. Although a creative work is generally classified according to ‘what it is’, this manuscript is distinguished by ‘what it is not’. In that sense, it falls within the very broad category of visual art. Other manuscripts are interpretable and their authors desire to be interpreted. This particular manuscript of mine is not easily interpretable and I have no expectation that it will be interpreted. That the meaning of words may be lost is nothing to be feared; indeed, it may even call for congratulations. [……] The value of art lies in the work of art itself. How or why the work of art was created is less than important. At least the artist should not be too concerned about it. How much an artist has suffered is not necessarily the measure for the value of his art.”¹

However it deserves our appreciation and congratulations that a few excerpts from the “Prison Notes” were transcribed , interpreted and translated in English by Tongming Jun Liu. Because of Tongming Jun Liu’s persuasion and persisting on the winter evening in New York , today we can read the original text of Mu Xin’s notes. And Tongming said the reason of what he has done is to pass on to posterity some evidence of Mu Xin’s resilient spirit and to preserve a part of our historical memory that is fading faster than the blue ink on the thin sheets.²

2.5 Literary Memoirs

In 1982, Mu Xin, with the inalienable literary heritage in his memories, bid farewell to his motherland and migrated to New York at the age of 55. In his dwelling in New York, he resumed his literary career with intensive writing. He usually wrote 7,000 to 10,000 words a day and often worked till midnight.³ The period from 1980s to 2000 was the second golden age of Mu Xin’s literary creating. He completed a new corpus of essays, prose, fictions and poetry. Ironically, the writing condition of the

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “A Dialogue with Mu xin,” pp. 139-140.

² Mu Xin, “ Notes from Underground,” in *An Empty Room*, tran. by Tongming Jun Liu, p. 52.

³ Mu Xin “ Haixia chuansheng,” p. 19.

period when Mu Xin first arrived in the United States had some similarity to that of the period when he was in solitary confinement in the Cultural Revolution. That is to say, there were no books available to Mu Xin. He recalled that in those early days when he resumed writing he had been looking around in a daze. Thus he jokingly called himself the Literary Robinson Crusoe.¹ Then he had to return to his memories again to have recourse to his mental library,² where there was his unalienable literary heritage and from where he could constantly get inspiration.

However he could actually publish his works this time. From 1986 to 1999, 12 anthologies of Mu Xin had been published by several publishers in Taiwan. It was eventual his turn to be known for his literary talent. This time his works were no longer the evidence of his ‘original sin’ and writing was no longer his secretive behavior. This time he could eventually take his own aesthetic stance above board and write his own works with a clear conscience. In an interview he once mentioned his writing habits in America, “as to my writing habits, I am not afraid of being laughed at to say that I could write on the subway or at the bus station; and sometimes I even could write while I was cooking. It is not because I am diligent. I just think that if I don’t write in those times then what others should I do. My favorite writing site is the corners of some coffee shop. I often stay there writing till the time when the coffee shop would be closed and other chairs in the shop were all put upside down on the tables. Then I would write the last sentence on my notebook before I leave, ‘even if I would leave now, I was still the last customer.’”³ Mu Xin, who resumed his writing career, was cheerful in that period and the happiness he felt is like that felt by the man who walks with his beloved in the sun. Therefore he said: “Happiness is loving art with a clear conscience.”⁴

Although Mu Xin need not to repress his love for literature and need not to feel worried and apprehensive about being hurt by a totalitarian society anymore after he migrated to New York, he still led the life of a recluse as he did in mainland China. He

¹ Mu Xin “Haixia chuansheng,” p. 20.

² Wu Hong, “Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past,” p. 42.

³ Mu Xin “Haixia chuansheng,” p. 19.

⁴ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 616.

rarely participated banquets or symposiums regularly held for writers by Chinese newspapers in New York. If the opening of his solo exhibition would not be so indispensable, he would not attend it. In one of his poems “The Eve Before Went to Adams House” (Fu Yadangsi Ge qianxi 赴亚当斯阁前夕), we can know his mood when he prepared to attend the opening of his solo exhibition in Harvard University in 1984. It was written: “On the street, there was someone who embraced me/ which means blessing / He blessed me to receive the key of Heaven /in the city far away / I just stood there blankly/ [……] Anyway, when Pompeii was conferred on me/ Pompeii had already been ruins.”¹

If we ascribe the reason why Mu Xin had ever shunned publicity of any official literary or art organization in mainland China to his defending his own aesthetic stance, then the reason why he still lived like a recluse in America after he had already obtained the freedom of creating and the deserved fame could be ascribed to his nature. He said jokingly in an interview that a recluse is the one who is addicted to seclusion.² However, it is Mu Xin who is blessed with the nature of a recluse that gave a series of lectures on the history of world literature to Chinese artists living in New York from 1989 to 1994. What made Mu Xin do it? Chen Danqing mentioned the cause and course of this 5-year ‘literary expedition’ in his article “Listen to Mu Xin’s Talks of Literature” (Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue):

In the autumn of 1982, I met Mu Xin in New York. Then I got closer to him next year and we often met for a long talk. Many words that he said in the later literary lectures had been already mentioned in our talks. I am a man of little poor learning. Thus I always felt Mu Xin’s talks were wonderful. And I felt that I could not enjoy those amazing talks alone. Soon after I introduced the artists from mainland China I knew to Mu Xin. [……] Of course, they all were soon marveled at Mu Xin.

¹ Mu Xin, “Fu Yadangsi Ge qianxi 赴亚当斯阁前夕,” in *Xibanya sankeshu* 西班牙三棵 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), p. 9. “街头, 有谁拥抱我/意谓祝福我去/远方的名城/接受朱门的钥匙/我茫然不知回抱……总之, 庞培册为我的封地时/庞培已是废墟”

² Mu Xin, “Chichi gaobai,” p. 88.

During the period from 1983 to 1989, Mu Xin resumed writing and constantly published his anthologies. Everyone of us had his books after we got familiar with him. We, three or five people, sometimes seven or eight, often got together to listen to Mu Xin talking all night during festivals and holidays or during some days we just wanted to meet each other. When dawn broke outside some of us fell drowsiness and some struggled to stay awake. The only person who did not feel sleepy and was still vigorous was Mu Xin. However he was the oldest one among us.

When Mu Xin lived in mainland China, he seldom contacted with his juniors who were born and grew up under the communist regime. Therefore after he contacted with us he had ever been surprised to say, “ So you generation do not know anything.” After we kept our night talks for several years, Zhang Xuelin 章学林 and Li Quanwu 李全武, the two of us, earnestly requested Mu Xin to give formal lectures on literature and art. Because they would not like to see Mu Xin’s precious and great learning being wasted. In addition, we had another intention: Mu Xin didn’t sell his paintings in that period and lived by his writing. Thus we wanted to make him a little more income by paying tuition. For our request and intention, Mu Xin spoke to me on the phone: “ What does that mean?” But he finally agreed to our request and began to seriously prepare the future lectures.

[……]

I cannot remember the details of the whole thing. Anyhow, we got together in the dwelling of Gao Xiaohua 高小华, a painter from Sichuan (四川), in the 15th January in 1989. That was the beginning of the formal lectures. On that day, the whole room was in an uproar and it took a long time to being quiet. And Mu Xin, dressed in a light-colored suit, smiling, sitting on the sofa alongside the wall. He was 62 years old that year. His hair on the temples was not yet grizzled. Hence he looked younger. — We agreed on the way of lecture as follows: Every student supplies their own drawing rooms in turn as lecture locations; Lectures during both spring and autumn semester and no lectures in summer and winter vacation; The lectures will be given fortnightly and each lecture will be 4 hours; If 3 to 5 people

ask for a personal day off, then the lecture would be postponed. If less than 3 people are absent, the lecture would be held as usual.

After the lectures began, we found gradually that a 4-hour lecture was not enough for a special subject. Only the subject on the literariness of the Bible occupied 4 lectures which took two months. One year later, we just went through the history of world literature, from ancient times to the middle ages. And the subjects and content of modern and contemporary literature are much more than before. Mu Xin ever planned to end the lectures when we finished the subject of 19th-century literature. However we asked him to continue to give lectures on 20th-century literature. Then he taught us the numerous literary genres in the 20th century. The existentialism is one of those genres and Mu Xin gave 5 lectures to talk that subject.

In that years, most of us were in the awkwardness and busyness of earning a living in the foreign country. It was inevitable that we asked for leave for personal chores so that the lectures were often postponed. Time went by through the postponements and summer and winter vacations year after year. This may be the reason why our ‘ literary expedition’ lasted for 5 years.¹

From ancient Greek epics and *The book of Songs* (诗经) to the postwar literature in the 20th century, Mu Xin led those Chinese artists to experience a 5-year literary journey. Recalling this literary journey today, Chen Danqing comments, “ In retrospect, what we had done in those years was nearly preposterous. For we had no student registration, no classroom, no textbook, no examination and certificate, even no sponsor and research funds. What we had done was just sitting around Mu Xin to listen to his wonderful talks in the different dwellings located in Queens, Manhattan and Brooklyn.”²

As Chen Danqing recalls, Mu Xin didn’t lectured in a tone of lecturing, that is to say, he lectures like he talks. Chen said, “ When he lectured, he spoke slowly and

¹ Chen Danqing, “ Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue,” pp. 1086-1089.

² Ibid., p. 1092.

never spoke aloud. When he referred to what he thought was important, he spoke out those words with emphasis just like reading the sentences written earlier.”¹ What impressed and interested Chen Danqing in Mu Xin’s lecturing is his digressions. Chen wrote in his article, “ Mu Xin’s marvellous ability is that he can digress whenever necessary: he said Kafka lived bitterly, had tuberculosis and was fond of burning manuscripts, thus Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 should be introduced to Kafka; he said Siomen wrote and lived by cultivating grapes and how nice it would be if what Tao Qian ever cultivated was not chrysanthemum but grapes! In Mu Xin’s lecturing, those chat-like digressions were in fact pertinent remarks. When we guffawed because of his interesting digressions, he became pleased and pretended to be indifferent. But wait a minute, he was inspired in our cachinnation and as expected he spoke out another digression. Then he no longer looked at us and continued to lecture.”² It is those chat-like digressions that make Chen Zishan 陈子善, the professor of the history of Chinese modern and contemporary literature of Central China Normal University, feel surprised and moved. He said, “ literature could be actually lectured like this.” Chen Zishan felt that the mind of people who engaged in literary studies would often be cooped up by a series of concept and terminology. When he read *Literary Memoirs* , he thought that lecturing on literature in the way of Mu Xin did would be better and more interesting. And he considered that lecturing on literature like this would make the audiences really understand that literature is adorable.³

All good things come to an end. On the 9th January 1994, Mu Xin finished the last class of the literary lectures in the dwelling of Chen Danqing. Chen said, “ Nowadays recording or videoing a lecture is popular. However in those days we didn’t have that kind of apparatus and Mu Xin didn’t allow us to record or video his lectures. He thought that lecturing is lecturing. Therefore we didn’t have a single photo or sound recording of the lectures during the 5 years.”⁴ Shortly after the last

¹ Chen Danqing, “ Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue,” p. 1090.

² Ibid., p. 1091.

³ Chen Zishan 陈子善, “Qizhi keyi kankan 岂止可以看看,” in *Shidai zhoubao* 时代周报, January 31, 2013

⁴ Chen Danqing, “ Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue,” p. 1091.

class, the students of Mu Xin had a party to celebrate the graduation of the 5-year literary journey. At the party, all the students dressed up and had a photo taken with Mu Xin respectively. A Cheng 阿城, the famous contemporary Chinese writer from mainland China, had already migrated to America at that time. On the day of the graduation party, he went to New York from Los Angeles with his video equipment and videoed the entire party. On that day, Chen Danqing recalled, “Mu Xin, like an old distant relative, smiled reservedly and sat quietly just as he was when he declared the lecture open 5 years ago. And he was 67 years old that year. As far as I know, that party was his last meeting with all the students. He gave a speech which began with Valery’s poem. Every time he quoted the words of westerner, I always felt that it was written by himself. He blurted the verse: ‘Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course ! ’”¹ From then until he died, Mu Xin had never attended a party and speech.

In the December of 2012, the first anniversary of Mu Xin’s death, Chen Danqing published his lecture notes of the 5-year literary journey, i.e. *Literary Memoirs*. Mu Xin had his own scripts prepared for the literary lectures. “After the lecture was open, every class Mu Xin carried a big size notebook filled with words with him. That was his preparation scripts.”² However Mu Xin would not like to publish his lecture scripts when he was alive. He thought it was not his work in a strict sense, because it didn’t belong to his own literary creation. As written in Chen Danqing’s article, “When he (Mu Xin) declared the lecture open, he ever said excitedly that he will publish his lecture scripts in the future. But I know well his Hamlet’s nature: Afterwards, I asked him to publish his lecture scripts for several times, he always said scornfully that it was not his work so he would not like to publish it. A few years ago, I brought the editor of Guangxi Normal University Press to visit him in Wuzhen and mentioned the publication of his lecture scripts again. Mu Xin still did not agree.”³ In my opinion, the reason that Mu Xin would not like to publish his script is that he was the perfectionist throughout. He remained committed to Flaubert’s advice, “I would

¹ Chen Danqing, “Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue,” p. 1092. “Que tu brilles enfin, terme pur de ma course !” See Paul Valery, “Fragments du Narcisse”.

² Ibid., p. 1084.

³ Ibid., p. 1085.

rather be tired like a dog, nor write out an imperfect sentence one second ahead.”

However Chen Danqing finally went against Mu Xin’s will. He published his own lecture notes in that 5-year period which presents their literary journey nearly 20 years ago to the public. As to the publication of his lecture notes, Chen Danqing wrote: “During the 5-year lectures, I made notes filling up with 5 notebooks. Throughout the past years, I moved house several times and carried those 5 notebooks with me. They were laid on the bookcases in my different dwellings. When I saw them once in a while, I always thought I would read those notes attentively again. However nearly 20 years passed, I didn’t read them again. [……] At the end of last year, more than hundred young readers came from all over to Wuzhen for a farewell to Mu Xin. In the memorial ceremony in Zhaoming (昭明) Academy in Wuzhen, they earnestly requested me to make the lecture notes public. I agreed immediately —— In those days when Mu Xin gave those lectures, he often mentioned how it would be in the future, after returning to mainland China. On the day of his memorial ceremony, I watched a roomful strange young men who were mournful and sincere, I suddenly thought that now would be the future to which Mu Xin had ever looked forward. In this spring, I took the 5 notebooks out of the bookcase and put them beside the bed. When I read them page after page before bedtime, I was in a trance, laughing aloud or weeping. I saw Mu Xin on his deathbed; and I saw clearly that we sat around Mu Xin listening to him. [……] Did we really have the long 5-year literary journey in New York? I watched those words of Mu Xin filling up my notebooks, which were not only my lecture notes but also his relics.”¹

From what Chen Danqing wrote we can know that one of the reasons of the publication of the lecture notes is that Chen Danqing was moved by the sincerities of Mu Xin’s young readers. From my point of view, the underlying cause is that Chen Danqing is sensitive to and believes in the significance and artistic merit of Mu Xin. He wrote: “However I was convinced that my lecture notes has its own value. Except for the content of the lectures, I also recorded Mu Xin’s considerable witticism in his

¹ Chen Danqing, “Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue,” p. 1085.

interesting digressions faithfully. I cannot guarantee that what I recorded was a hundred percent exact. But I kept recording as long as Mu Xin was speaking. Once I even recorded the talk between him and us when we walked in a park after class.¹

At the end of his article “Listening to Mu Xin’s Talks of Literature”, Chen Danqing wrote: “ Now I only wish that the master would forgive me for the publication of the lecture notes.”² From where I stand, Chen Danqing’s disobedience was sincere and was just as what Max Brod (1884-1968) had done for Franz Kafka (1883-1924). In compliance with Kafka’s wishes, Max Brod should burn all his manuscripts. However Max Brod didn’t do that and published them. And then we have literary Kafka. Although the publication of *Literary Memoirs* is disobedient to Mu Xin’s perfectionism, it presents a more rich-oriented Mu Xin to us. Just as stated by Gu Wenhao 顾文豪, a young reviewer in Shanghai, “The word ‘works’ does not only means what a writer writes. In Milan Kundera’s words, ‘works’ means a final result from a long-term work that is oriented around a kind of aesthetics planning. [……] The words of Kundera can be cited as our grounds for publication. That is to say, we can learn of Mu Xin’s own ‘ aesthetics planning’ through Chen Danqing’s more-than-four hundred thousand-words lecture notes. In other words, the two-volumes *Literary Memoirs* is not presented as a ‘final result’ i.e. ‘works’, but presents to us a lecturer Mu Xin rather than a writer Mu Xin in a more direct, more capacious and more original way. It presents his richer thinking dimension and spiritual energy besides Mu Xin’s published works.”³

If the works written by Mu Xin in the United States was the response to and the sublimation of the invisible literary heritage in his memories, then it is the notes of his literary lectures that let his readers see the invisible heritage clearly and really know its content. From Mu Xin’s literary lectures, we can find the catalogue of his literary heritage, i.e. the books ever read by Mu Xin. Mu Xin had given 83 lectures on the history of world literature. His lectures began from Greek and Roman mythologies,

¹ Chen Danqing, “ Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue,” p. 1085.

² Ibid., p. 1102.

³ Gu Wenhao 顾文豪, “ Wenxue shi yi chang ziwo jiaoyu 文学是一场自我教育,” in *Wengu: Mu Xin ji’ nian zhuanhao*, pp.263-267.

the Bible, Indian epics and Chinese philosophers in Pre-Qin period, and then involved Persian literature, Arabic literature and Japanese literature in the Middle Ages, Chinese classical poetry in Tang and Song dynasties, Renaissance literature, European literature in the 18th and 19th century, philosophers impacting on 20th-century literature, 20th-century literary genres, postwar existentialism literature and new novels, and finally ended with magic realism. The layout and partial material of his literary lectures were on the basis of *Outline of Literature* compiled by Zheng Zhenduo in 1920s. In his lecturing, the longitudinal pivot is historical period and the transverse pivot is country. Both *Outline of Literature* compiled by Zheng Zhenduo and the works and writers in the history of world literature mentioned by Mu Xin in his lectures were the part of the literary heritage in his memories, the source of his spirit which enlightened him in his youth, strengthened his will in his middle age and made him recollect the past time and again in his later years. The whole *Literary Memoirs* presents to us Mu Xin's reading memories. Except for the 20th-century postwar literature, we can't and needn't know among the books in his reading memories which ones are the books Mu Xin had already read in the Mao Dun library and which ones are the books he read after he left Wuzhen. As far as both Mu Xin and his readers are concerned, the worldwide literary landscape presented in his reading memories is a whole. The breadth and density of his reading memories alone will be enough amazing and admirable. Hence Chen Danqing stated that the read memories of Mu Xin is a personal testimony to the history of publication in the period of Republic of China (1912-1949).¹

The reading memories of Mu Xin, meanwhile, presents the cultural background of his own. It goes without saying that the baptism of European culture plays an important role in Mu Xin's cultural background. The introduction, translation and publication of the books of European literature, art and philosophy in the classical period, the modern ages and the early 20th century since late Qing dynasty are the way for Mu Xin to contact with the classical culture and modern spirit of the West.

¹ Chen Danqing, "Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue," p. 1094.

Therefore several times in his lectures Mu Xin declared with emotion, “ The translators in those days really did a lot and contributed greatly.”¹ When he introduced works of some European writer in his lectures, he often recommended to his students the best Chinese translation he ever read. For example, as to the Chinese version of Gide’s *Les nourritures terrestres*, he recommended the translation by Sheng Chenghua 盛澄华 (1912-1970), while he recommended Zhu Shenghao’s 朱生豪 (1912-1944) version of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.

The other significant part of Mu Xin’s cultural background is his accomplishment in Chinese traditional culture. In his youth, Mu Xin ever came to judge that Mao Dun’s level of Chinese classical literature is not below that of Zhou Brothers through the comment notes written by Mao Dun. He found those notes on the Chinese Classics he read in Mao Dun library.² From Mu Xin’s judgement, we can see that his own level of Chinese classical literature is at least between that of Mao Dun and Zhou Brothers. And we can see his accomplishment in Chinese classical culture more clearly in his literary lectures.

Mu Xin’s lecturing on Chinese classical literature involved the subjects from *The Book of Songs*, *Songs of the South* (楚辞), the works of philosophers in Pre-Qin Period, the literature in Wei and Jin dynasties and the classical poetry in Tang and Song dynasties to Chinese traditional plays and novels and prose in Ming and Qing dynasties. When he lectured on *Book of Songs*, he said: “ If there would be so magnificent epics like *Homeric Epics* rather than the 305 lyrics in *Book of Songs* existing in the history of Chinese literature, then how to choose? I prefer the 305 lyrics.”³ Referring to *Songs of the South*, he said: “ ‘The Lesser Master of Fate’ (Shao Si Ming 少司命) and ‘ The Mountain Spirit’ (Shan Gui 山鬼) are the two best poems in the anthology and I think they are the pinnacle of Chinese classical literature. [……] ‘The Lesser Master of Fate’ is like running script (xingshu 行书). While ‘The Mountain Spirit’ is like grass script (caoshu 草书). And other poems in the anthology

¹ Chen Danqing, “ Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue,” p. 1094.

² Mu Xin, “ Wuzhen 乌镇,” in *Zhongguo shibao* 中國時報 (Taiwan), 20th December, 1998.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 125.

are all like traditional regular script (kaishu 楷书).”¹ He read of literariness in Confucian Classics and historical records. He explained: “The first volume of *Gems from Chinese Culture* (Guwen Guanzhi 古文观止) is constituted of articles selected from *Chronicle of Zuo* (Zuo Zhuan 左传), *Discourses of the States* (Guoyu 国语) and *Strategies of the Warring States* (Zhang Guo Ce 战国策). Therefore Chinese ancient historical records are not only historical documentaries but also literary classics. They had perfect literariness from the very beginning. [……] Chinese ancient historians had amazing talent that they could write such beautiful articles.”² He said the philosophers in Pre-Qin Period were all stylists.³ He didn’t agree with the Confucian system of words and deeds while he was impressed by the literariness of *Analects of Confucius* (Lunyu 论语). He considered that it was almost an anthology of prose poetry.⁴ He supposed a metaphor that literature and art is like the human body. Any clothing on a man with a well-formed body looks good. However a human body looks best when it is nude. As far as Chinese classical literature is concerned, Mu Xin thus concluded, “literature in Han dynasty is like a man who likes to wear baggy clothing; literature in Wei and Jin dynasties is like a man who is dressed in chic clothing; literature in Tang dynasty is like a man whose clothing is gorgeous and that of Song dynasty is delicate; literature in Ming and Qing dynasties is like a man who imitate badly the way of people in Tang and Song dynasties to dress up.”⁵

Mu Xin was born and grew up in an aristocratic and literary family in Wuzhen which is an old town with a long history and profound cultural heritage located in the South of Yangtze River. In his prose ‘*Wuzhen*’, Mu Xin wrote, “Wuzhen has a long cultural tradition dating back to Liang dynasty. Prince Zhaoming of the Liang dynasty ever read here and compiled the anthology *Selections of Refined Writings* (Wen xuan 文选). The original version of the last half of *History of the Later Han* (Hou Han Shu 后汉书) was actually found in Wuzhen. The ginkgo trees planted in Tang dynasty

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 156.

² Ibid., p. 159.

³ Ibid., p. 404.

⁴ Ibid., p. 194.

⁵ Ibid., p. 177.

were still luxuriantly green today. The intellectuals in Wuzhen for generations applied themselves to be an officer after completing their learning and then engaged themselves in business after leaving their office. Therefore there had been in Wuzhen not only aristocratic and literary families whose mansions had gardens, porches and pavilions, ponds and barges, private libraries, but also a considerable number of ordinary people who were learned and could write poems. There had been also various literary societies founded by the literati who had the capabilities in Guqin (古琴), Go (Weiqi 围棋), Chinese calligraphy and painting.”¹ The mansion of Mu Xin’s family was adjacent to the reading spot of Prince Zhaoming of the Liang dynasty. In his prose “The Reading spot under a Pagoda”, Mu Xin wrote: “ If you open the door of our backyard garden, you can see the tall pagoda named Shousheng (寿胜). Under the pagoda was ever the reading spot of Prince Zhaoming of the Liang dynasty.”² In the mansion of Mu Xin’s family there had been also garden, pavilion and private library. In addition, there had been a home school with private tutors. Except for Confucian Classics, Mu Xin had also learned how to compose the different genres of Chinese classical poetry and prose, such as Lushi (律诗), Jueju (绝句) and Pianwen (骈文), in the home school in his childhood and early youth. His private tutors were all learned scholars. Xia Chengtao 夏承焘 (1900-1986) who was one of his tutors and a well-known Ci (词) poet in modern China became a close friend of Mu Xin. They talked about art of Chinese classical poetry and exchanged their comments on the poems of each other through their regular correspondence.

In those days when Mu Xin lived in Wuzhen, he preferred reading in his own study, ‘the spiritual island in his youth’,³ to learning in the home school. In his study, he read the works of the philosophers in Pre-Qin Period just as watching acrobatic fighting plays⁴; he enjoyed the prose by the Eight Great Prose Masters of Tang and Song (唐宋八大家), and by Tongcheng (桐城) School and Jingling (竟陵) School; he

¹ Mu Xin, “Wuzhen.”

² Mu Xin, “Taxia dushuchu,” pp. 7-20.

³ Mu Xin, “Wuzhen.”

⁴ Mu Xin, “Yiyin yizhuo 一饮一啄”, in *Sulü zhi wang 素履之往* (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), p. 135.

admired the gallant men recorded by Sima Qian 司马迁 (145 BC-87 BC) in *Biographies of Kinght-errants* (Youxia liezhuan 游侠列传) in *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji 史记); he was moved by the nature and talent of Ji Kang 嵇康 (223-262) and the noble simplicity of the style of Tao Qian; he was so fond of reading *The Peach Blossom Fan* (Taohua shan 桃花扇) that he transcribed the whole book¹; he felt cheerful when he read the preface of *Water Margin* (水浒传) in the night and then he considered Shi Nai'an as his intimate friend.² In the view of Mu Xin, except for his reading and the private tutors, another important teacher in Chinese traditional culture is his mother. His mother taught him to recite the pithy formula of the 64 hexagrams of *Book of Changes* (易经) when they sat out for the cool in the summer nights.³ She also explained the poetry of Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) to him. In his literary lectures, Mu Xin said: “The teacher who taught me Du Fu’s poetry is my mother. It was in the fleeing of the Sino-Japanese War. At that time I was so young that I cannot enjoy and understand the significance of Du Fu’s poetry until my mother explained them to me.”⁴

As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, Chinese classical culture is not only the classwork from a private school but also a kind of cultural atmosphere and unbroken tradition in which he immersed since he was a child. This kind of atmosphere and tradition are just like the watchman’s rattle which existed thousand years in the South of Yangtze River and still could be heard in Mu Xin’s childhood. Therefore I much agreed with the words of Chen Danqing. He stated, “As for Mu Xin, Chinese classical culture is a kind of self-cultivation. He is the interlocutor of the ancients since the Pre-Qin period.”⁵ Mu Xin’s accomplishment in Chinese classical culture contributes to his own literary style, which I would like to discuss in detail in the third chapter.

In short, whether the baptism of European culture and modern spirit or the accomplishment in Chinese classical culture, the factors which consist of his cultural

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 490.

² Ibid., p. 365.

³ Ibid., p. 191.

⁴ Ibid., p. 265.

⁵ Chen Danqing, “Wo de shizun Mu Xin xianshen,” p. 13.

background were rooted in his reading memories. They appear slowly with his lecturing on the history of world literature.

If the breadth and density of Mu Xin's reading memories will be enough amazing and admirable, then the vigorous thinking activities and rich spiritual connotation appearing in his lecturing must would be more amazing and admirable. During his 5-year lecturing, what Mu Xin referred to is not only literature itself, but also a variety of topics of art creating, such as the relationship between art and the real world, the relationship between personal style and imitation, the relationship between art and philosophy, the relationship between literature and various school of art, the relationship between art and critic, the relationship between modern literature and counterculture, the relationship between literature and morality, the relationship between individual artist and his era and so forth. Literature, philosophy, visual art, music, history, even love and fate, life and politics, all of these were frequently mentioned in his lecturing.

For instance, referring to the relationship between literature and school of art, he stated, “ It is most unfortunate if a writer or artist was classified as some kind of school. If it is due to the misconception of his readers and critics, the writer would be simply wronged. However if the writer himself considers that he should be classified as some kind of school, then he is certainly not a top writer. [……] Don't think of and participate in any kind of literary school. A greatest artist surely belongs to no school. You say which kind of literary school Shakspeare belongs to?”¹ As to the part of postwar literature in the 20th century, Mu Xin specially gave two lectures on the existentialism and literature of Sartre. Sartre supposed that a role of literature is getting involved in the life and the world and a writer and his works should get involved and influence his era. On Sartre' view, Mu Xin expressed, “ I am not opposed to getting involved in the era. But a man with no era belongs to any era. [……] It is for sure that great art get involved its era, while a man who advertises his getting involved is a utilitarian.”² Referring to the relationship between art and

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, pp. 562-563.

² *Ibid.*, p. 917.

tradition, he said: “ There may be decadency, defeat, extinction and change of regime in politics, while there is not in literature. Literature is perpetual. An emperor would be overthrown and a kind of scientific law can be negated, while there is no overthrow and negation in literature and art.”¹ And he declared, “ As far as art’s concerned, there is no place for Darwinism. We should have three kinds of attitude towards the works (books, paintings, music) of our predecessors: appreciating them as if we were in their era; appreciating them in our own era; appreciating them as if we were in the future.”²

When he talked about the relationship between literature and reality, he said: “ Literature doesn’t depict reality but creates it. For reality cannot be depicted. God is the artist of three-dimension and an artist is the God of plane. Jesus is semi-solid. Therefore the cross looks good only when you see it from the front, rather than from the side. An artist should be content with plane. Tolstoy and Nietzsche were not content with plane and one of the two went crazy and the other became so sentimental.”³ As to the personal style of an artist, he said: “ I always bear in my mind the words that every line should present your own nature. It should be the motto of every poet, painter and musician. Even if you cut the paintings of Van Gogh or Cezanne, you will find that every brush on the fragment of their paintings expresses what is Van Gogh and what is Cezanne.”⁴ He added : “ Are the works of Mozart easy to understand? Of course not. It is hard to understand them. For only Mozart himself had that kind of temperament and nature appearing in his works. The temperament of an artist will contribute to the quality of his art and his nature will contribute to his style. When we appreciate or critique art, we should focus on the art quality and style of an artist.”⁵ And further, “ The great art is from the great nature, thus art cannot be cultivated.”⁶ Referring to the role of sarcasm in art, he said: “ A satire with a direct and specific object doesn’t belong to art. The great rebellious deserves great objects.

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 588.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 448.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 401-402.

⁵ Ibid., p. 500.

⁶ Ibid.

The man who attacked God was Nietzsche and the man who attacked the universe was Laozi 老子. They never attacked some direct and specific people and affairs. Caricatures and news commentaries would not be handed down in history. And music cannot satirize anything. There is no march named ‘Fuck March’. Music is pure which is both its weakness and its greatness.”¹

There are so many such sorts of words given above in Mu Xin’s lecturing which was full of his vivid and striking ideas. The great amount of information and the rich and deep connotation contained in Mu Xin’s literary lectures are impressive. Therefore Chen Zishan commented: “ What Mu Xin in fact lectured on was the history of the relationship between literature and music and fine art. In a word, his view of the history of literature is open, comprehensive and forward-looking. From his point of view, the spiritual connotations of the categories of literature and art are interlinked.”² And Gu Wenhao stated, “ In Mu Xin’s long lecturing, he had been always treating literature as one of the categories of art. Literature is not only the object of his lecturing, but also an immense intelligence field.”³

As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, a true artist should have a kind of self-background, that is to say, he should be versatile and a man of rich culture. Mu Xin considered that the attainments of a true artist must be beyond his works (poetry or painting). He declared that the talent and intelligence of the Three Giants of the Renaissance are much more than what were presented in their works.⁴ And he said that Chinese Literati Paintings contain the painters’ concealed literary accomplishments. Hence the calligraphy of Li Bai 李白 (701-762) and the paintings of Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101) are wonderful.”⁵ And Mu Xin also mentioned Dostoevsky as a proof. He explained : “Dostoevsky read a lot in philosophy. When he was in jail, he wrote to his family asking them to send philosophy books to him and said they were virtually his life. However you can’t find from his novels that he ever read those philosophy books at

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, pp. 444-445.

² Chen Zishan, “Qizhi keyi kankan.”

³ Gu Wenhao, “ Wenxue shi yi chang ziwo jiaoyu,” p. 263-267.

⁴ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 502.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 957.

all.”¹ Therefore Mu Xin believed that the attainments of the man whose talent is ten times more than yours will be hundred times more than yours.² In Mu Xin’s literary lectures, we find his self-background as a true artist. As I mentioned before, Mu Xin is a true artist, an artist-writer. I will not repeat his accomplishments in music and painting here. Literature, painting and music are his beloved ‘the Trinity’. In addition to ‘the Trinity’, we can see clearly another dimension of his self-background in his literary lectures. Just as Dostoevsky who was proficient in philosophy, the accomplishments of Mu Xin in philosophy are also impressive.

In *Literary Memoirs*, there are 9 lectures given specially on philosophy. Among the 9 lectures, there are three on Chinese philosophy in Pre-Qin Period, two on philosophers who had impact on 20th –century literature and four on existentialism and Sartre. In the part of philosophers influencing the 20th –century literature, Mu Xin lectured individually on Schopenhauer’s philosophy of will to life, Nietzsche’s philosophy of Superman, the intuitionism and the philosophy of Life by Henri Bergson, the Pragmatists and functionalism by William James, the pioneer of pragmatism. In the part of existentialism, he gave an account from Kant, Husserl, Heidegger, Jaspers to Sartre. He said: “ I always say that existentialism has nothing new. The young people postwar wouldn’t like to bother to read the original texts by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bergson. And existentialism is the popularized version of thoughts of the three, which just happens to suit the taste of young people postwar.”³ In the part of Chinese philosophy in Pre-Qin Period, Mu Xin stated: “ The philosophers in Pre-Qin Period were in fact ethicists, focussing on social structure and interpersonal relation; they were political commentators, discoursing on statecraft. Among them, there was only Laozi who thought about the universe and life. And the thoughts of Zhuangzi is the continuations of and the artistic version of the philosophy of Laozi.”⁴ And he considered that the two had different temperaments that Laozi

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 969.

² *Ibid.*, p. 957.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 758.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

was the philosopher of Apollo while Zhuangzi was that of Dionysus.¹ Mu Xin agreed with the cosmology of Laozi. He said: “ The thoughts of Li Er 李耳 is most penetrating. [·····] He penetrated the two great mysteries: the one is heaven, i.e. the universe; the other is human, i.e. the life. Heaven is indifferent and human beings are straw dogs.”²

Except for the 9 special lectures on philosophy, in Mu Xin’s lecturing there are many ideas of the relationship between philosophy and art. For instance, he considered that the words of Nietzsche, “art is art and above all”, is close to the truth.³ He admired Nietzsche but not like his philosophy of Superman. And he asserted, “ It is too simple to regard Nietzsche only as a philosopher. I consider him as an artist who endeavoured to think. I always think: Nietzsche, come out from philosophy.”⁴ When he mentioned the *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal, he cited specially one word in the book “the eternal silence of the infinite space makes me frightened”. Mu Xin supposed that the words are clear and penetrating , and had something like the thoughts of Laozi, because it revealed the relationship between human and the universe.⁵ And when he gave an account of *The Dream of Red Mansion*, he said: “ It seems that Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 (1715-1763) ever read the works of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. For Cao Xueqin was familiar with Buddhist and Taoist classics. And the first half of Buddhism is actually pessimism and the second half of Taoism is actually the philosophy of Superman.”⁶

Tongming Jun Liu considered that Mu Xin is essentially a poet of philosophy, a writer who is an expert in aesthetic judgments.⁷ And Mu Xin also agreed that he is keen on thinking and considered himself as an artist of metaphysics.⁸ Whether the statement of a poet of philosophy or that of an artist of metaphysics, metaphysical thinking contributes to another feature of Mu Xin’s literary style, on which I would

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 174.

² Ibid., p. 169.

³ Ibid., p. 759.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 615-616.

⁵ Ibid., pp.405-406.

⁶ Ibid. p.496.

⁷ Tongming Jun Liu, “ Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 25.

⁸ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 453.

like to expound in later chapters. As far as Mu Xin's concerned, philosophy is not only the part of a true artist's self-background but also the foundation of life upon which he depended to survive the cultural catastrophe. He ever stated in an interview: "History makes man think clearly and philosophy makes man strengthen his will."¹ In the literary lectures, he said: "the Cultural Revolution is so fearful. However I treated it with the words of Laozi that a gale doesn't blow a whole morning, nor does a downpour lasts a whole day."² And he said that when he was in solitary confinement and felt in despair in the cultural catastrophe, he thought of the words of Michel de Montaigne: Oh, God, If You want to save me then save me, if You want destroy me then destroy me. While I will guide my own ship every moment."³

Undoubtedly, the history of literature lectured on by Mu Xin is literary history in a broad sense of word. It nourished his own literary writing. If the published works of Mu Xin are a restrained and refined expression of and the final sublimation of the literary heritage in his memories, then the history of literature he lectured on is the more direct and original presentation of that heritage. As a writer, Mu Xin is just like Jesus who speaks to the great crowds in parables and makes them indeed listen but never understand, indeed look but never perceive.⁴ While Mu Xin, as a lecturer, is just like Jesus who explains to his disciples the parables and makes them understand and perceive. In other words, his cultural self-background and thread of thoughts can be recognized in his lecturing, and many ideas mentioned in his lecturing arise in his works in a refined appearance. Let's take a proverb written by Mu Xin in his anthology *Traveling in Simple Shoes* (Sulü zhi wang 素履之往) for instance. It is written as follows, "Heidegger planned deliberately to make a nest which is so big and then God can be put in it." What is the meaning of this proverb? If you are not proficient in philosophy and familiar with Mu Xin's way of thinking, it is difficult to perceive the meaning of the words. However we can find out its meaning clearly in Mu Xin's lecturing on the existentialism of Heidegger. He said: "Heidegger's

¹ Mu Xin "Haixia chuansheng," p. 22.

² Mu Xin, "Zuihou yike 最后一课," in *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 1068.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 387.

⁴ *Matthew*, 13: 14.

existentialism is atheistical. He focussed on the question of being, however his final conclusion is that fear is the way to Being which is happiness and brightness, and the greatest happiness and brightness is the way to God. He moved round to God with millions words. That is his atheism. Thus I say that Heidegger made a bigger nest for his fattened-up God.”¹ In short, if Mu Xin’s works present a beautiful and precious jade to you, then his literary lectures show you the process how he carved it. Just as Liang Wendao has stated, “What we can find out in Mu Xin’s lecturing is the reason he wrote so, his self-background, the thread of his writing orientation and the revealing of his anxiety of influence.”²

Chen Danqing ever commented that Mu Xin was out of time all his life and his times was also unsuitable for him.³ In his earlier life, he encountered political totalitarianism. In the cultural catastrophe, he was almost put to death by political persecution. However he still struggled to avoid concurring with his times. In Chen Danqing’s words, what Mu Xin had done in his earlier life is to let himself not to be overwhelmed by his times.⁴ In his later life, he left his homeland alone in his more than 50 years old. Although he got freedom, he was in exile. He wrote intensively in this freedom and exile and eventually got his works published. However his works happened to meet consumer culture in this e-media age and suffered neglect. In Mu Xin’s untimely lifetime, what had always supported and continuously witnessed his maturity in literature was the history of world literature in his memories, his inalienable literary heritage.

Roland Barthes wrote in *Camera Lucida*, when he watched the group photo of his parents, he knows that they loved each other. And then an idea occurred in his mind: there would be no one can prove his parents’ love after he died and their existed love will fall into a kind of natural state to which people would be indifferent. When

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 896.

² Liang Wendao, “Wenxue, juwairen de huiyi,” p. X.

³ Hu jiujiu 胡纠纠, “Chen Danqing fangtan 陈丹青访谈,” in *Xin Zhoukan* 新周刊 389 (2013).

⁴ Ibid.

he thought of this, he felt a kind of intolerable pain. Then he said it is due to this kind of pain that Jules Michelet wrote a history of French Revolution alone. Roland Barthes treated Michelet's historical writing as a kind of protest of love.¹ In my opinion, Mu Xin's lecturing on the history of world literature is also due to such kind of protest of love. His literary lectures were filled up with his own thinking about literature, art, philosophy and life and his own standpoint and feelings of them. They are the precious and significant memories and heritage accompanying him all his life. He spoke them out. He didn't let them be the natural state to which people would be indifferent. In this way, he looked back on his life and responded to the masters he admired and respected in history. His literary lectures are actually the dialogues between them, his literary gods, and himself. He talked about them just as he narrated the history of his family, with his love and hate, with hope and depression, with lenience and snobbishness, with gentleness and harshness. As it is written in Chen Danqing's article, "How I wish that those literary masters could hear how Mu Xin talked about them. They wouldn't know that this man continually talked, discussed and retorted with them, and he praised them again and again. With the cleverness and sympathy of a Chinese old man, he perceived their soul, or spoke ill of them. This book (*Literary Memoirs*) is really not the history of the world literature alone. It presents the man who lightens those literary masters and is gradually surrounded and lightened by them."²

In conclusion, the history of world literature given by Mu Xin is his private literary history and the memories of his life with his own body temperature and love and hope. And it is the reason why Chen Danqing named the published lecture notes as 'Literary Memoirs'. Mu Xin's memories of literature is actually the true autobiography and an absurd novel about himself, although he never wrote an autobiography nor absurd literary works.

¹ See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

² Chen Danqing, "Ting Mu Xin tan wenxue," p. 1099.

2. 6 The Accomplished Self-perfection

After the five-year lectures of the history of world literature ended in the January of 1994, Mu Xin had no longer participated in any forgather nor had he gave any lecture or public speaking till he died. Except for a few seasonable memorial articles, he had no longer published works in New York Chinese newspapers or magazines as well. He led a life of a recluse again just as what he had done in his early years. He enjoyed solitude and wrote day and night. “Since then the concept of editors, readers, reviewers and publishers had become dim and gone, while the talent of and desire for speech, debate and talks with friends all night had calmed down.”¹ As a writer, when he finally gained the deserved reputation that was later for more than twenty years and when his literary anthologies were finally published one by one, he said, “fame comes from misconception. The fame will disappear without any trace if you just write for it, and if you reach the final perfection unless you will be pure in heart and be completely sincere in art.”² Therefore he chose to lay his published works aside and turn to a next rebirth, the new beginning of literary creating. Every day Mu Xin went to bed at 10 p.m. and got up at 5 p.m.. He said that the time between five in the morning and ten in the evening was the favourite period of a day of the poet Paul Valery to write. And he started a new journey of literary creating in the period ‘between light and dawn’ that Valery loved. He completed his anthologies of poetry : *Parron* (Balong 巴珑), *The Ever Flakes of My Desire* (Wo fenfen de qingyu 我纷纷的情欲), *The Correspondence* (Hui wu zhong 會吾中), *Letters in the Name of Solomon* (伪所罗门书).³

At the beginning of the new century, Mu Xin was invited sincerely by the government of his hometown. In 2006, Mu Xin returned to his hometown Wuzhen and dwelled there after he left there for more than sixty years. On the location of the previous mansion of his family adjacent to the reading spot of Prince Zhaoming of the

¹ Mu Xin, “Chichi gaobai,” p. 88.

² Ibid., p. 87.

³ Ibid., p. 88.

Liang dynasty, the local government built a new mansion for him according to the blueprint in Mu Xin's memories. Mu Xin eventually came back home, the spot he lived and read when he was a boy. He lived in this new home in the last six years of his life and kept on writing till he was suddenly sent to the hospital in the autumn of 2011. He was in a coma for more than three months in the hospital and died in the December of 2011. He left a large number of manuscripts need to be edited and published. Among those manuscripts, Chen Danqing found a finished couplet that he used as the elegiac couplet of Mu Xin's funeral:

The attained reputation with the completed wish in my heart

此心有一泛泛浮名所喜私愿已了

The unattainable perfection with uncompleted ambition in further shore ¹

彼岸无双草草逸笔尤叹壮志未酬

Then what was Mu Xin's completed wish? And what was his uncompleted ambition?

I believe that Mu Xin's completed wish was that as a man of letters he wrote diligently and got his works published, and that he would not fail to live up to what art had taught him throughout his life. It is written in his prose titled "The Tardy Confession", "Both my fortune and misfortune lie in that my life and art are synonymous. It took six-decade time and effort for me to fulfil the initial promise and to achieve the long-cherished wish. And now I consider my published works as encumbrance and would like to lay them aside. Then I can move on alone with nothing." And it is as well written, "what I see is just my private dawn through the remains of the night."² Throughout his life Mu Xin continuously experienced the circle of destruction and reconstruction, and of death and rebirth. In the memorial article for Mu Xin, Chen Danqing wrote: "The art and memories of Mu Xin had already experienced a death before he left China in his fifties. His manuscripts and

¹ Chen Danqing, "Shouhu yu songbie," p. 168.

² Mu Xin, "Chichi gaobai," pp. 88-102.

photos were all confiscated and destroyed so that he did not have private evidences to touch his past life.”¹ Therefore Mu Xin who was lying in the sickbed in his declining years turned his head crying heavily when he saw the surviving photo of himself that was found unexpectedly by a friend of Chen. In the photo, taken in 1946, Mu Xin was 19 years old.² However he made himself a new life. In the tragedy of the times, he survived from the shadow of destruction and death. And in the new life, facing the late fame, he just returned to the previous secluded life and write diligently between light and dawn, setting out a new journey again toward his private dawn. This private dawn is the self-perfection in art Mu Xin pursued all his life. He always made a new start in order for, and through, art. Just as what he mentioned that his life and his art are synonymous.

In the memorial article for Lin Fengmian, Mu Xin wrote: “To repeat one style and to paint one theme are bound to fall into the under process: out of practice — conversancy — decline. Thus the wisdom and talent of an artist lie in that he will stop resolutely the process at the time when his conversancy reach its climax. At that time he would say “it is finished” and then look for another cross. Nietzsche’s bless to artists is: death — rebirth — death — rebirth …… immortal. Then the cross that artists should bear is not seven but seventy times seven. However so many artists are unwilling to stop or unaware of stopping at the sacred but cruel crucial time so that they proceed till their art decline.”³ Nietzsche’s bless to artists, the cross of seventy-times-seven, is as well applicable to writers. Mu Xin is the man who comprehended and accepted this blessing. His writing career lasting for more than half a century accompanied with the rebirths and metamorphosis he experienced. In this process, he bore the greatest possibility of humanity, being a member who will be irreplaceable in a crowd.

Mu Xin ever said: “The true artists who even if died at the age of 90 died young.”⁴ When he started to publish his works in New York at the age of 56, he

¹ Chen Danqing, “Shouhu yu songbie,” p. 203.

² Ibid., p. 159.

³ Mu Xin, “Shuangchong beidao,” p. 290.

⁴ Chen Danqing, “Shouhu yu songbie,” p. 203.

exclaimed: “ I am still a young man of literature. Everything has just begun.”¹ It is written in his poem, “ there is one thing in the body will not get old/ the heart, the heart of the youth.”² For his heart was filled with love for art. For he pursued the rebirth and perfection of art all his life. He fulfilled Nietzsche’s blessing which is just like destiny, bestowing on him blessings with endless misery to make him eventually extraordinarily wonderful.³ Then whatever the uncompleted ambition of Mu Xin was, we would not know and need not to know. For Mu Xin’s pursuit of art was endless. As he put it that the uncompleted symphony of Schubert is already accomplished. Then in the same way, Mu Xin’s life and art are accomplished.

¹ Chen Danqing, “ Shouhu yu songbie,” p. 203.

² Mu Xin, “Wuyue chuang 五月窗,” in *Wo fenfen de qingyu*, p. 154.

³ Mu Xin, “Mingyun 命运,” in *Wo fenfen de qingyu*, p. 171. “The destiny has been always merciful to me/ the patient of it is truly so great/ that it makes me most blessed with endless misery/ and say that you must would be extraordinarily wonderful.” (命运对我真是一贯仁慈/它的耐心实在太好/用漫长的悲惨安排洪福/还说，你要异乎寻常的美妙).

Chapter 3

Literature and Times

When Nietzsche wrote, “Seine Zeit in sich zu überwinden”, “zeitlos zu werden”, in the preface of *The Case of Wagner*, he would never know that Mu Xin, a Chinese man who was born in the 27th year of the new century after Nietzsche died and was acquainted with the famous dispute between Nietzsche and Wagner, would fulfill those words by literature throughout his life. The relationship between Mu Xin and his times is just as what Chen Danqing said that Mu Xin lived really in our times, suffering many indignities of his generation, while he reject our times through his art and literature.”¹ In the essay “Sinking of the Drunken Boat” (Zuizhou zhi fu 醉舟之覆), which was written for the centennial anniversary of Rimbaud’s death, Mu Xin wrote: “If we say that we can perceive the life atmosphere of France in 1870s through Rimbaud’s poetry, it is because that we employ the theory of reflection of materialism in literary criticism. With his egocentricity and conceit, Rimbaud wouldn’t care about a France, a century and an era.”² Similarly, the theory of reflection of materialism will not work if you apply it in Mu Xin’s literary works in order to find out a familiar China after 1949. Even more, you will not see clearly the author behind the works. He concealed himself behind the works and watched himself and his times through others’ eyes.

¹ Hu jiujiu 胡纠纠, “Chen Danqing fangtan 陈丹青访谈,” in *Xin Zhoukan* 新周刊 389 (2013).

² Mu Xin, “Zuizhou zhi fu 醉舟之覆,” in *Jixing panduan* 即兴判断 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2006), p. 157.

3.1 The Second Level of Significance

3.1.1 The Aesthetics of ‘Whithering’

In the essay “Sinking of the Drunken Boat”, Mu Xin made a comment on Rimbaud’s poetry anthology *A Season in Hell*, “The whole anthology had a lot to insinuate and was too private, [……] anyone who knows the story between him and Paul Verlaine can perceive the disadvantage of this anthology, which is to say that he wrote too emotionally.”¹ And added, “This anthology is unwise. Because Muse has never been Nemesis and art has never heard a too private case.”²

Mu Xin never made Muse hear his private cases. As a testimony to Mu Xin’s suffering during the Cultural Revolution, the faded manuscript of *Notes from Underground* had been exhibited as a part of Mu Xin’s solo exhibition in 2001. However in this sixty-six-page manuscript written in his imprisonment, what he wrote is not his suffering or his complaint about the terrible calamity. Through the surviving paragraphs of the manuscript, we can see that the dungeon in which he was imprisoned is like the background of a stage and has never been the focus of his thinking and writing. In those paragraphs, what you can see is not the image of the dungeon in which Mu Xin stayed but the image of the cell in his reading memories, the cell in which Lermontov had been in confinement:

I don’t have the fortune to have lived in the 19th century. But I once saw a picture of the room in which Lermontov was imprisoned: there was a round table covered with a thick, solid tablecloth, a table lamp with an opalescent glass shade, a brass teakettle, and two high-backed chairs. The poet-prisoner, in his military uniform, was allowed to receive visitors, such as Belinsky. If I had lived in Lermontov’s times, I wouldn’t have been thrown into this dungeon flooded with filthy water. I feel profoundly relieved that Lermontov was more fortunate than me

¹ Mu Xin, “Zuizhou zhi fu,” p. 151.

² Ibid., p. 154.

— Lermontov with his tea kettle so authentically Russian, and his tablecloth with its rows of tiny tassels hanging from the sides.¹

Mu Xin didn't write his daily life as a political prisoner in the manuscript as well, however he wrote his experience of watching his self-created "opera of fire":

In front of me is a dark blue ink bottle and a gray ashtray made of fine china. The ink in the bottle is provided by the work unit. Being public property, it is perhaps 'socialist' in nature. The ashtray used to be a sugar bowl, part of a coffee set made in England that I brought here with me. I guess that that makes it 'capitalist' in nature. When I first came to the dungeon I would smoke a pack of cigarettes a day; recently I have cut down to half a pack. With a wave of my hand, the matchstick with which I light my cigarette with goes out. This, I discovered some time ago, could be used for my entertainment. All I had to do was to plant the stick gently into the ashes of the ashtray and watch it burn from top to bottom, a tiny bright- red pillar of flame. The pillar would then turn gray, bend, break, and become a circle of ash among ashes. For several months I have been successfully directing the same drama: the ashtray resembles a circular stage on which the matchstick, like a legendary diva, sings her swan song before she slowly falls on the ground and dies.²

Similarly, Mu Xin did not write his despair, but he wrote his thinking about despair:

Life can drive the young man to hopelessness as it can drive the middle-aged to hopelessness, but who grieves more in their hopelessness? It would seem that the youth would grieve more, but it is the middle-aged person who really gives up and no longer dreams. Because hope is the premise for life, hope will endure in the

¹ Mu Xin, "Notes From Underground," in *An Empty Room*, tran. by Tongming Jun Liu, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

subconscious if it is destroyed in the conscious mind. In this way the life of humans can be distinguished from the life of animals. The hopelessness of animals is a biological and instinctive feeling of the end, but the hopelessness of humans is a final judgment based on reason and conscious thoughts. A young person retains more of the animalistic quality, while a person aware of aging is being transformed to a 'human being' in a purer sense; he is learning precisely those fatal points that render hope hopeless.¹

During the cultural catastrophe of his times, what Mu Xin wrote in his manuscript was neither his personal suffering, his state of hopelessness nor the specific absurdity and cruelty of the era. What he wrote was the metaphysical aesthetic world in his mind. He said: "I was rejected by the absurd world at the time, so I built a more reasonable but magic world in which I sincerely lived."² He didn't ask Muse to hear his private case in the name of literature, although he was trapped in a real 'hell on earth' at the time. He said: "I restrain my sadness so hard in my writing, but the clever readers will perceive how sad I was."³ And he did not want the manuscript to be identified with any kind of ideology. He said: "It is my wish that the manuscript, in its original form, would establish its independent existence in the nameless, constant realm of the conceptual. In the preface to his *Logic*, Hegel, almost casually, said something about 'the greatness of the direct perception of art'. Indeed. Art is direct perception. It can only be direct perception."⁴

Mu Xin got rid of his state of hopelessness after he migrated to New York. However there was one thing which has never been changed to him. That was his aesthetic principle he held in *Notes from Underground* that he conceals the author and de-emphasises certain temporal-spatial factors as possible as he can. In Mu Xin's later works written in America, his real life, whether his personal experience or his past, like the dungeon he ever mentioned in *Notes from Underground*, can only be the stage

¹ Mu Xin, "Notes From Underground," tran.by Tongming Jun Liu, p. 55.

² Tongming Jun Liu, "A Dialouge with Mu Xin," p. 141.

³ Li Zongtao, " Wo shi Shaoxing Xila ren. "

⁴ Tongming Jun Liu, "A Dialouge with Mu Xin," p. 140.

background rather than the plots of the play in the center of the stage. Therefore when Tongming Jun Liu made a detailed inquiry about the past of Mu Xin and expected the author to give a romantic and realistic narrative of the manuscript of *Notes from Underground* in an interview, Mu Xin refused to do that, but replied, “I naturally prefer to describe my attitude in terms of cinematic stills and fade-outs.”¹

As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, the individualistic, specific and historical experiences must be transformed to ahistorical, metaphysical and aesthetical experiences, then they would have deeper significance and be closer to the essence of things, which he called ‘the second level of significance of things’. In the interview with Tongming, he said: “The Athenian culture in its prime was polychromatic, yet the Parthenon in ruins that we revere today presents a monochromatic Greece. The frescoes of Dunhuang (敦煌) and the Stone Sculptures of Yungang (云冈) were created due to the rise of a religious faith. Today they are works of art, appreciated primarily from an aesthetic perspective. It follows that when the first level of significance associated with things fades away, their second level of significance may possibly emerge. The second level of significance is usually more profound and closer to the essence of things. I enjoy the second level of significance as I am accustomed to immersing myself in it.”² By his words we can perceive that the second level of significance doesn’t mean historical, moral nor religious significance but aesthetic one, which is ahistorical and unrestricted to any particular time and place. Therefore, to pursue and to perceive the second level of significance is to make an aesthetic judgement of the world, to meditate on the world with aesthetic thinking.

Mu Xin is the man who observes and perceives the world by aesthetic thinking. Therefore he didn’t focus on the first level of significance associated with things in his writing. He had never tried to reveal what he suffered and how his daily life is, nor he taken any ideological stand on some specific people and things when writing. Just as Wu Hong said: “To Mu Xin, his personal experiences are always secondary to his artistic experiences, and his artistic experiences must transcend particular historical or

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “A Dialouge with Mu Xin,” p. 142.

² Ibid., p. 140.

biographical situations. [.....] Any meaning of art and literature generated by specific historical conditions constitutes what Mu Xin calls ‘the first level of significance’, while transhistorical or suprahistorical experiences elevate art and literature to ‘the second level of significance.’¹ I would like to take “Tomorrow, I’ll Stroll No More”, one of Mu Xin’s proses, as an example to explain Mu Xin’s view of ‘the second level of significance’ below.

In the prose “ Tomorrow, I’ll Stroll No More”, Mu Xin didn’t depict the scenes he saw or things and people he encountered on the way of his daily stroll. What he wrote in this prose is the stream of thoughts. He employed the process of thinking to narrate the advance of his steps and slowly revealed what ‘I’ thought on the way to home after ‘I’ bought cigarettes in one afternoon:²

‘I’ see the windows and doors in the area of Jamaica, Queens, are shut so tight that not a sound from within can be heard. It seems that none of them are inhabited. But right now is afternoon and “only the glow of windows at night could indicate if one was occupied”, ‘I’ suppose. Yet, ‘I’ think, “if a reclusive elderly lady dies in one of the houses, her lights would remain on for she wouldn’t have been able to turn off the lights before she died, then her windows could continue to glow for weeks. It would then be the lights, not the dead lady, who suffer”. By the poor lights of the dead lady, ‘I’ think further, “it’s fortunate that objects have no senses or the world would be infinitely more chaotic and it’s fortunate that we live among objects with no senses so we can find places to hide, so we can easily move, rest, frown, smile at will, which is what we’ve been doing from one generation to the next into the present”.

‘I’ continue strolling and thinking and recall that ‘I’ didn’t take such a stroll yesterday, but walked in the heavy rain with my friend through the hazy maze of Manhattan. We talked and laughed as if New York were nonexistent, because at the time, ‘I’ felt that “New York in pouring rain gives one the illusion that there is no New York. When it pours in London, too, there is only rain and no London”. Thus ‘I’ went

¹ Wu Hong, “Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without a Past,” p. 42.

² Mu Xin, “Tomorrow, I’ll Stroll No More,” tran.by tongming Jun Liu, in *An Empty Room*, pp. 117-128.

to imagine that “two armies in ancient times engaged in battle on a plain, their flags fluttering and waving, soldiers on horseback falling to the earth when, all of a sudden, it starts to rain”. Thus, ‘I’ think, “the rain would become a primary force and the battle secondary”. Although the two of us talked and laughed in the pouring rain as if New York were nonexistent, ‘I’ spied some yellowish white flowers that resembled a kind of autumn chrysanthemum ‘I’ used to admire in China behind the iron-wrought fence of a bank. When ‘I’ think of the flowers in the pouring rain ‘I’ spied yesterday, my thinking turns again. ‘I’ have felt that ‘I’ become dumb and not being able to name certain plants in this foreign land. “I often don’t have the confidence to identify even common plants and trees such as the maple, azalea, iris, and narcissus, if the variety looks slightly strange to me. One day ‘I’ will return to China and will once again be able to call most of the plants by their Chinese names.” As the same way that ‘I’ felt dumb to name plants, Westerners feel dumb when they pronounce my Chinese name. “My own name isn’t difficult to pronounce, but Westerners have to practice it, spell it out again and again, often smiling as they do so.” ‘I’ mean that “courtesy, culture, and the arts make people in this world slightly shy, vaguely apologetic and mildly bashful. In times of peace, people from different national and ethnic backgrounds can still communicate, coexist, cooperate, [……] When a war breaks out, we don’t feel shy or apologetic or bashful toward each other, so of course war is terrible, so terrible indeed.”

If war is terrible, then what is opposed to war? Then the thoughts of ‘I’ turns to music. “Diametrically opposed to war is music. No matter how remote the country is that you travel to , when you hear music, particularly the music of your childhood, it’s as if you’re no longer lost, drifting on a boat during a stormy night, but suddenly floating into the harbor of your homeland, knowing that someone, regardless of wind or rain, is expecting you.” Then another idea crosses the mind of ‘I’ that is in relation to music, another riddle demands explanation. “When human beings cry, laugh, yawn, and sneeze, these actions are universally understood. So why are there so many complex, disparate language systems in this world? Animals don’t have such complex language systems and so we’ve assumed they’re dumb and inferior. Humans have

created so many language schools, yet they walk in and out of them silent and sad.” Why we humans are still silent and sad even if we created so many language schools? Then ‘I’ turn to the relationship between language and life? ‘I’ am lost in thought: “ What then does life mean? Life means that you often don’t know what to do. [……]”

When ‘I’ ask and answer by myself silently in my mind, ‘I’ find ‘I’ lose my way on my return home. ‘I’ reconfirm the direction of my destination and continue my stroll. At the time, a clear, passing breeze brings a strong scent of flowers, which make me lost in memories of the past: “ Humans, not unlike canines, store memories of the past through scents, and a scent, at this moment, is what swiftly takes me back to those springs of my college years, to the narrow street in that colonized city in China, where the flower shops, record stores, and restaurants of the French concession scrolled on and on, where residents and businessmen were primarily Jewish, where there was an artificial Parisian mood, where White Russian drunkards and beggars loitered, where bookshops stayed silent while record stores roared, where the sweet smell of simmering tomato sauce drifted out of restaurants, where brewing coffee gave away half its essence to passersby for free, where the dense aroma from flower shops flooded the street. [……] That was a three-year college, though I only attended for two-and-a-half years. Leaving the college meant leaving the street. We often leave without saying good-bye properly. Thirty years later colonization is now an outdated idea: the French, the Jews, and the White Russians are all gone; the street is gone; the college is gone. Once I asked a local about the college and she pointed to a huge gray warehouse used for cold storage and said that was where the college had been. How could it be? How could a street simply vanish? I explored five more streets and found no trace of what I could remember —— nothing left resembled the past. I stood there foolishly looking for nothing.” The memories of the past interrupts and ‘I’ return to this moment when ‘I’ think of the vanishing of the street and college. And ‘I’ think, “Now I must look quite foolish standing here waiting for another breeze to bring me the scent of flowers”. So ‘I’ start walking again.

‘I’ near the end of my stroll after ‘I’ walk through two blocks. And an idea occurs

to me, “people like us are no longer capable of surviving outdoors day and night. We work at a table, sleep in a bed. To reproduce, to love or die, we need a house. These houses in Jamaica somehow resemble those in fairy tales, they exist somewhere between the legends of the aristocrats and fantasies of the commoners, narrating a story of the petty bourgeois, [·····] every house has this air. [·····] As I observed each house one after another on my stroll, I see that a few of them intelligently apply the techniques of straight lines, oblique lines, and arches, but the surface textures and paint colors are wrong in most cases and will continue to be wrong, [·····] One experiences pleasure when one sees houses constructed the right way. Yet, on second thought, one worries if the residents within might be stupid or mean, just as one worries if an intelligent and beautiful family lives in a poorly constructed house. Such formalist concerns don’t apply to a minister walking out of a monastery.” From the formalist concerns ‘I’ turn my thoughts naturally to the architectural symbolism. And ‘I’ think, “Monuments are philistine, erected to illustrate the extremely poor memory of humans. Towers are best. [·····] A well-designed tower embodies an architectural theme. When a tower is first completed, people surround it, crane their necks to look at it, they talk about it, a tide of voices rise and fall and then fade, while the original meaning of the tower also fades through the years so that if a bell hanging in the corner of the tower should fall, no one would bother to fix it. From the flowers of spring through the fruits of autumn, the tower stands just as a tower, seemingly in vain but in fact essential and inevitable. [·····] Tower-ness is fated solitude that defies praise.”

Tower-ness is fated solitude that defies praise, while ‘I’ know the houses in Jamaica are not solitary and ‘I’ have come to know these houses. “The seasonal changes of scenery in Jamaica decide the routes of my strolls.” At the end of my stroll, it hits me again: “That objects can neither feel nor speak is fortunate — otherwise, I would be mocked by the houses and plants on my return. They would say, You could even lose your way when taking a stroll.” And ‘I’, the man who loses his way on the way return home, realize what life is. Therefore Mu Xin wrote at the end of the prose: “I realize what life is. Life is constantly not knowing what to do. Therefore I let things

happen to me —— a breeze that brings a street filled with the scent of flowers, a tower whose meaning is obscured although it's still watched from a distance, a battlefield soaked in the rain while I talk loudly with a friend under a small umbrella. When something loses its first level of meaning, a second level of meaning emerges. The second level of meaning is often more accessible and more suitable for me: a baby stroller leaning against a tombstone, a three-page will found under a freshly baked loaf of bread. I stroll during a pleasant afternoon and lose my way in the second level of meaning. I have no other real pleasure. Often, just as I'm about to feel a small degree of pleasure, I feel a deep sadness. What is sadness? If I knew what sadness was, I would no longer feel sad. What then does life mean? Life means certain things are not yet done and must be done, and other things are done but not done well. Tomorrow, I'll stroll no more.”

The stroll in Mu Xin's writing is in fact some kind of metaphysical wander in mind. He wrote the daily stroll in the way of stream of consciousness. In his prose, the daily, specific stroll becomes the background of writing, while the flow of consciousness, i.e. the metaphysical thinking, becomes the real focal point. Therefore what Mu Xin wrote is not so much a daily stroll as a walk of thinking. Therefore in the prose “Tomorrow, I'll Stroll No More”, which was called by Tongming Jun Liu ‘the prose of Rousseau's philosophical walk’, Mu Xin told the true meaning: “When something loses its first level of meaning, a second level of meaning emerges. The second level of meaning is often more accessible and more suitable for me.”

Guo Songfen believed that we can hardly read the detailed appearance of the daily life in Mu Xin's prose, where we can only find the vague, fragmentary traces of it. That is to say there is very thin autobiographical air in Mu Xin's writing, which makes some kind of life's fading appear in his prose. The fading of life contributes to the way of ‘withering’ and ‘withering’ become a kind of aesthetics of prose.¹ Guo said that Mu Xin's writing of prose is just like an eagle's skimming the sky, that is to say, he wouldn't keep describing or stressing the significance of specific things,

¹ Guo Songfen, “Xiju-bi'an-zhixing,” p. 15.

regardless how tragic and miserable the things are. Guo quoted English critic David Daiches' comment about James Joyce that the literary career of Joyce is to isolate himself from life gradually and then to reach a kind of comic state. To extend Daiches' words, Guo added, "a comedian is the man who gives up his position in this world, retreating to be a completely detached bystander." Guo believed that Mu Xin is that kind of bystander and he finds the comic state in Mu Xin's proses. ¹

As Guo said, Mu Xin was a bystander. He gave up his position in this world because he kept the first level of meaning no more, and what he focussed on was the second level of meaning. It is his pursuit of the second level of meaning that makes him be isolated from life gradually and retreat willingly to be a bystander of the world. It is the seeking of the second level of meaning that makes a kind of fading of life appear in Mu Xin's prose and makes his writing reach a comic state. In the poem "The Coming of wisdom with Time" by William Yeats, it is written: "Though leaves are many, the root is one/Through all the lying days of my youth/ I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun/ Now I may wither into the truth." ² Mu Xin withered into the aesthetics. This kind of aesthetics of 'withering' is not only the characteristic of Mu Xin's prose, but also the style of his literature.

Because he held the aesthetics of 'withering', therefore when he commented on Rimbaud's poetry anthology *A Season in Hell*, he said: "art has never heard a too private case." And when he spoke of the memoirs written hurriedly by Mao Dun in his later life, he said: "literature is not the way of talking private domestic trivia after all, no matter how exhaustively you talk, it (memoirs) is only your own domestic trivia."³

In an interview, Tongming Jun Liu once asked Mu Xin, "But some day you will be writing your memoirs. What would you do then?" Mu Xin answered: "I am also waiting for that day. I have to wait till I can treat myself as the other, till the self is dispersed. That will be joyful."⁴ In fact, Mu Xin had ever planned to write a

¹ Guo Songfen, "Xiju-bi'an-zhixing," p. 7.

² William Butler Yeats, "The Coming Of Wisdom With Time."

³ Mu Xin, "Taxia dushuchu," pp.7-20

⁴ Tongming Jun Liu, "A Dialouge with Mu Xin," p. 142.

biographical novel named *Memoirs of China* (Ciguo huiyilu 瓷国回忆录),¹ however he had been holding off this plan in his lifetime and left no memoirs eventually.

3.1.2 'I' and the 'Other'

When life and the self retreat to be background in Mu Xin's works, his interest in the 'other' is always the focus of his writing. He said: "What keeps me still interested is, and will always be, the 'other'. The unparalleled Dostoevsky was in the temperament of tirelessly writing about 'others'."² If the fading of life revealed in Mu Xin's works is one side of his aesthetic principle, then the interest in the 'other' is the other side. The fading of life is for the dispersal of the self. Till the self dispersed, the author can treat himself as the other and observe himself and the world through the eyes of others. In the process of such kind of dispersal and observing, the author could become 'I' in the works. Then the author could be both the artistic subject and object simultaneously. The subject is the author himself who watches himself and the world through the eyes of others', while the object is the 'I' in his works and the world the 'I' sees. Therefore when Tongming Jun Liu asked Mu Xin how to consider and handle such subjects as 'remembrances of things past', he answered: "What interests me is not 'things past' but how to achieve simultaneously two I's through remembrance: one is long dead, the other is still living. [.....] My 'I' in the present looks at the 'I' in the past with the same kind of respect. However, the present 'I' often instills into the past 'I' certain 'possibilities'; in other words, I let him do, within the realm of fiction, certain things I wanted to do then but did not or could not do. So there is a critic who pointed out the the formula of the writing of mine: subject (subject +object)."³

The critic who pointed out the formula is Guo Songfen. He gave an elaboration on this formula in the article "Comedy-The Further Shore- Intellectuality". He believed that there had been very strong subjective consciousness in the

¹ Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 36.

² Tongming Jun Liu, "A Dialouge with Mu Xin," p. 142.

³ Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," pp. 66-67.

intellectualism writing since the 19th century. This kind of subjective consciousness revealed in those works of writing of intellectualism meant that the subject watches the object, namely: I watch my life, my past, my childhood, or the stories of others. I was the subject and what I watch is the object. And Guo Songfen thought Mu Xin's writing was so different. In Mu Xin's writing, there is a second subject before the first subject who watches the object, namely: subject (subject + object). It is the second subject who watches what the first subject watches, the object, and the first subject itself. Therefore when Mu Xin was watching his own past, it is the second subject of him who was watching Mu Xin and what Mu Xin was watching. Guo considered that it is the essence of Mu Xin's writing.¹ According to Guo's formula, the first subject retreats to be an object, or the 'other' in the eyes of the second subject when the second subject watches the world. And when the first subject retreats to be the object or the 'other', the self then completes the artistic conversion. The process of this conversion is the process that Mu Xin reaches the aesthetic world from the real world through the 'other', and the process of the dispersal of the temporal-spatial factors, i.e. the first level of significance. Only when the first level of significance gradually disperses, the second level of significance would appear slowly. Therefore Mu Xin's interest in the 'other' is also as a result of his seeking the second level of significance.

In his literary lectures, Mu Xin ever said: "I think the greatness of *Dream of Red Mansions* lies in that it is fortunately not the autobiography of Cao Xueqin. Of course, it has autobiographical factors, but it gets rid of the limitation of autobiography. An artist has a special talent, i.e. the talent of rumination of mind and spirituality. An artist can feel impression of the past through his memories. The artist can obtain infinite inspiration from those feelings beyond space and time. *Dream of Red Mansions* was written in such way."² The talent of rumination of wisdom and spirituality mentioned by Mu Xin, I think, is the process of artistic conversion of the self. Only through this process, an autobiographical novel would get rid of the limitation of autobiography. This is the reason why Mu Xin had been holding off his

¹ Guo Songfen, "Xiju-bi'an-zhixing," p. 13.

² Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, pp. 501-502.

plan to write his own memoirs in his late life. I believe that he could not treat himself as the other till he died. Thus he wouldn't like to write a kind of memoirs, in which the first level of significance has not yet dispersed.

The 'other' Mu Xin interested in appears as different 'I' in his works. I would like to take *An Empty Room*, his first collection of stories in English version, for example. In this collection, thirteen pieces were specifically chosen by Mu Xin from of his books: *Collected Sanwen: Volume 1*, *Windsor Cemetery*, and *Parron*. Each 'I' in those thirteen pieces, just like what Tongming said, embodies a different race, gender, history.¹ Mu Xin revealed others and his thoughts about others through those different 'I's. As for Mu Xin, the 'other' refers not only to another person but also an other time-space, an other reality, an other experience."²

For example, the 'I' in the fiction titled "The Moment When Childhood Vanished" is a boy under ten years old in 1930s' China who followed his mother and the whole retinue of his paternal and maternal aunts to Mount Mo-An (莫安山) for a Buddhist service. As 'I' didn't like Buddhist meals, the elderly master gave me a small bowl fired in a famous kiln as a gift. The bowl had a delicate cobalt-blue glaze. Any food served in it somehow became more appetizing. In a word, the bowl was my very cherished possession. However 'I' lost the bowl on our return home. 'I' told my mother what happened. "Such things won't be rare occurrences in the future", my mother replied very softly. But at that time 'I' didn't know what she meant. But at the moment when 'I' look back now, 'I' seem to understand her word. Thus Mu Xin wrote at the end of the story, "Looking back, I find my mother's words an ominous prophecy. Such things are indeed no rare occurrences in my life. Many things and people, far more precious than that bowl, have been lost. Some broken. At that moment, with the floating bowl, only my childhood vanished."

In the fiction "Fong Fong No.4", 'I' am a piano teacher in mainland China who experienced the Cultural Revolution in my prime. 'I' had a relationship with my student Fong Fong. In this relationship, 'I' always felt that Fong Fong was

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, "Translator's Afterword", in *An Empty Room*, pp. 147-148.

² *Ibid.*, p. 147-148.

unpredictable and this relationship between us had twisted and turned along with the change of Fong Fong's attitude to me. Before, during and after the Cultural Revolution, Fong Fong had changed her attitude to me for four times and her four kinds of attitude let me make a judgement on her again and again. My judgement and her unpredictable heart let readers think about the depth of humanity in a political catastrophe.

The story in "Quite Afternoon Tea" happened in England. 'I' am Alice, a young person moving to live with my aunt, the sister of my father. Although 'I' will inherit their house in the future, my present role is that of her servant and companion. After 'I' moved in, 'I' was in a constant state of anxiety, because of the difference between the world of the young and that of the old. To prepare an occasional afternoon tea and to enjoy it with my aunt and uncle is one of my duties in this family. And every time the afternoon tea ends in the unpleasant silence after the dialogue between my aunt and uncle goes to her suspicion of him, which puzzled her for thirty years. Every time 'I' have to bear this unpleasant oppressive atmosphere, meanwhile 'I', as a bystander, know that the suspicion between the elderly couple is just a misunderstanding. Then some kind of absurdity is revealed through the eyes of mine (Alice's).

In the fiction "The Windsor Cemetery Diary", 'I' am a stroller who frequently takes leisurely walks through a cemetery located in New York for several years. I keep correspondence with my girlfriend Sandra, who is a journalist living in Geneva. We talk about the jewellery of Duchess of Windsor, the love's promise between the Dutch and Duchess, which will be auctioned soon. The auction makes the priceless love will be given a price. Therefore 'I' begin to think about what love is in this world where the word 'love' became so overused in speeches and writing that it became stale, awkward, and clumsy. At the same time 'I' keep correspondence with Sandra, I keep a kind of 'dialogue' with the 'other' 'I' never met through a coin. Once 'I' found a penny on the platform of a tombstone when 'I' took a stroll through the cemetery. 'I' picked up the coin and placed it back down, Lincoln's portrait faced up. The next time 'I' walked through the cemetery, 'I' found that the coin placed on the platform of the tombstone has been flipped over. 'I' thought that someone else has seen this penny,

picked it up, and replaced it. Then 'I' flipped the coin back to the side of Lincoln's portrait. Several days later 'I' return to the cemetery and found the side of Memorial of that coin on platform facing dim twilight. I flipped it back again. After turning the coin several times, the 'dialogue' between 'I' and someone else I never met last continuously and get its meaning, which is, in the opinion of 'I', the same essence of vow of love.

Although Mu Xin often wrote in the first person. Of course, those 'I's in his works are not Mu Xin himself, but various the 'other' as the split or transmuted self. Mu Xin said: "I feel that it would be tedious for a person to have only one life. It would be much better to have two or three lives going on simultaneously, hence my desire to split or transmute the self by means of fiction. The first-person narrator is a preference of mine since in my fictional works I can, by such means, arbitrate and master those I's. The bags are fake but those things inside the bags are real. Some of my readers and editors believe that those fictional I's are the author's own self; they have mistaken the bags for the real thing. When the bags are real, things inside the bags could then become fake."¹

When the bags are fake, the author is watching his own self and the world through others' eyes by means of aesthetic thinking and the fiction of literature, then he would achieve his desire to split or transmute the self. Therefore the fake bags is the process of artistic conversion, and the link between things inside the bags and the aesthetic reality. The aesthetic reality is artistic not historical. It is the second level of significance. But when the bags are real, the author watches the world by means of aesthetic thinking no more, he is lying in the real world, trapped in the first level of significance, hence the things inside the bags would certainly lose their aesthetic reality and become some kind of fake art. Tongming Jun Liu pointed out, "the reality of literature doesn't mean whether the figures or things narrated in literary works really exist or not; the reality of literature lies in if its narrative structure could give some kind of aesthetic experience of touching, shocking or inspiring to its readers,

¹ Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," p. 61.

and if it can reveal historical or philosophical insights.”¹ Aristotle ever said, what plays imitate would not necessarily be the things that have happened, but the things that may happen. And Oscar Wilde said that life imitates art. In a word, artists create reality not describe, reflect reality. Through their curiosities about the ‘other’ and humanity and through their perception of life, they use their imagination to restructure the world they perceive in their works. In the reality created by artists, or in the other word, in the aesthetic reality, the author conceals himself behind the different ‘I’s, the various the ‘other’ to reveal the second level of significance, to utter his soul. Therefore Mu Xin said that art is one’s privacy revealed without qualms.² At the end of “The Windsor Cemetery Diary”, Mu Xin wrote: “*E pluribus unum*”. Indeed, as far as Mu Xin’s concerned, the self out of split or transmuted ones. The different ‘I’s in his works reveal the soul who signs ‘Mu Xin’ on the manuscripts. When he wrote the world and the numerous others, his soul and the second level of significance he seeks were seen by the world and the numerous others.

When Tongming Jun Liu asked Mu Xin how to consider the two opposing rules of a paradox of the fiction and truthfulness of literature, he replied: “Did you ever find that there is room between the two opposing rules of a paradox? That space between two almost opposite rules is the ground where I play and write.”³ The space between two almost opposite rules is the Mu Xin’s aesthetic principle, the second level of significance he focussed on. The process of waiting for the fading of the first level of significance and finding the second level of significance is the process of artistic conversion between self and others, between subject and object, the process to conceal artists but reveal art, and the process to retreat to be a bystander of times and the world.

3.2 The Style of Mu Xin

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 27.

² Mu Xin, “Yiyin yizhuo,” p. 144.

³ Mu Xin, “Zhongxia kaixuan,” p. 66.

In the prose “The Memorial of Lu Xun” (Lu Xun ji 鲁迅祭), Mu Xin wrote, “In my heart, Lu Xun is an excellent stylist. A writer is not always a stylist. While I can recognize Lu Xun’s works when I read just two sentences. In Europe, especially in France, ‘stylist’ is the most respectable title for a writer. Andrea Gide is a stylist, while Romain Roland is not.”¹ Mu Xin respected stylists seriously, and he himself is as well an excellent stylist.

Experiencing a long evolution since ancient times, whether in the Western world or in the Oriental world, there are generally these kinds of literary genres: poetry, fiction, prose, essay, play, and critique. And there are a variety of types of each literary genre. A stylist, like a bold experimenter, is the one who enriches the original literary genres with his personal talent and temperament, to provide them with more possibilities, just as Gide to prose-poetry; or the one who blurs the original boundaries between literary genres, just as Roland Barthes mentioned in his autobiography, “Let the essay avow itself almost a novel”²; or the one who crosses the boundaries between literary genres to practise and sharpen a new literary style of his own for years, just as Mu Xin’s cross-genre writing. Li Zongtao commented on Mu Xin’s cross-genre writing, “more cutting surfaces the diamond has, more dazzling it is. The writing of Mu Xin is like diamond that each literary genre is its cutting surface.”³

Mu Xin is versed in various literary genres, such as poetry, prose, fiction, critique, proverb and so on. He thought that poetry is sweet, prose is acid, fiction is bitter and critique is spicy, and all that he had tried.⁴ However he never confined himself in a single literary genre, but tried different genres and employed different methods to write. Between different genres, between different types of the same genre, between the classical and the modern of literary form and language, he never stuck to one pattern, but wrote freely. He got and perfected his own literary style, meanwhile

¹ Mu Xin, “Lu Xun ji 鲁迅祭,” in *Nanfang zhoumo* 南方周末, 14th December, 2006.

² Susan Sontag, “Writing itself: On Roland Barthes,” in *Where the Stress Falls: essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), p. 70.

³ Li Zongtao, “Wentijia Mu Xin,” p. 125.

⁴ Mu Xin, “Haixia chuansheng,” p.25.

enriching literary expression. Although Mu Xin had tried the sweetness, acidity, bitterness and spice of literature, he preferred saltiness of literature. He said: “ I prefer saltiness, mixing the other flavours, to make my proses, namely, I mix poetry, fiction and critique to write prose.”¹ He said: “ Jesus said, ‘ if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?’ The saltiness of my prose is such kind of saltiness.”² Such kind of saltiness is the core of the style of Mu Xin. Then, what does such saltiness mean? I would like to expound on it in this part.

3.2.1 Cross-genre Writing

3.2.1.1 poetry

Mu Xin was good at both classical Chinese poetry and new-style vernacular poetry. Among the six published anthologies of poetry, *Tres cepas* (Xibanya sankeshu), *The Ever Snowing Flakes of My Desire* (Wo fenfen de qingyu), *Parron* (Balong), *Larks Sing All Day* (Yunque jiao le yizhengtian 云雀叫了一整天), *Letters in the Name of Solomon: The Unexpected But Sensible History of An Individual's Growth* (Wei Suoluomen Shu: buqiran er ran de geren chengzhangshi 伪所罗门书: 不期然而然的个人成长史) are the anthologies of new-style vernacular poetry; and *The Correspondence* (Hui wu zhong), later named “ Variations on Book of Songs” (Shijing Yan 诗经演), is the collection of poems written in the style and language of *Book of Songs*.

Mu Xin's new-style vernacular poetry involves a variety of subjects, such as love, desire, philosophical ideas, impression of traveling, scene of life, and so on. As well, the written form of his vernacular poetry is not confined. Among his vernacular poems, some of them has only one line, such as the poem “I”, which reads, “ I am the

¹ Mu Xin, “ Haixia chuansheng,” p.25.

² Ibid.

man who is snowing flakes in the dark (我是一个在黑暗中大雪纷飞的人).”¹ Some of them employ the literary device of dairy but are written in form of poetry, such as the long-form poem “Correspondence in New York”(Wudao wanyou 五岛晚邮). In this poem, almost all the first lines of the verses are dates. The whole poem proceeds with the change of the date. Some of them are the variation on others’ literary works. For example, the poem “Ah, Mischa” (阿, 米沙) is based on a letter of Dostoevsky written in Siberia.²

The most special category of poems among his vernacular poetry are the ‘conceptual works’ that consist of the collage or juxtaposition of quoted passages from others’ works. The whole book *Letters in the Name of Solomon: The Unexpected But Sensible History of An Individual’s Growth* is that kind of conceptual literary work. In the preface of the book, Mu Xin said, “It may be assumed that the surviving proverbs and songs attributed to Solomon are all under the guise of his name. [……] If I can extract others’ text and purify them poetically (shi cui zhi 诗粹之) to form verses, [……] then how happy I will be.”³ Liao Weitang 廖伟棠, a young contemporary poet living in Hong Kong, commented on the book, “the whole book is just like a conceptual work of installation art. The broad half-century history of Mu Xin’s growth, combined with a kind of Walter Benjamin’s taste for the quoted passages, makes him extract various moments from others’ history of growth and purify them poetically to form this amazing book.”⁴ Among Mu Xin’s anthology of poetry, this book is his favourite one. It is said that he always carried the manuscript of the book with him when he traveled.

If *Letters in the Name of Solomon* is Mu Xin’s favourite anthology of vernacular poetry, then his most important but obscure book that he spent 50 years to fulfil is *Variations on Book of Songs*, the collection of three-hundred poems written in

¹ Mu Xin, “Wo 我,” in *Yunque jiao le yizhengtian* 云雀叫了一整天 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2008), p. 150.

² Mu Xin, “Ah, Mischa 阿, 米沙,” in *Xibanya sankeshu*, p. 59.

³ Mu Xin, Preface of *Wei Suoluomen shu* 伪所罗门书(Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009).

⁴ Liao Weitang 廖伟棠, “Yi ge shaonian xugou de shiren 一个少年虚构的诗人,” in *Shidai zhoubao* 时代周报 175 (2012).

the style and language of *Book of Songs*. In those three-hundred poems, he employed the style and language of *Book of Songs* to write the perceptions, feelings and ideas of modern people, with each poem in fourteen lines. He was fond of the style of *Book of Songs* since he was a child. He thought that *Book of Songs* is the best among ancient Chinese poetry. He said: “ They are truly the authentic ancient poems with primitive simplicity and nature. [……] Qu Yuan’s 屈原 (340 BC-278 BC) poetry *Departing in Sorrow* (离骚), and many poems of Tao Qian can be traced back to *Book of Songs*. [……] When I was a child, every time my tutor taught me *Book of Songs*, I felt so happy. Just at that time, I had already had an idea that the style of *Book of Songs* is the one I would like to pursue.¹ His pursuit of the style of *Book of Songs* and his desire to rewrite *Book of Songs* lasted for more than 50 years. He said: “ My desire to rewrite *Book of Songs* in form of sonnet lasts for more than 50 years. But I didn’t dare to write it, because the language of *Book of Songs* is a kind of dead language. But I suddenly wrote a poem in that way one day, then I began to write one poem by one poem like mad. I wrote a total of three hundred poems within two months.”²

The original name of *Variations on Book of Songs* is ‘The Correspondence’ (Hui wu zhong) when it was published for the first time in Taiwan in 1990s. The word ‘hui’ (会) means perceiving, or understanding. The word ‘wu’ means mine. The word ‘zhong’(中) means innermost words. Mu Xin came up with such name of the anthology, I think, because his composing of those three-hundred poems is not just a kind of rewriting, translation, imitation or plagiarism. He indeed wrote new things in those poems, in which he put the ideas, feelings, sentiments of modern people. The whole anthology in fact contained Mu Xin’s own innermost code.³ For example, in the book’s postscript written by Li Chunyang, she took the poem “Swish” (Susu 肃肃) as an example to elaborate Mu Xin’s innermost code, i.e. the modernity contained in the book. This poem is based on the poem “The Plumes of Wild Geese”(Baoyu 鸨羽)

¹ Li Zongtao, “ Wentijia Mu Xin,” p. 133.

² Zengjin, “ Haiwai zuojia Mu Xin dujia zhuanfang: wo bushi shenme guoxue dashi.”

³ Li Zongtao, “ Wentijia Mu xin,” p. 133.

in the grouping “Odes of Tang” (唐风) of *Books of Songs*. The following verse in the original poem presents a peasant’s complain about the heaviness of the king’s affair:

The king's affairs never cease, 王事靡盬
How can we plant our millet with care? 不能蓺稷黍

Because of the king’s affair, they have no time to plant and cultivate their millet. While in Mu Xin’s version, the meaning is totally changed. The verse in Mu Xin’s version as follows:

The political repression never ceases, 世事靡盬
I cannot pursue and perfect my art. 艺不能极

In the first line, Mu Xin replaced the word ‘king’s affairs’ (王事) with the word ‘affairs in the world’ (世事). Li Chunyang considered that the word ‘shishi’ (世事) alludes to political repression. In Mu Xin’s version, the last line was totally rewritten. Although the pronunciation of character ‘蓺’(yi, to plant) is same as that of the character ‘艺’(yi, art), the meaning of the two lines are rather different. Li Chunyang pointed out that Mu Xin’s rewrite makes the connotation of the verse turn to the values of a modern artist. Comparison with the peasant’s worry about their millet, the artist’s helplessness and regret is a kind of profounder sorrow.

As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, his rewrite is in honour of *Book of Songs*. He said: “Don’t I know that *Book of Songs* is classic that shouldn’t be changed? Did I harm any one word of *Book of Songs* when I wrote my book *The Correspondence*? I didn’t. What I did is variation and imitation. There were *Variations on a Theme by Joseph Haydn* and *Variations on a Theme by Niccolò Paganini* in music; and there were imitations of Huang Gongwang 黄公望 (1269-1354), or drawing after Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-1374) in painting. And Picasso ever repainted Velazquez’s famous painting *The Maids of Honor* into a modern style. The language of *The*

Correspondence is classical, while the perception contained in it is modern.”¹ These three-hundred poems contain the modern ideas that is just the internal words Mu Xin wanted readers to know. And the variation on the classical themes of *Book of Songs*, I think, is the reason that Mu Xin replaced the anthology’s name ‘Hui wu zhong’ (The Correspondence) with the name ‘Shijing yan’ (Variations on Book of Songs). *Book of Songs* is classical, the collection of poems by ancient generations, while *Variations on Book of Songs* presents private connotation full of modernity within the classical form. It is an perfect integration of individualism and classicism.

3.2.1.2 Haiku

Mu Xin was versed in writing haiku. He wrote a rather large quantity of haikus. “Mu Xin has already written more than nine-thousand pieces of haiku up to the present, which should be considered as a miracle in the history of haiku.”² Part of Mu Xin’s works of haiku are included in two of his published anthologies *Reflections in Jamaica* (Qiongmeika suixianglu 琼美卡随想录) and *Traveling in Simple Shoes* (Sulü zhi wang 素履之往). But his anthology of haiku wasn’t published in his lifetime, although he had already come up with a name ‘Snowing Words’ (Xue ju 雪句) for the unpublished anthology in 1990s.³ After he died in 2011, the Guangxi Normal University Press began to compile Mu Xin’s unpublished manuscripts. It is said that the publication of his anthology of haiku is in preparation.

Mu Xin’s works of haiku were not confined to the subject of seasonal scenes and he didn’t employ seasonal reference as well as punctuation in his haiku. As he said, “traditional haiku consist of 17 morae, in three phrases of 5, 7 and 5 morae respectively. It is generally acknowledged that haiku is a kind of short-form poetry to describe seasonal scenes. [……] When I write haiku, I only abide by the rule that I

¹ Li Zongtao, “Wo shi Shaoxing Xila ren.”

² Zhao Kun 赵琨, “Anmi de yijing 安谧的一惊,” in *Du Mu Xin*, p. 196.

³ Liu Ruilin 刘瑞林, ed., “Mu Xin Xiansheng Wuzhen zhuisihu 木心先生乌镇追思会”, in *Wengu: Mu Xin ji'nian zhuanhao*, pp. 13-51.

write it within three phrases. But my works of haiku refer to various subjects. They might be considered as ‘the unconventionality of haiku’.¹ As far as Mu Xin’s writing of haiku is concerned, haiku, as an artistic genre, is sometimes like photography to record split-second impression of scene, sometimes like quick sketch to present the subtle details of people’s demeanour, sometimes like proverb and aphorism to reflect on philosophy, life and art.

The category of Mu Xin’s haiku to describe split-second impression of scene and people presents subtle poetic imagery with strong painterly nature, i.e the sense of picture. Some of them are like Chinese ink and wash painting, full of a strain of simplicity and elegance that normally contained in classical haiku, such as the following two pieces of haiku :

Brand-new reeds on the waterside frogs just start singing that kind of morning
水边新簇小芦苇 青蛙刚开始叫 那种早晨

Village chickens crowing at noon the withered pistacia chinensis piled up at the
chalk wall three peach trees in full blossom
村鸡午啼 白粉墙下堆着枯楷 三树桃花盛开

Some of them are like oil-painting with rich colours, such as the haiku below:

The African youngster dressed in red trousers and a green shirt leans against the
yellow wall smiling at me with his white teeth exposed
红裤绿衫的非洲少年倚在黄墙前露着白牙齿向我笑

Some of them are like Netherlandish genre paintings, lively like a banter, such as the following one:

The closed market fish scales lying on the ground tomatoes rather tired

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.733.

落市的菜场 鱼鳞在地 番茄十分疲倦

Some of them are like quick sketch of people, drawing swiftly and precisely, for example:

This guy comes over like Wagner

这家伙 华格纳似的走过来

And some of them are like cutting of film or slow motion that leaves enough imagination space for readers, for instance:

Applying oils over the hinge of the door a silent night the mother lying asleep
next door

摸着门铰链涂了点油 夜寂寂 母亲睡在隔壁

Bees hitting the glass window reading the history of Rome in the library in a
spring afternoon

蜜蜂撞玻璃 读罗马史 春日午后图书馆

The category of Mu Xin's proverb-haiku is a kind of enrichment and innovation to the form of artistic expression of haiku. He conveyed his reflections on philosophy, art, life and history in the form of haiku so that haiku become a kind of short-form spiritual soliloquy in his writing, and become full of both classical aesthetic significance and modern metaphysical significance. Now I would like to give several examples below:

The stream flowing over therefore flowing away

流过来的溪水 因而流过去了

Autumn winds are all from last year's autumn

秋天的风都是从往年的秋天出来的

Thoughts will be frozen many of philosophical works are chilblains

思想会冻 好多哲学著作是冻疮

The tree of life is gradually grizzled philosophy is sequentially green

生命树渐渐灰色 哲学次第绿了

Artists complain to God by art

艺术家是用艺术来埋怨上帝

Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 28 the flavour of philosophy

贝多芬钢琴奏鸣曲第廿八号 哲学的滋味

Art presents divinity through demonic spirit

艺术以魔性呈现神性

Religion is cloud while art is red cloud

宗教是云 艺术是霞

What can be heard is rhetoric what cannot be heard is poetry

听得见的是修辞 听不见的是诗

If literature is compared to medicine it can only be taken but cannot be applied

如将文学比作药 只供内服 不可外敷

There is nothing new in history there is also nothing plagiarized in history

历史无新事 历史也不抄袭

As to exquisiteness fate is most exquisite

论精致 命运最精致

What I can do is merely going back to nature through a long trek

能做的事就只是长途跋涉地返璞归真

Mu Xin's works of haikus extend the connotation of the haiku as a kind of literary genre. In Mu Xin's writing, haiku become a kind of artistic expression with both sense of beauty (poetry) and intellect (philosophy), an integration of poetry and philosophy.

3.2.1.3 Fiction

Mu Xin's works of fiction are short stories, which he himself called as 'narrative poetry', just like ballade in music.¹ When Tongming asked Mu Xin to delineate the differences between prose and fiction, Mu Xin replied, "Prose is like a window; fiction is like a door. But it is not uncommon that he who should come in through the door jumps in through the window."² Mu Xin's reply is similar to Roland Barthes' words, "Let prose confess that it is similar to fiction". There are a variety of types of Mu Xin's works of short story, among which, I think, there are three main types of fiction, in terms of subject, writing method, and literary language. The first type is the fiction of remembrances of things past, such as "Shroud" (Shouyi 寿衣), "The Moment When Childhood Vanished" (Tongnian suizhi'erqu 童年随之而去), "Xia Mingzhu: A Bright Pearl" (Xia Mingzhu 夏明珠).

The second type is meta-fiction, such as "An Empty Room" (空房). In the fiction, 'I' found an empty room in an abandoned Buddhist temple during the war, where there were lots of pieces of paper scattering on the ground. 'I' read them and knew

¹ Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," p. 68.

² Ibid., p. 67.

they were love letters between Liang (良) and Mei (梅). Facing those letters, ‘I’ was lost in thought. Why were those letters here? And why were all those letters only with dates recorded down but without any particular year? According to those letters, I listed and analyzed seven doubts, each of which was related to the complex relationship between imagination, history and humanity. ‘I’ tried to get the truth of the story of Liang and Mei and avoided any too romantic imagination of the story as much as possible. At last, ‘I’ didn’t get an undoubted ending of the story of Liang and Mei. So the fiction ends up with the end of the analysis of ‘I’. Tongming Jun Liu considered that if Flaubert read this fiction, he would get excited. Because just as he commented, “ what the list of doubts in the fiction denied is not writing itself, but the plots of popular fictions. [……] And the purpose of Flaubert to create Madame Bovary is to analyze the misunderstanding of Romanism.”¹

The third type is fictions with features, language, or subjects of Chinese ancient novel, such as “The Maternal Manners in Song Dynasty” (Da Song muyi 大宋母仪), “Wugengzhuan Song” (Wugengzhuan qu 五更转曲), “The Rations for Seven Days” (Qiri zhi liang 七日之粮). Mu Xin integrated old vernacular Chinese language with modern Chinese language to write this type of fictions. In those fictions, he employed the fictional plots as the arrow and treated the views on old stories in history as the center of a target, his writing was beyond the historical textual research and with reason. The style of those fictions is rather similar to that of *Old Tales Retold* (Gushi xinbian 故事新编) by Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936).

Although the subjects of this type of fictions are almost from Chinese ancient tales, novels, or historical records, the author’s perspective of narrative is modern. I’d like to take the fiction “The Maternal Manners in Song Dynasty” as an example. This fiction is based on a novella (huaben 话本) included in *Slapping the Table in Amazement* (Chuke pai’an jingqi 初刻拍案惊奇), a collection of vernacular short stories, written by Ling Mengchu 凌濛初 (1580-1644).² In the original story, the

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “ Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 31.

² The story is in the seventeenth volume of *Slapping the Table in Amazement*.

mother, who lived in Song dynasty, kept committing adultery with a Taoist priest just after her husband died. With her son's gradual growth, the relationship between them was hampered. Therefore she and her adulterer framed her son in order to make him be condemned to death. However the judge was so clever that he found out the truth of the case. Finally, the son was released and got an official position through the judge's recommendation, while the mother and the Taoist priest were severely punished and died soon after. The happy ending of the story aims to tell readers an old Chinese proverb, "Good will be rewarded with good, and evil with evil." But, in Mu Xin's fiction, the original story hasn't ended yet. After the mother died, the son got married and left hometown for his new official position. The same sin again came to his family. His wife also kept committing adultery with a young Taoist priest, who was the disciple of the dead Taoist priest. His wife, together with the young Taoist priest, murdered him and their only son. However his wife was eventually abandoned by the young Taoist priest and committed suicide.

Mu Xin's version of the story doesn't focus on the moral idea that good and evil must at last have their reward, as the original story did. However it presents the recurrence of the dark side of human nature in the form of tragedy, meanwhile it reveals Mu Xin's reflections on history and fate — there is nothing new in history, while there is nothing plagiarized in history. In the postscript of this fiction, Mu Xin wrote, "The modernity of 'The Maternal Manners in Song Dynasty' is that the same sin occurred twice in the same family. Then trials and retribution have no effect of punishment and exhortation. Then such symbolic significance can be extended to the whole history of human civilization that the mistakes made by generations and generations are the ones their elder generations had made. Evil is going on, and there is nothing new under the sun."¹ Therefore the fiction has both the significance of ancient Greek tragedy and the perspective of modern fiction. From my point of view, the reason why Mu Xin wrote fictions with subjects of ancient China is as what Mu

¹ Mu Xin, "Da Song muyi 大宋母仪," in *Aimosheng jia de e'ke* 爱默生家的恶客 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009), p. 162.

Xin said, “there is nothing more than such people and such things in the world. Once ‘people’ and ‘things’ are written in the literature, even they are so current, they will become age-old, while when the age-old is read by the current, even they are so age-old, they will look current.”¹ Then what Mu Xin said is similar to Benedetto Croce, “all history is contemporary history”.

Except for the three types of fictions above, there are still works of fiction that cannot be classified. For example, the two fictions “The Windsor Cemetery Dairy” and “Quiet Afternoon Tea” I mentioned before. In the former fiction, Mu Xin use the form of diary, and the method of stream of consciousness. In the latter one, the author employed the writing skills of Western modern fiction, such as irony, arrangement of ideas, transition and so on. The fiction “The Magic Wheel” (Mo lun 魔轮), in which Mu Xin made up of the dialogue about beauty and wisdom between Socrates and a famous prostitute. This fiction is regarded as an aesthetic discourse in style of fiction.² Another fiction “SOS”, exploring into the humanity when facing death and life, is considered to contain the rhythm of Shakespeare’s trochaic tetrameter.³

3.2.1.4 Prose

As far as writing method and content are concerned, Mu Xin’s prose can generally be sorted into the following types: the first type is stroll-philosophy prose (散步哲学式散文) written with the method of stream of consciousness, such as “Tomorrow, I’ll Stroll No More”, “The Reflection of Columbia University”. In Susan Sontag’s comment on Roland Barthes, she wrote, “For the purpose of achieving an ideal digressiveness and an ideal intensity, two strategies have been widely adopted. One is to abolish some or all of the conventional demarcations or separations of discourse, such as chapters, paragraphing, even punctuation, whatever is regarded as impending

¹ Mu Xin, “Da Song muyi,” p. 162.

² Tongming Jun Liu, “Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 25.

³ Mu Xin, “Chichi gaobai,” p. 96.

formally the continuous production of (the writer's) voice.”¹ This has in common with Mu Xin's prose-writing by means of stream of consciousness. In the two proses I mentioned above, Mu Xin cancelled the paragraphs and only use commas, occasionally employing ellipses and dashes, to join the sentences together in the full text, to present the flow of thinking, and to indicate the move of the walker.

The second type is critique-prose in the form of letter, presenting the reflections and views on the cases of literature, art and philosophy in history, such as “Send to White Field” (Ji baise pingyuan 寄白色平原), “The Three Letters in late Summer” (Xia lan sanjian 夏阑三简). The third type is artistic-critique prose, such as “The Sinking of the Dunker Boat”, “On Kitsch”. The fourth type is prose in the form of proverb, quotation, and dialogue. This kind of prose is usually presented as the accumulation of fragments, exploring into philosophy, life and art. The two anthologies *Traveling in Simple Shoes* and *Reflections in Jamaica* contain many such prose. The fifth type is conceptual works. For example, the prose “The Two Sonatas” is composed according to the musical structure. As another example, Mu Xin used the concept of modern art, such as juxtaposition, collage and so on, in his writing that he extract paragraphs from the works of others to compose his own after selecting and rearranging. “Memo of France”(Falanxi beiwanglu 法兰西备忘录) is the typical case.

Of course, among the works of Mu Xin, there is also the prose of memorial to old friend and old time, such as “Wuzhen” (乌镇), “Sympathy Interrupted” (Tongqing zhongduanlu 同情中断录), “Christopher on This Side”(Ci'an de Kelisiduofu 此岸的克里斯朵夫). At last but not least, “Shanghai Fu”(上海赋), one of the most well-known proses of Mu Xin, written in the scale of parallelism in Hanfu, presents the old Shanghai before 1949 known by Mu Xin with the perspective employed by Balzac in *The Human Comedy*.

¹ Susan Sontag, “Wring itself: On Roland Barthes,” in *Where the Stress Fall*, p.70.

In Mu Xin's literary career, the published works at the earliest is his prose. *Sanwen yiji* (*Collected Sanwen: Volume I*) is the first published anthology of him. He was known for his prose. Indeed, he was good at writing prose, which we can learn from the richness of the genres of his prose. Thus, lots of people consider Mu Xin as a prose writer. But Mu Xin has his own point of view. Although he said that he preferred saltiness, mixing the other flavours, to write his prose, namely, mix poetry, fiction and critique to write prose, in fact, he also writes his poetry, fictions and critiques in this way, namely, prefer saltiness, mixing the other flavours to write his poetry, or fiction, or critique. For example, Mu Xin employs the method of writing prose and poetry into his fiction writing, which makes his fiction provided with the rhythm of poetry, such as the fiction "SOS" I mentioned above. Another instance is his prose-fiction "The Night of Atlantic City of Casino" (*Daixyang ducheng zhi ye* 大西洋赌城之夜). In this fiction, he used the anti-linear narrative, cancelling or undermining the storyline, to make the work have the feature both of prose and fiction. As another example, the whole poetry anthology *Letters in the Name of Solomon* is the novelized history of personal growth. In addition, Mu Xin was good at employing the literary devices in *Book of Songs* and Yuefu poems (乐府诗), such as implied comparisons (xing 兴), elements of repetition and variation (chongzhang diechang 重章叠唱) and so on, to endow works with the nature of poetry. For example, in the prose "Tomorrow, I'll Stroll No More", the words 'slightly shy, vaguely apologetic and mildly bashful' appears twice, and for three times Mu Xin referred to the words 'What then does life mean? Life means that you often don't know what to do'. Mu Xin mixed the method of elements of repetition and variation together with the literary method of stream of consciousness to strengthen the chanted theme in the flow of thinking.

Hence, as far as the so-called 'the saltiness of prose' is concerned, what plays a principal role is not 'prose' but 'saltiness'. This kind of saltiness is the flavour of art which is made by mixing the sweetness of poetry, the acidity of prose, the bitterness of fiction and the spiciness of critique. And the prose with this kind of saltiness is no more a single literary genre, but a practice of cross-genre writing. As Tongming

mentioned in his article “The Significance of the Style of Mu Xin”, “poetry, prose, fiction, proverb, these genres mixed and integrated with each other, which forms flexible genres of Mu Xin’s writing, such as prose-poetry, poetry-prose, prose-fiction, critique-prose, philosophical proverb and so on, when exploring into the subjects of life, history, art, philosophy. This kind of style of Mu Xin has two sides simultaneously. The one side is the tradition of Chinese ancient prose which is an integration of literature, history and philosophy. The other side is the literary style of Western modernism and post-modernism. For example, the style of Milan Kundera and that of Jorge Lius Borges are to mix and integrate novel, prose, history and philosophy into one.”¹

Therefore, to call Mu Xin as a prose-writer is a misconception of him. Because Mu Xin is a stylist in essence.

3.2.2 Poetry and Philosophy

Mu Xin is not only a stylist, but also a poet. The spirit of poetry is the obvious characteristic of his style. One of the features of Mu Xin’s poetry is prosifying, that is to say, the rhythm of his poetry is light and slow, which shows a simple grace, and his verses are filled with implicit and subtle poetic imagery, which leaves much space for readers to ruminate.

Mu Xin often extracted some paragraph from letters, prose, even novels to rewrite it into poetry, in his own words, to purify it poetically, which means to recognize, to choose and to retain the poetic imagery of the extracted sentences to compose a poem. If a poem is only in the form of poetry but without any poetic imagery, then it shouldn’t be considered as poetry. Conversely, if it isn’t written in the form of poetry but full of poetic imagery, then it is poetic. In an interview, Mu Xin said, “I often think of the words that art grows under metrical pattern but die of

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 22.

freedom. [……] There are two kinds of metrical pattern. The one is the external metrical pattern which is tangible, the other is the internal metrical pattern which is intangible. If the former one is ignored, there would still exist art; if the latter one is ignored, then art would be dying.”¹ If we consider the form, rhythm and rhetoric as the external metrical pattern of poetry, then the poetic imagery is the internal metrical pattern. To purify poetically is to comply with the internal metrical pattern of art.

Mu Xin much preferred poetic imagery to the form of poetry. In his literary lectures, he said, “ When you read a poet, you should not only read his poems, but also pay attention to his portrait, proses, his whole person. When you read Heinrich Heine, you should read his personality, to expand the poetic imagery to his whole personality; to put poetic imagery to wherever you can put it, this is Pushkin.”² From where Mu Xin stands, the poetic imagery doesn’t only means the pursuit of beauty, the deliberate and gorgeous rhetoric, the elaborate imageries, but a kind of simple aesthetics, a kind of direct impression with sincerity, simplicity and compactness of Tao Qian’s style. He said: “ when the poetic imagery is coming, don’t use rhetoric to undermine it.”³ And said: “ poetry which can be read aloud in public is crude. Text is not used to speak , to sing, but to read. When I composed poetry, I deliberately wrote poems only for reading. When reading poetry, there will be a natural rhythm in your heart, you mustn’t read it out. The coronation night for poets is silent.”⁴ I think that is the reason why Mu Xin’s poetry is prosified with the rhythm light and slow and the imagery implicit and subtle.

On the one hand, one of the features of Mu Xin’s poetry is prosifying. On the other hand, lots of readers consider if some paragraphs of Mu Xin’s prose are written into separate verses, then they will become poems. Mu Xin’s works are poetic. A lot of single sentences can be considered as a verse. For example, in the end of his prose “Tomorrow, I’ll Stroll No More”, there is such sentence, “ a baby stroller leaning against a tombstone, a three-page will found under a freshly baked loaf of bread.”

¹ Mu Xin, “ Haixia chuansheng,” p. 25.

² Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 168.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Again, a sentence in the fiction “SOS” goes: “sea water pouring in like walls”. Again, in the prose “The Reflection of Columbia University”, Mu Xin wrote, “wisdom is merely the much brighter melancholy.” Li Zongtao, the journalist who ever interviewed with Mu Xin, said: “if there is no poetry of Mu Xin, then there will be no his prose. Mu Xin’s prose is also poetry.”¹ Chen Danqing said: “prose writer, short-story writer, a man of letters, all the titles above are even though not misconception of Mu Xin, at least not exact conception. I remember that Mu Xin and I visited Shakespeare’s tomb in 1994, it is the word ‘poet’ rather than ‘playwright’ that is written on the tombstone. When Mu Xin saw this, he quite agreed.”² Indeed. Because Mu Xin himself is essentially a poet .

Guo Songfen mentioned that Mu Xin has a habit of metaphysical thinking, which is very similar to the German tradition of metaphysics. This habit makes the works of Mu Xin show a metaphysical intellect. This is the other main characteristic of the style of Mu Xin. Although Mu Xin was keen on metaphysical thinking and on reading philosophy, he treated philosophy as common sense and the background of art. He never devoted himself to any philosophical system and doctrine. He said: “Philosophers are supposed to be cool-headed, disinterested. In fact, they express their respective ‘wish’ when putting forth arguments and elaborating systems. Did Hegel use his logic to induce ‘der Begriff’ step by step? He created ‘der Begriff’ firstly, then elaborated a set of logic, which is therefore tedious.”³ He appreciated Michel de Montaigne extremely, and said, “Montaigne had never been devoted to any philosophical system and doctrine, which makes him much greater than others in my heart.”⁴ While Nietzsche is the one he much more respected. He said, “Every time when I hesitated to speak it out that to elaborate system is not sincere, he (Nietzsche) had already done. You see, he spoke it out and only he can speak out such words.”⁵

One of the results that Mu Xin was not interested in elaborating philosophical

¹ Li Zongtao, “Wentijia Mu Xin,” p. 135.

² Chen Danqing, “Wo de shizun Mu Xin xiansheng,” p. 13.

³ Mu Xin, “Haixia chuansheng,” p. 31.

⁴ Mu Xin, “Yiliang weihan 已凉未寒,” in *Jingxing panduan*, p. 41.

⁵ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 928.

system is that he opposed analyzing art and literature by ideas. He said: “As far as I am concerned, if an artistic work is in the nature a diagram of the ideas of the author, then it is an inevitable failure, whatever how brilliant the author’s ideas are. [……] Of course, we should have ideas, but what kind of ideas? Don’t employ diagrams, formulation and conceptualization in art.”¹ In his view, ideas should only be the distant background, something like a low horizon, of art and literature. Therefore, the method he used in his writing is to present ideas through impression.² In Mu Xin’s words, the so-called ideas is fixed conception, while the so-called impression is sudden judgment.³ The sudden judgment is aesthetic, poetic, belonging to aesthetic thinking, to form words and sentences; while the fixed conception is conceptual, metaphysical, belonging to logic thinking, to form ideas. Mu Xin said: “words and ideas are related to each other. Ideas lead to words, which forms (common) language. The superiority of literature over language just lies in that the precious ideas are always led to by words.”⁴ To present ideas through impression is an integration of aesthetics and intellect, an integration of poetry and philosophy, an integration of words and thoughts, an integration of aesthetic thinking and logic thinking, all that is just as what Nietzsche maintained that thinking of rhetoric and thinking of sentimental experience should be integrated with thinking of logic.

The other result that Mu Xin was not interested in elaborating philosophical system is that he preferred literary genre of laconism, such as haiku, proverb. Even his works of much longer length are accumulated and linked up through fragments of short sentences, rather than a linear statement elaborated in a system. Because Mu Xin maintained to present ideas through impression, therefore his expression is always brief but filled with subtle and profound connotation, which makes his readers have to think seriously about those connotations from level to level, just as waves rippling circle by circle. In his expression, there is enough space for his readers to muse on the ideas presented through the poetic and improvised impression again and again. This is

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 927.

² Mu Xin, “Zhongxia kaixuan,” p. 68.

³ Mu Xin, “Falanxi beiwanglu 法兰西备忘录,” in *Jixing panduan*, p. 174.

⁴ Mu Xin, “Liao yi zusui 聊以卒岁,” in *Jixing panduan*, p. 99.

the reason that his words and sentences are brisk and flexible. Mu Xin always said that Chopin is his brother in Poland. Because he considered that Chopin's method of composing and playing music is similar as his own method of writing, both of which are laconic and subtle, to click it and stop promptly. Mu Xin said: "Slight judgment is a kind of happiness, vague foresight is a kind of happiness. If you cannot enjoy the two kinds of happiness, then knowledge is a kind of distress. However you should only judge slightly and foresee vaguely, if you cross the line, i.e. overdo it, the judgment will become arbitrary and the foresight will become preconception, then both are no longer worthy to be considered as happiness. The line, which should be not crossed, is known by writers. Because if they don't know it, they are not writers."¹ Because when crossing the line, writing will fall into the system, the truth will become absolute one and there will no space for rethinking, words and sentences will no longer be brisk and flexible, poetic imagery will disappear, all will become rigid and tedious, then whether writers or readers are unworthy to feel happy. Mu Xin's writing doesn't cross the line. His writing in proverb-style is just the kind of slight judgment and vague foresight, which therefore makes both the author and readers feel happy.

The spirit of poetry and the intellect of metaphysics are the two main characteristics of the style of Mu Xin. In Mu Xin's words, "I always think that poetry and philosophic ideas are fragmentary, spiccato, and winking."² The fragmentary, spiccato and winking poetry and philosophical ideas are the core of the style of Mu Xin, the saltiness of his works. As Tongming mentioned, Mu Xin fulfilled perfectly the Nietzschean ideal of the reunion of poem and philosophy, he is a poet of philosophy.

3.2.3 Individual and Times

¹ Mu Xin, "Yiliang weihan," p. 35.

² Li Chuanyan, "Changtubashe de fanpuguizhen 长途跋涉地返璞归真," in *Du Mu Xin*, p. 105.

Mu Xin doesn't dedicate himself in any framework of thoughts, similarly, in literature, nor sort himself into any literary school. He said: "I oppose any boosted artistic trend and doctrine. When an artist boosts a kind of artistic trend and doctrine, whatever he boosts, such kind of his deed makes him look pretty small-minded."¹ And his haiku goes: "All kinds of doctrine are awkward, the meaning of doctrine is to be cussed."² Andrea Gide was born at the end of the romantic period, and then turned to symbolism, and eventually converted to no doctrine. Mu Xin said that he also experienced the course which Gide experienced. He said: "Struggling to get out of symbolism, then I can speak out the words that literature and art will not be worthy to read once they fall into any ism."³

On the one hand, Mu Xin doesn't choose any literary school or ingratiate himself with any literary trend. While on the other hand, he is a man of wide reading and a man who is influenced by various kinds of art and literature. But he never lost himself, or in other words, he knew well who he is and what his own style is. He believed, geniuses are apt to be influenced and to imitate others, because geniuses are sensitive, sincere, however they should find out their own styles from those influences and imitation. Mu Xin did so. He didn't confine himself to the classical or the modern, to whatever literary school or trend, to whatever skill or genre, but practise the cross-genre writing, continuously sharpening his own style.

Mu Xin maintained that art is private affairs. He said: "writers and artists are individuals. The meaning of 'individual' is in itself (zizai 自在); the meaning of 'art' is for itself (ziwei 自为)."⁴ Therefore he never would like to engage himself and his writing in the era and the society. He preferred Marcel Proust's self-involvement and Gustave Flaubert's private to Jean-Paul Sartre's engaged literature.⁵ He said: "To solve social problems by art and literature is mistaken from the very beginning."⁶ Li

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 927.

² Mu Xin, "Yiyin yizhuo," p. 144.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 990.

⁵ Jean-Paul Sarte, Introductory Statement to *Les Temps Modernes*.

⁶ Ibid.

Zongtao supposed that in Mu Xin's works there is always a special kind of soliloquy which seems to be written down in the case that he doesn't intend to publish it.¹ In Mu Xin's words, "writing is to face God (art), lecturing is to face students (friends), while delivering a speech is to face the masses (booboisie). Jesus was born to know it. He never told his disciples what he said to God nor told the masses what he said to his disciples. Let the one who deserve to know know, and let the one who doesn't deserve to know unable to know. The music of Chopin is what he said to God, playing piano alone with lighted candles, while those great writers could only hid secretly in his yard to listen to his playing."²

Mu Xin's writing is his spiritual soliloquy to God of art, which is nothing to do with times, school, trend and doctrine. Mu Xin is a tower, who perfected his own aesthetics with the fated solitude of tower-ness. As Sun Yu 孙郁, a professor in Chinese literature of Renmin University, mentioned, "When people express their consciousness from the perspective of 'nation-state', what he (Mu Xin) insisted on is 'individual'. This naked 'individual' shows the joy of intellect emanated from the aesthetic kingdom. The 'individual' of Mu Xin is not a self of sentimentalist, but a deeply intellectualized independent body of aesthetics."³

With his individual talent and sincerity, Mu Xin continuously explored the various probabilities of writing, within which he continuously rewarded and richened the past tradition, and sharpened his own style. He said: "because I am dull, thus I tried practising writing for a pretty long years eventually to form this expected style of my own."⁴ He said: "the style is not an individuality that is born to be, but diligent practice, attainment achieved in at least 10 years. Once your style is mature, just a word or two of your works would be shinning, unique, irreplaceable."⁵ In *The Fruits of the Earth*, Andrea Gide wrote, "to take on the greatest possibility of humanity, and

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 139.

² Ibid., pp. 388-389.

³ Sun Yu 孙郁, "Mu Xin zhi lü 木心之旅," in *Du Mu Xin*, p. 75.

⁴ Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 25.

⁵ Mu Xin, "Lu Xun ji."

to be an irreplaceable one among the crowd.” Mu Xin’s cross-genre writing, his own style are just the practice of and fulfillment of the words of Gide, and he is an excellent and irreplaceable stylist.

3.3 The Two Features of Mu Xin’s Literary Language

“There is only one exact word, a verb or an adjective, most appropriate to what you want to express. Thus you have to look for it and must have found it. You mustn’t use a similar word according with wishes. Don’t get by with tricks. To evade trouble can only make you get into bigger trouble. Hence you must have found the exact word.”¹ That is what Gustave Flaubert taught Guy de Maupassant and Mu Xin bore it in his heart all his life.

He is a faithful practitioner of Flaubert’s theory of ‘one exact word’. He said: “More tirelessly you look for the only exact word, more proficient you are. The exact and perfect words even sometimes will jump to your mind automatically, thrusting their way, one on top of another. The happiness of writing just lies in this silent carnival and the successive harvest of words. But how to reach such level? There is no shortcut. The only method is long-term exercise.”² Besides the long-term exercise, the long-term accumulation is also Mu Xin’s means of looking for the only exact word. He had several notebooks in private for different uses, among which there was one to specially record some ‘good word’. He often read this notebook at his leisure. Owing to this age-long habit, when he wrote, he said, those ‘good words’ in his notebooks would come out to his mind automatically and seemed to shout, “please use me, please use me.”³

The language of Mu Xin’s literary works is pretty refined, and exquisitely carved and polished without trace. He was nearly harsh in the use of literary language. He said: “any kind of art has the aspect of skill of its own, if you are mistaken in skill,

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 583.

² *Ibid.*, p. 584.

³ Li Zongtao, “Wentijia Mu Xiin,” p. 120.

then your art would be a failure in the very beginning.”¹ Literature is a kind of art made up of language. Word is the basis of language. Therefore, the selecting and the use of word is an essential skill of literary expression. The expression of a kind of experience or feeling depends on if the word that is used to expressed it is precise. As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, the only exact word means not only the precision of its meaning but also its sense of beauty. He said: “ According to my experience, there are two levels of significance of ‘the only exact word’: the first level of significance is precision of meaning and the second level is sense of beauty. I will not use a word which has only precise meaning but without sense of beauty; similarly, I will also not use a word which has only sense of beauty but without precise meaning.”² Precision of meaning requires author’s insight, while sense of beauty requires author’s aesthetic intellect and poetic spirit. Precision of meaning and sense of beauty are both the two principles of Mu Xin’s using of words and the two features of his literary language. The exquisiteness of Mu Xin’s literary language is just because that ‘the only exact word’ he used is not only with precise meaning but also with sense of beauty.

Mu Xin paid much attention to the rhyme and tone (yinyun 音韵) of a word. He said: “ The rhyme and tone of each word you used in your works should be appropriate to its context. [……] If the word I have already employed is good in every aspect, except for the aspect of rhyme and tone, then I will replace it later.”³ In fact, paying attention to the rhyme and tone belongs to the second level of significance of ‘the only exact word’ —— sense of beauty. For example, Mu Xin ever mentioned in his prose “The Tardy Confessions” that an editor ever changed a word in Mu Xin’s original text without knowing the reason why MuXin used it. The whole affair is as follows. The editor replaced the character ‘jia’(蛱) in the four-word phrase ‘chuan hua jiadie’(穿花蛱蝶 butterflies flitting among the flowers) with the character ‘hu’(蝴). Mu Xin thought that this change undermined the phrase’s sense of beauty. He said: “ she (the editor) didn’t know the reason why I used the character ‘jia’(蛱). It is

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 583.

² *Ibid.*, p. 583.

³ Li Zongtao, “ Wentijia Mu Xin,” p.119.

because the character ‘jia’ is an allusion to the poetry of Du Fu. In ancient times, there was still no distinction made between the word ‘fendie’ (粉蝶), ‘hudie’ (蝴蝶) and ‘jiadie’ (蛺蝶) and the word ‘jiadie’ was usually used as the generic term for butterfly. The verse of Du Fu’s poem goes, ‘Butterflies flitted deeply among flowers, dragonflies flew slowly above water’ (穿花蛺蝶深深见, 点水蜻蜓款款飞). In addition, I consider that the rhyme and tone of the character ‘jia’ is better than that of the character ‘hu’, so I employed it.”¹ The reason that Mu Xin preferred the character ‘jia’ to the character ‘hu’ is not only because the rhyme and tone of the word ‘jia’ is better, but also because the character ‘jia’ contains its special historical and cultural message, namely, it is both an literary and classical allusion.

From the instance above, we can know that Mu Xin not only focused on the semantics of a word but also emphasized its aesthetic significance, such as its rhyme and tone, and its cultural significance, such as literary or historical allusions related to it, when he decided to use the word. In Mu Xin’s opinion, if a writer only focusses on the semantics of a word, he will not bother himself to find the only exact word but use another word with the same meaning, then the aesthetic and cultural significance of a word will be ignored, which will undermine both the sense of beauty and cultural significance of literary expression. Of course, the semantic function is the basis of language and the precise meaning is the premise of literary expression. However a language with only semantic function is common language rather than literary language. It is the aesthetic and cultural significance of a word, i.e. the aesthetic function of a language, that makes a common language turn to be literary expression. Therefore, only with the semantic function, literary expression will lose its aesthetic function and tend to be poor and rigid and eventually be no more literary expression; while only with sense of beauty, literary expression may fall into the danger of failing to convey the idea, and may tend to be superficial and empty. And ‘the only exact word’ that both Flaubert and Mu Xin maintained looking for is the balance and harmony of semantic and aesthetic function.

¹ Mu Xin, “Chichi gaobai,” p. 82.

The premise of Flaubert's theory of 'the only exact word' is rich vocabulary. Only when a writer has a good knowledge of the cultural tradition of his native language, thereby possessing a rich vocabulary, there would be enough space for his literary expression to make a choice. A writer with poor vocabulary cannot express and present the rich and subtle experiences and feelings. Mu Xin is a writer possessing a rich vocabulary. In his works, he used a large quantity of vocabulary of classical Chinese, among which there are a lot of uncommon words. In addition, his works are full of literary allusions. Now, I would like to take one of his poems "The Fourth Day of Middle Ages" included in the anthology *Tres cepas* as an example. The last three lines of the first verse of the poem are as follows:

No one rang the bell , plague hung over the town

没有人撞钟瘟疫统摄着这座城

Tightly-closed city gate, blocked watercourse, vanished birds and beasts

城门紧闭河道淤塞鸟兽绝迹

The remains of officers and common people lay everywhere three days ago

官吏庶民三天前横斜成尸骸

Here, Mu Xin used the word 'shici'(尸骸), rather than the word 'shigu'(尸骨) that is often used in the modern Chinese language. The character 'ci' (骸) is hardly seen and used in the modern Chinese. It means a pile of human bones still with rotten flesh. So the word 'shici' means one's remains that nearly rots away. While the word 'shigu' only means the one's remains. Although the meaning of the word 'shigu' is similar to that of the word 'shici', it can only convey the fact of death, but cannot exactly convey the state of one's remains. Besides, another superiority of the word 'shici' over the word 'shigu', i.e, another reason why Mu Xin employed it, I think, lies in its rhyme and tone. The character 'ci' is a rhyme for the character 'ji' (迹) in the word 'jueji' (绝迹 vanish).

And the two lines in the poem "Correspondence in New York"(五岛晚邮) provides another example for us:

whenever I glimpsed your eyebrows, eyes, lips and nose

无奈每当骤见你的眉目鼻唇

I cannot help but be obsessed and intoxicated, mute and deaf, sinking straightly
into paradise

我痴而醉瘖而聩，直向天堂沉沦

The character ‘yin’(瘖) means not speaking or refusing to speak, i.e, silent or mute, which is its extended meaning. Its original meaning is ‘dumb’. In *Explaining and Analyzing Characters* (Shuowen jiezi 说文解字), it is said that the character ‘yin’ means unable to speak. The character ‘kui’(聩) means ‘deaf’, unable to hear anything. If the character ‘yin’ and ‘kui’ are replaced respectively with the character ‘ya’ (哑 dumb) and ‘long’(聋 deaf), the meaning will not be changed, but the subtle meaning of the pleasant fever because of love the poet wants to express will turn to naked physical disability without any poetry. In addition, the rhyme and tone of the character ‘yin’ and ‘kui’ are better than that of the character ‘ya’ and ‘long’. The former two characters are the rhyme for the character ‘chi’ (痴 obsessed) and ‘zui’(醉 intoxicated). The character ‘yin’ (瘖) can also be written as ‘yin’ (喑). Both the rhyme and tone and the semantics of the two characters are totally same. And the character ‘喑’ is more common than the character ‘瘖’ in the modern Chinese language, for example, the four-word idiom ‘wanmaqiying’(万马齐喑) which originally means that all horses are silent and usually is used to describe the silence of the masses owing to political repression. However Mu Xin preferred the character ‘yin’ (瘖). In my opinion, he employed the character ‘yin’ (瘖) in order to keep the sense of beauty from the perspective of the form of Chinese characters. Because the character ‘yin’ (瘖) and the character ‘chi’ (痴) have the same radical (pianpang 偏旁) and the same structure.

In addition, in terms of using of literary allusions, the poem “The Lover with Celery’s Perfume” (Qinxiang zi 芹香子) which is full of literary allusions to Book of Songs, is exactly a typical example. I would like to extract two lines of the poem to expound on:

You come from *Book of Songs*, lifting your gown up to wade across the river

你是诗三百中褰裳涉水而来

with your hair hanging down, covered with ancient celery's perfume

髡彼两髦，一身远古的芹香

The phrase ‘qianshangsheshui’ and ‘danbiliangmao’ originated from *Book of Songs*. The character ‘qian’ (褰) means lifting something up. The meaning of the phrase ‘qianshangsheshui’ is lifting the gown up to wade across the river. The phrase originated from the poem “Qianshang” (褰裳) of the grouping “Odes of Zheng” (郑风) from *Book of Songs*. The original verse goes, “If you miss me, you’ll lift your gown up to wade across the river Zhen to see me (子惠思我，褰裳涉溱).” The character ‘dan’ (髡) means hair hanging down. The character ‘mao’ (髦) means fringe. The word ‘liangmao’ (两髦) means a hair style for young men that hair parted hanging over the forehead from. The phrase ‘danbiliangmao’ (髡彼两髦) is used to describe a young look of a man with hair hanging down. This phrase originated from the poem “Baizhou” (柏舟 Cedarwood Boat) of the grouping “Odes of Yong” (邶风).

The above-mentioned are instances taken from Mu Xin’s poetry. And we not only see the rich vocabulary Mu Xin possessed as well as his practising of the theory of ‘the only exact word’, but also see how smoothly and gracefully Mu Xin integrated the classical Chinese language into modern vernacular in his own literary works. And there are lots of such instances in his prose and fictions. For example, his fictions which possess the characteristics of and factors of Chinese ancient novels, such as “The Maternal Manners in Song Dynasty” and “Wugengzhuan Song”, are written in the old vernacular of Ming and Qing dynasties. In the article “A long Trek to the Original”(Changtubashe de fanpuguizhen 长途跋涉地返璞归真), Li Chunyang took Mu Xin’s prose “The Ninth of September” (Jiuyue chujiu 九月初九) as an example, enumerating a large quantity of vocabulary of Chinese classical literature that Mu Xin used in the text and making a detailed comparison between the use of those words in Classical Chinese literature and their new use and connotation in Mu Xin’s works.

She even suggested compiling a *Mu Xin Literary Dictionary*.¹ Her article is a good example and study material for the study of Mu Xin's literary language. And there is no need for me to give unnecessary details here.

In a word, classical Chinese language and the modern vernacular are integrated gracefully and smoothly in Mu Xin's works, as one of Mu Xin's haiku goes, "when the ancient language is welded well to the modern language, the weld will be so beautiful."² Through the conciseness, subtleness, and elegance of classical Chinese language, Mu Xin expanded the boundaries of thinking, feelings and imagination, enriched the significance of expression of Chinese literature, revived the long-lost aesthetics of classical Chinese and made it get various new possibilities in modern literary context, meanwhile, made the modern vernacular since the May Fourth new literature movement richer and more mature in his writing. As Li Chunyang said, "Mu Xin's literary practice aims at making classical Chinese alive while the vernacular elegant. In this way, literary writings could become clear and smooth, be worthy of repeated reading to ruminate on its taste."³

Classical Chinese and traditional culture are almost lost in modern Chinese. The campaigning of the Vernacular Movement is because of a utilitarian purpose rather than an aesthetic one, which makes the aesthetic value of classical Chinese give place to the utilitarian political purpose to save and strengthen the nation from extinction. However the new vernacular before 1949 can still absorb nutrient from classical Chinese without obstruction, because classical Chinese, old vernacular with folk dialect, and new vernacular still coexisted peacefully at that time. The peaceful coexistence of the three kinds of language system is the cultural tradition maintained by Mu Xin all life long. This is the reason why we can find the perfect integration of classical Chinese and modern vernacular in his works.

However the connection between classical and modern Chinese was totally broken after 1949 because of the ideologization of language and culture as well as the

¹ Li Chunyang, "Changtubashe de fanpuguizhen," p. 111.

² Mu Xin, "Yiyin yizhuo," p. 140.

³ Li Chunyang, "Changtubashe de fanpuguizhen," p. 110.

malicious devastation of traditional culture in the period of the Cultural Revolution. The modern Chinese language thence becomes water without source, trees without roots. The coexistence of the spoken language of proletariat, political slogan and the translationese of systematized discourses of Marxism-Leninism thoroughly changed the way and the custom of Chinese language. It makes the modern Chinese become text symbols of ideology and the communication tools with mere practical value. Hereafter the aesthetic value of Chinese language died away.

The rigidness of language, poor in vocabulary, withering of text connotation are the main characteristics of the crisis of modern Chinese language and literature. But Mu Xin's writing is not within the crisis. Chen Danqing said that there is no 'our language' in Mu Xin's works. The so-called 'our language' is the systematized and ideologized modern Chinese language after 1949. Conversely, Mu Xin defended and revived the lost aesthetic value of Chinese language, saved the crisis of modern Chinese language and literature in his own writing, with his own language from the uninterrupted tradition he maintained all life long, with his talent, with his belief in his own aesthetic stance.

Mu Xin ever said that he overcame his times on himself.¹ The meaning of his words, I think, as follows: he had always insisted on his own aesthetic stance, focussing on the second level of significance (aesthetic significance), retreating from himself to fulfill his aesthetics; he took on the greatest possibility of humanity in literature, practising and perfecting his own style diligently and continuously for more than 50 years; he fulfilled the reunion of poetry and philosophy in his own style, practised the Nietzschean ideal of musical Socrates, to be an irreplaceable stylist; in the era when modern Chinese language becomes more and more functionalized and ideologized, he had always defended the aesthetic value of Chinese language, refused

¹ See Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 916. "In my art, I took myself as materials and overcome this devil of times on myself. As for this times, I would never get involved in." (我在我身上，一辈子以自己为素材，狠狠克服这个倒霉的时代。我对这个时代，永远不介入。)

to use ‘our language’ in his works; he never forgot what Gustave Flaubert taught him, maintaining employing the ‘only proper word’ in his writing, making classical and vernacular Chinese integrated gracefully and satisfactorily in literary expression; his subtle and noble literary language enriches the modern vernacular since the May Fourth era; in his literary writing, the modern vernacular language becomes truly mature, and the lost value of traditional Chinese language gets to revive.

Once Mu Xin referred to the relationship between literature and times in his literary lectures, he said, “ artistic works can be divided into three categories: artistic works belonging to the first category are provided with practical significance but without eternal significance; the ones of the second category are provided with eternal significance but without practical significance; the ones of the third category are provided with both practical and eternal significance.”¹ According to Mu Xin’s classification, his own literary works belong to the second category.

Mu Xin, who neither confined himself to times and any literary genre nor devote himself to any philosophical system, treated literature as his spiritual soliloquy to God. His writing is the dialogue with the literary and artistic predecessors in his reading memories, his holy family, with his heart, with his sincerity to art, with his talent, with his own aesthetic stance and language, as he wrote in his prose “The Modern Prophet” (Yikuang pian 遗狂篇). From ancient Persia, ancient Greece and Rome, to mediaeval China in Wei-and-Jin dynasty, he travelled across time and space to talk with Omar Khayyam, Pericles, Petronius and Ji Kang 嵇康 (223-262). In the literary and spiritual world, he is the man beyond borders of nations and eras. This is the relationship between Mu Xin’s literature and times. As Professor Sun Yu mentioned, “ the history of China after 1949 has only the significance of living to him, with no aesthetic and spiritual significance. [……] He, the survivor of the China before 1949, talked with the ancient souls of both the Western world and the Oriental world inwardly, and never had a spiritual contact with contemporaries.”²

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 915.

² Sun Yu, “ Mu Xin zhi lü,” pp. 73-74.

Chapter 4

Literature and Diaspora

In Tongming Jun Liu's book *The History of American Literature*, the piece of "Mu Xin" is placed in the part of "Diasporic Writers". It is written: "Chinese readers in the diaspora especially appreciate Mu Xin as a superior writer of sanwen whose style innovatively and organically combine fiction, philosophy and poetry. As it is what makes Mu Xin unique, the subtle and refined quality of Mu Xin's Chinese style brings out a kind of internalization, invention and unconventionality reminiscent of the best in Modern Western Literature. [.....] His literary accomplishments suggest that a wind transcending national boundaries is both a natural gift and a result of cultivation. By the example of his literary writing, Mu Xin, the author, believes that whatever is native and nationalist is automatically international."¹ After Mu Xin migrated to New York, he remained writing in Chinese. Tongming Jun Liu, the professor in the department of English literature of UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), translated part of Mu Xin's works into English and published them on the literary website "Words without Borders" which is founded by professors in the department of English literature of American Universities. From then on, Mu Xin obtained his readers from around the world and attracted a lot of interest in the American academia. Tongming Jun Liu is the translator of Mu Xin's works and he applied himself to the study of diasporic culture for several years. In his article "The Significance of Mu Xin's Style", he pointed out that Mu Xin is diasporic writer and his literature is the illustration of Chinese culture scattering to the world. He believed

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, *The History of American Literature* (Beijing: Waiyu jiaoxue yu yanjiu chubanshe, 2008), p. 427.

that the significance of Mu Xin's style lies in that Chinese literature obtains rich global connotation in his style.¹ In this chapter, I would like to analyse the diasporic characteristics of Mu Xin's literary writing based on part of views proposed by Tongming Jun Liu in his two articles "Diaspora" and "The Diasporic Culture and Literature".

4.1 The Semantic Reconstruction of 'Diaspora'

The word 'diaspora' stems from Greek. It traditionally refers to the exile of the Jews from the Holy land and their dispersal throughout the globe. According to *Oxford Dictionary*, the word 'diaspora' can be traced etymologically back to its Greek root 'diaspeirein', from 'dia' (meaning across) and ' speirein' (meaning to sow or to scatter). The term originated in the Septuagint (Deuteronomy 28:25) in the phrase 'esē diaspora en pasais basileias tēs gēs', meaning that thou shalt be a dispersion in all kingdoms of the earth. The word 'diaspora' is associated with the exile of the Jews for a long time and later has an extended meaning that people living outside their traditional homeland but maintaining strong links with their countries of origin—their homeland.

In Tongming Jun Liu's opinion, the word 'diaspora' is an old word with rich new connotations. He found that the experience of Jews is no more the main reference to define the meaning of 'diaspora' in recent years, and the study on 'diaspora' has already been beyond the subject of migration and migrant in the area of sociological research. In the contemporary literary creation and cultural practice, the word 'diaspora' becomes a kind of new concept and perspective, which has connotations of cross-national culture, culture-translating, culture-traveling and culture-mixing.² He pointed out that diaspora is a kind of cultural (literary) perception in the era of globalization and postcolonialism. And he believed that the contemporary way of

¹ See Tongming Jun Liu, *The History of American Literature*.

² Tongming Jun Liu, "Feisan 飞散," in *Foreign Literature*, No. 6 (2004), p. 52.

culture-producing and culture-creating is that culture crosses borders to multiply by means of traveling.¹ And the new definition of the word ‘diaspora’ should be that national culture and literature obtain cross-national and global connotation.² Therefore Tongming Jun Liu translates ‘diaspora’ into Chinese as ‘feisan’(飞散 fly and scatter), instead of the traditional translation such as ‘liusan’(流散 the dispersion), or ‘sanju’(散居 exile). He considered that the contemporary significance of ‘diaspora’ has less desolation of leaving one’s native place but contains more joyfulness of the multiplying of life, which is closer to the original meaning of the word. The change of the translation indicates the semantic reconstruction of ‘diaspora’. After the semantic reconstruction, the word is no longer confined to the study of homeland-leaving in the area of sociology and anthropology, it is provided with the connotation of contemporary cultural and literary studies. The semantics of diaspora is related to those signifier symbols to state the characteristics of knowledge in the contemporary era, such as postcolonial, postmodern, globalization, the information age, nation-crossing culture, culture translation, culture travel and so on. Besides diaspora is another flexible signifier symbol to state the characteristics of knowledge in the contemporary era.³

In his article “Diasporic Culture and Literature” (Feisan de wenhua he wenxue 飞散的文化 and 文学), Tongming Jun Liu proposed the three phases of the semantic evolvement of diaspora: the phase of Greek derivation, the historical experiences of Jews and the semantic reconstruction. Based on it, he sorted the study of diasporic discourse into two types: the traditional type (sociology, anthropology, demology) and the modern type (the school of cultural study). The original meaning of the word ‘diaspora’ derived from Greek refers to that plants multiply by means of the flying and scattering of flower powders and seeds. This is the first phase of its semantic evolvement.

Hereafter, till 1980s, the semantic content of diaspora was always connected with

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “Feisan de wenhua he wenxue 飞散的文化 and 文学,” in *Foreign Literature*, No. 1 (2007), p. 89.

² Tongming Jun Liu, “Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 22.

³ Ibid.

the Dispersion of Jews. Tongming Jun Liu pointed out that this connection endows the word with three levels of connotation. The first level of connotation is considered as its definition for a long time, which means that people of some nation leave their homeland to live in foreign lands but still keep the cultural characteristics of their homeland. The second level of connotation is to be in exile and under persecution. In the sixth century, the Jews dispersed after the destruction of Jerusalem. They were exposed to continuous enslavement and persecution by the Babylonians. Therefore the word ‘diaspora’ usually has a kind of connotation of victimhood. The third level of connotation is to recreate the culture in resettlement destinations. During the period of living in Babylon, Jews used Babylonian calendar and Aramaic. Meanwhile they recorded their own myths, legends and collected historical and legal literature of their own nation, by which the Bible was compiled. Therefore the resettlement destination has a connotation of the land of culture-recreating. This is the second phase of the semantic evolvement.

Tongming Jun Liu pointed out that sociological and anthropological research generally prefer to study the phenomenon of diaspora based on its semantic content of the second phase. Those studies often take the historical experiences of Jews as an example and focus on the social or living conditions of diaspora groups and their various feelings for their homeland. This type of study (traditional type) normally classifies diaspora groups by means of case study and generalize their respective characteristics. For example, Robin Cohen, in his book *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, employed this research method to sort diaspora groups into six types: victim diasporas, labour diasporas, imperial diasporas, trade diasporas, homeland diasporas, cultural diasporas. Tongming Jun Liu thought that the classification of diaspora groups proposed by Robin Cohen is very clear, but there is still defect in his classification, because he inevitably took a part for the whole. For example, Cohen has taken Chinese migrants just as the example of trade diasporas, but neglected the aspect of Chinese migrants as cultural diasporas.

The semantic reconstruction of ‘diaspora’ is the third phase of its semantic evolvement. In his article “Diaspora”, Tongming Jun Liu shared the view of James

Clifford, a theorist of diaspora, “the diasporic discourse is traveling under the new state of globalization. As far as this kind of discourse is concerned, Jewish (Greek/Armenia) Diaspora can be treated as a start, but not a criterion.” Tongming Jun Liu considered that the history of Jews indeed contributes to the theory of diaspora, but some connotations of ‘diaspora’ derived from it are not suitable to the characteristics of the contemporary era anymore. For instance, he mentioned, the information revolution has already made the connection between nations so convenient that people could continuously cross borders between nations whether in the spiritual and cultural world, or in the real world. The feelings of loneliness and helplessness due to leaving homeland are no longer as strong as before. Therefore if the historical experiences of Jews are still being considered as the criterion of the theory of diaspora, the studies of the phenomenon of diaspora which is already related to the new realities and problems of the contemporary era would be blocked.

The word ‘diaspora’ was generally capitalized in the English and American dictionaries before 1980s. Afterwards it began to appear in lower case. In Tongming Jun Liu’s opinion, the slight change of spelling is in fact a sign of semantic reconstruction of the word. The word ‘diaspora’ in lower case is the one reconstructed semantically, which becomes the symbol of the culture-generating and culture-creating in the era of globalization and postcolonialism, namely: it is of necessity that some national culture or history is revealed and multiplied in the connection between nations by means of traveling, translating and mixing. In addition, the usage of the adjective ‘diasporic’ has been beyond the area of homeland-leaving and the limitation of the historical experiences of Jews. Any form of nation-crossing, culture-translating or culture-mixing, such as some of literary styles, musical styles and cultural activities, can be considered to be ‘diasporic’. This is another sign of the semantic reconstruction of the word ‘diaspora’. Tongming Jun Liu believed that the new semantic content after reconstruction is in fact the return to the original meaning of its Greek derivation. The meaning of multiplying of plants and that of multiplying of culture are then syncretized appropriately into the same word. Through the passive semantic content of dispersion and exile, the word ‘diaspora’ gets its new and active

meaning of culture-multiplying and returns to the original meaning of its Greek derivation——life-multiplying.

Different from sociological research, Tongming Jun Liu mentioned, cultural and literary studies usually prefer the new meaning of ‘diaspora’ after semantic reconstruction and focus on the diasporic consciousness which takes shape in the contemporary cultural activities. On the one hand, the second and third phase of the semantic evolvement of the word ‘diaspora’ are related to each other, especially in the connotation of culture-recreating. Besides the diasporic consciousness or the diasporic perception of culture is based on the knowledge of the social and living conditions of diaspora groups. On the other hand, diaspora groups, those who leave their homeland to live in foreign lands, are not sure the ones who bear diasporic consciousness. Tongming Jun Liu proposed the concept of ‘diasporic consciousness’ and defined it as a kind of consciousness which is beyond one-fold thinking and generates culture. He believed that diasporic consciousness is derived from experiences but not equal to the direct experiences. Thus, in his article “Diaspora” (Feisan 飞散), he wrote: “the state or experience of diaspora and the diasporic perspective are inseparable. But the two are not synonymous. If a man, who lives under a state of diaspora, is entirely assimilated in terms of culture, he will not bear nation-crossing thinking, namely: he will give up diasporic perspective. Similarly, a man, who is not in the state of diaspora, may learn to take diasporic perspective, namely: to think in the way of nation-crossing and culture-traveling. A diaspora in terms of spirit, like the artists of fiction who are versed in narrating stories from various perspectives, belongs to aesthetic area. The cross-border thinking proposed in the contemporary Western literary theories, is another expression of diasporic perspective.”¹ Just as James Procter mentioned, “diaspora can appear both as naming a geographical phenomenon, the travel of physical terrain by an individual or a group, and as a theoretical concept: a way of thinking or of representing the world.”²

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “Feisan,” p. 55.

² James Procter, “Diaspora,” in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. John Mcleod, (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 151-158.

Tongming Jun Liu mentioned that consciousness of assimilation is the opposite side of diasporic consciousness. Because the essence of assimilation is fears for the exotic culture or a kind of narrow nationalism. Under the pressure of assimilation, so many migrants in Western lands try to conceal their own exotic characteristics as much as possible. Once the homeland in heart withers away, diaspora will terminate. On the other hand, to reject assimilation doesn't mean not to develop in the new residence or not to multiply their own culture in adaptation. The self-isolation will also make the homeland in heart wither away, and then diaspora will terminate. Therefore the diasporic consciousness and perspective are cross-bordered, plural and related to the paradoxical view of glocalism of the contemporary era. As James Clifford said, diaspora is the kind of nationalism that is opposed to nationalism. Tongming Jun Liu considered that the diasporas who bear diasporic consciousness wouldn't hold the cultural tradition of their homeland in a so-called 'pure' way, but translate the history and culture of their homeland in the context of cross-nation. Such translation would generate that kind of 'greater language' mentioned by Walter Benjamin. Hence Tongming Jun Liu defined diasporic culture and literature as follows: the national culture and literature which is translated in cross-national context but not assimilated.¹ He pointed out that a group of excellent writers in the contemporary era, who come from Latin America, Africa, Asia, perfect their own styles after they absorb European literature and culture and make their national culture to get multiply and develop in their diasporic style. Since 1960s till now, both the quantity and quality of cross-national national literary works and writers has risen rapidly and the situation of 'diaspora' in culture has taken shape.²

Although Mu Xin migrated to New York, he still wrote in Chinese. His Chinese is pure, old-fashioned and without translationese. He inherited the language style from the semi-literary-and-semi-vernacular tradition of May Fourth New Literature. However the explorations into philosophy, art and humanity in his works contain the

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, "Feisan de wenhua yu wenxue," p. 92.

² Tongming Jun Liu, "Mu Xin fengge de yiyi," p. 22.

profound Western cultural essence, which sometimes even makes his readers feel that the author is a Westerner.¹ Besides his writing is so modern and the perspective of his writing and the way of his thinking can be traced back to the same origin with the Western modern cultural perceptions. Alexandra Munroe ever commented on Mu Xin's painting, "The single imperative of modern Asian artists is to define a space that absorbs the cultures of traditional Asia, the classical West, and of modernity. Few artists are able to arrive at an authentic synthesis. Fewer still are able to create a genuinely original art that goes beyond a mere integration of artistic forms and styles to achieve an intelligence that transcends the boundaries of , yet resonates with, all three cultures. The artist and writer Mu Xin does this with uncommon grace, so that one feels not that a pastiche has been made, but that a self-evident wholeness has been discovered."² This comment is also suitable for Mu Xin's literary writing. And Tongming considered that Mu Xin's style is very rare in Chinese contemporary literature. Because the origin of Mu Xin's style is not unitary but plural. His spiritual origin is not only based on the classical Chinese culture—the culture of Pre-Qin dynasty, the culture of the period of Wei and Jin, the culture of Han and Tang dynasty, but also based on the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy; and the characteristic of his thoughts as well as the style of his art is western and modern.³ In my opinion, Mu Xin's unique style is thanks to his self-diaspora. He had always borne diasporic consciousness whether he was in Mao Dun library in Wuzhen, the Art College in Shanghai, imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution or in the dwelling in New York. He always held a diasporic perspective to think, to watch, to read and to write. And he always held a perception that culture and literature should be holistic and global.

4.2 The Self-diaspora in Literary Homeland

¹ Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," p. 62.

² Alexandra Munroe, "Palimpsest: Nearby Mu Xin," p. 4.

³ Tongming Jun Liu, "Mu Xin fengge de yiyi," p. 21.

Mu Xin's works always make Chinese readers feel both familiar and unacquainted. The reason that readers feel familiar is because Mu Xin's semi-literary-semi-vernacular language style is reminiscent of literary tradition before 1949. The reason because readers feel strange is that Mu Xin always placed himself in the overall landscape of literature (culture), namely: he always held a world outlook that literature (culture) should be treated as a whole. Mu Xin had never treated the cultural tradition of the West and China from the perspective of binary opposition of the nation and the world, of Chinese learning and Western learning, of tradition and modernity. Thanks to the world outlook Mu Xin held, when he saw the world with two eyes provided by Chinese ancient culture, he regarded the world literature as homeland in which he reconsidered Chinese cultural tradition. His reconsideration on the premise of the world outlook makes his old experiences be confirmed again, and make the distance of distinct vision between the subject and the object retractile.¹ The national culture and the world outlook get deepened and expanded in his love and cognition for art and literature. Therefore the overall landscape of the world literature where Mu Xin placed himself in is diasporic, cross-national and modern.

As I mentioned before, Mu Xin was a child of a rich and intellectual family, good educated in the Chinese literati tradition. He said: "My childhood and adolescent years were spent struggling in the sedimentary deposits of an ancient culture. But it gives me great pleasure to be able to see the world with two eyes provided to me by our ancient culture, because one eye is that of a polemicist and the other is that of a lover."² In Mu Xin's works, his cultural cultivation in Chinese ancient culture is reflected not only in the respect of words and terms, literary allusions, and so on, as I mentioned in the last chapter, but also in the respect of his distinctive view on the code and gene of Chinese culture and the respect of his comprehensive grasp of Chinese cultural tradition. I would like to take his prose "The

¹ Mu Xin, "Dai gen de liulangren 带根的流浪人," in *Gelunbiya de daoying* 哥伦比亚的倒影 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press), 2006, p. 60.

² Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," pp. 64-65.

Ninth of September” as an example. In this prose, Mu Xin addressed how people in China and nature in China are integrated to generate a kind of spiritual code which exists everywhere and has a long history. The prose begins with his reflection of the relationship between people in China and nature in China in Chinese literature, philosophy and religion, which is also the theme of this prose. In the first two paragraphs, he not only proposed the theme, but also summarized the history of Chinese classical literature concisely and pointed out the view of nature of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in Chinese culture accurately in the meanwhile.

From The Book of Songs, via Chu Ci and Hanfu, to the poetry of the Tang dynasty and Ci (词) of the Song dynasty, it shows that the relationship between human in China and nature in China lies in that they understand each other equally. Human in China vent both their joy and sadness on nature in China. In The Book of Songs, almost all the poems employ animals and plants to elicit or imply what they are supposed to chant. It is said that there is an intrinsic link between them, but it is more like that they are related to each other irrelevantly. Scholars can only know to use ‘explicit comparisons’ (bi 比) and ‘implied comparisons’ (xing 兴) to explain it. Why do they ask the reason why people in China couldn’t compose a poem without referring to flowers, trees, insects and birds. Chu Ci is entirely verdant and fragrant. It seems as if its author lives on a tree or in a cave and what he prefers to wear doesn’t belong to textile. Hanfu is grandiose, which displays all the characters whose radicals (pianpang 偏旁) includes jin (金), mu (木), shui (水), tu (土), as well as those characters which are used to name fowls, beasts and aquatic animals, as if it says to the nature, ‘I know you well.’ In Tang Dynasty, [……] ‘human’ and ‘nature’ looked at each other intimately, as such verse goes, ‘raising the cup I invite the moon’ (举杯邀明月). [……] The literary terms, such as ‘personification’, ‘empathy’, and ‘yongwu’ (咏物) are merely the perfunctory explanation for the relationship between ‘human’ and ‘nature’. Ci of Song dynasty is a melancholy continuation of poetry of Tang dynasty. The attitude of ‘human’ towards ‘nature’ turned to be dispirited. Although the style was exquisite and the wording was novel,

the vitality eventually became weak. Afterwards it is probably due to the exhaustion of wonderful rhetoric to describe the relationship between ‘human’ and ‘nature’, human in China then deified or demonized plants and animals in China that ghosts and goblins began to communicate directly with human just as human communicate with each other. — Is it that the nature in China bestow favor on people in China or is it that people in China flatters the nature in China? It has never been explained clearly which is the former and which is the latter; which is the host and which is the guest.

Confucian created their own doctrines by expounding on classics, however what they created and inherited was actually a set of political trickeries of kings; When kings could make their statement consistent, they said the whole; when they couldn’t, they put the blame on the ‘nature’; therefore there were lots of honest and frank cowards dressed with high cap and wide belt. The school of Ge Zhi (格致) pieced idealism and utilitarianism together hardly in the aspect of name (ming 名), principle (li 理), study (zhi 知), practice (xing 行), and put ‘nature’ into pragmatism, however the effect was so impractical that they themselves felt disappointed. Buddhism places itself above the ‘nature’, and the ‘nature’ is just Buddha’s platform and stage properties. Thus Buddhist view on nature, starting from benevolence and ending up with boundless arrogance, is eventually limited. —Generally comparing, Taoism is most alert, unrestrained and closest to the ‘nature’; Chinese ancients artists normally have Taoist temperament, or they had ever been the admirers and bystanders of Taoism. The Taoist master was originally an old man out of power, a hopeless cynic, with who artists were still willing to talk for a night. After the night, they left. (They didn’t leave far away, just tramped the way between pessimism and hedonism, paying attention to their own posture. They inevitably remained regarding Taoists intimately.) However it is fortunate that artists eventually did not become philosophers, otherwise it will be too bleak.”¹

¹ Mu Xin, “Jiu yue chu jiu 九月初九,” in *Gelunbiya de daoying*, pp. 3-4.

The two paragraphs above addresses the relationship between people and nature in China, but they also can be treated as the condensed history of Chinese culture. If Mu Xin doesn't have so profound cultivation of Chinese ancient culture, he wouldn't have such compact and incisive view on Chinese cultural tradition. In an interview, Tongming Jun Liu asked Mu Xin what he thought is the quintessence of Chinese culture. Mu Xin answered: "China was once a country of poetry. Emperors' decrees, memorials to the throne, festival greetings and elegies were all written in verse. [.....] The landscape paintings (shan-shui) of the Northern Song Dynasty can be compared to Western symphonies; the various masters in the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties all reached the peak in their own ways, which is a phenomenon in the history of world painting. Just as people in the West are good at dancing, we in China are expert at calligraphy. Of all forms of artistic expression, China's calligraphy is a special act of the intellect in its display of talent and training. In terms of the art of sculpture, the stone caves in Yungang (云冈), in their magnificent and perfect states, seem to have achieved a cosmic harmony. If we compare China's pottery, bronze and ceramic products to similar products from Greece, Rome, Byzantine, the Islamic world, Egypt, and India, then China, among these ancient nations, has a dignified superiority in its ancient craftsmanship. The masterpieces of our classic literature have attained a state of crystallization in which not a single word needs to be added or deleted. Our ancient philosophers were all first-rate stylists: as you contemplate their philosophical profundity, you fall for their literary charms. [.....] Why did Bodhi-dharma go to China and not anywhere else? That must be the greatest unsolved mystery in Zen Buddhism."¹ And in another interview, when the journalist asked Mu Xin if he had ever considered to write in English, Mu Xin said: "Among all kinds of the language in the world, Chinese is most graceful and ingenious. For example, when we want to describe 'aroma' in English, we can only say 'good smell' or 'pleasant smell', but in Chinese we can say 'fuyu' (馥郁), 'fenfang' (芬芳) and so on. Those Chinese words

¹ Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," p. 64.

cannot be expressed exactly in a foreign language. Therefore I have never thought that I will write in another language.”¹

From those words of Mu Xin above, it is not hard to find that he was well versed in Chinese ancient culture and how much he love and feel proud of his national culture. However Mu Xin had a ‘universal love’ for literature, because his literary homeland is so expansive. He preferred a ‘universal love’ for the whole literary homeland to a ‘personal pride’ in the national culture. This ‘universal love’ can be traced back to his reading memories in the Mao Dun library in Wuzhen. The profound read on European classical literature and philosophy and literary works of other nations made Mu Xin get a diasporic perspective and a world outlook. He got rid of the limitation of the perspective of binary opposition of Chinese learning versus Western learning, nationalization versus westernization, which had taken shape since late Qing dynasty. He said: “ When I left my hometown in my 15 yeas old, I bore a dream of the whole world in my heart.”² He said: “ As far as I am concerned, art is global rather than national.”³

Mu Xin believed that the first principle of modern cultures should be their connectedness. He said : “Culture is like wind and wind knows no boundary or center. Once there is a center, wind becomes a whirlwind. Some Spanish painter ever said, when he watched Parthenon in Athens, he felt every civilization in the world is derived from those eight Pillars. In environment protection, we advocate that we have only one earth. Then in literature and art, we have only one teacher. When Hegel spoke out that Greece is always the teacher of human beings, I think, he didn’t mean that Greece is only the teacher of the Western world.”⁴ It is obvious that Mu Xin is opposed to nationalism and localism in literature and art. He said: “ You see, there is no one in Western lands who boosts nationalism and localism. They have various

¹ Xu Jing 许璟, “Mu Xin: Zhongguo zuimei de daoying 木心: 中国最美的倒影,” in *He 蒿*, June, 2011.

² Li zongtao, “Wentijia Mu Xin”, p. 117.

³ Xu Jing, “Mu Xin : Zhongguo zuimei de daoying.”

⁴ Mu Xin, “ Zhongxia kaixuan,” p. 63.

kinds of style and character. That's right. Picasso had never painted Spanish beauties or the landscape of his hometown, nor he had brought that kind of paintings to Paris to found his artistic career."¹ As ever William Faulkner said, if nationalism enters literature, then there would be no literature. Mu Xin shares Faulkner's sentiments entirely. In his opinion, literature is the study of human (renxue 人学).² What he concerned about is the universality of human and the depth of humanity. Therefore he wrote both Western themes and Chinese themes in his works.

For example, in his fiction "The Windsor Cemetery Diary", the dialogue between 'I' and the 'other' I never met through the turn of a coin on the platform of one of a tombstones in a nameless cemetery in New York, the correspondence between 'I' and my girlfriend, and the love between the Duke and Duchess fo Windsor, correlate with each other. The author pondered on what the essence of love is, at the same time he reveal his reflections on the 'other', on the relationship between 'I' and the 'other', between 'I' and the world. Just as the words inscribed on the coin in the story, "*E pluribus unum.*"

In the fiction "SOS ", the author didn't give specific nationalities to figures. The scene is set on a sinking ship. It addresses the life ethics at an important juncture of life and death. In the fiction, 'I' was a doctor who left the cabin and was ready to get on the lifeboat. On the way to lifeboat, 'I' found a pregnant woman going to give birth. 'I' made a tough decision. 'I' stayed to deliver the baby. The baby was born when the cabin was flooded by seawater.

The fiction "Ration for Seven Days" use the Chinese ancient theme. The scene is set in the war between Chu (楚) and Song (宋) in the Spring and Autumn period. 'I' was Sima zifan 司马子反, the great general of Chu. 'I' found out that there has already been no provisions for both army and common people in the besieged town of Song, where men began to change their children to eat. Therefore 'I' persuaded the king of Chu to withdraw and made him agree to leave half of our only remaining army provisions for seven days to Song, although it would take more than seven days

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 1053.

² *Ibid.*, p. 998

to return to Chu. Of course, in the actual history, Sima Zifan didn't donate the army provisions to Song. The donation is fictional. However, through Mu Xin's invention, the Mohist thoughts of universal love and non-attack in ancient China and modern people's hate for and reflection on war merge together.

The scene of the fiction "Fellow Passengers" is in Shanghai. 'I' was a passenger in a bus. 'I' heard inadvertently the dialogue between a young man and his wife before he jumped onto the bus. The young man was in navy blue with an umbrella. 'I' observe him along the way: his slight sob because of unpleasant family disputes, his falling asleep during the journey, and his twirling his umbrella accompanied with his whistle after we got off. 'I' comment, "I had often thought that a human being is like a container holding both joy and sadness. But a human being isn't a container. He is more like a pipe through which both joy and sadness flow. A pipe with all sorts of emotions flowing through it until one's death or until it is emptied. A madman, then, is someone whose pipe is stuffed, or cracked. [.....] He who can feel sadness easily can feel cheerfulness more easily. Thus he possesses a strong capacity for survival. [.....] The world is made up of many unblocked pipes like the man in navy blue with his black umbrella."¹ Through the observation of the man twirling the umbrella, the author saw what the peace from numbness is. And he began to think about the life state of human beings. He found that a human being who is like a container and who is more like a pipe are not the same kind of people. He didn't evaluate which kind is better, but he knew that he is not one of those pipes. Because it is written at the end of this story, "I should be able to twirl my umbrella in his lighthearted manner after I have wept and grieved. Or else I should always be excluded from the world which includes them. They are insignificant people. I am less than insignificant."²

To what Mu Xin paid attention is to understand human beings through art and literature, is the relationship between human being and art. He believed that both the highest and lowest significance of literature are that human beings want to understand

¹ Mu Xin, "Fellow Passengers," tran. by Tongming Jun Liu, in *An Empty Room*, p. 57.

² Ibid.

themselves. He said, “ If human beings want to save themselves, they should understand themselves and others by means of knowledge, curiosity and aesthetics, which are the most valuable traits of human beings.”¹ And he pointed out that the relationship between art and human beings is the relation of signifying, namely: there at first doesn't exist a relationship between art and human beings, but if human beings want to be better, then they would be related to art.”² Mu Xin respected Dostoevsky who was so interested in human beings that he dissected humanity in his literature. He said: “ Not to look into ideological beliefs or code of ethics in the works of Dostoevsky.”³ He said: “ It is too narrow-minded to think that Dostoevsky is only an expert in revealing the mysterious soul of Slavic people. Dostoevsky is a cosmopolitan writer. Neither Nietzsche nor Gide would treat Dostoevsky only as a Russian Genius.”⁴ Mu Xin strongly agreed with what Nietzsche said that Dostoevsky is the only one who taught me in psychology. And he bore Gide's words that to read Dostoevsky is an important thing for a lifetime in heart all his life long. He regarded Nietzsche and Dostoevsky as a great pair of brackets. He said: “ Nietzsche is the left bracket, and Dostoevsky is the right one. All the antecessors I respect are included in this pair of brackets.”⁵

Therefore when Tongming Jun Liu asked Mu Xin to comment on ‘nationalism’ and ‘universal humanity’, Mu Xin said: “ That is the kind of question that becomes increasingly noisy in a period of crisis when the salt of the earth is diminishing. The Bible says: if salt is not salty, what else can remedy that? I care only about the saltiness of salt, not where the salt is produced. To regulate literature with such categories as nationality and regionality would seem to be expanding ethnographic research. But it could also become an activity in which the expert is trying to determine whose salt tastes less salty and whose more salty. In fact, Prosper Merimee had already mocked localism. And Albert Einstein ever said nationalism is the

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 645.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 646.

⁵ Mu Xin, “Ah, Misha,” p. 59.

smallpox of children. They all saw through the arrogant and autistic mentality of nationalists. Nationalist is very similar to the governor's wife in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Bertolt Brecht. In order to grab the child, she doesn't care if the arms of the child would be pulled apart, because she is mother, nation. [.....] Let's turn back to 'the salt of the earth'. In his later life, Andre Gide once received a letter from an African youth, who wrote his reflection and foresight on the confusion of the century. Gide said: this is the salt of the earth and I can die without hopelessness."¹

Mu Xin was just like the African young man. What he wrote in his works is about various cultural propositions, such as the past and the future of culture of human beings, the relationship between philosophy, art, science and the universe, i.e. the relationship between will to life and will to the universe, the relationship between the modernity and the tradition of culture, the contrast between cultural trends in history and so on. He said: "The world is in its entirety. The history is in its series. What literature touches are the whole world and the consecutive history."²

For example, in his prose "Night Talks in the Tower by the River", Mu Xin summarized the phases of the development of human culture and pointed out the characteristics and faults of the culture in our era. It is written: "Our times is the middle age of human culture. What a happy coincidence: the sun is in its middle age and so is the earth. Human culture has experienced its childhood with full of myths and fables, adolescence of Renaissance, youth of romanticism, each excellent art with its enough self-knowledge in each phase endowed its times the irreplaceable trait. The trait of childhood is keenness; that of adolescence and youth is enthusiasm; and middle age sincerity. [.....] Our times should take sincerity as its irreplaceable trait, however Picasso commented that there lacks sincerity in our times. We, we middle-aged, should envisage awakening art with sincerity."³

There is another example. In the prose "The Tardy Confessions", Mu Xin

¹ Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," pp.71-72.

² Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 36.

³ Mu Xin, "Jianglou yetan 江楼夜谈," in *Yuli zhi yan*, p. 9.

presented his reflections on the unbalance between the development of politics, economy and science and that of culture and art in the 20th century, and pointed out that the humanistic spirit lost in the process of modernization. He wrote, “ If I was born in the 17th century, I may be an ascetic monk; in the 18th century, a member of the Enlightenment; in the 19th century, a playboy. I prefer to be born in the early 20th century that I can witness the demise of fascism, the antichrist being utterly defeated. But unfortunately I witness that art is ravaged and literature is dying meanwhile. The scientific explorations have entered from the macroscopic world to the microscopic world, and from the low-speed phenomena to the high-speed phenomena in the microscopic world. We know more about the cosmos and life. Our times ought to be a great era in which the thoughts of human advances considerably. However we have neither groundbreaking thinkers nor the captain of the voyage in the conceptual world. There are only numerous mediocre terminologies. Only Martin Heidegger converted to literature from philosophy, who lived like a hermit in the Black Forest, which is like a vast expanse of whiteness of penitence. However a philosopher to be a poet is much more difficult than a camel to pass through a pinhole. Do human beings live poetically on earth? Human beings are destroying the poetry on earth. [·····] Politics and business are more like the “animalistic life”; they are tactic in nature. Culture and art are more like the “botanical life”; they are strategic in nature. When I presented this view in the form of dialogue to those Western writers, scholars and professors, they agreed sincerely with me. [·····] If there are no plants in the world, then animals will be extinct as well. I pray with my Western friends that this is a botanical and strategic requiem mass of literature. [·····] I still remember that the generation of the wise in the end of the 19th century who called the 20th century respectively the ‘new century’. With so much beautiful hope, they expected dawn’s coming. This devout generation is called as ‘idealist’ by their later generations. And we, the host and eyewitness of this century, would like to regard the twenty-first century as the ‘new century’ no more and no longer expect the coming of dawn of the world. The 20th

century honestly disappoints the 19th century's expectation and does owe the 19th century.”¹ And in the prose “The Reflection of Columbia University” (*Gelunbiya de daoying* 哥伦比亚的倒影), Mu Xin pointed out the main fault of modern civilization again. He said: “Cultures in former times were being with life, however the previous cultures that are interpenetrated with life have gone along with the vanishing of previous lives, what we get is just their inverted image.”²

The world outlook of Mu Xin comes from his universal love for the whole of human culture (literature, art, philosophy). Such universal love is a kind of love of the realm of conceptual, which is not limited to one nation or country in a political and geographical sense. With this universal love, Mu Xin perceived the generality shared in different cultures, namely: he reflected on his national culture in the homeland of world culture and made the Chinese and Western culture reflect and contact with each other in his works. As Tongming Jun Liu mentioned, “the essence of globalism is not sameness but generality. Divergences and differences, which contribute to cultural tensions, are allowed to exist in generality. The cultural tensions in generality of different cultures make the world broad and profound.”³ He added, “the most direct and rare medium between different cultures are some of the individuals who have an uncommon perception of the time and space of culture. Through this uncommon perception, the history and culture of different nations begin to connect with each other and get their new connotations.”⁴ Mu Xin is such kind of medium between different cultures. The best illustration of his uncommon perception is his prose “The Modern Prophet”. In this prose, Mu Xin traveled across time and space. His spiritual journey begins from ancient Perisa, Athens and Rome to medieval China in Wei-and-Jin dynasty. He recounted his imaginary conversations with Omar Khayyam, Pericles, Petronius, Ji Kang and his peers. As Wu Hong said, Mu Xin recounts those conversations with the conviction of a prophet or spirit-medium.⁵

¹ Mu Xin, “Chichi gaobai,” pp. 99-101.

² Mu Xin, “Gelunbiya de daoying,” in *Gelunbiya de daoying*, p. 101.

³ Tongming Jun Liu, “Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 39.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Wu Hong, “Reading Mu Xin: An Exile without A Past,” p. 40.

In addition to “The Modern Prophet” (Yikuang pian 遗狂篇), there are many other examples we can find in his works. For example, in the prose “Not Yet Cold”, Mu Xin compared Chinese calligraphy and European classical music, he pointed out that the common artistic essence of the two is the metaphysical nature of art. He said: “There is no music in China, or in other words, Chinese music has not self-consciousness in art. Or we say that Chinese music reveals the bad aspect of Chinese nationality. Or we say that the music Childe Ji Zha 季扎 in Pre-Qin dynasty had ever heard is the real Chinese music. After Qin dynasty, till the end of the 20th century, Chinese music has totally declined. [……] But (this ‘but’ is not easy) we can find the metaphysical landscape in Chinese calligraphy, which is on a par with that contained in European music. The hand-written styles of seal, clerical, standard and cursive script, like the styles of European classical music, express perfectly the history of artistic style from classical, romantic to modern phase. [……] Chinese calligraphy has a long history and in which there ever existed many great masters. The realm of art they reached and the accomplishments they achieved are in common in with European musicians to their music in essence. The popularity of calligraphy in China is similar to that of music in Europe.¹

In the prose “Visiting the Recluse”, Mu Xin wrote: “ One who always chooses Western style in aspects of daily life, especially in dress and in manners, once come to Europe and America, then he suddenly finds that he is no longer fashionable and out of tune with Western spirit. He begins to miss his homeland day and night. [……] Western spirit and Oriental spirit are the two sides of a coin. If one is out of tune with Western spirit, then he must fail in Oriental spirit as well. Imagine that they , Zhuang Zhou 庄周 (369 BC-286 BC), Ji Kang 嵇康 (223-262), Badashanren 八大山人 (1626-1705), come to Europe or America. They must be like a duck in water. Besides Ji Kang would be a pianist and perform in Paris, London and other cities.”² In this paragraph, Mu Xin not only mentioned that the spirits of Oriental and Western culture are the two sides of a coin, but also proposed the essential difference between the state

¹ Mu Xin, “Yiliang weihan,” pp.43-44.

² Mu Xin, “Bi yu qiuyuan 贲于丘园,” in *Sulu zhi wang*, p. 73.

of diaspora and the diasporic consciousness. And he himself is just the man who bears the diasporic consciousness and has an uncommon perception of the spirits of both Oriental and Western cultures. Therefore he can write down such sentence, “ If Li Shangyin 李商隐 (813-858) lived in the 19th century, he must be versed in French and often visited Stéphane Mallarmé. The two may talk till midnight and drink palm wine.”¹

In a word, as far as Mu Xin’s concerned, his homeland is the whole literary world. In this expansive homeland, he called himself a Greek born in Shaoxing. In my opinion, he didn’t mean the geographical Greece or China. As he wrote, “ It is better to say that he (Milan Kundera) doesn’t have a stubborn complex on any geographical or historical county than that he (Milan Kundera) treated France as his homeland.”² In the diasporic discourse, homeland is an important concept. The conception of homeland is not only the opposite side of diasporic consciousness but also the indispensable prerequisite of it. As we know that diaspora is not only a sociological phenomenon but also a way of thinking. Similarly, homeland doesn’t just mean a geographical country/ area, or an original land a diaspora ever left. Tongming Jun Liu mentioned that homeland could be different cities, nations, countries and cultures where a diaspora has a sense of belongingness.³ Homeland as well could be a selected location for self-identity, cultural creation, oppression-resisting and so on, i.e., the ‘imaginary motherland’ in Salman Rushdie’s words.⁴ Mu Xin said: “ there are two kinds of relationship between artists and country: one is that artists has no motherland, the other is that artists decides which is their motherland.”⁵ And he said: “Baron de Montesquieu called himself a Persian. Prosper Mérimée called himself a Portuguese. Stendhal said he was from Milan. Their self-identities are all due to the necessity for literature. French writers had always not lost the classical spirit. ”⁶ Mu

¹ Mu Xin, “Zheyu 嘘语,” in *Qiongmeika suixianglu*, p. 46.

² Mu Xin, “ Dai gen de liulangren” in *Gelunbiya de daoying*, pp. 60-61.

³ Tongming Jun Liu, “Feisan,” p. 55.

⁴ Tongming Jun Liu, “ Feisan de wenhua yu wenxue,” p.92.

⁵ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 576.

⁶ Mu Xin, “ Haixia chuansheng,” p. 14.

Xin himself as well didn't lose this kind of classical spirit, therefore he called himself a Greek of Shaoxing. I believe that his imaginary motherland lies in this kind of classical spirit, the uninterrupted tradition of Chinese culture and the essence of Western culture in his memories. Hence he said: "I return to China with China."¹ He said: "If you ask me why I left China, because I was taking a walk, and, unawares, went too far away."²

Mu Xin's stroll is actually his self-diaspora in the literary homeland. Obviously, his self-diaspora can be traced back to his reading memories in the Mao Dun library. When he left Wuzhen in his 15 years old, he has a dream in his heart, which is the dream about literature and art. In the real and the external world, he experienced home-leaving, imprisonment, various sufferings and exile, while the literary homeland in his heart had always been with him. When he returned to Wuzhen in his last years of life, he said: "Both diaspora and return are only for literature."³ I believe that the literary homeland and the adolescent's dream of art and literature in his heart as well return to Wuzhen with him.

Whether in the dungeon in Shanghai, the dwelling in New York, or in the old mansion in Wuzhen, what Mu Xin did is strolling in the expansive literary homeland in his heart, meanwhile writing continuously. Only through writing, he could express his deep nostalgia for his literary homeland. As Li Jing 李静, an editor of *Beijing Daily*, mentioned, "Mu Xin's writing makes him in an 'I- You' encounter with all experiences of the ancient and the modern, of the West and China. He resurrected the civilization of the past and his own experiences to be every 'You' in the flesh and then held numerous 'I-You' conversations of the spiritual return. 'I' become richer through 'You' and 'You' become more present through 'I'. This 'I-You' relation is in nature a kind of love, imagination and a deep nostalgia for the poetic world."⁴ Therefore Li

¹ Mu Xin, "Wuzhen."

² Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," p.70.

³ Li Zongtao, "Wo shi Shaoxing Xila ren."

⁴ Li Jing 李静, "Ni shi hanbaoyufang de zhexuejia 你是含苞欲放的哲学家," in *Du Mu Xin*, p. 87.

Jing regarded Mu Xin as the last lover of the world. When she heard the news of his death, she wrote: “ I stared blankly for a while, then said slightly to the world: your last lover has gone. Your objects, your colour, your life, your civilizations, your affectionate past, your heartless present, and your perplexed future will no longer be stared at by his perceptive eyes with full of love. [……] You will exist more lonely, while the love and its way he left to you will be the relics of you.”¹

The last lover Mu Xin expended his life for his beloved literature, strolling in his literary homeland. Therefore Tongming sorted Mu Xin to diasporic writer. At the end of the article “The diasporic Culture and Literature”, Tongming Jun Liu said: “ The generality of human beings lies in that we human beings have respective divergence with each other. Life becomes colourful because of divergences, comprehensive because of connections. Ultimately, diaspora is a kind of art of self-multiplying.”² While diaspora is, as for Mu Xin, not only a kind of art of self-multiplying but also a kind of art of love. Just as he said, “ to appreciate art is unrequited love. Art would not care about you. However we still love it.”³

4.3 Wanderers With Roots

Through the semantic reconstruction at the end of last century, ‘diaspora’ becomes an appropriate metaphor which symbolizes a social and cultural phenomenon, an intellectual condition and a new mode of thinking. While Mu Xin had already come up with his own view of exile writers in the 20th century in the prose “Wanderers with Roots” (Dai gen de liulangren 带根的流浪人) as early as in 1980s. And in a later interview with Tongming Jun Liu, he sorted them into two types, “Ivan Bunin and his generation of exile writers from old Russian left their homeland

¹ Li Jing, “Zuihou de qingren yi yuanxing 最后的情人已远行,” in *Wengu: Mu Xin ji'nian zhuanhao*, p. 115.

² Tongming Jun Liu, “Feisan de wenhua yu wenxue,” p. 89.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 1070.

hurriedly without roots and all withered later in foreign lands. While exile writers of later generation from Eastern Europe, Soviet Union and South America are more valiant and competent. As Milan Kundera's words goes, Paris is more a Prague than Prague itself. I call them as 'wanderers without roots'.¹

From Mu Xin's view, it is obviously that exile writers are not equal to diaspora writers and that exile writers of later generations accord more with the connotation of diaspora writers. When Tongming Jun Liu asked Mu Xin to explain this phenomenon, he replied: "There are two factors involved: nationalist sentiment and history-bound understanding. Artists in the early 20th century still had traces of romantic sentimentalism. It was through the experience of one adverse situation after another that later generations gained so much more talent and dignity. It follows that the power of historical understanding cannot come suddenly; it can come only gradually. Only then can there be such statements as 'Exile is my aesthetic' or 'Paris is more a Prague than Prague itself'. Evidently, their influences grow as their talents grow."²

Tongming Jun Liu sorted Mu Xin to diasporic writers rather than exile writers. Mu Xin quite agreed with him. As far as Mu Xin's concerned, there is, however, a deeper level of significance of diasporic writers. In his opinion, 'diaspora' is not only a social and cultural phenomenon of the external world or a new mode of thinking, but also a phenomenon of the internal conceptual world. Hence he said: "James Joyce agreed that exile is my aesthetics, while I feel that aesthetics is my exile. To wander in the spiritual world, accepting your own fate."³ And added: "An artist is the prodigal son. [.....] He has his own telos and methods. He designs his telos by religion and constructs his methods by philosophy, which yet doesn't mean the return of the prodigal son, but means that the prodigal son is weary of living home then leaves home with enough philosophical and religious properties."⁴ At the end of his prose "Wanderers with Roots", Mu Xin wrote: "The reason that Nietzsche is Nietzsche is that writers rather than philosophers feel more affinities for him and are much more

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, "A Dialogue with Mu Xin," p. 141.

² Ibid.

³ Mu Xin, "Zhongxia kaixuan," p. 70.

⁴ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 108.

influenced by him. What is revealed clearly is that those who follow Nietzsche for his philosophical concepts all leave him later, lost, while those who are well matched in character and temperament with Nietzsche all perfect their own styles. Milan Kundera is not alone. Wanderers with roots who are diasporas in the spiritual world will meet each other in voyage sooner or later. One globe is enough.”¹

Like Kundera, Mu Xin is not alone as well. Because he is the prodigal son of art with enough philosophical and religious properties, the wanderer with roots, the diaspora in the spiritual world. His roots are his spiritual lineage which is constituted of several perceptions, just as Flaubert’s words goes: “I am comprised of several perceptions.” Now I would like to expound on those perceptions which are essential to Mu Xin.

4.3.1 The perception of the Universe

Cezanne: “ If I know that my paintings will be destroyed, I won’t paint anymore.”

Braque: “ If I know that my paintings will be burned, I will paint desperately.”

We are asking the oriental painter sitting on the beach chair, “ And you, Mr Mu Xin? ” ²

In 1980s, the journalists of *Chuang Pao Monthly* (Zhongbao yuekan 中报月刊) of Hong Kong quoted the confessions of Cezanne and Braque to ask Mu Xin. Mu Xin replied: “ All my paintings have already been destroyed and I anticipate that the paintings I paint in the future would as well not survive. The three levels of happiness, respectively in the period before painting, of painting and after painting, are deserved. What troubles Cezanne and his peers is that they want to obtain the fourth level of

¹ Mu Xin, “ Dai gen de liulangren,” p. 66.

² Mu Xin, “ Jiaglou yetan,” p. 1.

happiness of maternal love. The instinct of breeding in sense of spirit is as well so strong that those brilliant artists were so stubborn, even being agitated.”¹ The journalists asked further, “ Mr Mu Xin, how do you know that all your works would not survive? Even the works of demanding Kafka have survived partly.” Mu Xin answered: “ I am not demanding as Kafka. I just hold common sense. [·····] Cezanne and Braque, who can survive? [·····] Human beings’ self-knowledge eventually converted to cosmology from fanatical religious faith. It doesn’t matter whether the view of taking the universe as homeland belongs to pessimism or optimism. Both would be laughed at by Voltaire. Be wise and affectionate. Only in this way, human beings can use the refined thoughts and perception to confront the universe. Your question belongs to the area of cosmology. From the universe to painting, there should be a sequence between the two: perception of the world- perception of life- perception of art. Personal emotions always reverses the sequence of common sense, then annoyance comes. The one would like to paint no more, the other would like to paint desperately. Why cannot they open their eyes to keep a kind of open and clear attitude as Montesquieu did ?”²

The sequence between the universe and painting mentioned by Mu Xin is his epistemology. He expounded on his epistemology in his literary lectures, “ I often mention my epistemology. Its sequence as follows: perception of the universe-perception of the world-perception of life. If your perception of the world is not based on the perception of the universe, then where your world is. If your perception of life is not based on the perception of the world, then don’t you live on the earth? Hence when you thought that you have a perception of life and you don’t and needn’t have a perception of the world and the universe, then you have a perception of nothing. [·····] Only when the perceptions of the world and life are based on the perception of the universe, they will be real and sincere and will not be the self-deception. In the philosophy of Laozi, his perception of the universe is embedded deeply and clearly into his perception of the world and life. Laozi saw the king, the people, the sage, the

¹ Mu Xin, “ Jianglou yetan,” p. 1.

² Ibid., pp. 4-5.

thief, the chick, the dog, all from the perspective of the universe.”¹

In Mu Xin’s opinion, whoever he is should have a basic philosophical attitude, namely, his thinking should be on the basis of the perception of the universe.² Mu Xin himself is no exception. We can see this kind of basic philosophical attitude clearly in his works. To think and to perceive from the perspective of the universe is the ground colour of Mu Xin’s literature and art. Therefore he classified himself as the artists of metaphysics. He excelled at metaphysical thinking and he has always treated the world, art and life from the perspective of the universe.

Then what is Mu Xin’s perception of the universe? In a word, his cosmology is that the universe is aimless and meaningless.

In Mu Xin’s judgment, among Chinese classical philosophy, the thoughts of Laozi is most penetrating, solitude and desolate, which is the total hopelessness. Because Laozi saw through two mysteries. One is heaven, i.e. the universe; the other is human, i.e. life. Heaven, the universe, is indifferent; human, life, are straw dogs. As to Mu Xin, the idea of Laozi that Heaven and earth are indifferent is great and transcendent. He believed that such idea must have been very modern in the era when Laozi lived. He regarded Laozi as a great rebel. He said: “ In ancient China, people were classified into three grades. However the three grades of people almost all regarded Heaven as supreme master, especially Confucians and neo-Confucians in later dynasty, who worshipped Heaven on bent knees. There were lots of words, such as, ‘He who offends against Heaven has none to whom he can pray’, ‘Oneness of Heaven and human’, ‘Destiny must not be violated’, and so on. Only Laozi exposed the trick from the very beginning, and said, “ Heaven is indifferent, treating creation as straw dogs. His rebellion is so great.”³ In Mu Xin’s opinion, the words of Laozi that heaven is indifferent and the words of Nietzsche that God is dead are different in approach but equally satisfactory in result. He considered that the philosophy of Nietzsche exists before Nietzsche and Laozi is the prophet of the Nietzschean

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, pp. 171-172.

² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

philosophy before Nietzsche.

Laozi's judgment on the universe is that Heaven is indifferent, which Mu Xin made a variation on it. He made a further judgment. He said: "Whether being indifferent or not is a matter of indifference to Heaven. (天地无仁无不仁)"¹ Because Mu Xin believed that the universe is aimless, meaningless and without morals. He made this judgment from the perspective of will to the universe. He said: "What held by Laozi is still a humanistic perspective, thus he said that Heaven is indifferent. If he held a cosmic perspective, it doesn't matter whether Heaven is indifferent or not."² This perception of the universe appears in diverse expressions in Mu Xin's works and his literary lectures. For example, there are two sections of proverb in Mu Xin's book *Traveling in Simple Shoes*:

The supremest is not God but fate. God is also dominated by fate. Ancient Greeks understand it. I also understand it. Fate is without right, justice and purpose, therefore you cannot know it when you confront it and you cannot escape it when you meet it. The final explanation of fate as follows: it doesn't matter whether there is fate or not. ——On this subject, neither ancient Greeks nor I get the answer.³

"God without morals is frightening." Kant has already been so fearful that he spoke out such words. "Heaven is indifferent." "Heaven's vengeance is slow but sure." (天网恢恢，疏而不漏) —— Li Dan 李聃 knew clearly that the universe is without morals, but he still wished that there would be Heaven's vengeance to make justice serve.⁴

There is another instance. In the sixth literary lecture Mu Xin talked about the Bible. He said: "Laozi said: 'Heaven is indifferent and treats creation as straw dogs.' What he said is just like the words written in the Bible, 'he makes his sun rise on the

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 176.

² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

³ Mu Xin, "Wu fen ruo ji 巫纷若吉," in *Sulü zhi wang*, p. 35.

⁴ Mu Xin, "Shipeng zhi gui 十朋之龟," in *Sulü zhi wang*, p. 62.

evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”¹ And added: “ ‘to send rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous’, the meaning of the words above is that there is no truth, no morals, no right and wrong. It in fact reveals the extreme pessimism of Jesus. God is without right and wrong, black and white, and above good and evil.”² He said: “ Good (shan 善) is adorable because there is no reciprocation; Evil (e 恶) is detestable because there is no punishment. As far as wisdom’s concerned, religion is lower than philosophy. The religious sense that good is rewarded good and evil is punished is low-leveled, ordinary, and hypocritical.”³

At the beginning of the prose “On Truth and Lies in a Normal Sense”, Nietzsche wrote: “Once upon a time, in some out of the way corner of that universe which is dispersed into numberless twinkling solar systems, there was a star upon which clever beasts invented knowing. That was the most arrogant and mendacious minute of “world history,” but nevertheless, it was only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths, the star cooled and congealed, and the clever beasts had to die.”⁴ Tongming Jun Liu thought that those words of Nietzsche satirized the arrogance of the man-centered knowledge from the perspective of the universe. In the article “Don’t Forget Music, Socrates”, Tongming Jun Liu said: “ There is a Dionysian perception in Nietzsche’s philosophy: the universe is not specially designed for human beings, who are not the center of the universe; the knowledge created by human beings is limited by human beings themselves; human beings are neither the center nor the noumenon of epistemology; any humanism as epistemology or humanism as man-centered knowledge has a big problem.”⁵

Mu Xin’s perception of the universe is the Nietzschean cosmology. He stands on the side of the will to the universe, reflecting on life and wisdom from the perspective of the universe. In Mu Xin’s opinion, “ The phenomenon of life is not the cosmic

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.83.

² Ibid., p. 84.

³ Ibid., p. 85.

⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Normal Sense,” in Walter Kaufmann trans., *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*. (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 79.

⁵ Tongming Jun Liu, “Don’t Forget Music, Socrates,” in *Foreign Literature*, No. 2 (2008), p. 122.

phenomenon . Life is the rebel of the will to the universe.”¹ In the prose “The Night of Atlantic City of Casino”, Mu Xin wrote, “ The universe is not designed for human beings. Human beings are enough clever that they can distinguish between Yin and Yang (阴阳), between plus and minus, between chance and inevitability, between relative and absolute, between finite and infinite, and between the knowable and unknowable. [·····] However all that can be analysed is integrated in origin. Integration is being. The reason that the universe is the universe is that it seems as if the universe wouldn’t like to be analysed. To analyse is in order to utilize. The motive of analysing is anti-cosmic. The disobedience of human being is also revealed in the aspect that human beings want to intervene will of the universe, then human beings appear great. However human beings get frustrated on the subject of the significance of the universe. The universe is a riddle without an answer. But human beings insist on getting the answer, then philosophers think hardly, while religionists create an answer by themselves and show it to the world. [·····] Three or five kinds of religion make up their own answers, then there exist three of five answers, for which those religions attack each other. Every religion asserts that its own answer is the only real one, the answers of others’ are fictional.”²

From Mu Xin’s point of view, religions have never explained the universe. He said: “Genesis can be treated as a myth; Buddhist Sutra and books have lots of different levels, which is so complex that it seems as if Buddhism create another universe, but it in fact contemplates the relationship between life and death with physiological and psychological views.”³ He said: “ If there exists Satan, then it equally means that God is just a relative concept, besides, his power is limited, or why he tolerates that Satan exists all the time. As far as the comparison of the power’s concerned, the tricks of Satan always make God unable to find a solution, all that has been recorded shamefully in the Bible. If the evil’s existence is in order to try and encourage human, i.e. the way to distinguish between the righteous and the

¹ Mu Xin, “Aimosheng jia de e’ke 爱默生家的恶客” in *Aimosheng jia de e’ke*, p. 70.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

³ Mu Xin, “ Haixia chuansheng,” p. 29.

unrighteous, then how cruel and harsh the intention of God is. I wouldn't like to read such religious stories any more. I think: even if a born chosen person with the root of wisdom will know clearly what deception and absurdity are through those various religious stories of innocent martyrs.¹ And added: "if there exist two kinds of religion in the world, then it is enough to prove that both the God of these two kinds of religion are not omniscient and omnipotent as well as not with the supreme good and love. It is self-evident. If two kinds of religion exist simultaneously in the world, and they not only attack and slander each other but also turn to political persecution and large-scale and long-term wars, then it is obvious to prove that God is mere the copy and puppet of human beings."² Mu Xin called the contradictions and attacks between various kinds of religion as 'disease of religious logic'(zongjiao luojibing 宗教逻辑病). He thought that the more the kinds of religion, the less the significance of religion.³

Then what is religion? The answer of Mu Xin as follows: "Because the universe is aimless and meaningless, therefore religion is the one who wants to make up a purpose and significance in the aimless and meaningless universe."⁴ Mu Xin often referred to the doctrines of Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity. When he is inquired about his own perception of religion, he replied: "I treat religion philosophically and humanistically, or in the other words, in the initial sense, religion is the phenomenon of philosophy and humanism. Because there has been no longer the Inquisition, thus I dare to mention religious themes freely in my works. I admire and respect Sakyamuni and Christ very much, while I love Li Dan much more. That I often refer to religion is in order for artistic thinking."⁵

Since religions had never explained the universe, then which method should human use to touch the noumenon of the universe if not by means of religion? Mu Xin gave his answer to this question in an interview:

¹ Mu Xin, "Kafei misa 咖啡彌撒," in *Sanwen yiji* 散文一集 (Taipei: Hongfan Books, 1984), pp. 203-204.

² Ibid., p. 203.

³ Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 30.

⁴ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.108.

⁵ Mu Xin, "Haixia chuansheng," p. 27.

The first method is the exploration into the principle. The second is the inferring with intellect. The third is the perceiving through spirit (soul). But human beings can only talk to themselves all the time. Scientists, philosophers and artists, the three Hamlets, can only speak out their own soliloquy simultaneously on the same stage. Because the universe doesn't have a dialogue with human beings.

What scientists can do is to analyse 'being', which is not creative. The discovering of the four kinds of force is mere discovering. The name of 'elementary particle' is wrong, which should be changed as 'non-basic elementary particle'. There seems a chance to touch the noumenon of the universe through the exploration into high-speed phenomena of microcosm. Meanwhile, there exists the crisis that materials will disappear, namely, materials will transfer to another spatial-temporal frame that human beings are unable to observe. This frame now has no name, while someone calls it as 'conception'. Many particularly sensitive Hamlets in science have already been worried that they themselves will fall into the intangible and unreal situation. When it goes to the situation that rationality is both not enough to use and useless to use, it is hard for them to admit defeat. Therefore I pity Einstein a bit, while I would not like to say that he got quite an achievement in the former part of his life but schemed in vain in the latter part of his life.

Philosophers are the ones who are interested in the riddle of 'the noumenon of the universe'. The one sort of philosophers personify the universe as a human, which is equal to God-creating. Thus those philosophers belong to the school of pantheist and they would like to create an answer to the riddle of the universe by themselves. The other sort of philosophers sum up the findings of scientists to get 'science of science'. Thus they belong to the school of antitheist and they would like to reveal that the universe is the riddle with no answer. We should not classify the two sorts of philosophers simply into idealism or materialism. Philosophers are supposed to be cool-headed, disinterested. In fact, they express their respective 'wish' when putting forth argument and elaborating systems. Did Hegel use his logic to induce 'der Begriff' step by step? He created 'der Begriff' firstly, then

elaborated a set of logic, which is therefore tedious. When philosophers express their ‘wishes’, what I see is their different temperaments. Then the history of philosophy is the list of the temperament of philosophers, which is therefore interesting. Heinrich Heine ever called the snake in the Garden of Eden as ‘the female Hegel without feet’.

How poor the artists are. They have no apparatus, no formula, no syllogism, no the logic of Hegel. Looking up to the starry sky, one artist said: “ Oh, my great mother, please accept my broken heart.” Another one said: “ Above those numerous stars, there must be a Merciful Father.” The view of the universe becomes the view of family. Young artists don’t talk about the universe, but when they become old, sitting lonely on the bank of Rhein, watching the setting sun, they begin to understand that their affection confront the indifference of the universe. [……] Every time I listen to the third chapter of the ninth symphony by Beethoven, I always feel that he is pouring his heart out to the universe, earnestly advising the universe not to be so heartless and indifferent. I think that the universe lives up to Beethoven and should feel ashamed.

The soliloquy of the first Hamlet of the three is clear, the soliloquy of the second one is reasonable, the soliloquy of the third one is graceful. But the universe doesn’t respond to them. Numerous galaxies, which are like a pile of toys no one played with, rotate in the infinite universe. Human beings cannot help but wish to have a dialogue with the universe, to touch it with their fingers and mouths, because ‘life’ is made up of curiosity, desire for learning (求知欲), aesthetic ability and protein. What comforts me and gives hope to me is that the cross-relationship between science, philosophy and art will take shape consciously. Culture in ancient times is comprehensive, in later centuries the division of culture has been more and more detailed. But there might be a new integration emerging, and then the time when it emerges can be called as ‘The Golden Time’ again. At that time, the three Hamlets might sit down to have a talk.¹

¹ Mu Xin, “ Zhongxia kaixuan,” pp. 30-32.

Although the Nietzschean cosmology of Mu Xin looks as if it despises human beings, it is in fact the highest dignity of human beings; it looks as if it is heartless and pessimistic, while it contains great love for human. The soliloquys of the three Hamlets, science, art and philosophy, are the internal soliloquy of Mu Xin. Therefore when Mu Xin read the words of Pascal, “only thinking makes human great”, and “human is a reed provided with thoughts”, he agreed with Pascal. Therefore he said: “Be wise and affectionate. Only in this way, human can use the refined thoughts and perceptions to confront the universe.” Therefore he could still get consolation and feel hopeful when he confronted the eternal silence of the universe.

4.3.2 Theory of Non-truth (无真理论)

What coheres with Mu Xin’s perception of the universe is his theory of non-truth. Mu Xin ever said: “Atheism starts from facing the universe, at which moment lots of atheists are scared to be ‘theists’.”¹ It doesn’t mean that those who are scared to be ‘theists’ will convert to theism again, but means that they will enter the hall of ‘truth’ to convert to ‘truth’ after stepping across the alter of God, which is so-called as ‘theory of truth’ (有真理论) by Mu Xin. He said: “theory of truth is in fact a kind of theism. They are wont to rely. When they can no longer rely on God, then they turn to rely on truth.”² And added: “the times passed can be called as the times of God, the times of truth, the times of theism, or the times of the theory of truth. [……] At first those who believed in God regarded God as truth, thereafter those who believed in truth regarded truth as God.”³ Hence Mu Xin drew a conclusion, “to perceive atheism is easy, to perceive the theory of non-truth is difficult.”⁴

Then what is ‘theory of non-truth’? According to its name, if theory of non-truth

¹ Mu Xin, “Xianghui yanxi 向晦宴息,” in *Sulü zhi wang*, p.122

² Ibid., p. 127

³ Mu Xin, “Hanzhen duanxu 寒砧断续,” in *Jixing panduan*, p. 65.

⁴ Mu Xin, “Xianghui yanxi,” p.127.

is the theory to deny the existence or possibility of truth? In order to clarify the two questions, we might at first clarify the meaning of truth in Mu Xin's opinion. There are two paragraphs of proverbs relating to truth written by Mu Xin below:

There must be a construction opposite to 'truth', whether truth is perceived as an entity or as a concept. Then the construction opposite to 'truth' will be with truth eternally. Then 'truth' is sincerely impossible.¹

The existence of every doctrine, system, or school depends entirely on elaborating and constructing the 'truth' they believe in by their own. In the disputation between each doctrine, system, or school, they hold their respective 'truth' for attacks or defence. If truth is impossible, then all doctrines, systems and schools will collapse, only leaving ruins of thoughts and spirits everywhere.²

The 'truth' mentioned in the two paragraphs above undoubtedly refers to 'absolute value' and 'logic system' maintained in the western philosophical tradition from Plato. The essence of this tradition is 'will to truth' which is criticized by Nietzsche. What 'will to truth' pursues is the incontrovertible value and knowledge, the absolute and one-dimensional judgment on the universe, world and life. However it neglects the aesthetic origin of value and knowledge and the diversification of life, namely: it puts live lives under rigid value.

Therefore Mu Xin's theory of non-truth doesn't deny the existence and possibility of truth, but turn to another way of thinking, namely: to convert the way of thinking from 'what truth is' to 'what kind of truth is'. This turn makes knowledge and value liberated from the logic system, makes human turn to question various kinds of value and think about the value of values rather than believe in absolute value, namely, this turn brings the possibility of the revaluation of all values, as Nietzsche proposed. What Mu Xin denies is not knowledge and value, i.e 'truth', but

¹ Mu Xin, "Shipeng zhi gui," p. 63.

² Mu Xin, "Wu fen ruo ji 巫纷若吉," in *Sulü zhi wang*, p. 41.

to treat the logic system of some kind of knowledge and value as the unique perfection and telos, and to reject all that are inconsistent with it. This is the essence of his theory of non-truth. Facing the universe's eternal silence, the respective 'truth' of various kinds of doctrine, system and school, are just like respective 'God' of various religions. The conflicts and attacks between a variety of 'truth' has in common with the 'logic disease of religion' in nature. Both the two attempt to set up a purpose even to give an answer in the universe with no purpose. This is the reason why Mu Xin considered that the theory of truth is in fact a kind of theism.

Undoubtedly, a kind of knowledge and value must have its own concept, logic, or framework, which Mu Xin called 'the fulcrum of spirit'. He said: "A philosopher has to set a point, a concept for himself. The concept for Schopenhauer is the freedom of the human will; for Nietzsche, will to power; for Hegel, 'Begriff'; for Confucius, humaneness; for Mencius, righteousness; for Han Feizi, legalism, and so on. [.....] It reminds me of a physics term 'leverage'. Some physicist ever said: 'Give me a lever and a place to stand on, and I will move the Earth.' But no one can give him this kind of place. While philosophers provide this kind of place of the spiritual world to themselves by their own."¹ Mu Xin didn't oppose logic, concept or framework, in fact he was versed in various kinds of 'the fulcrum of spirit'. He read and studied religious and philosophical books since he was young. He said: "There are two reasons why I read the Buddhist scriptures and the Bible, and later studies on Zen Buddhism and scholasticism. One reason is that I would like to explore whether truth is possible or not. The other is that reading those books is a kind of spiritual aerobics."² However Mu Xin never regarded any 'fulcrum of spirit' as the purpose he pursued or the criterion of the possibility of truth. He said: "I don't mean that I needn't a fulcrum of spirit, but I didn't dedicate myself to pursue any 'fulcrum of spirit'. I know from the very beginning that the fulcrum of the lever of the spiritual world can't be found. In physics there actually exists fulcrum. Theoretically, even the place to move the Earth might exist. Only the fulcrum to move the universe, or to

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 182.

² *Ibid.*, p. 69.

move ‘Tao’ and ‘Begriff’ is impossible.”¹

Because the universe is with no purpose; because the universe is not set specially for human beings, who are not the centre of the universe. Therefore, human beings can only explore the noumenon of the universe continuously and be infinitely close to it, but you needn’t and can’t get an absolute answer of it. Therefore the fulcrum to move the cosmos is impossible. As it is written in *Tao Te Ching*, “The Way that can be told of is not an unvarying Way; The names that can be named are not unvarying names.” This is the connotation of Mu Xin’s theory of non-truth.

The theory of non-truth coheres with Mu Xin’s perception of the universe. It starts from facing not-being (无) (no purpose); it is sceptical about and rebels against God and the absolute truth; it is beginning of the revaluation of all values. Therefore, Mu Xin said: “Atheism and the theory of non-truth are ‘fatal position’. Only going through this kind of danger of death, then there would be a hope for the spirit of human beings to come out alive.”²

4.3.3 Aesthetic Wisdom

It is written in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “[.....] We may assume that we are merely images and artistic projections for the true author, and that we have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art — for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified.”³ In Tongming Jun Liu’s judgment, these words of Nietzsche aims to inspire the modern people to feel with their instinct as the ancient Greeks did, and to understand that the life of human beings as well as vitality of all things is an eternal creation and an aesthetic phenomenon.⁴ He said: “The essential significance of Nietzsche is that he was not devoted to the system of any theory. He spoke out frankly that will to truth is an error

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 183.

² Mu Xin, “Wu fen ruo ji,” pp. 41-42.

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, p. 52

⁴ Tongming Jun Liu, “The Power of Tragedy,” in *Foreign Literature*, No. 1 (2008), p. 118.

of philosophy. Nietzsche questioned the base of various kinds of values and thoughts about the value of values from the perspective of 'will to life'. In Nietzsche's opinion, the generally accepted knowledge, science and view of truth in modern times lack the vigorous vitalities and joyful wisdom of ancient Greek."¹

Mu Xin agreed with Tongming Jun Liu and use literary language to express the same view in form of proverb. In the proverb titled "The Two Explanation of Pantheism", he wrote: "The one explanation has already been spoken out by Schopenhauer that pantheism belongs to polite atheism. The other explanation as follows: To attempt to coordinate the proportion of gods to human, and to ascribe all to gods, then it is sure that gods will be with human. While gods permeated the infinitely small as well as extended to infinity. The proportion of gods to human became disproportionate. Were Leibniz and Newton bewildered and content with this disproportion? Whether Spinoza felt a vague portent that it would go badly or not? Afterwards, Pantheism goes so further away that Einstein, Planck, Cantor, Faraday, Eddington, Compton, they all didn't think about the proportion. Only those scientists who committed suicide may know that there were people who were sad because of this disproportion. They could become neither theist nor atheist and turned to death. Then when was the proportion of gods to human best balanced and harmonious? In ancient Greece. The ancient Greek's perception of proportion is strongest and most brilliant, which is revealed in their sculptures, architectures and mythology."²

Nietzsche was the first one who mentioned that we should observe science in the artists' vision and observe art from the perspective of life.³ Tongming Jun Liu thought that it is the essence of the Nietzschean wisdom. In his article "The Power of Tragedy: The Nietzschean Turn", Tongming Jun Liu wrote: "What is the Nietzschean wisdom? In a word, it is aesthetic wisdom. The fundamental meaning of aesthetics is the beauty of artistic creating, that doesn't lie in the judgment on beauty and ugliness. The starting point of the Nietzschean wisdom as follows: all things in the world and all

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, "The Power of Tragedy," p. 117.

² Mu Xin, "Yu er mi zhi 与尔靡之," in *Sulü zhi wang*, p. 92.

³ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, p. 197.

activities of human beings are artistic creating, which is called the most generalized ‘aesthetic phenomenon’ or the ‘artistic phenomenon’; and we should take it as the start of reflections on knowledge, truth, value, subject, history and so on.”¹

Mu Xin is the descendant of the Nietzschean wisdom. Mu Xin’s perception of art (how he regards the relationship between life and art, between art and the world, i.e. philosophy, religion and science) and his theory of non-truth are the two sides of the Nietzschean wisdom. Now let’s firstly look at what Mu Xin’s perception of art is.

As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, the relationship between art and human is that art is representations of human beings, that is to say, “ there was at first no relationship between art and human beings, but if human beings would like to be better, then they should turn to art.”²

Question: Why would human like to be better?

Answer: Because they want to know themselves.

Question: Why do human want to know themselves?

Answer: First, they want to perfect themselves. Second, they want to see the cosmos through themselves. Third, they know that they are lonely in the world. They want to look for companion, but they cannot find out. Thus the only one they can depend on is themselves.³

Question: Then what is the relationship between art and human’s knowing themselves?

Answer: The function of art is much greater than that of mirrors. Art reflects souls, numerous souls. When Adam left the Garden of Eden, God said: “ my poor child, you will go outside where there are mountains and sea. Are you afraid?” Adam said: “ I am not afraid.” God said: “ there are serpents and beasts.” Adam said: “ I am not afraid of them.” God said: “ Then go.” Adam said: “ I am afraid.” God looked surprised and asked: “ what are you afraid of ?” Adam said: “ I am afraid of loneliness.” God thought for a while and then gave art to Adam.⁴

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “The Power of Tragedy”, p. 117.

² Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 58

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 586.

In Mu Xin's fictional dialogue between God and Adam, art was born. He articulated that art is the self-reflection of human, the way of self-cognition and the way of touching the universe. This is the relationship between art and human (life), in other words, to observe art from the perspective of life. As for this kind of relationship, Mu Xin gave a clearer explanation in his literary lectures, he said: "Gide expounded well on the significance of the story of Narcissus. His general idea as follows: Narcissus is the self of human being. He found the reflection in the spring of time. The reflection is art, the self that is beyond the self of his own. Art can neither complete reality nor be occupied actually. Human beings can only keep a distance from art to look at the reflection through it. That is to say, when you touch it, the reflection will disappear; when you stay still, it will appear again."¹

In Mu Xin's judgment, art is the reflection and representation of human. Then what is the relationship between art and the world in his opinion? He said: "literature and art are full of vitality, or literature and art are the vitality themselves."² He said: "God created this world, but he doesn't understand it. Artists created this world, and they understand it."³ He said: "An artist is the one who is only secondary to God."⁴ And added: "Shakespeare is the man who is only secondary to God, therefore he is more adorable than God."⁵ Obviously, Mu Xin practised what Nietzsche taught him that he regarded the world as artistic creating and creation.

It is because Mu Xin treated the world as the aesthetic phenomenon that he denied the 'absolute value' elaborated in any system of logic. He said: "I have always been very interested in meaningless things. A thing which already has its meaning will be rigid in its meaning. Only the thing without any meaning will be vivid and expect the advent of significance."⁶ He said: "I thought that art, philosophy and religion, all are narcissism of human being. Only when human beings keep a proper distance from them, there would be beauty, truth, goodness. If you treat religion as philosophy, then

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 33.

² *Ibid.*, p. 468.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 476.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Mu Xin, "Shanghai zai nali 上海在哪里," in *Tongqing zhongduanlu*.

there will be a distance for you to see clearly what religion exactly is; if you treat philosophy as art, then there will be a distance for you to see clearly what philosophy exactly is; if you treat art as religion, then there will be a distance for you to see clearly what art exactly is. My opinion as follows: to treat religion just as religion, confusion is coming; to treat philosophy just as philosophy, something of a pedant is coming; to treat art just as art, cynicism is coming. Because it is too direct, like Narcissus' desire to kiss the reflection in the water. While Narcissus was a wise man. He didn't violate the reflection in the water any more after he failed twice. He was content to keep a distance to watch the reflection till he died."¹

Like Narcissus, Mu Xin was also a wise man who knew how to keep a proper distance. He said: "To read literature as philosophy and to read philosophy as literature."² He said: "Why do we fuss about who are religionists, who are philosophers and who are artists. They all have a heart. They all are Icarus, all want to fly high and all will fall down."³ And he ever explained religious allegories from the perspective of art, finding out their artistic significance. For example, as to the miracle of 'five loaves and two fish' recorded in the Four Gospels, Mu Xin explained: "From the aspect of religious significance, it is a miracle of God. From the perspective of art, there is no other metaphor which can show the great function of art as it does. Art reveals maximum significance with minimum materials. A book, a painting, a piece of music, can move and inspire thousands of people, handed down from generation to generation. Museum is the inexhaustible food basket of human beings."⁴

In summary, Mu Xin used the aesthetic wisdom to treat the world. Therefore he always held the theory of non-truth and didn't devote himself to any system of logic. He said: "A common system of logic can be regarded as a kind of externalized sophistication, the macro-sophistication. While I pursue a kind of internalized sophistication, the micro-sophistication. The externalized sophistication, which belongs to philosophy, is reflected in that philosophers denominate things by

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 32.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴ Ibid., p.103.

reasoning; the internalized sophistication, which belongs to art, is reflected in that artists perceive things but not denominate them. Among philosophers, there was only Nietzsche who noticed the flaw of philosophy and spoke it out frankly. Other philosophers refused to admit the embarrassment of the course of thoughts.”¹ Artists perceive things but not denominate them, because artists make the aesthetic judgment on the world.

In a section of Mu Xin’s proverb, it is written: “ The greatness of art lies in the direct perception of art. Great art is direct perception. The one who is familiar with the direct perception of art should use the direct perception in philosophy. Then he will see a kind of scene: philosophers in previous times thought by heart (soul); philosophers in later times thought by tools.”² To think by heart is to treat the world as an aesthetic phenomenon, to combine logics (rationality) with art (aesthetics), to make thinking and perception to be synonymous. While to think by tools is to use the system of logic to separate knowledge and value from their aesthetic sources, to make truth and art opposed.

Mu Xin is the one who thinks by heart. He is the one who treated the world with the Nietzschean aesthetic wisdom. Therefore life and the world in his eyes are the combination of poetry (aesthetics) and philosophy (rationality). He is the prodigal son of art with enough philosophical and religious properties who wandered in the spiritual world and devoted himself fully to art that he regarded as his faith.

4.3.4 The Turn of Pessimism

The pessimism held by Mu Xin results from his contemplation of the universe and life. It can be traced back to his perception of the universe and the Nietzschean aesthetic wisdom. In a word, the connotation of Mu Xin’s pessimism is ‘tongda’ (通达 to be wise and good). In Mu Xin’s opinion, ‘tong’(通) belongs to epistemology,

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.184

² Mu Xin, “Kun yu gelei 困于葛藟,” in *Sulü zhi wang*, p. 102.

while ‘da’ (达) belongs to methodology; ‘tong’ means to contemplate, while ‘da’ means to stay well or be good in itself and for itself.

To contemplate is to face the indifference of the universe and death of life. The universe is meaningless, aimless and heartless; and man is born to die. Human beings have affection for the universe, they desire to touch, analyse and have a dialogue with the universe with torrent will to life; while the universe is indifferent and will to the universe always keeps silent. Thus Mu Xin said: “Life is the non-comic phenomenon and the disobedience towards will to the universe.”¹ And when Mu Xin read Blaise Pascal’s words that the eternal silence of the infinite space makes me afraid, he thought Pascal hit the nail on the head.² Mu Xin added: “The relationship between human and the universe is the relationship between the initial and the final. There is no place for sadness. Because there is no space between affection (human) and indifference (the universe, God). Therefore Pascal felt afraid.”³

As to the indifference of the universe, Solomon, the son of David, king in Jerusalem, knew well. At the beginning of *Ecclesiastes*, it is written: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” And followed by “There is nothing new under the sun”, “I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.”⁴ And Nietzsche said: “Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitably without any finale of nothingness: ‘the eternal recurrence.’ This is the most extreme form of nihilism: the nothing (the “meaningless”), eternally!”⁵

In the eternal recurrence of the nothing, ‘I’, as an individual life, will die inevitably. At the think of this and ‘I’ cannot help but be sad. While ‘I’ have a further thought —— What is life? “Life is the course before death. Just with this idea, religion, philosophy, literature and art are resulted in.” Then will religions, philosophy, literature and art exist eternally? “Religion, philosophy, literature and art will also die.

¹ Mu Xin, “Daxiyang ducheng zhi ye 大西洋赌城之夜,” in *Gelunbiya de daoying*, p. 70.

² Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 405.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 405-406.

⁴ *Ecclesiastes*, 1: 2, 9, 14.

⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed., Walter Kaufmann, trans., Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968), §55.

Even the sun will cool down. The earth will enter into the Ice Age and human beings will not survive before the destruction of the solar system.” But Doomsday seems still far away. “ Church, museum and library look prosperous and solemn and seem to be the same yesterday and today and forever. In fact, all are the landscapes before destruction.”¹ Life is the course before death and the world is the landscape before destruction. At the think of this, ‘I’ am filled with dismay and hopelessness. And then “ I stare at the things without knowing sadness sadly.”² Then pessimism comes into being.

Mu Xin thought that pessimism means to contemplate the nature of things.³ Just as Jesus did. When he saw the lilies of the field, he thought of Solomon’s glory and human’s worries and toil in vain. And Mu Xin said: “ My sadness is often due to thinking about those things which are no concern of mine. The result of thinking is that they are still no concern of mine. But my sadness becomes the bridge between those things and I. ”⁴ In my opinion, to contemplate the nature of things is to keep sensitive, clear-headed and sincere towards the universe, the world and life.

Facing the indifference of the universe and death of life results in Mu Xin’s pessimism. However it is not the whole of his pessimism. He said: “ The ancient Greeks confronted death and fate squarely. Facing death and fate, their attitude was to be good, i.e. humanism, the way of human (rendao 人道). It is so great to use humanism against the way of heaven.”⁵ And he said: “ When a healthy and noble Greek watched tragedies, he would think both proudly and humbly: although it has done, to be good (haoziweizhi 好自为之).”⁶ The way of human, or ‘ to be good’, is so called ‘da’(达), the methodology. If the meaningless and indifference of the universe (the nothing) and death of life are the inevitable hopelessness, then the way of human (‘to be good’) is the triumph over it. Thereupon the pessimism about life turns to joyful affirmation; the hopelessness for the silence of the universe turns to the

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.1073

² Ibid., p. 1073.

³ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴ Mu Xin, “ Hanzhen duanxu, ” p. 56.

⁵ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 58.

⁶ Ibid.

antagonism towards it; and then the pessimism of Mu Xin gets complete.

Then what is the essence of the way of human? Mu Xin said: “ The common sense and the fundamentals of ancient Greek tragedies are that destiny is irresistible. [……] The ancient Greeks not only admitted fate but also thought about how to revolt against fate. The Greek proverb engraved on the lintel of Greek Temples, which is the outline of their education, goes: ‘know thyself’.”¹ In Mu Xin’s opinion, the way of human means to know yourself and he considered that human beings know themselves by art and wisdom. He said: “ Be affectionate and wise (痴心而明哲). Only in this way, you can use refined thoughts and perceptions to confront the universe.”² He said: “ To know is always in direct proportion with to love. The more you know, the deeper you love. [……] To know is philosophy, while to love is art. Art can save human beings.”³ In Mu Xin’s opinion, Thoughts make human beings great and art makes human beings see their souls. The creating of art and the generating of thoughts are confrontation and dialogue between human beings and the universe, the aesthetic phenomenon in general sense.

The pessimism of Mu Xin doesn’t stop at nothingness and hopelessness. He employed the aesthetic wisdom as the turn of pessimism, thereby the fear of ‘the nothing’ turn to the joy of creating of art and thoughts. Because ‘I’ hold pessimism so that ‘I’ understand the position of a finite individual life in the infinite eternal recurrence; so that there is a possibility that ‘I’ can know myself. Because ‘I’ hold pessimism so that ‘I’ admit the littleness and fragility of individual life; so that ‘I’ perceive the preciousness of the will to life; so that ‘I’ confront the universe by knowing myself. Because ‘I’ feel the fear and pain of death so that ‘I’ understand how to confront eternal life and destruction with an open and clear attitude; so that ‘I’ treat the meaninglessness of the universe, the irresistibility of fate and the inevitability of death as common sense.

Therefore Mu Xin’s pessimism is neither to be pessimistic about specific people

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 58.

² Mu Xin, “Daxiyang ducheng zhi ye,” p. 70.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 90.

or things nor the misanthropic mood of nihilism. It is the joyful affirmation for life, the love and mercy for the world after seeing through the meaninglessness of the universe, the irresistibility of fate and the inevitability of death. Huang Fan 黄帆, who ever worked for Mu Xin in his later life, said: “ He always confronted all things with smile. His pessimism doesn’t mean sadness but mercy. Therefore whether suffering or joy, both became a joke from his mouth, behind which is in fact the pair of God’s eyes overlooking creation.”¹ Mu Xin’s love and mercy for life and the world is contained in his artistic creating, his admiration for art and his faith in art. He said: “ I imagine faithfully my readers, among which there are someone old, someone young, someone in 88 years old or 12 years old, someone a man, someone a woman, someone beautiful, someone ugly, someone honest, someone silly, someone rich, someone poor, someone healthy, someone disabled, someone a teacher, someone a student, someone a clerk, someone a civil servant, someone working in the hydrological station, someone working in the taxation bureau, someone selling soya bean milk, someone a driver. I ever said that art is the mercy with no object, however these groups of readers are just the objects of my art.”² He said: “ For Mozart’s sake, be nice to the world.”³ He said: “ Every chapter of Beethoven’s music is advising human to love this world.”⁴

The essence of Mu Xin’s love and mercy for the world is a kind of wisdom of happiness. Or in the other word, as to Mu Xin, art is a kind of happiness. He said: “ Art is joyful, creating itself is joyful. They are cash.”⁵ He said: “ Writing is joyful. The one who is obsessed with writing is an undeniable hedonist.”⁶ He said: “ The sadness of Mozart is the sadness between two happiness. In terms of the purity of happiness, I am not as good as Mozart. He is a hundred percent happy man. I am a

¹ Huang Fan 黄帆, “His Every Word Tell You How to Love This World”, in *Xin zhoukan* 389 (2013).

² See *Yangcheng wanbao* 羊城晚报, 9th April, 2013. This quotation is from Mu Xin’s manuscript left unpublished and given by Chen Danqing in a literary seminar named ‘ Another Possibility of Literature’ held in Renmin University of China in the 30th March 2013.

³ Mu Xin, “Yiyin yizhou,” p. 146.

⁴ Huang Fan, “His Every Word Tell You How to Love This World.”

⁵ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 1074.

⁶ Mu Xin, “Xue xi chouzuo 雪夕酬酢,” in *Yuli zhi yan*, p. 56.

thirty percent happy man and a seventy percent hedonist.”¹ Therefore Mu Xin’s pessimism is the wisdom of happiness based on pessimism, the two opposing rules of a paradox of joy and suffering. Just as he said: “Pessimism means to be happy while not getting happiness.”² And added: “The meaning of pessimism is to be happy.”³ And said: “The wise men in ancient China were pessimistic but happy.”⁴

“Is there any significance of life?” When Schopenhauer stopped at pessimism with this question, while Nietzsche pointed out that the significance of life and the world lies in that they are the aesthetic phenomenon.⁵ The Nietzschean turn is not only the completion of pessimism, but also the thinking course Mu Xin experienced. — It is art (aesthetic wisdom) that makes Mu Xin get happiness from the beauty of art after he got frustrated with the heartless and meaningless universe; It is art (aesthetic wisdom) that make him turn to ‘amor fati’ (love of fate) from fear when he confronts irresistible fate and the eternal recurrence. In a word, Mu Xin’s pessimism is the inheritance of the Nietzschean aesthetic wisdom and the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy.

In his book *Traveling in Simple Shoes*, Mu Xin wrote: “For too long time we have forgotten that romanticism was human affairs, instead, in our impression, it seemed the natural romantic records of spirit. At that time, the European talent all joined the trend of romanticism. Perhaps only Chopin didn’t attend any meeting. He just lit white candles and played piano alone. As to the paintings of Delacroix, who was a close friend of Chopin, Chopin always made no comments, evading the subject. As to musicians, he valued only Bach and Mozart. — Afterwards, in the history of music, if we compare romantic music to a tower, then Chopin is the spire. Someone, who was literary critic as well as a nosy person, ever said that Dostoevsky’s novels

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 1074.

² Mu Xin, “Yiyin yizhou,” p. 145.

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p.971

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 930.

⁵ Tongming JunLiu, “The Power of Tragedy,” p. 118.

belong to Realism. Dostoevsky replied angrily: in the highest sense, they does, I can admit that I am a realist. —— In the history of literature, if we compare Realism to a tower, then, Dostoevsky is the spire. In late night talks, Tolstoy said hesitantly: when we go to a strange city, we recognize it only by the seldom spires of its architectures. We can only remember those seldom spires after leaving.”¹

If we compare Chinese new literature since May Fourth Movement to a tower, then Mu Xin is not the spire but a walker strolling outside the tower. His homeland is spacious. He returned to his world literary homeland step by step since he left Wuzhen in his 15 years old. In the exile and catastrophe of the external world, he had always kept his spiritual lineage; he wandered in the spiritual world and met the prophets and descendants of Nietzschean spirit. The course he experienced is the way to homeland; his stroll is from starting point to starting point. The former starting point is carbon, while the latter is diamond. In *The History of American Literature* compiled by Tongming Jun Liu, Mu Xin is classified into diasporic writers. The diaspora of Mu Xin is the self-diaspora in the worldwide literary homeland, the wander with root in the spiritual world. Therefore, Mu Xin doesn't belong to the history of American literature. He belongs to the history of the world literature, which I believe is the real intention of professor Tongming Jun Liu.

¹ Mu Xin, “Paoyu jibian 庖鱼及宾,” in *Suli zhi wang*, p. 3.

Chapter 5

Literature and Reception

Mu Xin has died, but studies of his literature haven't really started yet. Quantities of manuscripts he left need to be edited to publish, while it seems that the published works in his lifetime didn't get the deserved attention, interpretation and studies in the world of Chinese literature, especially in mainland China's literary circles. There is a stark contrast between the great fondness of readers, especially of the young readers who were considered as 'the clear stream and undercurrent of contemporary literary conscience' by Chen Danqing,¹ and the silence and absence of literary and academic circles. Although Mu Xin's works had already been published in mainland China, he is just the phenomenon of publication, rather than the phenomenon of literature there. The literary and academic circles avoided Mu Xin through silence and absence and eventually made him become a neglected important writer. Meanwhile, his obscure readers sincerely responded him and his literature by their own means. Up to the present, Mu Xin has not yet come into the field of vision of mainland China's literary studies. He remains the independent existence outside the history of Chinese modern literature. He has his own judgment on himself; he has his unique perception of readers. Facing others' neglect and misconception, he remained committed to his own style and his own aesthetic stance, pursuing his self-perfection. Because he knew that history is fairest; he knew that great artists can afford misconception; he knew that his persistence in literature will eventually tell us who he is and how far he can go.

¹ The Presentation Speech of "The Most Attractive Fifty in 2011" held by *Nanfang renwu zhoukan*.

5. 1 The Publication and Reception of Mu Xin's Works

As far as the publication and reception of Mu Xin's works are concerned, there are generally two periods. The first period is from the year 1982 when Mu Xin migrated to New York to the year 2000, the beginning of the new century. I call it 'the overseas period'. During this period, except for the anthology *Larks Sing All Day*, all his published books in his lifetime had already been published in Taiwan. And the English version of his works attracted a lot of interest in literary and academic circles in America. The second period I call 'the period of mainland China', is from the year 2006 when Mu Xin's books were published in mainland China for the first time till now. I would like to give a detailed narrative of the publication and reception of Mu Xin's works in these two periods below.

5. 1. 1 The overseas Period

During the period from 1983 to 1989, the Chinese newspaper in New York was rather prosperous. And that is the period when Mu Xin wrote and published works most frequently. "At that time, a few Chinese newspapers in New York, such as *China Times* (中国时报), *World Journal* (北美世界日报), *China Daily News* (美洲华侨日报), took the literary supplement seriously, and the Chinese writers overseas published their works in those newspapers energetically. There virtually existed a kind of 'overseas Chinese literary circles'".¹ Wang Yu 王渝 was the editor of the literary supplement of *China Daily News* at that period, who is the old friend of Ya Xian 痲弦, an illustrious poet as well as the editor of the supplement of Taiwan newspaper *United Daily News* (联合报). *China Daily News* Wang Yu previously

¹ Mu Xin, "Chichi gaobai," pp. 80-81.

worked for is a leftist newspaper. It was founded in 1939 by The Union of Chinese Laundries with the assistance of the underground members of the Chinese Communist Party.¹ With the thaw of the relationship between China and America in 1970s, many writers from mainland China migrated to America. However they only trusted *China Daily News* to publish their works. Therefore, as the editor of its literary supplement, Wang Yu was so familiar with the way and the style of writing of writers from mainland China. And she thought that Mu Xin was so different from them. The first time when she received Mu Xin's manuscript, she felt rather amazed. She said, "how exists there such a man who wrote so well and differently? His writing is without any mainland China's literary style. This writer although comes from mainland China, he is just like the Monkey King 孙悟空 who was born and jumped from the stone."² Wang Yu held the manuscript of Mu Xin in her hands and was too excited and surprised to evaluate or locate the author. And then she made a decision, which she thought, is very absurd to a professional editor. But she did it. She didn't invite Mu Xin to write articles for her newspaper, but recommended his works to Ya Xian in Taiwan. Because she felt aggrieved for Mu Xin, and thought his works deserved more readers and the number of Chinese readers in New York was after all very small. Therefore Taiwan was the best choice at that time.³

As Wang Yu expected, Mu Xin's works were fully appreciated by Ya Xian, who began to invite Mu Xin to write articles for *United Daily News*. When Wang Yu heard Ya Xian once read Mu Xin's prose "Drums in the Lincoln Center" (Linken Zhongxin de gusheng 林肯中心的鼓声) aloud with drumming in a literary conference in Taiwan, she felt sincerely happy for Mu Xin.⁴ In 1984, Taiwan United Daily News Group prepared to establish a literary journal *Unitas*. Ya Xian was appointed as the editor of *Unitas*. He suggested initiating a special volume of Mu Xin in the journal, including solo-exhibition of proeses, an interview with the writer, a short biography of

¹ Wang Yu 王渝, "Mu Xin yixiang 木心印象," in *Jingbao* 晶报, January 1, 2013.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

the writer and the list of his works.¹ Mu Xin accepted Ya Xian's suggestion. Then the special volume of Mu Xin was published in the first issue of *Unitas*. His works shocked the whole literary circle in Taiwan. Afterwards, Mu Xin's first book *Collected Sanwen: Volume I* (散文一集) was published by the Taipei press Hongfan Books (洪范书店) in February of 1986. On the 9th May of that year, the editor of the supplement *West and East of China Times* in New York conducted and presided over a symposium on Mu Xin's proses. It is the first formal academic forum on Mu Xin's works, and also the beginning of the studies on the literature of Mu Xin. Chen Danqing, one of the participants in that symposium, said with emotions at that time, "the comprehensive evaluation of Mu Xin's literature is far in the future, when, I believe, there will be more and more evaluation of him. By that time, we will feel that today, the Ninth of May in 1986, is a date worthy of looking back."²

From the February of 1989 to the October of 1999, Hongfan Books, Yuanshen press (圆神出版社), Hanyin Culture(翰音文化), Yuanzun Culture (元尊文化), Hsiung Shih Books (雄狮图书), the five presses in Taiwan sequentially published twelve books of Mu Xin. Chu Anmin 初安民, the chief editor of Taiwan literary magazine *INK*, said that generations of people in Taiwan were influenced by Mu Xin.³ Among those overseas Chinese people who were influenced by Mu Xin, many of them become writers themselves, such as Taiwan writer Luo Yijun 骆以军, Hong Kong writer Ma Jiahui 马家辉 who ever studied abroad in Taiwan, and Hong Kong columnist as well as public intellectual Liang Wendao who encountered Mu Xin's books in 1990s in bookstores in Hong Kong. He still remembered his feelings when he first read Mu Xin's works in the bookstore, he said, "it seems as if he (Mu Xin) comes from an uninterrupted tradition, and he can attract you thoroughly into that tradition with his words."⁴

Guo Songfen was also one of the participants in the symposium on Mu Xin's

¹ Mu Xin, "Chichi gaobai," p. 84.

² Chen Danqing, "Yi ge yishu 一个异数," in *Guanyu Mu Xin*, p. 2.

³ "The Ignored Writer in the World of Chinese Literature", in *Xin Jingbao* 新京报, December 24, 2011.

⁴ Ibid.

proses conducted in 1986. In that symposium, he proposed the article “Comedy-The Further Shore-Intellect”, which is considered as the most important interpretation on Mu Xin’s literature. He not only was a critic, or a reader of Mu Xin, but also became a friend of Mu Xin later. It is Guo Songfen who recommend Mu Xin’s works to his friend Tongming Jun Liu. Tongming Jun Liu’s introduction to and translation of the works of Mu Xin made Mu Xin obtain his readers and friends in English literary circles. In the article “The significance of the Style of Mu Xin”, Tongming Jun Liu narrated his encounter with Mu Xin, “ The first time when I heard of Mu Xin was in the late 1980s. At that time I studied in the institute of Anglo-American literature of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Once I went to New York to visit my friend Guo songfen. He was a famous modernist writer from Taiwan. When we met, he said that a big guy would come. I thought he meant some politician. But he said the one who would come was a great writer. I heard from Songfen that there was a breath of spring brought by Mu Xin in the overseas Chinese world at that time. When I left New York back to Amherst, I brought two books of Mu Xin with me. I read them and shared them with my friends. Afterwards, every time when I got together with my friends, we talked about Mu Xin’s works excitedly and there were divergent views. But we all agreed that Mu Xin’s artistic attainments are the unique phenomenon in Chinese literature.”¹

In 1990s, Tongming Jun Liu began to teach in the English department of the University of California, Los Angeles. He translated Mu Xin’s fiction “The Windsor Cemetery Diary” into English, and chose it to the syllabus of his course of the world literature. He handed in the syllabus to the dean. The dean immediately asked Tongming Jun Liu if he could invite Mu Xin to give lectures here, when he just read two pages of “The Windsor Cemetery Diary”. Previously, Mu Xin had been invited to be as ‘resident writer’ by Harvard University. But Mu Xin didn’t accept the invitation. Tongming Jun Liu knew Mu Xin’s temperament of recluse well, so he declined the dean’s kindness for Mu Xin.² Then the dean appointed Tongming Jun Liu to

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “ Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 23.

² Mu Xin, “ Chichi gaobai,” pp. 97-98.

interview with Mu Xin, asking Mu Xin to talk about his views on art, history and culture. This interview was written in the form of twelve-subject *Q&A* (Dakewen 答客问) and later published in the literary journal *North Dakota Quarterly* and the literary website *Words without Borders*. This interview is the original version of Mu Xin's later prose "Opening the Windows in Midsummer" (Zhongxia kaixuan 仲夏开轩). In 1996, Tongming Jun Liu had finished the translation of Mu Xin's fiction "The Windsor Cemetery Diary" and "An Empty Room". He sent the two fictions and his interview *Q&A* to the editor of *North Dakota Quarterly*. Later he received the editor's reply. Robert Louis, the editor as well as a novelist, decided to publish the English version of Mu Xin's fiction and the interview. He said that their editors were very fond of Mu Xin's works and asked Tongming Jun Liu if he could send more works of Mu Xin to them. Then the two fictions of Mu Xin and the interview *Q&A* were published in the chief position of the spring issue of *North Dakota Quarterly* in 1997. And in the beginning of the editor's note in that issue, it says, "Although this is not a 'special' issue, it became special because of the coincidental receipt of two stories by and an interview of Mu Xin."¹

Since 1990s, Tongming Jun Liu has maintained translating Mu Xin's works into English in his spare time. Part of his translation was published both on *North Dakota Quarterly* and *Words without Borders*. In 2011, *An Empty Room*, the English version of the collection of Mu Xin's fictions translated by Tongming Jun Liu, was published in America. It is Mu Xin's first collection of stories to appear in English², including thirteen pieces of Mu Xin's fiction. "The Windsor Cemetery Diary" and "An Empty Room", were also chosen to into the book. The thirteen pieces were specifically chosen by Mu Xin from three of his books: *Collected Sanwen: Volume I*, *The Windsor Cemetery*, and *Parron*.³ The America magazine *Publishers Weekly*'s comments on this book as follows: "These stories have an exquisite, crystalline quality ably captured by Liu's flawless translation." And a reader, whose name is

¹ "Editor's Note" in *North Dakota Quarterly* (Spring 1997). 196.

² Tongming Jun Liu, "Translator's Afterword" in *An Empty Room*, p. 147.

³ Ibid.

Grob Whalenson, left his comments on the website *Amazon*, he said, “I read Mu Xin’s “An Empty Room” in a Diasporic Themes seminar course. It is truly an incredible work and a wonderful way to become acquainted with contemporary Chinese fiction.”

Like Grob Whalenson, I think, many American readers first encountered Mu Xin’s works in Tongming Jun Liu’s course of the world literature and began to read and be fond of him. In his course of the world literature, his lecturing on Mu Xin attracted a lot of interest in his class. As Tongming Jun Liu said, “ It was a great success. My students, graduate students, and foreign scholars were all engrossed in my lecturing. They discussed ardently about Mu Xin after class. Besides, they asked me to give another special lecture on him. Because they were so surprised that a Chinese writer was able to write the West such profoundly.”¹ Among Mu Xin’s American readers, there are editors, poets, professors and students. From 1990s till nowadays, Tongming Jun Liu witnessed the surprise and joy Mu Xin’s American readers got and expressed when they read the English version of his works. He said: “ What amazed me was not their surprise and joy, but the way they expressed their surprise and joy. Their sincerity impressed me seriously.”² In his article “The significance of the Style of Mu Xin”, Tongming Jun Liu listed several pieces of Mu Xin’s American readers’ comment and criticism. Here I’d like to quote some of them as a testimony:

[I have read literary works by many Chinese authors.] It’s very rare to see an author like Mu Xin who can exercise such incredible restraint in his style.” (by Susan Harris, an editor for the Chicago University Press and is currently an editor for Words Without Borders)

Mu Xin is a sage. His words are graceful, profound, clever and insightful, as if dancing on the edge of revelation.” (Ruben Quintero, a professor of Anglo-American literature)

¹ Mu Xin, “ Chichi gaobai,” p. 98.

² Tongming Jun Liu, “ Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 24.

I love short stories but stopped reading many years ago because I could not find very good ones. It's a pleasant surprise to discover Mu Xin's short stories. Short stories are alive again." (Donald Junkin, a poet as well as a professor)

The [translated stories] have a lovely evocative quality. [Reading the stories,] I was reminded of the very different, yet very similar feeling that one has when reading Hawthorne's tales. There's a haunting sense of the mysteries that lie just beneath the plain surface of life." (Timothy Steele, a poet as well as a professor)

It's Saturday night, well into Sunday, but the world has to stop for a few words of appreciation for Mu Xin." (Roberto Cantu, a literary critic as well as a professor) ¹

5.1.2 The Period of Mainland China

Before Mu Xin's works were first published officially in mainland China in January 2006, part of his works had been read by a rather few readers there by their respective means. Chen Zishan, the professor working in Chinese language and literature department of East China Normal University, is the oldest reader who encountered Mu Xin's works in Taiwan literary magazine *Unitas* as early as in 1980s. He said, "I was rather amazed and happy when I read his works. So wonderful! But I never heard of the author before, and at that time I couldn't judge where he comes from and which times he belongs to."² The surprise and joy Chen Zishan felt when he first read Mu Xin rose out of the uniqueness of Mu Xin's style and the strangeness resulting from his reclusive life. Thus, Chen Zishan said, "Before I encountered Mu Xin's works, I had never been in such case that I can't judge a writer's background. I

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, "Mu Xin fengge de yiyi," p. 24.

² "A Special Volume of Mu Xin," in *Xin Zhoukan* 389 (2013).

have studied Chinese modern literature for so many years, I almost know all writers in the history of Chinese modern literature well. Although I didn't read someone's works, I at least had heard of his name and hardly made a mistake. Or even I don't hear of some writer, I still can judge that he is the writer of which times, of 1920s, of 1930s, or of 1940s, when I read him. But I can't give a judgment on Mu Xin when I read him, especially when I read his so unique proses. Initially, I thought that he might be a writer from Hong Kong or Taiwan, or even he might be an American-Chinese writer."¹ At that time, Chen Zishan didn't know that until moving to New York in 1982, Mu Xin had actually lived in Shanghai, the same city in which Chen Zishan lived. He didn't know that Mu Xin, whose background he couldn't judge, also experienced various political movements, persecutions and catastrophes happened in the mainland since 1949.

Afterwards, Chen Zishan started inquiring about Mu Xin and seeking his works around. And Taiwan Hongfan Books became the main position for Chen Zishan to seek Mu Xin's books. When he eventually learned about Mu Xin's background, he commented, "Mu Xin is truly an accident in the history of Chinese modern literature". Meanwhile, he felt strange why Mu Xin had been absolutely unknown previously in literary circles in the mainland.² But the individual's query of Chen Zishan and his interest in Mu Xin's works didn't attract any attention in the literary circles in the mainland. In 2001, Chen Zishan was invited to be the editor of a column in the literary magazine *Shanghai Literature* (上海文学). This column was set to publish excellent works whose subject is about Shanghai. Chen Zishan thought of Mu Xin's impressive prose "Shanghai Fu", on which he commented, "till at present, it is the best work to write Shanghai I had ever read".³ He published "Shanghai Fu" in *Shanghai Literature*, which is the first encounter of Mu Xin's prose with readers in the mainland.

The publication of "Shanghai Fu" in the magazine *Shanghai Literature* made

¹ "A Special Volume of Mu Xin," in *Xin Zhoukan*, 389 (2013).

² Ibid.

³ Liu Ruilin, ed., "Mu Xin xiansheng Wuzhen zhuisihui," pp. 13-51.

Chen Cun 陈村, a writer from Shanghai, encounter Mu Xin's literature. As far as Chen Cun's concerned, this literary encounter was so impressive and astonishing that he described it as lightning striking him. He said that he would never forget Mu Xin.¹ As Chen Zishan ever did, Chen Cun started seeking Mu Xin's books with the assistance of his acquaintances lived in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Moreover, he typed all Mu Xin's books he could find on the computer, making them into electronic text and sharing them with his friends. He rather would like to make Mu Xin's works known by more readers in mainland China, but he hesitated to post the electronic text of Mu Xin's works on the website. Because he was unwilling to see that the acceptance of Mu Xin's works in the mainland begins with piracy.² But when he learned the news that the official publication of Mu Xin's works in the mainland was blocked, he hesitated again and again; finally he posted part of the electronic text of Mu Xin's works on *Minority* (Xiaozhong caiyuan 小众菜园), the literary website he took charge of. He made such a decision because he wanted to let those who were fond of Chinese literature broaden their horizons, and raise their literary standards. He stated, "one who decides to devote himself to literary writing with Chinese language should read Mu Xin as early as possible, then he will have a measure on himself."³ When Mu Xin's books were finally published officially in the mainland later, Chen Danqing said with appreciation, "Chen Cun is the first person who willingly typed and posted Mu Xin's works on the website in order to share them with everyone."⁴ And Chen Cun frankly stated the reason why he recommended Mu Xin's works in his prose "About Mu Xin", he wrote, "Since I have read some of Mu Xin's works, if I won't tell the information of Mu Xin to others who was fond of reading, which will be the cold-blooded act of mine, and the blasphemy against the wonderful Chinese language and literature, I would feel guilty."⁵

Since he had returned to China teaching in Tsinghua University in 2000, Chen

¹ Chen Cun 陈村, "Guanyu Mu Xin 关于木心," in *Du Mu Xin*, p. 3

² *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴ "A Special Volume of Mu Xin," in *Xin Zhoukan*, 389 (2013).

⁵ Chen Cun, "Guanyu mu Xin," p. 6.

Danqing always held a wish. He wished he could help to publish Mu Xin's works in the mainland, assisting him to be known by readers there. Before Mu Xin's works were first published by Guangxi Normal University press in 2006, Chen Danqing had contacted some press in Shanghai who agreed to publish Mu Xin's works. In the America literary website *Words without Borders*, there is a brief account of Mu Xin's life, it says: "Eight more of his books, all in Chinese, will soon be published in Shanghai." But that publication plan ended up with nothing definite. Up to now, we don't and can't know the name of that press in Shanghai. Chen Danqing once mentioned the failed publication plan after the death of Mu Xin. He said that the chief editor of the press backed out at that time. But he was unwilling to tell the name of that editor and that press. As to this affair, it was also mentioned in Chen Cun's prose "About Mu Xin", it says: " I inquired about whether Mu Xin's works could be published in mainland China, but it is said that the publication was blocked unexpectedly. [·····] The reason was very absurd. Just because someone who was in charge of publication absented himself."¹ Therefore Chen Cun posted part of electronic texts of Mu Xin's works on the website *Minority*. In fact, since his return to China in 2000, Chen Danqing had tried to contact lots of presses to in order for the publication of Mu Xin's works. But he hardly got replies over the years. The frustration of the publication of Mu Xin's works is the harbinger that his works encountered neglect and silence in the mainland later.

In January 2006, Mu Xin's anthology *The Reflections on Columbia University* (Gelunbiya de daoying 哥伦比亚的倒影) was eventually published by Guangxi Normal University press with the assistance of Chen Danqing's recommendation and introduction. It was the first official publication of Mu Xin's works in mainland China. Mu Xin, the writer whose writing career lasted for more than sixty years, eventually witnessed the publication of his works in his motherland, although he was in his 79 years old at that time. Afterwards, Guangxi Normal University press sequentially published Mu Xin's five prose anthologies, one fiction anthology, and six poetry

¹ Chen Cun, "Guanyu mu Xin," p. 6.

anthologies. At the end of 2012, when was the first anniversary of Mu Xin's death, according to Chen Danqing's lecture notes, the press published the Mu Xin's literary lectures scripts *Literary Memoirs*. The press is currently editing quantities of manuscripts Mu Xin left and preparing to publish the complete works of Mu Xin.

The acceptance of Mu Xin's works in mainland China is not smooth, although his works had already been published, and the publication of his complete works is in preparation at present. Since the affair of rejection in 2006 till nowadays, the consistent neglect and silence of literary and academic circles has made Mu Xin become just the phenomenon of publication, rather than the phenomenon of literature.

In March 2006, the journalist from the magazine *Sanlian Life Weekly* (Sanlian shenghuo zhoukan 三联生活周刊) interviewed Chen Danqing about Mu Xin and his newly published Book *The Reflections on Columbia University*, but the interview was eventually rejected by the chief editor Zhu Wei 朱伟 without any clear reason. Later, Zhu Wei posted a blog "Mu Xin's Awkwardness" on the website. In his blog, Mu Xin had become an object of ridicule. But there appeared more and more readers' comments on the website with the publication of *The Reflections on Columbia University*. Chen Danqing was interviewed by *Sanlian Life Week* again. In this interview, he talked about the reason why he introduced Mu Xin to the readers in mainland China, the cultural background of Mu Xin's writing. This interview that was named "Talking about Mr. Mu Xin Again" encountered rejection again. Of course, this time, the chief editor gave no clear reason again. Facing the two rejections, Chen Danqing had to post a declaration of this rejection affair and the two rejected interviews on the website. The mass media waited to cover Zhu Wei's response, but he kept silence from the beginning to the end, it seemed as though he considered himself as a gentleman.

The affair of rejection ended up with the gentleman's silence. After that came the greater silence of the literary and academic circles. Except for a few writers and scholar, such as Sun Yu, Chen Zishan, Chen Cun, Sun Ganlu, the whole literary and academic circles ignored the existence of Mu Xin and his works collectively. Till 2008, Guangxi Normal University press had already published eight books of Mu Xin,

therefore Li Jing, the editor of *Beijing Daily* thought that it was the time to compile a collection of critiques of Mu Xin's works. Then she, together with Sun Yu, the dean of the college of Chinese language and literature in Renmin University, started preparing to compile such a book. However she could hardly invite a writer or a critic who was willing to write an article on Mu Xin. Her invitation was usually rejected. Among those who rejected her invitation, some of them told her, "I didn't like Mu Xin, he and I were from two different worlds"; another told her, "Mu Xin can only use some classical and elegant language, he was nothing more than this, if I want to use such language, I can do it as well". Li Jing found that she could hardly communicate with the acquaintances in the literary circles. And she noticed that the phenomenon had already appeared at that time, namely: the one who was fond of Mu Xin liked him seriously, while the one who was not fond of Mu Xin disliked him seriously.¹ Fortunately, the collection of critiques, named "Reading Mu Xin" (Du Mu Xin 读木心), was eventually completed and was published by Guangxi Normal University press in 2008. In the afterword of *Reading Mu Xin*, Li Jing wrote, "This book doesn't focus on 'objective', but aims to present our surprise and comprehension to a poetic soul. The reason why we made such a decision is that we hold a profound perception of the poetic spirit of this 'literary Robinson'. And we believe that the fair judgment is definitely not to ignore the excellent but alien literary creation. Conversely, it should participate in the fate of such creation and devote its generous enthusiasm."²

Although the book *Reading Mu Xin* was eventually published, there remained no trace of the fair judgment on Mu Xin's works that was expected by Li Jing, the editor of the book. The neglect and silence of critics, scholars, and writers still continued. Meanwhile, what grew silently and gradually were the attraction and impact of Mu Xin's literature on his young readers who have grown very fond of Mu Xin, of art, of literature over the years. In the bookstores located in Universities, you might meet Mu Xin's readers. From their comments left in the literary websites, you might find their profound affection for Mu Xin. Among those obscure readers of Mu Xin, there are

¹ See *Nanfang dushibao* 南方都市报, March 14, 2013.

² Li Jing, "The Afterword," in *Du Mu Xin*, p. 293.

students, graduate students, lawyers, teachers, photographers, architects, freelance writers, journalists, civil servants, and white-collared workers. When they heard the news of Mu Xin's death, they came to Wuzhen from all over the country to bid farewell to Mu Xin, to attend the funeral of 'a family member' they never met. Mu Xin ever said to his readers, "we are each other's family members in literature." And said, "you should find your spiritual consanguinity among both ancient and modern artists, writers, poets throughout the world." Mu Xin is the spiritual consanguinity of his readers. In the memorial ceremony in Wuzhen, Sun Yu was deeply impressed and touched by the speaking of those obscure readers who came to attend Mu Xin's funeral. He said, "the speaking of you readers is much more wonderful than those speeches in various literary symposium."¹ Here I'd like to quote several readers' speaking as the testimony to their affection for Mu Xin:

I am from Wuxi (无锡). I work for Wuxi Daily (无锡日报). When I was at home, I thought about how should I express my affection for Mr. Mu Xin. I feel that our affection for Mr. Mu Xin is not enough. In the western world, there is a proverb that some writers are dedicated to minority. The more perfect version of this proverb, I think, as follows: some writers are dedicated to unlimited minority. And I want to dedicate this word to Mr. Mu Xin. [·····] I consider that the best memorial of Mr. Mu Xin is reading him sincerely. Thus I hope I can read him more and comprehend him more.

I come from Hangzhou (杭州). The day before yesterday I heard that Mr. Mu Xin died. I recalled what Mr. Mu Xin once said in an interview. He said that he was very fond of Andrea Gide when he was young and he always carried with the Chinese version of *The Fruits of Earth* translated by Sheng Chenghua 盛澄华 and read it repeatedly. He said that he had ever practised French diligently in order to visit Gide in France. But later he heard the news of Gide's death. He said he cried his heart out at that time and since then lost one of his most precious hope. The

¹ Liu Ruilin, ed., "Mu Xin xiansheng Wuzhen zhuisihui," pp. 13-51.

moment when I heard the news of Mu Xin's death, I felt that I understand what Mu Xin ever said.

The last new year's day we came here to visit Mr. Mu Xin. When we came out of his home, I thought that this place is really a quiet center of the world culture. As far as I'm concerned, where Mu Xin is, there is the center of culture. He is the one who had direct conversations with great persons, like Leonardo da Vinci, Ludwig van Beethoven, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and so on.¹

Since the works of Mu Xin were published in mainland China, reading Mu Xin was always the affair belonging to a small minority of readers who were very fond of him, and always had nothing to do with literary circles, academic circles, and the masses. At the end of 2012, the publication of *Literary Memoirs* attracted a lot of interest in the media. They rushed to cover *Literary Memoirs* like a swarm of bees, which exposed dead Mu Xin to the public. It seemed as if Mu Xin became a 'literary UFO' discovered newly, or an excavated 'literary antique'. The mass media's excessive reporting seemed to provoke the nerves of academic circles. On March eleventh, 2013, Zhang Ning 张柠, a literary critic as well as the professor of Chinese modern literature in Beijing Normal University, was interviewed about Mu Xin by *Yangcheng Evening News* (Yangcheng wanbao 羊城晚报). In the interview, he commented, "in terms of literary value, Mu Xin is highly evaluated at present." This interview report resulted in a debate about the value of Mu Xin's literature.

On March thirteenth, responding to Zhang Ning's comments, Sun Yu gave his interview in *Beijing News* (Xin Jingbao 新京报). He held a totally contrary view. He considered that our society, especially the literary and academic circles, lowly evaluated Mu Xin's value. In the interview, he said, "when reading Mu Xin, you will find that Chinese language is provided with numerous possibilities of expression. What he had done is an experimentation of expression of Chinese language. His

¹ Liu Ruilin, ed., "Mu Xin xiansheng Wuzhen zhuisihui," pp. 13-51.

literary language has its own style that forms through his long and arduous exploration. Or in the other word, he was a lonely experimenter. [……] Both the current social environment and current cultural ecology in China are rather unitary. And the existence of Mu Xin can enrich our expression. From this point of view, we should thank him. Of course, we can criticize him or debate on him as well. The more such discussion are there, the more our literature will be stimulated. [……] The most important thing at present is if there will be a diversified literary ecology in our society. Our current literary ecology has a big problem. In this sense, the whole society, especially the literary and academic circles, lowly evaluated Mu Xin's value.”¹

Chen Zishan's response to Zhang Ning's comments was published in the *Southern Metropolis Daily* (Nanfang dushibao 南方都市报) on March Fourteenth. He said, “ if you conclude that Mu Xin is nothing more than this, then please list your reason of criticism, and we can discuss them…….But the basic fact is that the value of Mu Xin had never been highly evaluated, even there had never been enough evaluation. Whether a writer is valuable or not, and what his value is, should be told by history.”

As far as I'm concerned, whether Mu Xin is highly or lowly evaluated is a pseudo-question. Because the so-called 'high evaluation' just means the provocative titles and reports of the mass media. But the state of studies on Mu Xin is just like the fact mentioned by Chen Zishan: Mu Xin's value has not been highly evaluated at present and the whole literary and academic circles remain silent to him. Since Mu Xin's works were introduced to mainland China, the response of readers and that of academic circles are on the complete contrary. The former is enthusiastic, while the latter is silent. There had never been a symposium on Mu Xin's literature held in the literary and academic circles in mainland China, nor been there a monograph on his literature published, except for the publication of the book *Reading Mu Xin*, which

¹ See *Xin Jingbao*, March 13, 2013.

conveys the surprises and sensations when reading Mu Xin. There also hadn't been a literary critic who commented on Mu Xin's works in literary journals or in columns of book review with a serious attitude of literary criticism. In a word, Mu Xin had almost not come into the field of vision of studies on the history of Chinese modern literature. Chen Zishan said, " Seriously speaking, he (Mu Xin) has not yet entered into the history of Chinese literature, there still hasn't been a book of history of Chinese literature in which he is mentioned."¹ And Chen Danqing considered that Mu Xin is a dramatically shelved literary landscape that was ignored collectively and deliberately.²

5.2 The Reason of the Phenomenon of Publication

In mainland China, from 2006 till now, literary circles and academic circles have always kept silent to Mu Xin and his works. Reading Mu Xin has always been the affair of a small minority of readers who are fond of his literature. As recorded in the Bible, " Then give to the emperor's the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ³ When Li Jiang compiled the book *Reading Mu Xin* in 2008, she said, " up to now, Mu Xin is mere the phenomenon of publication in mainland, rather than the phenomenon of literature." Unfortunately, her words still work nowadays.

If the phenomenon of publication refers to the awkward situation of Mu Xin's literary works, then what the phenomenon of literature means? From my point of view, the precondition for the phenomenon of literature is the existence of a diversified literary ecology and uninterrupted cultural tradition. Under this precondition, between writers, readers and literature critics or scholars, there will exist a normal interaction. Such interaction starts with sincere reading. In such interaction, works deserve

¹ " A Special Volume of Mu Xin," in *Xin Zhoukan* 389 (2013).

² The Presentation Speech of "The Most Attractive Fifty in 2011" held by *Nanfan renwu zhoukan*.

³ *The Gospel According to Luke*, 20: 15.

interpretations and evaluations, the constructive criticism that can be discussed are provided, the new experience of literary expression and another possibilities of spiritual territory are tried to be found, the original literary ecology and cultural tradition thence are enriched. This is the phenomenon of literature. In the phenomenon of literature, a writer might be highly or lowly evaluated, might be praised or criticized, might be comprehended or questioned, but he will never be snubbed and ignored silently and collectively, nor be refused to accept and interpret. The main difference between the phenomenon of literature and that of publication are as follows: in the phenomenon of literature, writers, readers and critics (scholars) are interrelated with each other, further each other, inspire each other so that they consist of an organic whole in a diversified literary ecology. In this organic whole, critics (scholars) belong to part of readers, and the level of writers depends on that of readers. While in the phenomenon of publication, the organic whole is split. The absence of critics makes writers be ignored and readers be isolated, then the original organic whole become a kind of dislocation.

In my opinion, the reason why the reception of Mu Xin's works in mainland China is just the phenomenon of publication rather than the phenomenon of literature, is that his own literary style is out of tune with the one fold literary ecology in mainland China, and his spiritual temperament is incompatible with the spiritual dimension of the literary circles there.

The essence of the uniformity of the literary ecology is the uniformity of the spiritual dimension and the way of thinking, which is the result of the cultural rupture caused by the sixty-year political repression and ideologized education. We generations are facing the consequence of the ideologization and instrumentalization of Chinese language education. On the one hand, the tradition of classical Chinese language and the May Fourth new literary tradition were interrupted. The former experience and custom of literary expression and the former cultural resources were denied and forgotten. On the other hand, political ideology overrode literature. The politicized cultural policy based on Mao's slogan that all literature and art are for workers, peasants and soldiers was regarded as sacred criterion of all literary creation,

literary criticism, and literary studies, which shaped we generations' language, reading habits and way of thinking. The political totalitarianism, accompanied with language hegemony, made literature become language tools without aesthetic value, meanwhile the contaminated literature and language indicated the fact that party's work style is literary style. It is the meaning of the so-called 'mainland style' of language or 'our language' nowadays.

After 1980s, such situation began to change. With the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the open-door policy, many long forgotten writers who were famous during the period of Republic of China (1911-1949) were re-unearthed, such as Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931), Feiming 废名(1901-1967), Zhang Ailing 张爱玲 (1920-1995), Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988), Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 (1910-1998) and so on. And Western modernist literature came into the field of vision of mainland China's literary circles. Since 1980s till now, from the scar literature (shanghen wenxue 伤痕文学), seeking-root literature (xungen wenxue 寻根文学), native-soil literature (xiangtu wenxue 乡土文学) to cyber-literature prevalent in the new century, the popularity of various literary schools and trends, and boom of various methods and styles of writing made the mainland China's literary ecology look rather diversified. However, behind this prosperous superficialities, the literary language, the way of thinking, and the creating ideas were still one-fold, are in fact the continuation of the ideology of 'revolution literature'.

Such continuation is manifested in boosting realism, worshiping grand narrative, neglecting and dwarfing aesthetic significance and metaphysical thinking. Nowadays people are still convinced of the ideas of literary creating that literary creating comes from life and reflects life, and of the literary conception of typical characters and environment. They considered that literary works must reflect life and times and that only the realistic lengthy narrative of great suffering and numerous characters can reveal a writer's strength and the literary value of the work. They prefer the moral and practical significance of a literary work to its language style and aesthetic significance. Such realism is a kind of worship towards volume and weight, and a kind of narrow and limited moral judgment. It is in fact the disguised continuation of the ideology of

‘revolution literature’ that all literature and art are for the masses in the post-revolution age, and it is a kind of pseudo-realism. Therefore the prevalence and acceptance of various literary schools and trends, from absurdist literature to magical realism, in mainland China, is just the superficialities. What was truly accepted is just writing skill, but not the modernity of thinking and art style.

While the case of Mu Xin is just on the contrary. Firstly, what Mu Xin focussed on is the second level of significance of things, i.e. the aesthetic significance, and his judge of the world on the aesthetic judgment, rather than on the moral judgment. He dedicated himself to metaphysical thinking and the construction of beauty. Once when Wang Yu mentioned Mu Xin, she said, “the most special feature of Mu Xin’s works is that he always took a superior attitude towards his bygone past in mainland China. It doesn’t mean that he doesn’t care about or look down on the past. Rather, he was just unwilling to turn to complaint and censure lightly. From his works, we cannot see what he ever suffered. As to those who caused suffering, he has only scorned for them. As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, it is not worth complaining about them, because they don’t deserve his complaint. He confronted the past with his elaborately cultivated self, and with his elegant demeanor. His literature has nothing to do with those literary trends that were prevalent in mainland China at that time, such as scar literature, seeking-root literature, and later magical realism or native-soil literature. He remained committed to his own style, constructing his own literary kingdom.”¹ And Sun Yu supposed that Mu Xin dissipated pains through his construction of beauty.²

Secondly, although Mu Xin had experienced that kind of political totalitarianism and language hegemony, he remained committed to his own artistic stance. He said, “I had never yielded to the language hegemony of mainland China. The language hegemony and I treat each other as a dissenter.”³ He always placed himself in an uninterrupted cultural tradition, always held the conception that culture is a whole so that he placed himself in the worldwide literary landscape through his self-diaspora.

¹ Wang Yu, “Mu Xin yinxiang.”

² Sun Yu, “Mu Xin de shijie 木心的世界,” in *Xin Jingbao*, December 24, 2011.

³ Mu Xin, “Chichi gaobai,” p. 91.

Hence, the classical Chinese culture, from Pre-Qin period to Ming and Qing dynasties, and the spiritual tradition of the Western world, from the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy, the humanism of the Renaissance to the Nietzschean aesthetic wisdom, are integrated together smoothly in Mu Xin's works. As Sun Yu mentioned, "The spirit of the Oriental and the Western world become an integration in a single palette."¹

Thirdly, Mu Xin didn't confine his writing in a single genre. He not only was good at diverse literary genres and writing methods, but also try practising cross-genre writing. He integrated the style of poetry, prose, fiction and critique together to form his own literary style. Chen Cun said, "his works are provided with both factors and features of poetry, prose, fiction and critique. Sometimes his style of writing is slow and deliberate, like *adagio*, while sometimes it becomes quick suddenly, like *presto*."² Therefore Chen Cun still often felt surprised when he read Mu Xin, although he read him repeatedly.

On the one hand, Mu Xin's unique literary style is just the fascination of his works. On the other hand, it is the uniqueness and the strangeness of his literary style that makes his works encounter snub and neglect. By the same token, the aesthetic stance he maintained since he was young helps his literary writing but had ever brought him illegal imprisonment and the total destruction of his manuscripts in the Cultural Revolution. Chen Cun said, "lots of people don't accept Mu Xin. It is not because that they don't know the value of Mu Xin's literary works. Rather, they are unwilling to recognize his value. Some of them even directly deny Mu Xin or avoid him before they read him. As I see it, they are maybe the ones who raise their guard even become hostile instinctively, when they find others who are different from them or who surpass them."³ And Liang Wendao also analysed the reason why some writers and scholars in mainland China deny, ignore and even are hostile to Mu Xin uncritically. He concluded that their snub and hostility are due to their arrogant mentality. He believed that Mu Xin's alien-like originality makes those scholars and

¹ Sun Yu, "Mu Xin de shijie."

² "A Special Volume of Mu Xin," in *Xin Zhoukan* 389 (2013).

³ Ibid.

writers feel dangerous so that they boost their ego and employ snub and neglect to refuse danger.¹

If the individual's hostility and arrogant mentality can be regarded as a difference of literary and aesthetic stance, even as a kind of maliciousness, then the collective hostility and arrogant mentality is just the result of the one-fold literary ecology. The uniformity of the literary ecology, that of the spiritual dimension and that of the way of thinking are interrelated. They are each other's reason and result. The one-fold literary ecology inevitably leads to the one-fold way of thinking and the unified values, and the one-fold way of thinking and the unified values inevitably lead to the denial of and the hostility to alien cultures, which will undermine the possibilities of the diversity of culture and exacerbate the uniformity of the literary ecology. Therefore, as to Mu Xin, the collective silence and absence of literary and academic circles in mainland China just reflects the uniformity of its literary ecology. Such one-fold literary ecology is the fundamental reason that Mu Xin is mere the phenomenon of publication in mainland China.

5.3 Perception of Readers and The Historical Position

Mu Xin knew well that he was put in a mighty awkward situation in Mainland China, however he always stayed on the sidelines for others' misconception and snub. If the deliberate collective snub is a kind of malicious misconception, then praise without comprehension, in Mu Xin's judgment, might be a kind of misconception with goodwill. In fact, as early as when he lived in New Yorks, Mu Xin had already been familiar with this kind of misconception with goodwill. In the prose "The Tardy Confession", he ever described his readers' various misconception for his works. For example, a woman writer thought that Mu Xin had traveled around in Europe before he moved to New York, when she read Mu Xin's works, while a UN diplomat who

¹ "A Special Volume of Mu Xin," in *Xin Zhoukan* 389 (2013).

ever worked in India thought that Mu Xin had ever lived in India, after he read Mu Xin's prose "Ganges-Sisters-Lotus" (Heng He-jiemei-lianhua 恒河-姐妹-莲花). Mu Xin said, "If I tell the woman writer that I have never been Europe, or tell the gentleman with beard that I have never lived in India, both of us will be embarrassed. [·····] Afterwards, I eventually lingered in England and traveled around in southern and northern Europe, instead, I dared not to describe what I saw and experienced in my works. If Dante had truly gone to Hell and Paradise, he couldn't write *Divine Comedy*. It is to write with imagination and reasoning based on materials that brings me pleasure, and then I can convey this kind of pleasure to my readers. If not so, then why it should be called as literature."¹

Mu Xin's attitude towards others' misconception is as follows. "As to the others' praise or disparagement, I have been always insensitive, just as Einstein's words go, the arrows of enemies are shooting at me one after another, I am safe and sound, because what they hit is not me."² To be insensitive doesn't mean that Mu Xin despised others' misconception. Rather, it is a kind of means of looking on. In this way of looking on, Mu Xin read others' misconception for his literature. When you read his works, meanwhile, he read you silently. You comment on his works, your own views, the characteristics of your thinking, your spiritual dimension, your values, your literary stance and your aesthetic principles are reflected in the meanwhile. The process of reading and commenting on Mu Xin is also the process of being read by Mu Xin. Therefore, Sun Yu considered that the book *Reading Mu Xin* is not so much as an interpretation on Mu Xin as introspection on our own old experience.³

Guo Songfen found that the sense of strangeness revealed in Mu Xin's works would make readers so puzzled that they would not comprehend what Mu Xin wrote at once. Many people thought that it is Mu Xin's self-expression, or his contempt for readers. But Guo Songfen held a contrary view. In his opinion, it exactly indicates that Mu Xin bore respect for his readers. He said: "I feel that he (Mu Xin) has a writing

¹ Mu Xin, "Chichi gaobai," pp. 81-82.

² Ibid., p. 84.

³ Sun Yu, "Mu Xin de shijie."

habit that he deliberately digress far afield and return later when he writes and he is able to control it exactly well. If a writer who truly bears respect for his readers, he should do like this. When an ordinary writer draws a circle, he will make it round immediately. But Mu Xin draws slowly, detail by detail, moving far away. He doesn't fear reader's complaint, because he knows that he will eventually return and make the circle round. [……] Mu Xin is a writer who has so great ambition that his works contain rich and profound significance. I think that he is expecting some kind of readers who don't comprehend the significance contained in his works exactly in the beginning, but will get it suddenly years later.”¹ Guo Songfen considered that a piece of work that can be comprehended immediately in the very beginning has no vitality. He said, “as Andrea Gide mentioned that a good work will give readers a blow on the head to make them suddenly feel they are nobody. In Søren Kierkegaard's words, it is an inner shock. Only when readers go through the period that they feel strange and puzzled, then there will be a possibility of true appreciation.”² The process from puzzlement to appreciation is the authentic respect for readers.

Hence, in this sense, Guo Songfen considered that Mu Xin is one of a minority of writers who truly have respect for their readers³ And Mu Xin deserved this comment. He ever said that he has the secret to writing, “ I have a perception of readers in my heart, which is ten times wiser than me. I write for it with awe and fear my gaffes and discourtesy, while it is rather hypercritical and never expressed satisfaction. I lived together with it for 40 years and I was accustomed to its existence. —— Thanks every reader who is the incarnation of my perception of readers for being with me. Immanuel ! ”⁴

Mu Xin had respect for readers, meanwhile he himself was also the faithful reader of the writers and poets he admired and respected. He treated works as a letter of an author to an unknown reader who truly comprehends his works. He said *Dream*

¹ See *Guanyu Mu Xin*, p. 34.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴ Mu Xin, “ Haixia chuansheng,” p. 21.

of *Red Mansions* is the letter that Cao Xueqin wrote to him.¹ He considered that the relationship between writers and readers is that they regard each other as their intimate friend they never met. From my point of view, Mu Xin's perception of readers is essentially owing to his love for literature and others. When Jean-Paul Sartre said, "Hell is other people", while Mu Xin said, "Paradise is other people". He said, "Paradise is the narrow gate, where it is hard for one person to squeeze into, but easy for two people."² Mu Xin is the man who would like to enter the paradise of literature together with his readers.

In his literary lectures, once Mu Xin talked about Tao Qian, he said, "Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 is a double recluse. On the one hand, he led the life as a recluse in the country. On the other hand, his literary style is so simple and peaceful that his literature was concealed by a variety of misreading, which is the second significance of recluse for him. [.....] It is the second significance of recluse that makes him lived and died in obscurity."³ How similar the fortune of Mu Xin is to that of Tao Yuanming. Did he think of himself when he spoke those words out? He said, "every great artist ever measured himself justly before he died. Some of them cannot help but speak his judgment out, such as Dante, Pushkin; some of them didn't, such as Tao Yuanming."⁴ Did Mu Xin measured himself justly then? When a student in his literary lectures asked about the position of Tao Qian in the history of Chinese literature, Mu Xin answered, "he is not the spire of the tower of Chinese literature. He strolled outside the tower. What I also have gone through and decide to continue going through is such imagery and realm."⁵ In my opinion, this is Mu Xin's judgment on himself. And it is enough for us to know that he ever measured himself justly from his own literary style, from his perception of readers, from his attitude towards others' misconception of his literature.

Chen Zishan considered that scholars in literature studies shouldn't ignore Mu

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 504.

² Hu Jiujiu, "Chen Danqing fangtan," in *Xin Zhoukan* 389 (2013).

³ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 234.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.154.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

Xin anymore, but find a proper position for him in the history of Chinese literature.¹ But from where I stand, what is urgent at present is not to place Mu Xin into the history of Chinese literature with a historical position, but to pay normal attention to Mu Xin's works without prejudice, i.e. to read his works with sincere attitude and to put a deserved interpretation on them. I think what Mu Xin cared about is neither the high or low evaluation of the value and significance of his literature, nor a pointless historical position not based on sincere reading. What he bloody cared about is the ideal reader in his heart who truly comprehends his works. Therefore, he said, "A writer is a person. An ordinary person needs only others' praise, while a special person needs others' comprehensions. The significance of a top-class writer, considered to belong to the top class through a long history, is so rich and profound that it will take hundreds years to comprehend, praise therefore seems rather secondary. [·····] Then comprehension might be the best way to treat writers. In the process of comprehension, it's not worth caring about some commendatory verbs or adjectives used occasionally."²

In the postscripts of *Letters in the Name of Solomon*, Mu Xin said, "At the time when Johann Sebastian Bach died, less than a dozen works of him had been published, and he was less famous than his son Carl Bach. The giant star dominated music at that age was G. P. Telemann. In the later years of J. S. Bach (mid-eighteenth century), Baroque music was on the wane, while Classical period was on the rise. Counterpoint was considered to be out-of-date, while the composition of harmony was popular. Only J. S. Bach remained employing the rigorous counterpoint to compose oratorios for church. Nowadays, G. P. Telemann and Carl Bach have already been no more celebrated as they were in the past, while J. S. Bach shines brilliantly. [·····] J. S. Bach is not so much a conservative as a creator. He believed that his composition method is just suitable for himself and to well develop this style is his own self-perfection. [·····] As to *The Art of Fugue*, Pablo Casals considered it as the unmatched milestone of Bach's musical ideas, which we hardly dare to believe. He

¹ "A Special Volume of Mu Xin," in *Xin Zhoukan* 389 (2013).

² Mu Xin, "Xuexi chouzuo," pp. 49-50.

seemed to deliberately tell us: let you see who I am and how far I can go.”¹

Like Johann Sebastian Bach, Mu Xin had always maintained his own style, walking towards to his self-perfection through a long and difficult journey. He knew that history will eventually tell people who he is and how far he can go.

¹ Mu Xin, *Wei Suoluomen shu* 伪所罗门书 (Beijing: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2009), pp. 257-259.

Conclusion

In terms of reality, he led the life of a recluse; in terms of literature, he conceals himself to reveal art. The double significance of recluse makes Mu Xin become a legend. In 2011, Mu Xin was awarded a prize of ‘Attraction of Legend’ by *Southern People Weekly*. This tardy prize regarded Mu Xin as ‘the most romantic and revelatory writer in this era’.¹

However, behind this romantic metaphor ‘legend’, Mu Xin’s long and authentic life has more piercing strength, and is more revelatory. Mu Xin is not a legend. He had indeed lived in his times, suffering various absurdities, humiliation and calamity, experiencing the circle of destruction and renaissance. As for times, the only thing he was able to do is to overcome his times on himself by literature and art. He said: “In my art, I took myself as materials and overcome this devil of era on myself. As for this era, I would never get involved in. Previously, I couldn’t find a proper statement to express this idea. But now, I get it: if I will write realistic and autobiographical memoirs, then I will write how I overcome my times on myself.”² In fact, till his death, he had never written his autobiographical memoirs. But he had indeed overcome his times by seeking the second level of significance, by his own aesthetic stance, by his unique style. Chen Danqing said: “If you have read Mu Xin’s works, you will agree with me that all his words, his innermost being, his language, his personal standpoint, have nothing to do with our times.”³ Mu Xin remained committed to making the aesthetic judgment on the world. He constructed and named his own world, where he transcend the evils and suffering of times, by metaphysical

¹ The Presentation Speech of “The Most Attractive Fifty in 2011” held by *Nanfang renwu zhoukan*.

² Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 916.

³ Hu Jiujiu, “Chen Danqing fangtan,” in *Xin zhoukan* 389 (2013).

thinking and by writing on ‘beauty of art’. He was artist of flying bird who wouldn’t focus on the earth, but flying freely in the skies.

He had ever willingly lived in obscurity like a recluse in order to persist in his own standpoint of art, to defend the freedom of literary writing. However he still didn’t get rid of the political persecution. During the 10-year cultural catastrophe, he encountered the death of his mother and sister, the ruin of his family, the illegal imprisonment, and the destruction of his unpublished manuscripts. A series of suffering almost exposed him to death. But he survived to fulfil his commitment——“ I would not fail to live up to what art had taught me”. In the death traps, he said to himself, “ to sacrifice by staying alive”. With his faith in literature and art, he evaded all the death traps and went to self-perfection in art step by step. He said: “ I was interested in military strategies and tactics, but I had no chance to carry out them. In terms of my real life, my family was totally ruined in the Cultural Revolution, all my direct family members died at that time; I never got married and had no children. In terms of love, I was a loser, for me, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But, anyway, I have been surviving by art. Whether being fortunate or being unfortunate, whether creating or not creating, as long as you are versed in literature, you can be considered to get some kind of success.”¹ And said: “ A genius had only faith when he was young. He had no plan at that time. [……] Faith means happiness. [……] But where a genius got his faith after all? Faith means devotion. It is easy to have an aspiration (立志), while it is hard to persist in it. Many people change their aspiration soon after they establish it. If it is like this, it would be better not to establish an aspiration. [……] Pursuit of aspiration undoubtedly needs determination and devotion. You should go on, although you have to walk on the sea.”² Mu Xin held an aspiration to be an artist and a man of letters since he was a child, and he never failed to live up to it. As far as Mu Xin’s concerned, life and art are synonymous. The whole life of Mu Xin is the life to be reclusive for literature, to recollect in literature, to educate and perfect himself by literature. Literature is both his starting point and his terminal

¹ Mu Xin, *Wenxue huiyilu*, p. 152.

² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

point.

His writing career lasted for more than sixty years, but he had hardly encountered proper chance to publish his works with dignity for years. He began his writing career since he was in his 14 years old, but his unpublished manuscripts written in his early life were totally destructed in the cultural catastrophe. He migrated to a foreign country alone when he was already more than 50 years old, where he continued his writing career. In the year when his book was firstly published overseas, he was nearly 60 years old. And in his 79 years old, he witnessed that his books were published in his motherland, and then he was dramatically regarded as ‘fresh writer’ there. And then the absurdity of the times befell him again. His unique style, his spiritual temperament, the originality and strangeness of his works were out of tune with the the spiritual dimension and unitary cultural ecology in mainland China. In his native land, he became a lonely literary landscape that was neglected collectively. His works haven’t got deserved interpretation and criticism, the rich and profound values and significance of his literature are awaiting to be evaluated. However, he had ever measured himself fairly; he believed in history’s fairness; he looked on others’ neglect and misconception, while he remained committed to keeping respect for his readers.

He comes from an uninterrupted cultural tradition, the background of his literary writing is wide and broad. The origin of his style is not unitary but plural. “His spiritual origin is not only based on Chinese classical culture——the culture of Pre-Qin dynasty, the culture of the period of Wei and Jin, the culture of Han and Tang dynasty, but also based on the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy; and the characteristic of his thoughts as well as the style of his art is western and modern, and is related closely to the most profound ideas of humanism in the western world in recent 30 years.”¹ The tradition of classical Chinese literature and May Fourth new literary tradition are linked up completely in his literary writing. He remained committed to the perception that culture is a whole. He placed himself into the worldwide literary landscape from the very beginning. He employed the diasporic thinking to wrote the depth of human

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “Mu Xin fengge de yiyi,” p. 22.

nature. In his works, he responded to as well as paid his respect for the spirit of ancient Greek tragedy, the humanism of the Renaissance and Nietzschean aesthetic wisdom. His self-diaspora and his world spirit transcended the May Fourth antecessors' spiritual realm that is the the binary opposition of tradition and modernity, and of the nation and the world.

He is a true artist. He was versed in fine art and music; he was well cultured in religion and philosophy; he was good at metaphysical thinking; he took literature as a medium and wrote his exploration into the universality and commonness of human art, and the depth of humanity in his works. He sought his own spiritual lineage among artists, writers, poets and philosophers of both ancient and modern times; he went into self-diaspora in the homeland of world literature; he was a wanderer with roots in the spiritual world. He said: “ theology is the homesickness of philosophy, humanity is the homesickness of literature.”¹ He said: “If homesickness is that big, one need not feel homesick for a small home.”² And his homesickness is vast, his literature is the profound homesickness to the poetic world, to the remote other shore. Therefore, he said, “ if you ask me why I left China, because I was taking a walk, and, unawares, went too far.”

If we compare Chinese Literature to a tower, then Mu Xin is not inside the tower. Because his world is wide. He is the double recluse who strolls outside the tower of Chinese literature.

¹ Tongming Jun Liu, “A dialogue with Mu Xin,” p. 142.

² Ibid.

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