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# Transition in Chinese Literature, Chinese Literature in Transition: A Critical Study of 'New Period Literature' and its Representative Literary Genre, 'Scar Literature'

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### Abstract

The paper here attempts to make a critical study of 'new period literature' (*xinshiqiwenxue*) in general, and 'scar literature' (*shanghenwenxue*) as one of its most representative literary genres in particular, by relocating it against the historical and socio-political backdrop of contemporary China. The central objective of the study here is to map the trajectory along which 'new period literature' and later, 'scar literature' evolved in contemporary China and to critically examine the complex processes involved therein. To capture discernable features of 'transition', 'overlaps' and 'convergence' in the context of contemporary Chinese literature remains to be the central task of the research investigation. The objective of the study here is to critique those particular literary creations that come under the domain of 'scar literature' and have been known to have defied the socialist political dictum of an unending class struggle during the decade-long Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), while responding to a humanitarian call in favour of preserving the lost voices of those intellectuals, who once pledged their lives for the cause of socialist construction in China.

**Keywords:** Scar literature, Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Transition

### Introduction

"It is not the bruises on the body that hurt. It is the wounds of the heart and scars on the mind..." Aisha Mirza

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was perhaps a radical watershed in the history of communist China, representative of an extreme form of party dictatorship, authoritarian and totalitarian state control, politically coercive leadership, the extermination of intellectuals, the absence of freedom of expression and violation of human rights. When the revolution ended after ten years in 1976, with the death of the helmsman of the Chinese state, Chairman Mao Zedong, and

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at the note of arrest warrant for the members of the infamous *Gang of Four*, China had almost already lost an entire living generation of intellectuals, all of those who had been falsely charged of conspiring against the Chinese communist regime, especially its founder father, Chairman Mao and the socialist ideals he stood for. The call for the revolution was to successfully weed out all representatives of capitalism and revisionism, and those included Mao Zedong's real and imaginary enemies within the party, some of them being his closest comrades-in-arms. Post-cultural revolution Chinese literature has been designated as 'new period literature' (*xinshiqiwenxue*) in general terms, while 'scar literature' (*shanghenwenxue*) refers to that particular literary genre that emerged in contemporary China between 1976 and 1979, vividly portraying the psychological wounds and emotional scars of tens of thousands of intellectuals who were tortured to silence and yet survived death. Scar literature was an exemplar in the field of 'new period literature', as it pointed towards a critical departure from all existing forms of communist propaganda literature and stood in complete defiance of an authoritarian Mao Zedong cult which had held China under its grasp since 1949. The umbrella term 'scar literature' refers to a collection of short stories which depict the lived experiences of intellectuals, party officials, cadres, workers, writers, stage performers and artists during the decade long Cultural Revolution in China and their real life stories of suffering, humiliation and psychological trauma faced at the hands of their very own compatriots at the national call of emergency issued by Chairman Mao Zedong to protect the proletarian socialist interest of the ruling party in China which was feared to be losing ground against a secretly rising capitalist class, led by the intellectuals of China. 'Scar literature' also expose the dark shades of human emotions, the inner conflicts and contradictions in the minds of young student red guards who were forcibly made to rise above their individual selves and were torn between feelings of nationalism and emotions of societal and familial bonds.

#### Central Research Questions

The treatment of the subject here entails a critical inquiry of the following issues, which would eventually help in the formation of the conceptual framework for the study. First, as to what remains to be the defining parameters for literature in China to be called contemporary? Does contemporaneity in Chinese literature dwell upon the form, content, and style of literary creations, or does it reflect certain political tendencies, sociological patterns and ideological formulations to be called so? Second, can contemporary Chinese literature be perceived as a homogeneous literary identity? Is it contemporaneous with post-modernist wordlist tendencies? And third, as to whether contemporary Chinese literature has ever had an independent soul and a free voice?

#### Problematics of Perceiving the 'Contemporary' within the Chinese Context

To deliberate upon the above-mentioned questions, the foremost task is to re-position contemporary Chinese literature within the context of contemporary Chinese socio-political reality.

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Most scholars view contemporary Chinese literature within the confines of the historical period, post-1949, when China won liberation under the leadership of the Communist Party up until the present times. Chinese contemporary literature is, therefore, primarily indicative of the literature in China since 1949. Although subject to questioning and criticism, since the late 1970s, this system of periodization of contemporary Chinese literature has been broadly utilized. Hong Zicheng proposes that, what makes literature in China, 'contemporary', is the specific historical discourse field of 'socialism', against the ideological backdrop of which, this type of literature emerged (Hong 3). Stipulating 'socialist literature' as the nature of 'contemporary literature', based upon the initial ideological literary classification methodology remains to be an important approach to the study of contemporary Chinese literature (Hong xvi). During the first ten years of national construction, between the years 1949-1959, neither the term nor the concept of a 'contemporary' Chinese literature appeared in usage amongst critics of literature, arts and politics. This can be testified from the reports pertaining to documents of the Third National Congress of Literature Representatives in 1960 which do not carry any reference to the word 'contemporary Chinese literature' (Hong xiii). It is to be noted that 1949 was a defining moment in the history of contemporary China. With the victory of the Communist party against Japanese domination on the international front and the overthrowing of the Kuomintang nationalist government at the domestic level, China was now preparing to be metamorphosed into a socialist country. The magnitude of socio-political change, encountered by China post-1949 was massive. Transformation in the socio-political dynamics of any country does not necessarily weave itself into the internal structures of literature. However, in the case of China, where there has been an inseparably close connection between literature and politics, the socio-political changeover in the late 1940s deeply influenced the nature of literary compositions, as much as the role of literature and arts. To mark a new beginning in the history of China under communist rule for the first time, and also to redefine all intellectual and creative activities, including literature, along socialist ideals, terms, interchangeable in meaning with 'contemporary Chinese literature', such as 'new China literature', 'literature since the establishment of the nation' were employed. The earliest use of this concept of an emerging socialist literary trend, depicting new China's socialist aspirations, in Hong Zicheng's opinion, was by literary institutions and literary histories edited by universities in the late 1950s (Hong xvi). After 1949, when the whole nature of Chinese society had already become 'socialist', literature also necessarily experienced a change in its fundamental nature.

With reference to contemporary Chinese political, social and economic trends, as well as contemporary Chinese literary and artistic tendencies, there have been two noticeable diverging lines of departure, one that proceeded along the socialist ideology of Chairman Mao Zedong, between the years 1949-1979, and the second, along Maoist ideology of modernity, from 1979 onward. 'New period literature' and its representative literary genre, 'scar literature' embraced the second

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ideological line. Contentions arise at this very point, first, in relation to locating contemporary Chinese literature within the larger socialist revolutionary historical political context of China, and second, with regard to relocating 'new period literature' within the domain of contemporary literature. So far, critics have perceived contemporary Chinese literature in isolation, proposing its emergence between the years 1949 and present, thereby conforming its evolution and growth to the post-revolutionary takeover of communist China by the Communist Party under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong only. What has been overlooked though, in this popular discourse, is that post 1949 communist China carried much of the remnants from the past, particularly so in matters of political ideology. Scholars have also used the term and the concept of 'contemporary' to refer to almost all literary creations post 1949, thereby viewing 'contemporary Chinese literature' as a homogenous identity. Herein, lies a serious problem as well, since Maoist China between 1949 and 1976, post-Mao China between 1976 and 2000 and again post millennium China have all witnessed varied interpretations and applications of the same Marxist-Leninist-Maoist socialist ideals, and therefore cannot be viewed through the same prism.

#### **Main Proposition of the Study**

The study here contradicts the above mentioned popular discourse and argues that there exists yet another specific 'contemporary' within the larger generalized 'contemporary' in the post-1949 literary context of China, and a newer 'new' within the whole canvas of new literary productions post 1949. It is important to distinguish one from the other, to attempt to rise above generalisations and homogenisations, and to adopt a more nuanced approach to the study of 'contemporary Chinese literature', based upon specific timelines, political orientations, ideological formulations and psychological interpretations, all of which in turn have influenced the kind of literature that has been created in the years that followed. Therefore, the study here contests the use of the term 'contemporary' for any and every literature that has been created between 1949 and the present times. It also proposes that the 'contemporary' in Chinese literature does not necessarily merge with the post-modernist wordlist tendencies and therefore should be viewed in critical response to China's transformation with regard to its indigenous political environment and not in respect to China's modernisation-globalisation drive. The portrayal of the latter by Chinese and western critics, as a Chinese phenomenon of marching towards the world (*zouxiangshijie*) in an attempt to establish a siblinghood between Chinese literature and post-modernist world literature is also contested in the course of the study here. Contemporary Chinese literature cannot be treated as a monolith or an insulated compartment. Emerging trends in contemporary Chinese literature have been closely shaped and influenced by literary trends of modern China (1919-1949). Literary trends in modern and contemporary China have in turn been carved out of its political landscape, political ideological framework, and political orientations. In order to posit 'new period literature' within the domain of contemporary Chinese literature, it is important to take note of the intricate

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connection between phases of transition from modern to contemporary, and of overlapping tendencies in literary and art forms therein. Of equal concern is the issue of whether 'new period literature' of contemporary China could be seen as a complete departure from modern China's 'new literature' and also whether it imbibed elements of postmodernist wordlist tendencies.

### **The Emergence of 'Scar literature': When, Why and How?**

In late 1977 and 1978, following the death of Chairman Mao Zedong, the intellectuals once purged, tortured and silenced during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) were gradually getting their lost voice back. The Cultural Revolution was formally declared to have been over, the policies of the Communist Party under the *gang of four* regimes were being put to question, the credibility of the cult of Mao was being debated, and the socialist ideological framework against which an organized state crime of the stature as that of the Cultural Revolution, where an estimated ten to twenty million Chinese intellectuals were tortured and killed, was being re-assessed. In November 1977, the official literary journal, *People's Literature (RenminWenxue)* published the first series of stories about the suffering endured during the Cultural Revolution and about the emotional and psychological state of the Chinese people who had survived it (Knight 527). 'Scar' or 'The Wounded' was not a name given only to a collection of short stories that emerged during the following few years but to a new genre of literature. Although 'scar literature' stood as a direct counterforce opposing the mainstream communist discourse of propaganda literature, it did reflect strong socialist literary tendencies from the past. These were similar to the pre-1976 literary compositions in the sense that these were all intensely political (Barne 77). Therefore, a critique of scar literature would ideally require identification of the mainstream discourse on literature and arts pre-1977, from the time of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and also of noticeable tendencies of overlaps or transition from former periods in history, if any.

The rise of the 'modern' Chinese nation dates back to 1911, marked by the success of the Xinhai Revolution (*xinhaigeming*) in overthrowing the three millennia old Chinese monarchical system of governance and preparing the new-born nation to fight against the remnants of western imperialism and domestic feudalism. Literature in China between 1919 and 1949, during the age of China's intellectual quest for national salvation, functioned as an important tool in creating a critical mass, impregnated with the principles of Marxism and Leninism, directed along socialist ideological line, while advocating a complete break away from China's presumably decadent traditional Confucian foundational ideological framework. Throughout the twentieth century in modern China (1911-1949), the spell of modernity bonded the nation and the individual citizen together, and catalysed a common obsession to break with the past and tradition, and to be completely new (Huang 2). The political and social movement launched on 4 May, 1919, known in history as the May Fourth Movement (*Wusi yundong*), in its demand for a new approach to facilitate the creation of a 'modern China' also deeply influenced the

advancement of the concept of 'new literature'. And post-1949, we still hear reverberations of the same. With the founding of the Communist Party of China in 1921, there was for the first time in the history of modern China, the emergence of left-wing literature, standing in complete isolation from China's former traditional, classical literature, introducing new themes, language, and literary concepts, and most importantly bearing upon the task of gearing up China's socialist modernisation drive. During the early 1920s, the mainstream May Fourth discourse on politics, literature, and arts was gradually taking shape at the hands of a rising Communist revolutionary thinker, young Mao Zedong. Self-taught as he was, Mao Zedong developed his own version of what he called, "spiritual individualism" (*jingshengerenzhuyi*), which was the result of a hybridisation of traditional Confucianism with the newly imported German idealism and nationalism, emphasising individual development as the foundation of the Chinese nation-building project (Huang 3). Mao Zedong's spiritual individualism was endowed from the very beginning with a nationalistic and universalistic vision, and the tension and contradiction between the individual, the nation, and the world was reconciled under his conception of a grand individual subjectivity, which in due course was to develop into a Maoist voluntarism imbued with both Nietzschean "will to power" and a Hegelian teleology (Huang 4). During the early years of communist struggle for survival against the then ruling nationalist Kuomintang regime (1921-1937), Mao Zedong through his political writings and speeches, and through his analysis of the nature of modern Chinese politics, economics and culture, some of which were reflected in his writings "On New Democracy", established a direct connection between the course of political orientation and the course of literary development. The socio-political utility or functionality of literature remained the essence of the literary thought of Mao Zedong. Mao did not acknowledge the existence of literature with an independent character and position, believing that in the world today, all culture and literature and arts are part of a definite class, are part of a definite political line (Hong 14). He was of the opinion that literature is "subordinate" to politics and "influences" political views, to the extent that it gives rise to the demand for the "standardisation" of literature. This not only stipulates "what to write" (topic), but also "how to write" (the handling of the topic, methodology, artistic style). Mao Zedong's spiritual individualism gradually gave birth to the 'new man' in the history of modern China (1919-1949), one who was not contaminated by the malaise of an almost decadent, degrading, decomposing part Confucian tradition, having broken free from its roots in history, and was now realigned with the proletarian socialist world ideals. This 'new man', created during the post-May Fourth movement in 1919, in the opinion of Yibing Huang was, in fact, nothing less than "an orphan of history", as opposed to the one with an impure, illegitimate origin (Huang 2). Post-liberation 1949, Mao Zedong's views on literature and arts became the guiding principle for all literary creations. His strict adherence to themes, styles, topics, closely related to socialist ideals became the "norm" for all modes of literary activities in contemporary China, including writing, reading, and criticism. Over the years since 1921, the 'new man' of the modern Chinese nation

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was metamorphosed now into the 'socialist new man', who like its predecessor was charged with a nascent national consciousness and was expected to develop into a national subject. During the 1950s and 1960s, there were minor adjustments in the treatment of cultural heritage, accompanied by a temporary upsurge in the publication of some of the ancient Chinese works of literature, the first ever since the May Fourth movement. However, the general literary tendency towards self-imposed isolation continued. By the eve of the Cultural Revolution, an ideological trend in favour of an absolute departure from the old traditional Chinese culture was already widespread and the radicals' impulse to build a utopia of 'true proletarian literature' on a blank foundation had already begun to be put into practice (Hong 26). With regard to literary criticism, Mao Zedong in his *Talks*, perceived it not as an individualised scientific explication of a text, nor as an exercise for critical appreciation, but as a means of adjudicating political intentions. In contemporary China, on one hand, criticism was used to support and praise those writers who followed the norm of propagating and conforming to socialist ideals, and on the other to issue warnings to those authors, who to a varying degree exhibited deviant tendencies. Scar literature in post-cultural revolution China emerged out of the above mentioned historical socio-political backdrop.

#### **Chinese Propaganda Literature: The Voice of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution**

A considerable degree of political dictatorship upon literary trends and tendencies in contemporary China, is seen reflected in, what can be called 'propaganda literature', wherein articles in party-run newspapers, journals, party-sponsored magazines and big character posters (*dazibao*) called upon the masses for an unconditional support to the cause of socialist construction in China, without questioning the legitimacy of the one-party communist rule or of the totalitarian dictatorial Maoist regime. Propaganda was an institutional system at the heart of the Chinese Party-state apparatus and literature in contemporary China was used as the mouthpiece of the Communist Party, and more precisely of Chairman Mao Zedong. The first shot of the Cultural Revolution was fired by the Chinese Communist Party-controlled newspaper, the *People's Daily*. The editorial, dated 1 June 1966, called upon its readers to 'sweep away all monsters and demons', and urged people to denounce representatives of the bourgeoisie class who were out to deceive, fool and benumb the working people in order to consolidate their reactionary state power (Dikotter 2016: 10). Amidst uncertainties about an impending political crisis, four top leaders of the Communist Party, including the then mayor of Beijing were placed under arrest, accused of having planned to turn the communist capital into a citadel of revisionism. The newspaper editorial hinted at hundreds and thousands of counter-revolutionaries to have been attempting to walk China down the road of capitalism and trying to transform the dictatorship of the proletariat into that of the bourgeoisie. However, the editorial remained silent with regard to specificities. Who were these counter-revolutionaries, how did they make their way into the supposed inner circles of the Chinese communist party,



and why did they attempt to subvert the communist regime remained unclear. Within a few days after, articles in newspapers, journals and demonstration posters across China were flooded with verbs of propaganda in support of the Cultural Revolution, such as 'down with', 'burn', 'fry', 'scorch', 'kill', often accompanied by creative dysphemism with reference to the capitalist road takers as 'ox freaks' and 'snake monsters'. Until a decade after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the prime cause behind this catastrophic political, social and cultural upheaval that shook China was not revealed. The fact that Mao Zedong, the once all-powerful socialist revolutionary communist leader of China, had become paranoid of a possible de-Stalinization in his home ground and was desperately on the lookout for China's Khrushchev, remained unknown to the common masses, who were made to believe through Chinese communist propaganda, that bourgeoisie elements had crept into the communist party system and that the mass movement by the name of the Cultural Revolution, would successfully weed out all representatives of capitalism and revisionism. But nowhere in the party newspaper was it mentioned that it was Chairman Mao who was secretly plotting against real and imaginary enemies, many of who being top-ranking party officials, close allies and comrades-in-arm, who had fallen into Mao's suspicious eyes for having held him solely responsible for the failure of the non-pragmatic Great Leap Forward Movement (*Da Yuejin*) and for the starvation of one million ordinary Chinese people, making it the world's worst man made famine in the history of humankind, in an ambitious programme to overcome the United States and Great Britain in the manufacture of steel production. Mao Zedong carefully concealed his strategy, and the rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution was purposefully kept vague.

#### **Scar Literature: The Untold Stories of Survival**

After a tyranny of ten years, when the Cultural Revolution finally ended, the worn out, burnt out revolutionary zeal of the intellectuals, once again found expression in their creations under 'new period literature'. With a limited amount of independence from state surveillance and state-imposed restrictions, writers for the first time again in ten years began to come forward, this time in criticism (veiled, not open) of party dictatorship and political coercion. Their former political affinity towards the socialist cause was not explicitly visible anymore, and the idea of 'faith Maoism', one that had shrouded China for almost five decades, was being vehemently opposed. The first observable sign of departure from the ideological fanaticism under ultra-leftist party tendencies was marked by the first such "exposure" short story, titled *Ban zhuren* (*Class monitor*), authored by Liu Xinwu. This was the first such literary work to have attracted national attention for venturing into territories and sparking critical conversations on topics and issues which were taboo during the decade-long Cultural Revolution. The short story *Ban zhuren* (*Class Monitor*) published in November 1977 by China's premier national level literary magazine, *People's Literature* (*RenminWenxue*), for the first time, since the Cultural Revolution, admitted in public that the young participants, organised under the Red guard clique during the revolution had been misdirected, misled

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and misguided. Liu Xinwu's short story revolves around China's education system, interpersonal relations between teachers and students, and the fate of teachers during the Cultural Revolution. The major breakthrough in the story, in the opinion of Mcdougall, has been the choice of an intellectual as the protagonist (Mcdougall 216). This is seen as a bold step taken by the author, Liu Xinwu in presenting to the readers as the leading character, a school teacher, Zhang Junshi, a representative of one of the most oppressed sections of Chinese society during the revolution, owing to his political inclinations which tried to question, reason out, and at times, defy the political dictum. Zhang Junshi, a devoted teacher, comes to the rescue of the most exemplary student of the Cultural Revolution, a former young Red Guard when other students refuse to accept him back in the group. Rather than merely criticizing the young Red Guard for his delinquency, Zhang Junshi reveals the humanist side of his own character and his rationalist mindset, by assigning the prime cause of his student's delinquency to the psychological harm that had resulted from the fascist cultural tyranny set loose by the chief advocates of the Cultural Revolution, the *gang of four*. While passages in the story condemn the *gang of four* and lectures on the need to cure the body politic, the author convincingly portrays the ability of a teacher to open his students' eyes to the wider achievements of human civilization (Mostow 527). Liu Xinhua, therefore, perhaps as Mostow opines, in this story, attempts to proclaim deep devotion towards the cause of national salvation, while exposing China's contemporaneous state of spiritual impoverishment. There is also a subtle portrayal of a young woman who possesses "model leftist characteristics", namely energy, unswerving loyalty (to the Marxist-Socialist cause), puritanical attitudes and gradually turns into an ignorant, insensitive bigot, portraying many a Red Guard of her age and times (Link 17). The flaws in the juvenile characters, as sketched in intricate details, is reflective of the unstable mental condition that many a Chinese youth suffered from, owing to the political and ideological brainwashing sessions that they were subjected to during the Cultural Revolution. Critics suggest that although the political atmosphere after the arrest of the Gang of Four was gradually returning to normal, as also was the Chinese state's treatment towards the wrongly persecuted Chinese intellectuals becoming increasingly humane, the publication of Liu Xinwu's *Ban zhuren* (*Class monitor*), venturing into forbidden territory, could not have been possible without an official nod from the Chinese state authorities. Yet, it took almost a year's time or more, for the next such 'exposure' story to be accepted for publication and not without the struggle. This second story in line was titled, *Shanghen* (*Scar*), authored by Lu Xinhua in August 1978. It initially came as a surprise as to how a mediocre story with an ordinary storyline could draw such tremendous reader response. But it was owing to its clear, unhindered, and non-politicized depiction of the political domination of intellectuals in China, of the contradictions and conflicts in the minds of the young Red Guards while they silenced the voices of their very own senior comrades and compatriots, and of moments of psychological vacuum that arose out of decades of separation. The short story *Shanghen* (*Scar*) was so very representative of the times, that the title *ShanghenWenxue* (*Scar literature*) came



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periods during the Cultural Revolution gave rise to China's "lost generation", members of who were deprived of education and of the right to live with their families. Hu Rongfen, like many of her other urban classmates, was deported from Shanghai to a far-flung village in East China's Anhui Province to work in the country. This was not any form of punishment, recalls Hu Rongfen, as she was the top student in the class. The migration was the result of an order from the central government to every urban household that at least one of their teenage children would have to leave the city to work on the farm to work on it indefinitely. This political order remained in effect from the end of the year 1966 until the mid-1970s. Known in Chinese as "up to the mountains and down to the farms", the urban-to-rural youth migration was part of a social and political movement, initiated at the call of the Cultural Revolution to implement Communism and Maoism in China by eliminating any remnant of capitalist and feudalistic tendencies. According to Chinese media, as many as 17 million "intellectual youths" in the country moved to some of the remotest parts of the country, where they transformed from care free students to farmers. In the words of Hu, now 58 years of age, "We were told that city dwellers never moved their limbs and could not distinguish crops. So we were banished to the countryside to labour and learn skills and grit from the farmers." As reported to the CNN correspondent, Hu Rongfen spent four years (1971-1974) planting rice, spreading cow dung and chopping wood in Jin Xian, a mountainous county. Memories of the past still haunt Hu Rongfen. She remembers how she would toil in the paddy fields in early freezing spring time, her legs in water for ten hours with lumps of ice floating on it. She would slap her legs to get rid of the leeches, blood oozing out from her wounds and mingling with the dirt and water. Her detention was for an indefinitely long period and she would not sleep for nights together, worrying if she could ever be back and reunite with her family. That her farmer days had drained her, both physically and emotionally, is evident when she says, "If the Cultural Revolution came back and I were to be deported again, I would rather commit suicide." The only thing she gained was an iron will to live on through some of the toughest conditions.

Yu Xiangzhen, now a retired editor, was a middle school student when the Cultural Revolution broke out in May 1966. She shared with CNN Beijing correspondent her story, which was edited to length and clarity and posted on 15 May 2016. As one of the high school student members of Mao Zedong's Red Guard, Yu Xiangzhen holds herself responsible for having abused, traumatized and tortured to death, hundreds of teachers, writers, artists, friends, and family, who had been accused of "bourgeoisie" or "revisionist" tendencies. An excerpt from her interview captures the mood of the times, "...On May 16, 1966, I was practicing calligraphy with my thirty-seven classmates when a high pitched voice came from the school's loudspeaker, announcing the central government's decision to start what is called a cultural revolution. It was my first year of junior high, I was just thirteen. "Fellow students we must closely follow Chairman Mao", the speaker bellowed...Two boys rushed out of the classroom door, heading to the

playground, yelling something. I left more slowly, holding hands with my best friend, Haiyun, as we followed everyone else outside. It would be my last normal day of school. As Red Guards, we subjected anyone perceived as revisionist to brutal mental and physical attack. I regret most of what we did to our homeroom teacher Zhang Jilan. When the class held a struggle session against Ms. Zhang, I pulled an accusation out of nowhere, saying that she was a heartless and cold woman, which, I know was entirely false. Not long after, with sixty other "class enemies", she was sent to the cowshed, a makeshift prison for all intellectuals..."

#### **Transition in Chinese Literature: Convergence, Divergence, Overlaps**

Transition, a complex phenomenon, is principally indicative of a recombination of all tendencies, groupings and power relations that bridge two or multiple periods in time or phases, and exhibit a gradual shift, amidst overlaps, convergence, and divergence towards an evolution into something new. Yet, the new cannot be severed from the old, as it carries remnants from the past. 'Scar literature' under the domain of 'new period literature' undoubtedly exhibited new tendencies of departure from the socialist political literary line and adopted fresh techniques of expression for the depiction of human emotions conflicts and contradictions. Although 'scar literature', as a literary genre, suggested a break away from past traditions, ironically, the literary content still reflected the very Maoist persistence of a modernity with a historical discontinuity. The 'new socialist man' in contemporary Chinese literature is seen transiting from its former 'new man' image of modern China, but still remains the 'orphan of history' as he used to be. But this 'new socialist man', although loyal to the proletarian socialist cause, now has a voice of his own, he now questions the totalitarian state control, opposes unconditional party dictatorship and demands for greater participation in political decision making.

#### **Afterthought**

Physical wounds can possibly heal through the passage of time, but while living through conditions of prolonged political coercion, state dictatorship and intellectual impoverishment, psychological wounds that scar the intellect, remain unhealed for long. In a country like China, where literature will continue to play a dual role, one of protecting and legitimising the one-party Communist rule and function as state propaganda apparatus, and on the other of raising voice against the inhumane treatment of political critics, scar literature, in some form or the other will continue to survive as a repository of lost voices, silenced emotions, parched criticisms.

#### **Endnote**

<sup>1</sup><http://www.fap-publishing.com>

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