

How Novelists Use Folklore as Weapons in Contemporary Revolutions of China: With the Examples of Lu Hsun, Hsiao Hung and Dai Sijie

Xuan Madeline Wang

School of Arts and Literature

Jiangsu University

301 Xuefu Avenue,

212013, Zhenjiang, China.

Email: xw4661@mun.ca

Abstract:

Folklore is often used in literature to express nostalgia and depict the everyday lives of a nation's people. There are few studies, however, on the role of folklore within Chinese revolutionary literature. Through interpreting three female fictional characters: Sister Xianglin in Lu Hsun's *The New Year's Sacrifice* (1924), the Little Child-bride in Hsiao Hung's *Tales of Hulan River* (1941), and the Little Seamstress in Dai Sijie's *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (2000), I interpret how Chinese writers differently regarded folklore as weapons, either allies or enemies, to reveal the miserable lives of women in the fight for liberty during two of China's contemporary revolutions, the Revolution of 1911 and The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution held between 1968 to 1978. Folklore, in the context of these novels, is manifest primarily through references to folk sorcery cures, shamanic beliefs, and folk songs. Nevertheless, through the novelists' different attitudes to folklore, we can see the complicated and thought-provoking history of Chinese contemporary revolutions.

Keywords: Folklore, revolutionary literature, Lu Hsun, novelists, Hsiao Hung

Introduction

Chinese contemporary novelists often use folklore as a weapon, and their pens are compared to guns. However, studies about how authors use folklore as weapons to fight in revolutions are rare. Although novelists do not openly declare that they are using folklore as weapons to fight, the interpretation of folklore in literature, such as in my work, exposes this revolutionary function of folklore present beneath the literal words. The two crucial revolutions in contemporary China were the May Fourth Movement and the New Culture Movement in the Revolution of 1911, which followed the end of the last feudalism emperor of China, and the other one was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution held from 1968 to 1978. These two revolutions extensively converted Chinese cultures and traditions.

I put forward three writers and their works to illustrate the questions below: How do fiction writers use folklore as weapons in different periods of modern China? How might women be portrayed as protagonists in the struggle for freedom concerning China's revolutions? First, I will summarize the

three novels, the writers and their writing backgrounds. Secondly, a structural diagram is made to compare and analyze the differences and similarities between the three examples.

The Death of Sister Xianglin: Lu Hsun and *The New Year's Sacrifice*

Lu Hsun (鲁迅 1881-1936) is widely regarded as the most excellent writer in contemporary China who practised and promoted vernacular Chinese (白话文) than classic Chinese in writing to make reading more accessible for commoners. He was the representative and leader of leftwing (radical) literature, a soldier using his pen to fight for democracy and freedom, a translator, an educator, and a professor. Lu Hsun's works exerted a substantial influence after the May Fourth Movement that began around 1916. He was highly acclaimed by Mao Zedong and the Communist regime after 1949. A Chinese writer compared Lu Hsun's role in the May Fourth Movement with Voltaire's in the Enlightenment of France (Chen 1976, 101).

New Year's Sacrifice (祝福) and the character of Sister Xianglin (祥林嫂) are some of Lu Hsun's most impressive works. Sister Xianglin was the servant of the Lu household. At the first time, Sister Xianglin gained the chance to work in Lu town through her diligent labour. However, the fact was Sister Xianglin escaped from her family after her husband died. Then, her mother-in-law sold and forced her to remarry in exchange for the money for her younger son's wedding. Unfortunately, Sister Xianglin was widowed the second time and came back to Lu Town for work again, and, more pitifully, her little son Ah-mao was attacked by wolves and also died. Sister Xianglin seems to have a mental disorder and tells her tragic tale over and over again.

Sister Xianglin's master is Fourth Uncle Lu—a local landlord who is the relative of the first-person narrator in this short story. In fact, Lu Hsun grew up in a similar landlord clan, which became a basic setting in his semi-biographical nostalgia serious novels. He created Lu Town, Lu clan relatives and neighbourhoods in his novels based on his life experiences.

The progressive youth, who is the incarnation of Lu Hsun, came back to Lu Town right before the New Year's celebration; he saw a beggar woman wandering in front of Lu's household. He recognized that she was Sister Xianglin, a servant maid in his uncle's house. He was not very clear about how she became a beggar. She asked him some questions: "Just the man I've been lookin' for. You know how to read books. You've been out there in the world and mustn't seen a thing or two. Now tell me... Is there *really* a soul after a body dies?... Then there's gotta be a hell too, right?... then dead kin are all gonna meet again, right?" (Lu 1990, 222). The young man was terrified by her questions and quickly escaped. The next day, he got the news that she had died on New Year's Eve. He began to recollect her story.

Lu Hsun contrasted the first and second impressions of Sister Xianglin: "[s]he looked to be twenty-six or twenty-seven and was on the whole rather pale, though her cheeks were rosy" (Lu 1990, 227). After widowing again, Sister Xianglin returned to Lu Town for work. Something became different: "She was much the same as she had been the first time... But her cheeks had lost the slightly rosy touch that had once relieved her general pallor. She kept her eyes averted; the spirited gleam that

once had lit them was now gone, and traces of tears showed in their corners” (Lu 1990, 232). The vanishing of the slightly rosy touch on the cheeks indicates that Sister Xianglin will go on to have a more miserable life.

During the New Year celebration, the most important thing for people is to prepare sacrifices for entertaining the gods and ghosts. Preparing sacrifices became a thread that links together the stories of Sister Xianglin. The Fourth Uncle reluctantly accepted Sister Xianglin again, and he warned the Fourth Aunt privately:

People like her may seem quite pitiable, ...she must have absolutely nothing to do with the family sacrifices. You will have to prepare all the sacrificial offerings yourself; otherwise they will be tainted and our ancestors will not accept them. (Lu 1990, 234)

If a widow is unacceptable, a remarried widow is unforgivable according to the morals of that time. Sister Xianglin lost the right to prepare for the New Year’s sacrifice because she was a remarried widow. It separated her from others, reminding her that she was “guilty” all the time.

Mother Liu, who was a servant as well as a Buddhist and a vegetarian, “kindly” told Sister Xianglin that when she died, she would be split into two pieces because she married twice and should serve two men underground. She would be forgiven by people if she donated money for a doorsill in the temple to be her replacement to bear thousands of steps and tens of thousands of walks. Sister Xianglin used up nearly one year’s salary to donate a doorsill and then appeared relaxed and happy. Nevertheless, donating a doorsill did not eliminate her guilt; people still thought she was unclean and prevented her appearance on the occasion of the sacrifice.

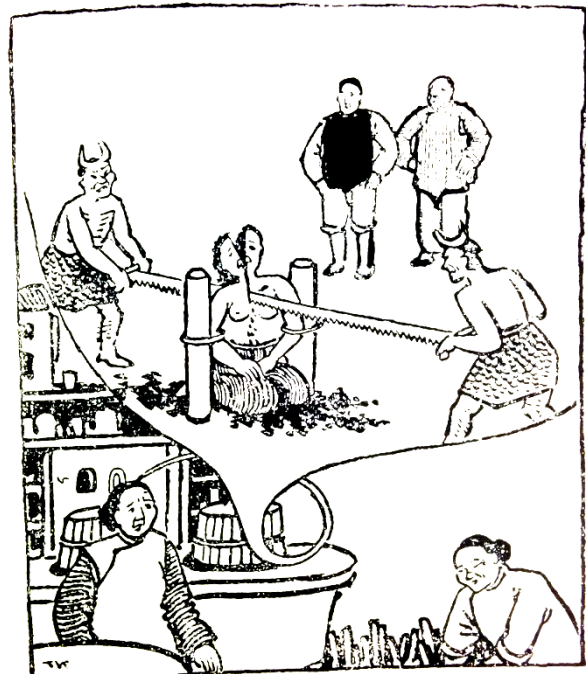


Fig. 1. Mother Liu telling horrible stories about the underground world (Lyell 1976, 221)

Following the approach of New Year, Sister Xianglin became particularly energetic. She thought she had been forgiven after the donation: “[w]ith complete self-assurance, she went to get the winecups and the chopsticks” (Lu 1990, 239). However, the Fourth Aunt again shouted, “Sister Xianglin, leave those there!” (Lu 1990, 239). Sister Xianglin “[j]erked back her hand as though it had been scorched and her face began to darken” (Lu 1990, 239). It made her feel desperate because she knew she could never change her fate whatever she did in her remaining years. She lost the desire to live and became more timid and dull. In the end, her master sent her out, and she died on New Year’s Eve—the most important and happiest moment of the entire year.

Lu Hsun had an apparent attitude toward traditions, in other words, folklore. Although Lu

Hsun disapproved of some Chinese traditional cultures, such as superstitions, folk beliefs and the backward perspectives of three obediences and four virtues, which severely constrained women, his purpose did not aim at folklore. Folklore is just a weapon for him to fight in the revolution. His object or enemy was not traditional culture and folklore; his enemy was the obstacles, such as backward perspectives and feudal ethic codes, that held back progress. Essentially, he wanted to change the people who used folklore and lived in traditions set out by folklore, not to eliminate folklore altogether. How did he express these views in his works? He only utilized the negative aspects of folklore to depict a conservative society. His attitude to folklore and cultural heritage is vivid in the words below.

He opposed those who would subvert the cultural heritage, although the epigonists and nationalists—those who would steer art back into the old rut—became his chief enemies. “Although the new ideas have never made much headway in China, many old fogies—young ones too—are already scared to death and have started ranting about national culture.” “China has many good things,” they assure us. “To chase after what is new instead of studying and preserving the old is as bad as renouncing our ancestral heritage.” Of course, it carries enormous weight to trot out our ancestors to make a point; but I cannot believe that before the old jacket is washed and folded no new one must be made. (Semanov 1980, 120)

Lu Hsun put forward that one of his friends once said: “If we want to preserve our national heritage, our national heritage must first be able to preserve us” (Chen 1976, 103). It became his basic perspective on cultural heritage and folklore. In his time, the survival of the nation was the primary issue for the Chinese. Lu Hsun had to choose to put folklore as an enemy to construct a new life: “Of course, there must be destruction, but the purpose of destruction is to construct a new future” (Chen 1976, 326).

The Death of Little Child-bride: Hsiao Hung and *Tales of Hulan River*

Hsiao Hung’s (萧红 1911-1942) true name was Zhang Naiying. She was born to a minor landlord family in what was then known to the outside world as Manchuria. Hsiao Hung was thought to be one of the most gifted fiction writers; most importantly, she was a feminist writer who enjoyed wide popularity among her contemporaries. More impressively, she was the only female writer allowed to participate in the small coterie of authors around the leading literary figure of the period, Lu Hsun (Hargrett 1977, 498).

Widely recognized as the most gifted but fleeting writer in China, Hsiao Hung died at a young age when she passed her 30-year-old birthday. She used a signature language style and sensitive emotions to depict a fictional world peacefully. However, under the tranquil description and graceful language style, she expressed the same radical opinions as Lu Hsun, who was her instructor and promoter. Her works were influenced a lot by Lu; however, she did not totally imitate him. Pollard praises Hsiao Hung’s excellent works in *Tales of Hulan River*:

The childhood sketches are personal to the author, and she participates as an onlooker in the dramas that take place in her family's compound, but there are general descriptions too of the temples, shops, trades and activities in the town, all of these separate gems. Hsiao Hung's style in this later work is poised and sophisticated, and her syntax orthodox. Her art of controlled irony can be presumed to have been learnt from Lu Hsun, under whose wing she had lived in Shanghai, but she outshines her master in imagination and humour. (Pollard 1981, 410)

Tales of Hulan River is a semi-biography novel with first-person narration—the naive and clear voice of a little girl. Although Hsiao Hung suffered through an emotionally wrenching childhood to rebel against the traditional values that so oppressed her countrymen and to live as a bohemian (Hegel 1980, 485), the fiction depicts the childhood memories and the affection between a little girl and her grandfather and the everyday life of Hulan River people.

The death of the little child-bride is the most impressive chapter in the novel. Hsiao's peaceful and allegorical words ironically create a little child-bride's short and pitiable lifespan. This little child-bride is killed by her mother-in-law's "unintentional" violent frustrations and diverse deadly folk cures. The first latent tragedy is that people do not realize they abide strictly by absurd ethical codes and common laws. In their minds, a child-bride should be timid, weak and, most importantly, obedient. People criticized the little child-bride: "What's this world coming to when a child-bride doesn't look anything like a child-bride ought to?" (Hsiao 1979, 231).

The second latent tragedy is that the mother-in-law does not think that beating a little child-bride is wrong. "As Goldblatt notes, Hsiao Hung here describes 'the individual tragedies experienced by people who, like the author herself, are brutalized by this violence they do not really understand'" (Hegel 1980, 486). "Whatever the situation, when things were not going well with her, her reaction was to hit someone. Who would that someone be? The answer was always the young child-bride... She wouldn't disappear from sight or run away (like a cat or a dog); she didn't lay eggs; and, unlike a pig, if she lost a few pounds it wouldn't make any difference, since she was never weighed anyway" (Hsiao 1979, 258). It means that in the perspectives of ordinary Chinese people in the 1920s, the lives of human beings were less worthy than those of livestock. It was the environment that Hsiao Hung and Lu Hsun devoted themselves to change: a society that lacked human rights and individual values.

Moreover, the abuses of daughters-in-law had been transmitted from generation to generation before 1949. It is believed that when the mother-in-law was young, she was beaten by her mother-in-law. Hence, there is a view of compensation to explain the relationships between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in old China: a bride was always violently or mentally abused; but did not feel upset, because the bride will become a mother-in-law someday. An old Chinese idiom says, "Finally the daughter-in-law becomes mother-in-law." On that day, she will do the same things to her daughter-in-law to compensate for the oppressions and tortures she experienced at a young age when she gained power over the household and the little bride.

The third latent tragedy is that people voluntarily contribute various folk sorceries to cure the child-bride as an experimental article, and they do not know they actually hurt her. The unreliable

folk cures include burning a proxy doll as the replacement of the child-bride, making her eat a whole, unplucked rooster, using an herb blaster, and immersing her in hot water in a vat three times. Hsiao Hung stressfully depicted the shamanic bath in hot water.

The young child-bride was quickly carried over and placed inside the vat, which was brim full of hot water—scalding hot water. Once inside, she began to scream and trash around as though her very life depended upon it, while several people stood around the vat scooping up the hot water and pouring it over her head. Before long her face had turned beet-red, and she ceased her struggles; standing quietly in the vat, she no longer attempted to jump out, probably sensing that it would be useless to even try. The vat was so large that when she stood up inside only her head cleared the top. (Hsiao 1979, 265)

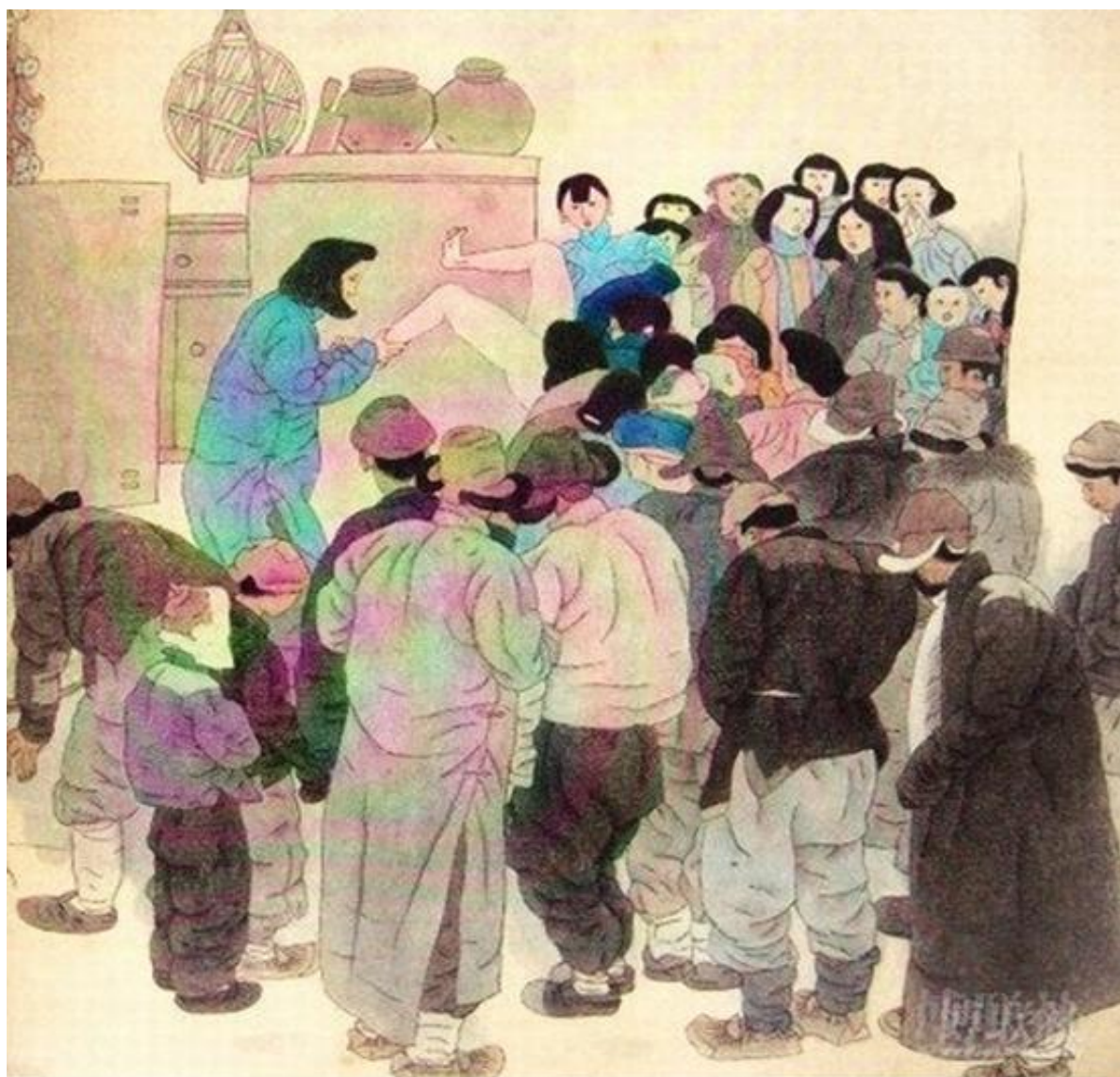


Fig. 1. The Little Child-Bride was bathed three times in scalding water (Illustrated by Hou Guoliang, 2007).
<https://www.doc88.com/p-5406266883539.html>

Firmly, Hsiao's calm language and indifferent distance incarnated her own position in the story. It is not difficult to tell that the indifferent observations above did not fit the voice of a five or six-year-

old girl. Hegel points out Hsiao's unique writing style that contrasts cruel plots and poetic language:

The strength of the novel lies in just such contrasts: the squalor of other houses in the compound jars against the beauty of the old man's garden; the joy of the child narrator is opposed to the sufferings of the child bride, whose similarly irrepressible spirit provokes the grotesque worries of her mother-in-law and the morbid curiosity of the rest of the town. (Hegel 1980, 485)

The little child-bride was bathed three times in scalding water, and each time, she passed out.

At that moment the crowd witnessing the excitement yelled in panic, thinking that the girl had died, and they rushed forward to rescue her, while those of a more compassionate nature began to weep. A few moments earlier, when the young child-bride was clearly still alive and begging for help, not a single person had gone to rescue her from the hot water. But now that she was obviously to everything and no longer seeking help, a few people decided to come to her aid... How could she not be pained? Here was a sprightly young child whose life had suddenly come to an end. (Hsiao 1979, 265)

Hsiao Hung cannot stop asking why the onlookers did not save the child-bride when she still had consciousness. The people's ignorance resulted in these three latent tragedies and the miserable story of the child-bride. Actually, the true patients who needed to be cured were the healthy onlookers and not the child-bride. Scholars and writers around the May Fourth Movement and the Revolution of 1911, which ended feudalism history in China, thought that Chinese people possessed some negative characteristics, and they resulted in the tough history of contemporary China. People were indifferent and timid. They were so curious about everything but leapt back when a desperate situation needed someone to stand up. They cared about the pitiable people, but at the same time, they remained onlookers. Lu Hsun has similar criticism of the negative characteristics of the Chinese. He thought these characteristics caused contemporary China's disgraced history, such as lost battles with western navies. Chen analyzed it clearly:

In Lu Hsun's opinion, the elimination of China's undesirable traits constituted the first step toward achieving individual liberation. His early literary career was an attempt to expose the undesirable characteristics of the Chinese people, to awaken the individual's self-consciousness, and to change the national spirit... China was in need of an uncompromising man like Lu Hsun to wake the millions from their self-complacency, mental apathy, and thousands of years of accumulated inertia. (Chen 1976, 105)

At the end of the story, the onlookers' superstitions and ignorance resulted in the tragedies of child-bride. Similar to Lu Hsun, Hsiao Hung used folklore as a weapon. Folklore elements in her story showed the author's perception of the foolishness of these people. She exposed the cruelty toward the miserable life of child-bride to wake people up and make them give up their harmful, backward perspectives and ethical codes.

Runaway Little Seamstress: Dai Sijie and *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*

Born in China in 1954, Dai Sijie (戴思杰) is a filmmaker and writer, and he left China in 1984 for France, where he has lived and worked ever since. During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), Dai Sijie was “re-educated” between 1971 and 1974. These experiences became the basis of his famous novel, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*. The ten years of the Cultural Revolution eliminated the bourgeois elements and feudalist traditions and maintained the single communist proletarian culture. In the period, western culture, Chinese classic culture, bourgeois culture and folklore all became the enemies of the communist proletarian culture, which the government devoted to simplifying and controlling.

Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress tells the story of two intellectual youths who were dispatched and re-educated to a rural region in Sichuan province during the Cultural Revolution. Their fathers, who are a dentist and a pulmonary specialist, have been declared enemies of the state and “reactionaries of the bourgeoisie.” The youths experience arduous labours such as mining and agricultural work which they would never do in the city. Thankfully, there was a hidden beauty in the mountains, the Little Seamstress, Comforting their exhausted minds and bodies. Expectedly, they fell in love with the young girl. Luo, “a genius for storytelling,” rapidly gains the heart of this beauty through many strategies, such as storytelling, narrating films and reading western novels.

Luo wants to culture the Little Seamstress and make her an educated lady. After the first meeting of the two boys and the girl, the narrator Ma asks Luo whether he has fallen in love with her; Luo replies: “She’s not civilised, at least not enough for me!” (Dai 2002, 27). Watts analyses this statement: “The seamstress’s individuality within her own rural environment is not enough to satisfy Luo, however, who casts himself as a latter-day Pygmalion in an attempt to turn her into a match more suited to his urban tastes” (2011, 35). Hence, in the whole book, Luo’s goal is to culture this rare beauty who has grown up in an area isolated by mountains. Their lives become hopeful when they find the forbidden western novels which belong to another re-educated boy—Four-Eyes. Luo begins to read these books to her: “With these books I shall transform the Little Seamstress. She’ll never be a simple mountain girl again” (Dai 2002, 100).

Indeed, the forbidden western novels have more meaning to the three young people. In their eagerness for knowledge, they do various works to get close to those books from Four-Eyes. Folklore, in relation to this intention, functions as a tool in three ways. First, the desire for books makes the two boys collect folksongs for Four-Eyes as an exchange. Four-Eyes has an opportunity to go back to the city. It requires him to collect folksongs and mail them to a journal press. However, he does not really appreciate the value of traditional folk songs; he utilizes them as a springboard to go back to the city. Hence, he fails when he tries to collect folksongs from the old miller. In exchange for western novels, Luo and the narrator decide to collect folksongs for Four-Eyes. Even it is very hard to dig treasures from the miller’s mouth, for example, they have to eat the “jade dumplings with salty sauce”—pebbles dipping into salty water. “He dips them in salty water, puts them in his mouth, rolls them around and spits them out again” (Dai 2002, 64). Four-Eyes

refuses to eat it, and the old miller refuses to treat him on his own side. On the contrary, the two boys happily spend a fantastic night with the poor, weird, but genius old singer and successfully collect many authentic folk songs.

Second, the positive attitudes to folklore that the two boys express show the writer's own preference. Four-Eyes belittles the 18 songs Luo and Ma diligently collected. He regards the songs as "shit" that cannot be published in an official journal because of their erotic and vulgar elements. However, Luo disagrees with Four-Eyes' judgement: "I thought he was great—his songs, his voice, his weird rippling stomach, and the things he told us. I'm going back there so that I can give him some money for his kindness" (Dai 2002, 77). When Four-Eyes adapts the folksong to a fake one with the style of flattering the Cultural Revolution and Chairman Mao, the narrator Ma heavily beats his jaw. The narrator, who represents Dai Sijie in the story, guards the authentic folklore. These are the two versions of old miller's folksong; the latter one is Four-Eyes' adaptation:

Tell me:
An old louse,
What does it fear?
It fears boiling water,
Boiling bubbling water.
And the young nun,
Tell me,
What does she fear?
She fears the old monk
No more and no less
Just the old monk. (Dai 2002, 74)

Tell me:
Little bourgeois lice,
What do they fear?
They fear the boiling wave of the proletariat. (Dai 2002, 78)

Dai Sijie expresses his own attitudes to folklore by describing the defending actions of the two boys, and separates himself from being an accomplice of the Cultural Revolution. In that period, everything of traditional culture, such as folklore, is abandoned, as well as bourgeois literature and culture. Bourgeois culture and folklore are the common enemies of the Cultural Revolution. Hence, the bourgeois intellectuals show their compassion for folklore out of companionship. Dai Sijie's views about Cultural Revolutions are analyzed by Watts:

In celebrating the personal and political freedoms represented by nineteenth-century French fiction, Dai criticizes the Cultural Revolution for persecuting a generation of middle-class Chinese, and for leaving a traumatic imprint on their collective consciousness. (Watts 2011, 37)

Third, folklore becomes the ally of the boys who intend to steal the books. In the celebrating banquet of Four-Eyes' release from re-education, five shamans whom Four-Eyes' mother invites forecast his fate and perform an exorcism ritual for him. This farce attracts the attention of all the village people and creates a chance for Luo and Ma to secretly get into Four-Eyes' house and steal the suitcase, which is full of forbidden novels. Besides that, shamans do not function substantively but with comic implications. It expresses Dai's conservative attitudes to superstitions and folk sorceries. Like Lu Hsun and Hsiao Hung, Dai Sijie uses folklore as a tool. His target is not folklore. Hence his reservations about folklore do not impact that he gets an alliance with folklore in his story.

As the novel progresses, the Little Seamstress learns about the outside world by reading foreign books. "Embracing a series of new literary role models, she fashions a bra based on an illustration from Madame Bovary, and, much to Luo's irritation, starts to imitate his city accent. She has her hair cut into a bob, and buys a pair of pristine white tennis shoes" (Watts 2011, 35). She is impregnated by Luo and subsequently gets an abortion. After that, she realizes that she should live a more colourful life. She runs away from Luo and Ma and starts a new life in the city. Luo's plan is successful because she has been cultivated, but he does not anticipate the ending: "She said she had learnt one thing from Balzac: that a woman's beauty is a treasure beyond price" (Dai 2000, 184).

A Crossover Comparison of Three Fictions and Their Uses of Folklore

Based on the diagram below, comparing three stories, I will analyze the similarities and differences in terms of the novelists' backgrounds, the novels' historical backgrounds, the settings of the novels, the female characters, the uses of folklore and the authors' attitudes to folklore:

	Lu Hsun (1881-1936)	Hsiao Hung (1911-1942)	Dai Sijie (1954-)	Similarity
	<i>The New Year's Sacrifice</i> (1924)	<i>The Tales of Hulan River</i> (1941)	<i>Balzac and Little Chinese Seamstress</i> (2000)	First-person narrative, Semi-biographic novel, nostalgic sentiments
Historical background of writing	The Revolution of 1911, May Fourth Movement & New Culture Movement (1919)	Aftermath of May Fourth Movement & New Culture Movement (1919), Anti-Japanese War (1938-1945)	21st century in France	Lu Hsun and Hsiao Hung had similar satiric writing style and May Fourth inheritance
Historical setting of story	The Revolution of 1911, May Fourth Movement & New Culture Movement (1919)	The Revolution of 1911, May Fourth Movement & New Culture Movement (1919)	The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)	Cultural revolutions

Sites of story	Shaoxing, Zhejiang, South-eastern China	Hulan, Harbin, Manchurian region of China	Yong Jing, Sichuan, South-western China	
Sister Xianglin	Servant. Widowed twice. Died			1. The female characters have no name. Show that they were controlled by a patriarchal society and could not be independent. 2. The destinies of female characters imply the fates of authors.
Little Child-bride		Sold as a child-bride. Violently abused by mother-in-law. Died		
Little Seamstress			Lover of two heroes. Escapes from home after being cultured by western literature	
Folklore use	1. New Year's Sacrifice. 2. Folk legend of hell. 3. Donate doorsill in temple to expiation	1. Folk medicine. 2. Folk cure methods. 3. Shamanic ritual and belief.	1. Folk cure methods. 2. Collecting folk songs. 3. Shamanic ritual and belief.	
Attitudes to folklore	Mostly negative	Mostly negative	Positive and respectfully	
Similarity	1. The authors were influenced by western perspectives and literature. 2. The authors respectively used folklore as tools in their works to cater to different revolutionary needs.			

First, the three writers have similarities and differences. Lu Hsun, Hsiao Hung and Dai Sijie come from different periods. Dai Sijie is still alive, while Lu Hsun and Hsiao Hung, born around the 1900s, died long ago. Lu Hsun and Hsiao Hung were writing about similar historical periods. They are influenced by the same historical period, even though the two stories were published nearly 20 years apart. Hence, Lu and Hsiao possess the same attitudes and perspectives on their stories. Even though the periods in the three stories are all cultural revolutions, this Cultural Revolution differs from the former. However, their stories share many similarities: they are first-person narrative novels. They are also semi-biographical novels which use the voices of a progressive youth (Lu Hsun), a little girl (Hsiao Hung) and the narrator Ma (Dai Sijie) to express the writers' incarnation. Finally, these three stories show authors' nostalgic sentiments toward their hometowns and past experiences.

Second, the three female characters in these three novels have similarities. 1. The female characters have no name. Sister Xianglin, the Little Child-bride and the Little Seamstress all are not true names for people. In the Chinese version, the name of the protagonist is called Xianglin Sao (祥林嫂). Sao, which was translated as "Sister" by many translators, means "elder brother's wife" and was used by extension as a general term of respect for married women (Lyell 1976, 142). Xianglin is her dead husband's name. From the beginning to the end, people do not know her family name and given

name. The Little Child-bride is called the Little Wholeness Bride (小团圆媳妇) in Chinese, shows people's wish for a whole and happy life after the child-bride married. In fact, Jing Teng inferred that Sister Xianglin had a child-bride background (2009). The exchange of a child-bride was a symbolic phenomenon of feudalism. The little girl, who was generally several years older than the boy, was sold to a family where the boy was just a baby. The girl and the baby boy have a marriage by name only. In the meantime, the girl is the babysitter and labour force for the family. When the boy grows up to a marriageable age, the girl and the boy live a normal married life together. In Lu's story, Sister Xianglin's mother-in-law thus had the complete sovereignty to manipulate her life, such as selling her to her second husband.

If it is strategic to use anonymous titles to indicate Sister Xianglin and the Little Child-Bride because the narrators in the two stories are not very familiar with them. They are narrators' acquaintances either as a servant or a neighbour. However, why does the narrator of *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* still call his hidden lover "little seamstress"(小裁缝)? He knew her well and it was impossible to be unknown to her true name. Does Dai Sijie use the code name of the female protagonist for some hidden reasons? I infer that the three writers wanted to express women's oppressive positions and tragic fates through their anonymous titles. They have no name; therefore, they have no individual identities and human rights. The women were not independent and were severely controlled by the patriarchal society because their names were decided by their husbands (Sister Xianglin), identities (Little Child-bride) and occupations (Little Seamstress).

Another similarity among the three stories is that the destinies of female characters imply the fates of novelists. Lu Hsun and Hsiao Hung rebelled for democracy and freedom for Chinese people throughout their lives. The early death of the Little Child-bride forecasts Hsiao Hung's early death. Meanwhile, the escape of the Little Seamstress reflects Dai Sijie leaving China to go to France after the uprising ended. The departure of Little Seamstress shows the liberty and the pursuit of new life that Dai Sijie also sought.

Third, based on the above descriptions of folklore in the three stories, I suppose that the writers utilize folklore as their weapons to fight in these revolutions. Lu Hsun and Hsiao Hung regarded folklore with negative attitudes because they wanted to use the negative aspects of folklore to wake people up and make social progress. The folk legend about hell and the tradition of donating a doorsill in the temple as expiation are superstitious folk beliefs. Sister Xianglin was frightened by the legend and practised the tradition but did not change her fate and died. Folk sorceries and shamanic rituals killed the innocent child-bride in Hsiao Hung's story. In Dai Sijie's case, folklore becomes his colleague and friend. His attitude towards folklore and traditional culture is positive, and he guards "authentic folksongs" (Dai 2002, 76). Moreover, the three writers are greatly influenced by Western literature and perspectives. Lu Hsun said: "Whenever I am reading a Chinese book, I feel miserable and despondent. I feel as if I am living in an isolated world, divorced from the reality of human life. Whenever I am reading a foreign book, with the exception of an Indian book, I feel as if I am doing something, and coming into contact with human life" (Chen 1976, 109). In

the whole book of *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*, Dai Sijie illustrates the tremendous influences of Western literature on him and his characters.

Conclusion

Fiction writers in modern China treat folklore with different attitudes in different revolutions. I proved this by introducing three Chinese writers and their works from different periods. During wartime in China, intellectuals fiercely criticized all the elements of folklore which they deemed as negative, including superstitions, conservative natures and fraudulences, striving to construct a new China without old-fashioned ethic codes and negative Chinese characteristics. During cultural oppression of diverse cultures, they respect, praise and guard folklore, and unite with folklore to ally to fight against despotism. Folklore is always used in revolutionary literature as weapons, either allies or enemies.

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