

Original Article

Fragmented Memories and Narrative Ruptures: A Critical Study of Yu Hua's *Worldly Things Are Like Mist* and *1986*

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Abstract - Chinese literature in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, which ended in 1976, remained preoccupied with memories of the trauma caused by the unceasing political movements launched by the State since the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The “obsession with history”, the intense need and desire to make sense of the recent past and at the same time to move forward towards the future, was central to the writers at this time. The avant-garde fiction that emerged in the 1980s was an important literary movement that attempted to articulate the trauma of the recent past while experimenting with narrative structures and language. Yu Hua, arguably one of the most important avant-garde writers, began writing in the 1980s and achieved international fame and critical acclaim. Memory is a critical narrative element in Yu Hua's works. The memory represented in the avant-garde works is fragmented and unreliable, which is deeply reflective of the consciousness of Yu Hua's generation. Through a careful study of the narrative structure, plot and voice in two of Yu Hua's short stories, *1986* and *Worldly Things Are Like Mist*, this paper will attempt to explore how memory is represented and articulated in these works.

Keywords - Yu Hua, Memory, Narrative Structure, Narrative Voice, Critical Study.

1. Introduction

Chinese literature in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, which ended in 1976, underwent a profound transformation, marked by an intense preoccupation with memory and history. The unrelenting political campaigns and movements initiated by the Chinese State since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 left deep scars on the collective consciousness of the nation and its people. Contemporary Chinese literature in the post-Cultural Revolution period responded to this collective pain in literary forms. This post-1976 literary production was termed “new-era literature” (新时期文学, *xinshiqi wenxue*), signifying not merely a temporal shift but an epistemic rupture from Maoist ideological discourse. Chinese literature since the establishment of the People's Republic could be seen as inseparable from politics and used as a propaganda tool for furthering the cause of the Communist Revolution. The post-Mao period heralded a new epoch defined by accelerated economic growth, modernisation, national reconstruction, liberalisation of the cultural and intellectual space, and an increased engagement with the outside world.

The literary renaissance of the 1980s was facilitated in part by a large influx of Western literary works, literary theories and literary trends, which created an environment of intellectual and cultural ferment symbolised in the “culture fever” (文化热, *wenhua re*) of the 1980s. This

created a fertile ground for stylistic and thematic experimentation. This period witnessed an emergence of not only a varied style of writing but also different generational cohorts that engaged in literary enterprise with different motivations, perspectives and goals. There were the older writers who were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution and earlier political movements, who returned to the literary field rehabilitated and vindicated. They wrote memoirs and fictional works that dealt with the painful past and attempted to rewrite history from a personal perspective. The other significant group of writers comprised the generation of youth who were born under the Red flag, the “Mao's children” who were sent down to the countryside during the Rustification Movement and had the stories from the time spent in the countryside.

Within this broader literary landscape, memory writing emerged as a key mode of engagement with the past. Where history failed to account for the suffering caused by the unceasing political campaigns during the Mao period, memory came to the fore as a crucial tool for reflection and for bringing the past to life. Lingchei Letty Chen states that “Memory is important because it holds on to historical details and can supplement official history and aid historiography” (2020, 7-8). In post-Mao China, with the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy, the focus shifted from revolution to economic development, which required the Chinese State and people to move



forward, look towards the future and leave the past behind. The official historiography was used to strengthen the legitimacy of the Communist Party. Memory, as many scholars have pointed out, is not a true apprehension of the past; it is not a reflection of reality but a representation, a reconstruction. Memory is important because it supplements history; it fills the gaps that history leaves, it brings to light the silences, the ellipses and gives voice to those whose lives remain out of the official history. The complementary relation between history and memory has also been discussed by scholars like Aleida Assmann and Pierre Nora.

This complex, complementary and sometimes contradictory entanglement between history and memory finds a discursive space in literary texts. Literature in post-Mao China emerged as an important site for navigating the complex and often contradictory evaluations of the recent past. Literary texts, as cultural forms, can preserve personal memory and serve as carriers of collective and cultural memory. Literature, with its various narrative devices and aesthetic potential, can function as an alternative history, ensuring that a generation's memories are not forgotten or lost to oblivion.

2. Post-Mao Literature and Yu Hua: Background of the Study and Review of Literature

Among the many literary trends that emerged in the post-Mao period, avant-garde literature was a prominent one. Avant-garde works were distinct from prevailing realist conventions and were viewed as both aesthetically daring and politically risky. Labelled as “experimental fiction,” “meta-fiction,” or “new wave fiction,” these works bore the influence of Western modernism and postmodernism—particularly Borges, Kafka, and Robbe-Grillet. The representative writers of this movement, such as Ma Yuan, Su Tong, Ge Fei, Ye Zhaoyan, Sun Ganlu, Hong Feng, and Yu Hua, questioned the transparency of language, the stability of meaning, and the authority of historical truth through their works.

The rise of avant-garde literature coincided with China's socio-political transformation in the 1980s—a decade defined by the transition from Maoist revolutionary ideology to Deng Xiaoping's economic liberalisation with the implementation of reform and opening-up policy. The relaxation of ideological control created new cultural and intellectual spaces, enabling literary innovation and engagement with global discourses. However, this period also produced contradictions: corruption, inequality, and widespread disillusionment, culminating in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. In this uncertain context, many young writers perceived a rupture between experience and representation, and their fragmented narratives reflected the disorientation of living through a time of accelerated modernisation. Chen, in her study, regards these avant-garde writers and other writers born between the mid-1950s and 1960s who spent their childhood during the heyday of Maoist politics and witnessed the brutalities of political

persecutions, hunger, and the violence of the Cultural Revolution as the “1.5 generation” (2020, 69). She uses Marianne Hirsch's concept of “postmemory” in the context of Holocaust studies, which refers to the inherited memory of the trauma of the holocaust by the children of the survivors. While Hirsch's idea of “postmemory” refers to the second-generation survivors, Chen suggests that these writers, born in the late 50s and 60s, even though they do not conventionally belong to the second generation, were still too young to comprehend their experiences and hence may be termed the “1.5 generation”.

Avant-garde fiction received much attention in Chinese literary and cultural circles with ardent supporters and vehement critics. Chinese scholars like Chen Xiaoming, Y. H. Zhao and Li Tuo argued that the avant-garde fiction was the product of a specific ideological and cultural climate, and they saw in it China's entry into the global literary arena. Other scholars who have written extensively on avant-garde writers include Irmay Schweiger, Cai Rong, Andrew Jones, Xiaobing Tang, Cai Yongchun, Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg, Dai Jinhua, and many others. While it was praised for its daring linguistic and artistic experimentation, it was also met with vehement criticism by a section of the academic world for being too apolitical.

Yu Hua is one of the most celebrated contemporary Chinese writers living and writing in China today. He was born in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, in 1960 and spent his childhood and early adult years in the small town of Haiyan. He began his experimental literary journey with a string of successful stories like *On the Road at Age Eighteen* (1987), followed by works such as *The Event on 3 April* (1987), *1986* (1987), *Worldly Things Are Like Mist* (1988), *One Kind of Reality* (1988), *In Memory of Miss Willow Yang* (1988), and *The Past and the Punishments* (1989). These stories are marked by fragmented structures, unreliable narration, and graphic depictions of violence that challenge moral and linguistic conventions. As Liu Kang (2002, 90) observes, Yu Hua “set himself the task of scandalizing conventional expectations and, ultimately, subverting the values and rationales that inhabit the Chinese language.” Yu Hua's avant-garde works engage deeply with traumatic memories of the past and describe recent Chinese history. His works display postmodern characteristics with their rejection of grand narratives, heterogeneity of form, emergence of subjectivity, intertextuality, self-parodying, negation of absolute truth, constructed nature of reality and historical rupture.

Existing scholarship on Yu Hua's avant-garde works has examined the prevalence of violence, trauma, and the crisis of historical representation, the influence of Western writers on avant-garde fiction and Yu Hua, and generally employed theories of modernism and postmodernism to analyse his avant-garde works. The diverse angles through which these stories have been studied by many scholars have illuminated the strong historical consciousness inherent in these works despite the lack of overt political stance. However, significantly less attention has been paid

to how the narrative structure of the stories itself enacts the act of remembrance. Memory in Yu Hua's works has not been a subject of much critical attention and has mostly been studied as a thematic concern or as a reflection of historical trauma; however, the relationship between the narrative form and memory processes remains an interesting dimension to explore. This article addresses this gap by studying two of Yu Hua's avant-garde works, *1986* 《一九八六年》 (1987) and *World Things Are Like Mist* 《世事如烟》 (1988), not only for the representation of memory in these works, but as narrative texts that perform memory, evident in their fragmented structure and narrative ruptures. Thus, this study asks how memory is narratively constituted and who performs the act of remembrance and how. How do the fragmented narrative structure, unstable narrative voice and non-linear temporalities shape the representation of memory in these works? And what does the formal instability reveal about the relationship between memory, literature and history in post-Mao China.

In response to these questions, this article argues that the fragmented narrative form of *1986* and *World Like Mist* is not merely an aesthetic feature but a mnemonic structure. The fragmented plot and non-linear narrative structure in *World Like Mist* and the unreliable, polyphonic narrative voice in *1986* reflect the uncertain, uncomfortable and ruptured nature of traumatic experience. In these works, memory does not emerge as a coherent and complete recollection of the past, but rather, it appears through silences, gaps, and repetition, marking the very nature of traumatic experience. Drawing upon narrative theory and memory studies, this article argues that Yu Hua's avant-garde fiction not only represents memory but also performs the processes of remembering, forgetting, repression and return of the past. This article further argues that this fragmentation, the ruptures, are the methods used by Yu Hua to represent the past and the current reality, which lies beyond the comprehension abilities of the writers of his generation.

3. Theoretical Framework: Memory and Narrative Designs

The interconnection between memory and narrative has become one of the defining concerns of contemporary literary theory. Scholars have argued that memory exists not as a fixed recollection of the past but as a narrative reconstruction. Narrative and memory both are concerned with ways in which our experiences are structured and mediated through the act of storytelling. Narratology provides a useful framework to study how narratives are structured in literary texts. Bal states, "Narratology is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that 'tell a story'. Such a theory helps us to understand, analyse, and evaluate narratives." (1997, 3). Bal's concept of the "act of memory" highlights how the act of remembering is also an act of narration. Memory in Bal's conceptualisation is an action, a process and thus is not stable or fixed but in constant flux. Through her theory of focalization, Bal shows how the different

positions of the narrator or the "focaliser", who sees, who remembers, who feels, determine the kind of memory produced. An unstable and unreliable narrative voice, multiple focalisations deny the authority of a single, fixed, coherent memory. As Bal claims, "Among memory's many tricks, the illusion of narrative coherence is primary", and that narrative's "presence as a cultural force that affects the lives of subjects, cannot be over-estimated. It is an indispensable tool as well as a dangerous weapon" (2001, 12).

Astrid Erll also conceives of narrative as a medium of memory; she suggests that narratives provide the "templates" through which societies make sense of their past. In Yu Hua's avant-garde stories, the absurdity, discontinuity, senseless violence and rupture suggest the instability of collective memory in post-Mao China, a period marked by silence, repression and historical amnesia. In *Worldly Things Are Like Mist*, the unstable, non-linear, and fragmented structure disrupts the possibility of a coherent plot, and in *1986*, the unreliable and polyphonic narrative voice destabilises the authority of a single, authoritative narrative voice. This destabilising and disruption of a coherent plot or narrative voice becomes a means of representing historical experience that resists narration. It is therefore crucial and revealing to view this formal experimentation as not only a subversive act but also as a crisis of representation, where the trauma of the past resists narration; it cannot be fully recovered or articulated, and therefore appears in fragments, ruptures and silences.

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive methodology focusing on close reading of the selected texts. It studies Yu Hua's *Worldly Things Are Like Mist* and *1986*, two very important avant-garde works using the tools provided by narratology and memory studies. Narratology provides the primary analytical method for examining how the narrative voice and narrative structure, the polyphony, silences, narrative gaps, etc reflect the representation of the past.

4. Fragmented Memories: Spectres of a Traumatic Past: Discussion and Analysis

Memory is a critical narrative element in Yu Hua's works; it brings to light "the inherent fallibility and the disjointedness of historical claims" (Rutkowski 2016, 613). In Yu Hua's avant-garde stories, memory remains elusive; it is personal and fragmented. Memory cannot be recovered as a coherent narrative of the past. This past, which is riddled with trauma, violence and suffering, makes its presence in these stories as an unhealed wound. Linder (1998, 186) argues that avant-garde writers like Yu Hua had not experienced the political persecutions and the violence of the Cultural Revolution directly as they were too young, and yet that remains an important aspect of their past that they cannot run away from and seem captivated by it. Linder suggests that it is because the recent past is an unresolved memory for them, and they inherit it as an intergenerational trauma, which consciously and subconsciously finds a place in their literary works.

In post-Mao China, writers struggled with finding a linguistic medium that was capable of not only articulating their unresolved past but also helping them express their anxieties in a rapidly changing world. The legacy of revolutionary language of the Mao era was suddenly not adept at expressing the conflicted self, tortured by its past, struggling in its present and ambivalent about the future. This anxiety and ambivalence are reflected in the way Yu Hua structures his avant-garde stories. The non-linear and scattered structure accentuates the loss of meaning that constitutes the very existence of the self in post-Mao China. Yu Hua subverts conventional linguistic and narrative systems, which contributes to a “narrative method that seeks to dismantle the regular, established associations between signifiers and signifieds and aims to create instead a multiplicity of freely drifting connotations” (Cai 1998, 339)

4.1. *Worldly Things Are Like Mist: A Narrative Maze*

In one of his most significant works, *Worldly Things Are Like Mist*, the narrative structure is turned into a labyrinthine maze where characters are represented by either numbers or their characteristics. The narrative is not structured chronologically or linearly but in a haphazard, scattered manner, reminiscent of a maze, with countless paths all leading to each other and yet divergent. There are multiple storylines, and even though there is only one omniscient narrator, there are multiple points of view provided by the multiple characters in the story, rendering the narrative polyphonic. By deconstructing the notion of a single, authoritative narrative voice and a coherent narrative structure, Yu Hua subverts the reader's expectations. In this story, Yu Hua creates a fictional world that exists in a state of “in-betweenness”, a liminal state of being stuck or caught between the real and the imaginary, between the world of the living and the dead, between past and present, and between truth and fiction. This is a world haunted by ghosts and dreams. The memory-like quality of the story is enhanced by the frequent shifts between different plot lines. There is no temporal or spatial marker in the story, as the town in the story is unknown, and there is no reference to when this story is taking place. Thus, “what Yu Hua creates in his story is less a fabrication of plot than a postmodernist presentation of fantastic visual images, deconstructing the linearity of time and narration” (Cai 1998, 338).

This is a story of several households living within a compound in a small, unknown town, which could be anywhere. The residents of this compound are all assigned numbers; they are nameless figures in this decaying space, haunted by sickness and gloom. The characters in the story are all stripped of identities and reduced to either numbers or markers like “the woman in grey”, “the fortuneteller”, the midwife, etc. There is no coherent plot, but the whole narrative is pieced together with seemingly unrelated events or occurrences that sometimes seem realistic and other times fantastic. These multiple storylines revolve around the residents of this compound. In this compound there is a sick man referred to as just 7, who falls ill on his son's fifth birthday and his health is deteriorating rapidly, a sixteen year old girl 4 who talks in her sleep, 3 is a sixty year old

woman who is in an incestuous relationship with her seventeen year old grandson, 2 is a young man, 6 is a selfish and greedy man who had seven daughters and sold them for money, there is the truck driver and his midwife mother, the woman in gray who is perhaps a ghost, the blind man, and the fortuneteller. Each of the storylines features one or two of the characters in the story, the scattered parts of the narrative are held together by the fortune teller, who is the common link among all the characters. The stories that involve more than one of these characters are all marked by violence, sickness and death. The narrative structure of the story does not follow linear progression but is a cluster of multiple incidents where one event may be connected to another later in the story.

The story is told in a third-person narrative voice, which is an omniscient, authoritative narrative voice. However, the multiple focalization in the story results in a polyphonic narrative, which undermines the authority of the narrative. The actions are described in a cool and detached tone, in a seemingly objective narrative voice, but multiple focalizations provide the reader with an intimate knowledge of how the characters are feeling or seeing. In a significant example of this multiple narrative “points of view”, when 4 is taken by her father to visit the old fortune teller to find a cure for her sleep talking, the fortune teller tells her father the cure; he says, “I'm going to pull the ghost out from her nether parts.” (Yu 1996, 99). At this point in the story, readers are made to see the point of view of 4 and what she sees and feels: “This sudden turn of events left 4 helpless. Terrified, she gazed imploringly toward her father. But instead of returning her gaze, he took up a position behind her. She heard him say something, but before she had made out just what it had been, his hands were latched around her body, and she was overwhelmed by a feeling of utter powerlessness.” (Yu 1996, 99), the fortuneteller, “As the fortuneteller unbuckled 4's belt, his fingers felt a little numb. But then he felt the warmth of 4's body against them. The warmth rolled across his fingers like fog, and his hands began to feel moist.” (Yu 1996, 99) The narrative also focuses on the point of view of the blind man who hears the assault from outside, but interestingly, never the father's. The assault on 4, her rape, is described in excruciating detail with different narrative focalization.

Referring to the fragmented narrative structure of the story, Yu Hua stated that “When I was writing *World Like Mist*, its structure had already abandoned the framework of imitating facts. On the surface, to represent more facts and to make its world appear as diverse as possible, I adopted a structure of juxtaposition and dislocation.” (当我写作《世事如烟》时, 其结构已经放弃了对事实框架的模仿。表面上看为了表现更多的事实, 使其世界能够尽可能呈现纷繁的状态, 我采用了并置、错位的结构方式。) (Yu 2007, 55) Thus, Yu Hua deliberately attempts to create a fragmented narrative structure to represent a diverse world. Liu Xu believes that Yu Hua traps you into finding meaning in the text when there is no meaning; the aim is to make it incomprehensible. “His purpose is not to tell a story, but to weave an

incomprehensible narrative maze” (他的目的不在于讲故事，二在于如何编织一个让人看不懂的叙事迷宫) (2018, 66) It can also be argued that through trapping the readers inside this narrative maze, Yu Hua attempts to reveal the complicated nature of modern experience. The characters in the story at first seem to have no connection at all, only later revealing the complex web of links between them, which could be a reflection of how everyone is connected in each other's stories.

4.2. 1986: Spectres of a Traumatic Past

The story begins in the formulaic mode of “Many years ago...” and tells the story of a high school history teacher who disappears during the Cultural Revolution after he is dragged out from his home by red guards, leaving behind a wife and a three-year-old daughter. After waiting in vain for many years, the wife remarries and settles down in her new life with her daughter and a second husband. With the years, “The past receded farther and farther behind them, until it almost seemed to have dispersed like so much mist into the air, never to return” (Yu 1996, 132). Her husband, of course, was only one of the many who disappeared during the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution. When the tumult died down, many of the families whose relatives had been lost began to receive word of their whereabouts, even if it was only to learn that they had died years before. She was the only one who had never heard any news of her husband. She presumed he was dead.

The story begins with the return of the history teacher as a madman. This is the story of the sudden, shocking return of a memory that had been repressed for a long time, unsettling the present. The history teacher returns to a town that has moved on after the end of the Cultural Revolution and is comfortably settled in its modern rhythm with its commodity fetishism and blissful material life. This story, unlike *Worldly Things Are Like Mist*, is centred around temporal markers, which is reflected in the title of the story itself. It is understood that the story is taking place in the year 1986, which, on its own, is insignificant, but only becomes significant when placed within the larger historical timeline. The year 1986 is ten years after the Cultural Revolution ended and twenty years after it started, thus establishing the importance of this political event in the story. While the story does provide a temporal point around which the story could be comprehended, the narrative structure is non-linear. The narrative shifts between the past and the present, where the past appears as hallucinations in the mind of the madman and the memories of the wife and the present when the madman returns to the town and goes on to self-mutilate himself in the public eye of this unnamed town. Although the story has a temporal marker, and we know when the story is taking place, we do not know where it is taking place. By not providing a name to this town where the madman returns, Yu Hua perhaps suggests that this is the story of not just one town but many towns like this one in China.

When narrating the past, the narrative voice adopts the form of a voice-over, “He saw that he was washing his feet

as his wife sat on the edge of the bed watching over their little daughter” (Yu 1996, 174). He thus recollects his past as if watching it on a movie screen, but the action is taking place in the present, blurring the boundaries between the past and the present and making the narrator unreliable. The story is told in the third person as an authoritative, omniscient voice, but the narrative focalization is multiple and keeps shifting between the omniscient narrator, the madman, the wife and the daughter. The narrative provides readers with multiple points of view and allows them to witness the events from all these perspectives, where they are privy to the fears, anxieties and paranoia of all the characters in the story. They can feel the fear and paranoia of the wife, “She heard the footsteps for several nights in a row. The footsteps terrified her. The footsteps made her cry aloud with fright” (Yu 1996, 132), can understand the uncertain anxiety and helplessness in the daughter's voice, “For the past few days, she had taken to going out alone and strolling through the streets. She couldn't bear the silence that had enveloped her home. At home, the sound of a pin hitting the floor was enough to startle” (Yu 1996, 153), and can see the hallucinations in the mind of the madman, “He felt the knife twirling in his hands, severing the air around him into fragments. After a spell of twirling, he directed the blade toward their noses. He saw each nose fly up from the knife blade and hover in space.” (Yu 1996, 151)

The past is not recollected in the story in a linear and chronological fashion, but erupts in the mind, suddenly bringing with it all the sensory experiences. The madman is not someone who has lost all his memories, on the contrary, it is the memories of the past that continue to haunt him. The memories, however, come to him in fragments and flashes, coursing through his mind, stirring his emotions, but never clear enough for him to make sense of them. When he returns to the town, he does not immediately return home, instead, he wanders around in the streets. He doesn't remember exactly where he is supposed to return to. This inability to remember all of his past life is an aspect of his insanity, he is a madman because he has lost his self, the self that is rooted in a past. This past, his past, and memories of his life before everything changed for him, the day he was taken from his home, and later when he witnessed all the violence of the Cultural Revolution, returns to him only towards the end of his life.

Wang Kan and Liu Lin opine that the senseless violence of the Cultural Revolution marks the cultural, national and personal memory of an entire country. The story, with its non-linear, fragmented narrative, an unreliable and incoherent narrator, use of flashback, destabilizes any effort on the part of the reader to find an unchallenged truth. The story seems so absurd that it screams its fictitious nature, on the contrary, Yu Hua tells us that this image of a madman was not a literary creation, a figment of his imagination, but a memory, a memory that left a deep impression on him. He says that after the Cultural Revolution, “when I went to Mount Emei and Lingyin Temple in Hangzhou, I could see some people who went insane after being persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. They were still reading Chairman

Mao's quotations and shouting slogans like "Down with Liu Shaoqi". I guess they may have spent their whole lives like this, crazy... So, I wanted to write about the Cultural Revolution through the eyes of such people. For them, the Cultural Revolution will never pass, or for the memory of our generation, the Cultural Revolution will never pass." (我去峨眉山、去杭州灵隐这些地方游玩时也都能够看到,有些‘文革’中被迫害成精神病的人,他们还在那儿读毛主席语录,喊‘打倒刘少奇’之类的口号。我估计他们的一生可能就这样度过了,疯了啊.....所以,我就想通过这样的人来写‘文革’。对他们来说,‘文革’永远不会过去,或者对我们这一代人的记忆来说,‘文革’也永远不会过去的。)(Yu 2007, 15).

5. Conclusion

In Yu Hua's avant-garde stories, the representation of memory emerges not through direct narration of the past but through the fragmentation and instability of the narrative itself. The disjointed narrative voices, unreliable perspectives, and temporal ruptures function as formal embodiments of a traumatised consciousness unable to fully reconcile with its history. Rather than recovering the past as a coherent, continuous account, Yu Hua's narrative structures evoke memory as something discontinuous, involuntary, and mediated by forgetting and repression. The non-linear storyline, the multiple focalizations and the narrative ruptures undermine the authority of an omniscient narrator and a coherent narrative plot, suggesting that the very act of remembering is haunted by silences, gaps and forgetting.

Yu Hua's narrative practice, therefore, transforms the act of storytelling into a process of memorial reconstruction. The narrative's fragmentation mirrors the psychic dislocation of post-Cultural Revolution China, where memory is simultaneously desired and feared, remembered

and denied. His fractured structures and unreliable narrators do not obscure meaning but instead expose the impossibility of unfiltered remembrance in the aftermath of historical trauma. By rejecting linearity and coherence, Yu Hua represents memory not as static knowledge of the past but as a living, unstable process of negotiation between presence and absence, between what can be told and what must remain unsaid, and between what is known and what, as Margaret Hillenbrand (2020) suggests, remains a "public secret".

The significance of this study lies in its effort to not only ask what is remembered but also how the narrative form can tell us the very nature of remembering itself. The study demonstrates that memory can be studied not only through what is told but also through what remains outside this articulation. This perspective contributes to the study of Yu Hua's avant-garde works by bringing together the study of narrative form and historical memory. It reaffirms the value of literary texts in articulating a traumatic past that resists representation. This particular reading adds to the ways we can understand the avant-garde fiction in China, where Yu Hua's works offer an important example of how the experimental wave in post-Mao China can be seen as a mode of mnemonic and historical engagement with China's Maoist past. The incoherent, disjointed narrative structure and unreliable narrative voice become a means of representing the past that is neither completely forgotten nor fully recovered.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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