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Public Secrets, Private Exposures: Li Ang's *The Lost Garden* and Ye Zhaoyan's *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story*

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Abstract

This essay presents a comparative reading of Li Ang's *The Lost Garden* (1991) and Ye Zhaoyan's *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story* (1996). Both texts deal with moments of historic trauma that were once public secrets: the February 28 Incident in the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Nanjing Massacre in the People's Republic of China (PRC), respectively. My analysis of the novels is performed concurrently with a contextual investigation of the way both events emerged from the pall of secrecy by redrawing the boundaries between public and private. In both cases, this redrawing was central to the (re)formation of national identity, and my analysis shows how both novels participate in, and challenge, the wider context of nationalistic (dis)avowal with and against which they are written. Beginning with a focus on the theme of time, I suggest that Li's work, emerging as part of a wider movement to uncover a repressed Taiwanese history, offers a picture of various temporalities interpenetrating and transforming one another. I contrast this with the treatment of time in *Nanjing 1937*, showing how Ye radically sunders a private past from the public discourse of the present so as to challenge the historiographic practices prevalent in the PRC since the Nanjing Massacre's emergence from public secrecy. Beyond these differences, however, I argue that in their probing of the public/private boundary, each of the texts utilizes sexual politics to confront the reader with ethical questions that throw into crisis any attempt to construct simplistic nationalist histories. I suggest both Li and Ye thereby insist on the impossibility of historical closure and the fundamental openness of the past.

Keywords

Nanjing Massacre, February 28 Incident, comparative literature, public secrecy, temporality, national identity

Introduction: Diffraction, Comparison, and (Con)textualization

When waves meet, they produce what are known as interference or diffraction patterns, resulting from the relative differences in amplitude and phase (the intensity and timing) of the two waves. Difference is at the heart of this phenomenon. Even sameness produces difference: when two waves of the same phase and amplitude meet, the result is a larger wave. Feminist philosophers of science Donna Haraway and Karen Barad employ diffraction as a metaphor for thinking about difference without retreating into essentialism. "A diffraction pattern," Haraway writes, "does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the *effects* of difference appear. Tropically . . . the first invites the illusion of essential, fixed position, while the second trains us to more subtle vision" (300). Barad suggests using this more subtle vision to create a "diffractive methodology," which reads different texts and theories "through one another" to show their resonances and discordances. Such a methodology does not take "for granted but rather investigates the material-discursive boundary-making practices that produce 'objects' and 'subjects' and other differences out of, and in terms of, a changing relationality" (93). This resonates with Haun Saussy's understanding of comparative literature, which he suggests "is engaged with specificity and relation: the specificity of the object whereby it exceeds established models of discourse, and the relations that a new reading creates among its objects" (24). Like Barad, Saussy sees comparison as a technique for investigating how discourses construct the world, looking for the excesses or, as Judith Butler has it, the "constitutive outside" of discursive intelligibility: that which discourses must exclude to be coherent, but which haunt their "boundaries as the persistent possibility of their disruption and rearticulation" (8).

In what follows I look at the boundary-making practices that produce and transform distinctions between public and private, revealing how this relates to the construction of national identity in Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. My main aim is to provide a comparative reading of two novels: Taiwanese author Li Ang's 1991 novel *The Lost Garden* (迷園 *Miyuan*) and Chinese author Ye Zhaoyan's 1996 novel *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story* (一九三七年的愛情 *Yijiusanqi nian de aiqing*).[1] Both deal with moments of historic trauma that were once public secrets but have since become central to the construction of national identity: the February 28 Incident in the Republic of China (Taiwan) and the Nanjing Massacre in the People's Republic of China (PRC), respectively. This shared history of public secrecy is of

[1] I use the titles of the English translations of these works for ease of reference. Citations refer to the Chinese texts and translations are my own.

fundamental importance to my reading of the texts. As Shung-in Chang notes with reference to *Lost Garden*, much literary "theory" (Marxist, postcolonial, feminist) has a sociological orientation, and so "before using this kind of literary criticism it is first necessary to make clear the relationship between the 'novel' and 'history'" (131). I therefore interweave my readings of the novels with a wider discussion of the historiography of the two events they describe, undertaking what Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub call "textualization of the context" (xv), which they suggest must be part and parcel of a contextualization of the text.

As they write, "to gain insight into the significance and impact of the context on the text, the empirical context needs not just to be *known*, but to be *read*; to be read in conjunction with, and as part of, the reading of the text" (Felman and Laub xv). This emphasis on the importance of textualization flows from their object of study, which is the literary and historical act of testimony. They emphasize a text's participation in redescribing and transforming the very context into which it speaks, a redrawing of the boundaries of the knowable and the speakable by means of an act of avowal—making something public. This action, of bringing a secret out into the public, marks the historiographical records into and against which both *Lost Garden* and *Nanjing 1937* speak. My argument is that redrawing the boundaries of public and private is part and parcel of the redrawing of national boundaries. Understanding this diffractive transformation makes legible the distinct yet related interventions that these two works of fiction make in their engagement with "history."

The contexts I textualize, then, are those in which February 28 and the Nanjing Massacre emerged from the pall of public secrecy by means of a redrawing of the boundaries between public and private. In both cases this was central to the (re)formation of national identity, and my analysis of the novels shows how they participate in, and challenge, the wider context of nationalistic (dis)avowal with and against which they are written. The first section of the essay deals with *Lost Garden* and February 28. Building on previous scholarship, I theorize the emergence of the event from public secrecy using Michel Foucault's concept of countermemory, which I connect to Barad's understanding of diffraction as it relates to temporality. I suggest that Li's work, emerging as part of a wider movement to uncover a repressed Taiwanese history, offers a picture of various temporalities interpenetrating and transforming one another. In the second section, I contrast this with the treatment of time in *Nanjing 1937*, showing how Ye radically sunders a private past from the public discourse of the present. In doing so, he works to challenge the historiographic practices prevalent in the PRC since the Nanjing Massacre's emergence from public secrecy. However, in the third section of the essay, I move beyond these differences

to highlight a commonality across the works. I suggest that in their probing of the public/private boundary, both Li and Ye utilize sexual politics to confront the reader with ethical questions that throw into crisis any attempt to construct simplistic nationalist histories, pointing to the impossibility of historical closure and the fundamental openness of the past.[2]

Temporal Topologies (I): February 28 and *The Lost Garden*

When Taiwan was retroceded to the Republic of China after the Second World War—having become a Japanese colony following the Qing dynasty's defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95)—the new Nationalist (KMT) government was initially celebrated as a liberator. But as Michael Berry writes in his book on trauma and art in China and Taiwan, tensions quickly grew

> around a multitude of issues ranging from linguistic incomprehensibility and intolerance (Taiwanese spoke primarily Japanese and Taiwanese [Minnan/Hokkien], while the mainlanders spoke Mandarin), corruption, and widespread failure to employ Taiwanese in positions of power, all of which reinforced native feelings that they were being "*re*colonized" rather than "*de*colonized." (181)

Protests broke out on February 28, 1947, the day after a local woman was accosted by the State Monopoly Bureau for selling smuggled cigarettes and a man protesting her treatment was shot dead. Taiwanese took over government buildings and radio stations, calling for self-government; the KMT responded with a military crackdown, killing many thousands. Martial law was declared and lifted twice during the uprising, and following the KMT's defeat by the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War (1945-49), martial law was declared once again and not lifted until 1987.

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[2] My approach here resonates in many ways with David Der-wei Wang's in both *The Monster That Is History* and *The Lyrical in Epic Time.* As he writes, "literature, particularly fiction . . . can be drawn on as a complementing *and* contesting discourse" in relation to historiography (*Monster* 2). However, while Wang's focus is the relationship between literary/cultural works and history, his contextualization of the works he discusses is not performed with the kind of textualization of context that I undertake here. As such, "history" in his texts remains rather abstract, a backdrop against which literature is written and works of art are made. Missing from his account is the fact that historiography itself has a history, and this history too shapes literary and artistic approaches to the past. The two novels I look at here, because the events they deal with have historiographies marked by transformation, are particularly amenable to this kind of analysis.

These events were "the direct catalyst for the White Terror" (Berry 184), a program of sustained violence against suspected communists and nativists that lasted nearly forty years.

The KMT considered Taiwan a province of China and maintained that they were the rightful rulers of the mainland, representing China at the United Nations (UN) until 1971. This led to "the imposition of a Chinese nationalist discourse that rejected rather than incorporated Taiwanese local identity, language, culture, and perhaps most important, Taiwanese collective memory of the February 28 Incident" (Edmondson 30). The event was made "secret" but, as Michael Taussig argues forcefully, to take a public secret's claim to secrecy at face value is to misunderstand it, for those forced into silence still know the truth—it just cannot be spoken in public (5-7).[3] In this way, to render a public event secret is to make it private, a demarcation which, as Jean Bethke Elshtain writes, aims to "conceal some activities and aspects of ourselves" from public view (9). Margaret Hillenbrand, in an essay on fiction related to February 28, describes the KMT's attempted erasure of the Incident from public memory as a "taboo of silence" and a "desire for concealment" ("Trauma" 51). This gestures toward a privatization of the event that Robert Edmondson makes explicit: "Narratives of the Incident remained locked in private spaces" (30). As opposition to the KMT grew in the 1970s and 1980s, commemoration of February 28 became a "part of the deconstruction of Chinese nationalism in Taiwan, derailing the historical legitimacy of the KMT by revealing the violent process of its fabrication" (59). This deconstruction was dependent on making publicly visible what had had to be excluded for Chinese nationalism to be constituted, and it thus involved a re-inscription as publicly significant what the KMT's discourse had rendered publicly incommunicable: private histories of February 28.

Hillenbrand argues that the commemoration of February 28 functioned as a "countermemory" to the KMT's official historiography: "Countermemory . . . deals with the past in its unorthodox, private, and shadily ambiguous apparitions . . . It favors epistolary over documentary, the diary over the census . . . and, above all, a potent sense of possibility over the certainties of History" (60). Countermemory, as Foucault originally proposed, is "a transformation of history into a totally different form of time" (160). In its form and associations, it can be linked to what Dorothy Ko calls, in her study of footbinding, "private-individual" history. She contrasts history of this kind, which makes space for the ambiguous and polyvocal experiences

[3] Margaret Hillenbrand's book on public secrecy in China, *Negative Exposures*, draws on Taussig's insight. I would like to thank her for giving me early access to the relevant section of this book, which I draw on in detail below.

of women who often had conflicting emotions regarding their bound feet, with the "public-national" history of footbinding's abolition, which presents a univocal story of progress (12). Pointing to a view of the past which does not follow the teleological trajectory of public-national history, countermemory works to show how time, as Barad writes, "is diffracted through itself" ("Quantum" 244). Rather than following linear temporality, countermemory shows time to be a trefoil knot—the past intervenes in the present, shaping possibilities for the future, which in turn reshape memories of the past. The boundaries between the past, present, and future are constantly being drawn and redrawn. *Lost Garden* is, as Aubrey Tang notes, "a product of 1980s politics in Taiwan" (99), a part of the history of commemoration just described. Its de/construction of the public/private is therefore best understood in these complex temporal terms.

The novel focuses on the life of Zhu Yinghong, but Li does not present her protagonist's biography to the reader in a linear fashion. Throughout, she presents scenes from three time periods: Yinghong's childhood in her family home Lotus Garden, during which her father Zuyan is imprisoned and tortured as part of the White Terror for his involvement in February 28 and subsequent resistance activities; her young adulthood spent studying in New York; and her life after returning to Taiwan following the death of her father, when she begins a love affair with the business tycoon Lin Xigeng. These different temporalities all intermesh and transform each other, diffracting time through itself. In Part I of the novel, the reader is introduced to the nine-year-old Yinghong in 1952, when she is given her first writing assignment for school: an essay entitled "Me." Yinghong, "without any hesitation whatsoever, wrote down the first sentence in her notebook: I grew up in the final years of the First Sino-Japanese War" (21). This sentence, a piece of childhood nonsense—as Zuyan points out, that would make her at least fifty-eight, not to mention the fact that the war lasted less than a year—unfurls in multiple directions. In the time when it was originally written, it is dismissed with a laugh, but later, when Yinghong is in New York, she receives a letter from her father in which he suggests, "in fact, you could say that you were born in the final years of the Sino-Japanese war" (28).[4] He goes on to state that he "always thought that, for the people of Taiwan, the Sino-Japanese War was a beginning and also an end. From that moment on, the fate of the Taiwanese was already decided" (32).

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[4] This is not the only time Zuyan's letters are referred to in the novel. Letters are also present in *Nanjing 1937*, where they and diary entries play an important part in the narrative. These "private," counter-mnemonic forms are certainly an important aspect of the way the two novels work, and their presence offers support to my overall argument. However, for reasons of space, I am unable to offer an in-depth analysis of them here.

The "beginning" and the "end" references the short-lived Republic of Taiwan, which was declared by Taiwanese elites in an attempt to resist Japanese takeover of the island after it was ceded from the Qing dynasty (Morris 28). But it also indicates something more. As Yu-hua Liu writes, it suggests that "beyond his sense of despair for Taiwan's fate, there remains a glimmer of hope" (419). The coexistence of despair (in the present) and hope (for the future) suggests a complex enfolding of multiple temporalities, and this is tied to shifting boundaries of public and private. Zuyan links the historical failure to resist Japanese colonialism to his own failure to resist KMT rule, and in doing so he creates a reading of Yinghong's private childhood nonsense as politically significant. Rosemary Haddon suggests that by misdating her birth, Yinghong "has confused the onset of Japanese colonialism—one type of hegemony—with that of the Nationalist rule, a period that perpetuated many of the hegemonic features of colonialism" (52). This is an idea that David Der-wei Wang echoes when he suggests the sentence is "a message from [Yinghong's] repressed political unconscious" ("'Fin-de-siècle'" 53). But both readings simplify temporality, for it is Zuyan's reading of the child's sentence that makes the political link, not the sentence itself. Jacques Lacan can perhaps elucidate how this political unconscious works better than Freud, because for Lacan what is repressed "doesn't come from the past, but from the future" (158). Yinghong's message, then, is not encoded with public-national meanings from the start but takes on these meanings retroactively. It is an example of a thing that "mean[s] nothing all of a sudden signify[ing] something, but in a quite different domain" (Lacan 159).

In this instance, what means nothing at all in a private domain comes to mean something significant in a public one. But the enfolding of temporalities is more complex even than this, for Yinghong's private childhood mistake does not take on public-national significance in the "present" when she reads the letter. When Zuyan refers to the First Sino-Japanese War as simultaneously the beginning and the end, he is suggesting that whether it is the beginning or the end depends on what happens *in the future*. After suggesting that the fate of Taiwan is already decided, he states that he once believed "on this land there could never again be a true paradise, never again could there be justice or hope" (32). It was for this reason that he sent Yinghong and her brothers abroad, but this is a choice he regrets; it has severed his sons' connection with Taiwan and the Zhu family, which has lived on the island for eight generations. He asks that Yinghong return to Taiwan:

> I can't help but selfishly place my hopes on you. For even though you are a woman, you are from the Zhu family, and you have our Zhu blood

> in your veins. I don't know why, but lately I've had this funny hope that somehow, mysteriously, the Zhu family will be revived by your hand. (33)

It is this future—in which the possibility for justice and prosperity in the Taiwanese nation-state is tied to the continuity of the Zhu family—that invites Zuyan to reinterpret Yinghong's private blunder.

In thinking about how the meaning of the past is not closed, Barad draws on Walter Benjamin to suggest that the possibility of securing justice for the wrongs of the past is always "here-now in the form of 'messianic chips' whose energies are released through collective praxis—material activities of reconfiguring the conditions of im/possibilities of change/transformation/revolution" (Barad, "What" 74). The idea of "messianic chips" builds on Kabbalistic interpretations of Jewish theology, which construct the messianic not as something that will arrive at some point in the future, but as something already scattered, in a fragmented form, throughout the world. In Benjamin's materialist reworking, this Kabbalistic view of time challenges the "homogenous course" of public-national historiography, offering an understanding of liberation not as something arriving in the future but as emerging through the present transformation of relations with the past (Benjamin 264). The beginning/end represented by the First Sino-Japanese War works precisely as such a messianic chip in *Lost Garden*. Yinghong does return to Taiwan, and with the help of Lin Xigeng, she restores Lotus Garden, which has fallen into disrepair, and opens it up to the public. Xigeng wants her to give the garden to the government and responds to her refusal on the grounds that the KMT persecuted her father by asking, "This all happened such a long time ago, what's the use of bringing it up?" Yinghong replies, "Yes, it's past. That's why I want this garden to belong to Taiwan, to twenty million Taiwanese people. I don't want it to belong to any government that oppresses its people" (276). The injustice done to her father, she seems to suggest, will not be in the past unless she breaks out of the tradition of Taiwanese capitulation to "outside" (KMT/Japanese) authority.

In doing so she cuts across time, signifying that the beginning/end that is the First Sino-Japanese War was indeed a beginning. And this temporal diffraction is achieved by a transformation of a private residence into a public park; the private-individual and public-national transform each other through the temporal diffraction of past, present, and future. But there is, importantly, no final closure. Li makes this clear in her use of a frame narrative in the form of a prologue, which follows a group of gay men in Taipei collecting money for the first Taiwanese man diagnosed with

AIDS. These men see Yinghong introduced on television as "Ms. Zhu, a descendent of a prominent Taiwanese family, the Zhus of Lucheng" (15). Noting that the "marginalized and economically disadvantaged gay men" respond to the news about Lotus Garden by swearing at the television, Tang suggests that they "curse because . . . the upper class figures are remote, inaccessible, and incomprehensible to them" (105). That the reader first encounters Yinghong as a public figure through the eyes of a marginalized group is central. Li begins the story at its close, with a beginning/end that ensures the story remains open. In the prologue, Yinghong is a public figure; she represents Taiwan and its history. The novel reveals that this was not always the case, that her family was once excluded, the "private" outside of the KMT's public sphere. But the prologue reminds the reader ahead of time that even as Yinghong and her family have gained recognition, there is still an excluded outside. The gay men who seek public recognition for their friend's "private" plight are verbally abused for their efforts. Yinghong's end is their beginning; they too are Taiwanese, Li implies, and their justice is still to come.

Temporal Topologies (II): The Nanjing Massacre and *Nanjing 1937: A Love Story*

There is much more to be said regarding Li's prologue, and I return to it in the next section, but I now want to turn to the way that her presentation of time stands in rather stark contrast to Ye's approach in *Nanjing 1937*. As he makes quite explicit in his preface, for Ye the past is beached on a shore we can never reach: "the year 1937 is just smoke passing before my eyes. . . . I cannot see the history that historians call history. All I can see is various broken fragments, a few . . . sad useless stories" (3). Whereas Yinghong's childhood nonsense can be retroactively shot through with political significance, the events of this novel, Ye tells us, can be nothing but sound and fury. Yet in his insistence that his approach to the past stands in contrast to "history," he positions his work quite explicitly as a counter-mnemonic intervention, one which, through negation, turns history into another form of time. His suggestion that the events of 1937 are nothing but broken fragments on the stage of history strikingly recalls Benjamin's Angelus Novus:

> Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise . . .

> [that] irresistibly propels him into the future. . . . This storm is what we call progress. (257-58)

It is the storm of the public-national narrative of the Nanjing Massacre that Ye's novel attempts to resist.

This event's journey out of public secrecy was somewhat different to that of February 28. The Massacre occurred over "a period of six weeks," beginning on December 13, 1937, during which the Japanese army captured what was then the capital city of the KMT-governed Republic of China and "carried out wanton killings, rapes and lootings on a large scale" (Xu and Spillman 101). Rana Mitter suggests that the Massacre and other Japanese atrocities were not publicly discussed in the early years of the PRC because of the KMT's international recognition as a government-in-exile on Taiwan. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was therefore intent on bolstering its international relationships in order to secure recognition. It "need[ed] to appease Japanese sensibilities . . . [which] meant that it was simply not tactful to recall the horrors of the war in detail" (118). This was combined with a Mao-centered historiography that "placed the story of the [Communist] Yan'an base area at the centre of the permitted narrative of the war . . . [and] cut out . . . the areas that remained under the control of the Nationalists" (119). As Hillenbrand observes, "mourning the Nationalist dead scarcely served the propaganda war that the CCP was waging . . . at home and across the Taiwan Strait . . . that designated the KMT as chief national foe. The dead of Nanjing were, in this sense, the 'wrong' victims" (*Negative* 48). As with February 28 in Taiwan, the exigencies of a particular construction of the nation required that this event remain secret.

But unlike in Taiwan, when the secret of the Massacre emerged it was not by means of a grassroots campaign of countermemory aimed at challenging official historiography. Instead, it was official historiography itself that led the way. In the 1980s, international legitimacy was secured (the PRC now had a seat on the UN), but the legacy of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), coupled with increasing marketization and rising inequality, was undermining the internal legitimacy of the CCP. Nationalism began to be seen as a bulwark against increasing division. By moving from a narrative of class-struggle to nationalistic-struggle, the CCP allowed for the possibility of a reconciliation with the KMT and reunification with Taiwan (Mitter 121). Takashi Yoshida notes that on July 2, 1983, "the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee and the Research Office of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee issued a joint statement calling for a strengthening of patriotic education" (105). Soon after this, state-sponsored museums and what Berry

describes as "a virtual flood of historical monographs and historical publications" dealing with the Massacre began to appear (110). The violence unleashed on protestors in Tiananmen Square in 1989, Hillenbrand states, "made rebooting 'patriotic education' a panicked necessity," and commemoration gathered apace in the 1990s and beyond (*Negative* 49).

Despite the top-down directionality of the secret's outing, however, traces of the private remain. As Yoshida states, although "writings on the Nanjing Massacre can be seen as state propaganda . . . they still vividly present the recollections of men and women who had experienced grief and pain" (110). Berry points out that Chinese documentary films concerning the Massacre include "extended testimonial interviews and . . . physical scars are continually displayed by a number of survivors" (114). Private-individual histories have been marshaled for a transformation of public discourse in ways that are, ostensibly, not dissimilar to the re-articulation of February 28 in Taiwan. But whereas countermemory attempted to pierce the veil of secrecy that the KMT had placed over February 28, the private-individual testimonies and displays of bodily mutilation in commemoration of the Massacre are not intended to uncover the historic silence of the CCP. Instead, the public-national discourse that these private-individual narratives are supposed to counter is the denialism of Japanese revisionist historians. As Berry argues, "in the face of Japanese denial, much of the Chinese discourse on the [Massacre] focuses on trying to 'prove' it" (117). But Japanese denialism also acts as a useful cover: it allows the official historiography of the PRC to present commemoration of the Massacre with the emotional force and iconoclasm of countermemory without admitting that part of what is countered is the CCP's erstwhile silence.

Hillenbrand points to this fact when she suggests that historical photographs and their remediations, which, especially since the 1990s, have been central to the commemoration of the Massacre, "exist in a dialectical relationship with the secret that the Nanjing Massacre was during the Maoist period" (*Negative* 52). She suggests that a "core cache of ultra-violent images" (52) of decapitated men, raped women, and other historical atrocities have undergone a transformation "from state secret to branded logo" (62). The "logo" is the opposite of the "secret"—it is inherently public and, unlike countermemory proper, univocal. The photo-logos of the Massacre, celluloid recordings of private-individual experience, mean only one thing—China has suffered—and the only legitimate response to them is a reflexive, and defensive, nationalism. Hillenbrand notes that these photo-logos are never presented with contextualizing information, such as the names of the people in the photograph or the exact date it was taken, because "appropriate contextualization . . . would render the

images unfit for the uses to which they are put" (181). To function as a logo, the meaning of a sign must transcend its context: all private-individual roads must lead to a uniform understanding of public-national history.

This is evident in the first major film dealing with the Massacre, Luo Guanqun's 1987 *Massacre in Nanjing* (屠城血證 *Tucheng xuezheng*). The plot revolves around a group of people who sacrifice their lives to ensure that photos of Japanese atrocities reach the West. The private-individual experiences the film records—characters' relationships, their love affairs and careers, and especially their experiences of rape and murder—serve as symbols for a public-national narrative of Chinese victimization and the brave attempt to document that victimization and show it to the world. As Berry observes, the plot of recovering and exporting the photographs, in which all the main characters play a role, means that "these victims become symbols of all the victims of the massacre, inscribed with new meaning by their transformation into martyrs" (118). Private-individual experience is harnessed for a particular public-national purpose. Compare this to the first film about February 28, *A City of Sadness* (悲情城市 *Beiqing chengshi*), directed by Hou Hsiao-Hsien and released in 1989. It never directly portrays the violence of February 28, focusing instead on intimate details from its characters' private lives. And when violence is depicted, it presents not only KMT violence against Taiwanese but also Taiwanese violence against suspected Mainlanders. The film was initially met with hostility by many Taiwanese critics precisely because of this failure to fit the event into a simplistic nationalist discourse (Chi 48-51). But this points to the ambiguity of the countermemory proper, the ultimate irreducibility of private-individual experience to the requirements of any public-national discourse.

It was into the post-Tiananmen environment that *Nanjing 1937* first spoke, though Ye's technique for challenging the new historical narrative makes his roots as a writer in the 1980s quite plain. As Xiaobin Yang argues, New Wave writers from that time, such as Mo Yan, Yu Hua, and Can Xue (to offer a somewhat arbitrary triad) subverted the gory and violent imagery of Mao-era fiction, which worked to "enhance the sublimity of revolution . . . [and] glorify heroic death." Instead, they showed violence for its own sake and thereby expose the latent "sheer horror" in Mao-era attempts to "rationalize historical brutality" (Yang 28). Ye similarly refuses to assimilate the shattered pieces of his characters' private-individual stories into the univocal discourse of the official commemoration of the Massacre, and in doing so he goes some way toward shattering that discourse. A consideration of irony is perhaps the best way of understanding how Ye's subversion works, and dramatic irony, with its suggestion of foreknowledge, underscores how temporality is central

to his project. As Ye himself writes, “those living at this time had no idea what was to come” (3). The novel tells the story of Ding Wenyu, a playboy and professor of foreign languages who falls in love with the bride at a wedding he attends on New Year’s Day, 1937. This woman is Ren Yuyuan, a soldier whose father is a senior in the military. Their complicated romance is the main love story of the novel’s title. Initially the relationship is presented as a conflict between an overzealous Wenyu and an uninterested Yuyuan, but after her husband’s death the two do become briefly intimate, only to be separated as the Japanese enter the city—Yuyuan leaves with her division and Wenyu is left behind and killed in the invasion.

The novel is, as Yun Zhu notes, “split between . . . two kinds of gazes,” alternating “between a subtle and sensitive depiction of the characters’ inner thoughts and a factual and rational introduction of objective facts that is well-informed by historical hindsight” (389). The narrator frequently intervenes to inform the reader of developments in national and international politics, the state of the economy and urban planning, and gossip about politicians and celebrities. What Zhu calls the “split gaze” is the juxtaposition of this retrospective narrative perspective with the characters’ experience of time, which moves inexorably forward with no sense of the future that awaits. This doubled temporality is split along public/private lines—the public-national retrospective gaze and the private-individual experience of the characters (which are sometimes, in the case of Wenyu, communicated through first-person diary entries)—and it is central to the novel’s ironic vision. One example of such irony can be found in what Berry refers to as the “militaristic descriptions of romance and interpersonal relationships [that] saturate the novel” (157). The relationship between Yuyuan and her husband, for instance, is described in such a way as to suggest they are two battalions at war:

> When one side was defending its position, the other side was utilizing its advantage to attack mercilessly, until the first side could take it no more, mounted a counteroffensive, and the other had to retreat back into defense. From the very beginning theirs was a long-term war, neither of them willing to admit defeat and neither able to claim victory. (105)

The irony of this militaristic language is a product of the story’s temporal framing: the reader knows that the “real” battle is still to come.

Irony also comes from the fact that private, romantic relationships are described using language associated with the public-national event of war. As in *Lost Garden,*

the use of temporality and the de/construction of the public/private dichotomy are closely interconnected. But in *Nanjing 1937*, the use of militaristic language does not suggest that Yuyuan and Wenyu's love affair is publicly significant; rather, it highlights the transient and insignificant nature of their private lives compared to the coming onslaught of History. The same juxtaposition can be seen in what Zeng Yiguo refers to as the novel's "nostalgia" for early twentieth-century Chinese modernity (78). "1930s Nanjing," Ye writes, "was dazzling, and by 1937, when they were at the last juncture before their country and families would be destroyed, the carefree Nanjingers continued unconcerned as usual—eating, drinking, and having fun, living as if in a dream" (47). Zeng suggests that while such descriptions may make the reader feel "longing and nostalgia . . . the narrator never forgets that this hope [to return to the past] is but a dream [奢望 *shewang*] . . . everything that is flourishing will, in the end, fall into oblivion" (82). Setting the carefree behavior of the city's denizens up against an adumbration of the coming calamity, Ye creates a sense of an idyllic past of private-individual experience (eating, drinking, socializing) lost permanently in the mists of Historical time.

If countermemory involves the use of private-individual experience to open up dominant public-national discourse, then *Nanjing 1937* does not present itself in these terms. Ultimately, private-individual experience has no transformative effect: when Wenyu is shot dead by Japanese soldiers, he "collapsed on the riverbank, never able to get up again" (247). Zhu suggests that Wenyu's story can be read "either as a personal tragedy that evokes strong nostalgic and sympathetic sentiments or as a minor and objectified accident embedded in the making of history but apparently lacking any historical significance" (389). But it is not an either/or. Irony enables Ye to hold two such conflicting views together at once, and in doing so he makes clear that the tragedy of History counterintuitively renders the personal tragedies intrinsic to it completely insignificant. Georg Lukács suggests that irony is "an attitude of *docta ignorantia* [learned ignorance] towards meaning . . . in it there is the deep certainty . . . that through not-desiring-to-know and not-being-able-to know [the writer] has truly encountered, glimpsed and grasped the ultimate, true substance, the present, non-existent God" (90). Replace "God" with "History," and this passage helps unpack how irony works in *Nanjing 1937.* The History of the Massacre is supposed to contain all private-individual experiences, to turn them into a symbol of China's suffering and trigger a reflex-response of nationalistic pride. By showing that the very idea of History renders these private-individual experiences meaningless, Ye puts the lie to the whole project.

Ye's presentation of time works in opposition to the wider context of

commemoration of the Massacre, and this is a key difference between his text and Li's, which is a part of the counter-mnemonic reappraisal of February 28. Unlike in the PRC, where there was a state-led attempt to corral all private-individual experience into a singular narrative of the nation, in Taiwan multiple histories of February 28 were allowed to surface into the public sphere. The past was in fact open, and Li's approach to time reflects this fact. Taiwanese nationalist criticisms of Hou's *City of Sadness* make clear that the desire to submit history to a reductive nationalist frame persisted, but it remains the case that this was a very different environment of commemoration to that against which *Nanjing 1937* was written. Yet it seems to me that in her use of the prologue, Li shows the extent to which, even within this ebullient environment of seemingly free expression, she remained keenly aware of the risk that a Taiwanese nationalist historiography would itself construct its own "private" outside, and she works to bring this outside into view, refusing any final historical closure. With this resistance to closure, she shares much with Ye. In the next section, I explore this commonality through the lens of sexual politics. That this should emerge as an important theme is no surprise, for sexual politics is itself a disruption of the borders of the public and the private that works to show how even our most intimate experiences have wider political import. In both novels, I suggest, it is used to highlight ethical dilemmas that trouble simplistic public-national historiographies.

Body Politic(s): Sexual Deviance and the Troubling of Nationalist Historiography

I suggested above that History "contains" private-individual experiences of the Nanjing Massacre. This is informed by a conceptual distinction made by Ko, who refers to private-individual experiences as "'miniaturized' or 'contained' histories," which she opposes to "the gigantic history of the nation" (*Cinderella's Sisters* 12-13). She is drawing here on Susan Stewart, who writes that "the miniature and the gigantic may be described through metaphors of containment—the miniature as contained, the gigantic as container. We find the miniature at the origin of private, individual history . . . we find the gigantic at the origin of public . . . history" (71). The relevance of this conceptual distinction to a comparison of the Massacre and February 28 can be demonstrated by comparing two sculptures. The first is the colossal statue outside the Massacre Memorial Hall in Nanjing, which depicts (the inscription informs us) a recently raped woman clutching her dead baby in her arms. The second is an installation in Taiwan's Kaohsiung Museum of History, which shows a miniature model of the museum building on March 6, 1947, when KMT

forces violently retook what was then the municipal government office from Taiwanese nationalist protestors. Nanjing's colossal statue, like the memorialization of the Massacre more generally, turns private-individual suffering into (literally) gigantic history—the public-national becomes a container for the woman's pain, which cannot speak on its own private-individual terms. The Kaohsiung Museum of History, in contrast, presents public-national history in miniature, as itself contained. It does not tell any explicit private-individual stories, but its contained nature suggests secrets hidden within. All manner of histories might be waiting to emerge and change our view of events.

What seems to me the greatest strength of this conceptual division is that it does not mark an absolute difference, for the container and the contained are, quite literally, nested inside one another; each gives way to its opposite. Returning to my analysis of *Lost Garden*, we could note how the complex temporal topology I describe might reduce down to simply replacing a Chinese teleological narrative with a Taiwanese one. Though the past is opened up and its meaning transformed in order to bring to the surface a repressed history, this history could easily become a new master narrative that renders unspeakable certain private facts. But by opening the novel with a group of gay men whose economic insecurity is underlined by their need to raise money for their friend, Li works to counteract this. Contained by the prologue, Yinghong's story is complicated from the start. Tang suggests that the prologue reveals the rest of the novel to be "an ideologically mediated image . . . [that] alludes to a fictive reality instead of a realistic fiction about Taiwan" (105). This is an important point. However, I would like to suggest that it is not the narrative of the novel that is undercut, for the novel itself also works to show that the image of Yinghong presented in the prologue is not the whole story. The impoverished gay men highlight themes of sexual deviancy and capitalist exploitation that, the novel shows, are central but publicly disavowed aspects of Yinghong's story.

These issues are explored through Yinghong's relationship with the wealthy real estate tycoon Lin Xigeng. As Fang-mei Lin suggests, Xigeng "represents Taiwan's rising commercial power [in the 1980s]" (278), which emerged directly from the economic structure built up by the KMT under the lodestar of US imperialism (Ash et al. 83-106). A link is made between the economic world and sexuality when the couple first meet. They are at a dinner Yinghong has been invited to by her maternal uncle, who is trying to negotiate a favorable price for some land he wants to sell:

> Her uncle, who was somewhat famous in the business world, had a consistent strategy: if sometimes you had some women there (and it couldn't be those girls at the entertainment venues who only sold their bodies), it would make the men talking business take on a more gentlemanly air and help reduce disputes. (35)

The casual mention of sex work here hints at its ubiquity, and there is an implication that Yinghong too is selling her body (it's just that that is not *all* she is selling). Having met in a culture where sex work and business are intimately bound up with each other, the novel then goes on to show how Yinghong struggles to locate her sense of self in relation to Xigeng.

While *Lost Garden* is written mostly in the third person, first-person passages from Yinghong's perspective appear throughout. This "I" or "me" (there is no distinction in Chinese), the same one who identifies herself with the island of Taiwan in her childhood essay, focuses mostly, as Shung-in Chang observes, on "her infatuation with and dependence on [Xigeng], and her interior psychological maneuvers as she decides she wants to attract him" (136). These passages show the extent to which Yinghong's sense of herself as a subject is thrown into crisis by their relationship, which for most of the novel is an extramarital affair carried out without the knowledge of his wife. The "I" focuses on her relation to "him." When he begins to ejaculate too quickly when having sex with her, she reacts with terror: "I seem to notice the change in him immediately. . . . That most frightening fear surges up from the depth of my heart, seizes and totally occupies me" (209). This sense of radical insecurity drives her further in her pursuit, and eventually she succeeds in getting him to divorce his wife and marry her. It is as a wife that the reader first encounters her in the prologue, when the murkier, private aspects of her sexual past (this includes not only her affair with Xigeng but also with another man, Teddy, as well as an abortion) are hidden from view.

To relate this relationship to the public/private dichotomy, it is helpful to turn to an analysis of how that dichotomy is understood in traditional Chinese thought, where, as Ko writes, "the husband-wife bond . . . served as a metaphor for ruler-subject ties and a model for all political authority since the Warring States period (fifth century to 221 B.C.)" (*Teachers* 5-6). She argues that in the seventeenth century especially, the hierarchical organization of the family (*jia*), and the values of loyalty and obedience it fostered, made it a suitable training ground for political subjects: "in the eyes of the state . . . [the family] was the very embodiment of public (*gong*) virtues. In contrast, the state branded horizontal groups built on extra-familial ties

'private,' with the negative connotations of 'selfish' (*si*)" (*Teachers* 156). The Chinese word for adultery, *sitong* (私通 "private connection"), points to the ongoing relevance of these conceptual divisions today. The image of Yinghong we get at the beginning of the novel—a daughter restoring her long family lineage, a wife of a successful businessman—is remarkable for just how well it accords with traditional "public" ideals. And in journeying into the public sphere, she covers those "private" aspects of her past which deviate from them.

The sexual and the economic, tied together from the beginning, are explicitly linked at the end, too—Xigeng's marriage proposal comes simultaneously with an offer to help finance the restoration of Lotus Garden (Li 265). Ostensibly a public symbol of Taiwan's national history linked to the traditional *gong* virtue of loyalty to one's family lineage, Lotus Garden is restored by private funds and moral compromises that remain hidden from view. Yinghong's refusal to hand it over to the government is in some ways, like her marriage, a cover for more compromising private realities, such as the fact that KMT "political heavyweights" (271) give money to the foundation she sets up. The garden she wants to belong to the Taiwanese people is inextricably bound up with the political and economic system established by the government she sees as their oppressors. This relation throws the simplistic story of the Taiwanese nation's triumph over adversity into crisis, just as the affair with Xigeng threatens to do with Yinghong. In this way, the novel makes visible those aspects of Yinghong's story that might, if made public, bring the gay men from the prologue inside the public-national narrative on the television screen. Capitalist exploitation and nontraditional sexual practices are a part of Yinghong's story; they just do not appear in public. The exclusion of these facts is mirrored in the exclusion of the gay men, and Li keeps this clear in the reader's sights.

Li's use of sexual politics to enjoin upon readers ethical considerations that challenge simplistic nationalist readings finds an echo in Ye's *Nanjing 1937*. A key difference in their approaches arises from Ye's unswervingly masculinist narrative voice. As a result, sexual politics manifests itself under a much more violent and disturbing context, where said voice is used to shocking effect. Sexual violence is at the heart of public commemoration of the Massacre, as the statue outside the Memorial Hall attests. The event is known in the Anglophone world as "the Rape of Nanjing," an appellation made famous by Iris Chang's popular history book of that title. Both at home and abroad, as Yongdong Li argues, the "synecdoche of the female body" has come to stand in for "the nation state" in representations of the Massacre, the denial of a woman's bodily autonomy symbolizing the denial of national sovereignty (50). This recalls a phenomenon Wai-yee Li identifies in Ming loyalist

fiction from the early Qing, where depictions of resistance to rape by conquering Manchus turned "the female body . . . into a metaphor for the body politic" (196). In this kind of gigantic history, it is China itself that is "raped," and the private-individual experiences of women (according to Chang anywhere between "twenty thousand to . . . eighty thousand" were raped during the Massacre [139]) are contained by that history. Ye's depiction of sexual violence in *Nanjing 1937* is disturbing, and it is only when read against this context that it appears as anything other than gratuitous.

Long before the arrival of the Japanese in the city, Wenyu's personal rickshaw driver, Heshang, kills a teenage girl, Xiao Yue, and then attempts to have sex with her corpse. Xiao Yue was promised to Heshang in marriage by her grandmother (Ms. Zhang, referred to below as "the blind old woman"), and he murders the former after discovering she is engaged to someone else. The climax of the terrible event runs as follows:

> He carefully pulled Xiao Yue's trousers down to her ankles, then unzipped his own trousers and just as carefully lowered himself onto his knees. He realized at this crucial point that his body seemed to be opposed to his plans. He realized at this moment that he didn't really want to do it. . . . Suddenly, the blind old woman called inquiringly from downstairs, and Heshang, his senses even more disordered than before, tried to get himself under control, but with a momentary lapse in his attention, he couldn't stop the filthy stuff from flowing out and shooting onto the floor. Heshang hurriedly scooped some up with his hand, and, as if it were not already too late, extended his fingertips to wipe what he had gathered onto Xiao Yue's sex. He realized at that moment that a lot of blood was flowing from her head, trickling along the floor like a long red snake and dripping through the cracks between the boards. Droplets of blood fell on the blind old woman's face below, which she dabbed at with her hands. Smelling it, she cried out in absolute horror. (126)

It is difficult not to recoil at the grotesque details. Like the grandmother, the reader can feel only horror.

Indeed, this sense of horror is enhanced by the fact that as readers we cannot get outside of the event, for we see it through the eyes of the perpetrator. As Julia Kristeva has shown, feelings of horror are provoked by what she calls "the abject,"

defined as "something rejected from which one does not part" (4). The narrative of the assault begins with Heshang coming to Wenyu for help, so the entire tale is framed as a secret confided by a friend in trouble. Though the narrative itself is in the third person, the reader sees events through Heshang's eyes, as the word "realized," repeated throughout the passage above, makes clear. We see what he sees, and it is his feelings—hesitation, panic—that we feel. The retroactive narrative and concomitant dramatic irony already discussed mean that a reader cannot help but place this event up against the public-national discourse of the Massacre. This scene does not fit into any of the available paradigms for thinking about sexual violence in 1937 Nanjing, and that is surely the point. But how this seemingly private-individual event—which appears entirely cut off from the grand historical narrative of China's suffering—speaks back to commemoration requires some unpacking.

First, the sexual violence here is intra-national, motivated by Heshang's sense of entitlement over Xiao Yue. This can be linked to Lydia Liu's reading of Xiao Hong's 1935 novel *A Field of Life and Death* (生死場 *Shengsi chang*), where she suggests that because the rape that occurs in the narrative is perpetrated by a Chinese rather than Japanese man, it works to contest "the appropriation of the female body by nationalist discourse" (162). By highlighting Chinese-on-Chinese gendered violence, Ye pushes into view an experience of rape which public-national commemoration cannot contain. He brings the "private" fact of sexual exploitation and male entitlement within the national family into public view. In doing so, he works to trouble simplistic narratives that place gendered violence as something for which only the "other" is responsible. That the reader is forced into the position of perpetrator further highlights this fact. And this identification, the abject horror of not being able to separate oneself from the crime, points to what I take to be the other, perhaps even more pointed way sexual violence in this novel is brought to bear on the context of commemoration. By forcing the reader to look, in full knowledge, through the eyes of the perpetrator, Ye brings us close to confronting what Hillenbrand refers to as the "humanistically compromising" "open secret" that the photographs circulated and remediated in commemoration of the Massacre are "unattributed war pornography" taken by Japanese soldiers (80).

Ye gives his readers no choice but to confront the disavowed problem of voyeurism, which Rey Chow highlights in her analysis of the early twentieth-century feminism of male Chinese intellectuals: in "the enthusiastic investigations of women, mental and physical, sociological and fictional, a new kind of *voyeurism* surfaces as the other side of solemn patriotism" (86). The deep concern with women's suffering at the hands of the Japanese in commemoration of the Massacre similarly allows

voyeurism to surface, albeit unconsciously. The defensive anger and reflexive nationalism which "the Rape of Nanjing" inspires has as its underside an emotional, even libidinal investment in images of the Massacre that were produced for the scopophilic predilections of the Japanese army. None of this denies the horror experienced by the Massacre's victims or the justified outrage at crimes of war. Rather, it forces the reader to confront a far more complex and difficult moral terrain than commemoration of the Massacre in general allows. Ye makes space for questions about indigenous sexual violence and encourages a more self-reflexive and open relationship to the past and its commemoration. As such, despite the obvious differences in their approaches, Ye, like Li, uses sexual politics to forestall attempts to settle the meaning of history once and for all.

Conclusion: Historical Closure and the Limits of Literature

What distinguishes Li Ang's approach to history most significantly from that of Ye Zhaoyan is that her attempt to undermine historical closure was conducted as part of a counter-mnemonic movement in Taiwan. In a sense, she uses the emergence of the repressed past of February 28 to drag other, "private," occluded realities into view. Her novel is therefore shot through with a sense of possibility and hope, however attenuated. Conversely, hope seems entirely lacking from Ye's novel, which, written as a kind of antithesis to public-national commemoration of the Massacre, can easily be read as nihilistic. But in a strange twist that shows the impossibility of meaninglessness, by presenting lives that transcend the instrumentalist meaning-making procedures of History, Ye shows that not all of history is contained by History and that, therefore, there is more meaning to be made from the past than what is being made in the PRC in the present. Despite their very different contexts, which leave an undeniable imprint on their writing, particularly in terms of temporality, what emerges from both texts is a fundamental sense of the past as open.

But the question remains of what effect this strategy has on the wider context of commemoration of the two events and on politics in Taiwan and the PRC. That Ye's challenge to public-national discourse in the PRC is likely to have little impact is perhaps obvious. But one ought not to be too sanguine about the room liberal democracy makes for a plurality of views. What the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre observes in relation to satire holds true for literary critiques of all kinds, including Li's:

> those who delight [in political satire] commonly fail to recognize . . . that . . . kings have always needed jesters . . . and . . . what the jester provides is a harmless expression of rebellious sentiments, one that functions as a substitute for effective critique of and resistance to that order [in which they work]. The defenders of that order, when intelligent, understand very well that the jokes of nonconformity are one thing, effective action aimed at the redistribution of power and money quite another. (212)

In other words, that Li can express her views does not mean that they will have any impact, especially if that expression is taken to substitute for real action. This is certainly something the CCP understands, despite its reputation as censor extraordinaire. It applies different, more elastic standards to the censorship of literature and art than it does to journalistic or political expression (Hockx). Ye's oblique commentary on commemoration in *Nanjing 1937* is therefore something that can be spoken, even if an outright challenge to the PRC's nationalist discourse is not. And that is precisely because it cannot, by itself, do anything.

Recall that the power of "messianic chips" buried in the past can, for Barad, only be released through "collective praxis" ("What" 74). Without political action, highlighting a repressed or foreclosed history does not necessarily have any effect. We might speculate that a Chinese nation that could take account of the fact that the history of sexual violence in 1937 was not confined to Japanese invaders might be better able to confront the systematic sexual assault of Uyghur women currently taking place in Xinjiang and do something to redress it, rather than denying it at all costs (Ochab). But Ye's text by itself does not get us there. What it does is keep that possibility open for the future. So too, with Li Ang. Reading *The Lost Garden* in the present, one can observe that the gay men of her prologue have found a place in the public sphere in Taiwan. But like Yinghong, their entry into that sphere required that their sexual practices be made legible according to the norms embodied in the traditional institution of marriage, and capitalist exclusion and exploitation on the island persist. Keeping the meaning of the past open and revealing private-individual experiences excluded by public-national history are necessary preconditions for the redress of such problems. But it is here that literature passes over into politics, where the private experiences of reading and writing must give way to public action.

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