Revolutionary Appropriation of Disability in Socialist Chinese Literature and Film

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ABSTRACT: Literature and film in socialist China represented disabled people primarily in two ways: either as courageously contributing to socialist development in spite of physical impairments, or as recovering miraculously due to the medical practices supported by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This article seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of these two narrative paradigms. In the first case, it examines a mutually constitutive structure of love and disability, and then demonstrates how writers maintained a certain agency under socialist censorship by deviating from this structure. In addition, this article traces the formation of miraculous recovery stories and argues that this process was a complex interaction among disability, Soviet or Chinese medical practices, Sino-Soviet relations, and the Mao cult. I will further explore why the second paradigm became more influential than the first one during the Cultural Revolution.

KEYWORDS: literature, film, socialist China, disability, love, Soviet or Chinese medical practices, Sino-Soviet relations, Mao cult.

Influenced by the anxiety of "The Sick Man of East Asia" (*Dongya bingfu* 東亞病夫), Chinese intellectuals in the Republican era (1911-1949) considered disability abnormal and associated physical or mental abnormality with the fate of the nation (Riep 2018: 408-10). They therefore constructed disability as "signs of racial degeneration and the nation's backwardness" in the name of "science" (Xun 2002: 106-10). Although the Chinese Communists also stressed this link between individual bodies and the body politic, they greatly challenged the Republican interpretation of disability during the socialist period (1949-1978) and demonstrated a transformative power through literature and film – turning figures with impairments into productive bodies not only economically but also politically and ideologically.

Two narrative paradigms were available to achieve this transformative power: 1) the disabled characters' continuing contribution to socialist development regardless of their disability led by war-related service; and 2) the miraculous recovery from their disability thanks to Maoism. Scholars, including Emma Victoria Stone, Sarah Dauncey, and Steven L. Riep, have confirmed that these two ways of representations were the limited channels through which disabled people could appear during Maoist years, known for the worship of healthy and non-disabled bodies (Stone 1998: 142-3; Dauncey 2007: 481-90; Riep 2008: 137-8, 2018: 408-10). In addition to summarising conditions under which disability was made visible, scholars are preoccupied with the role of the first paradigm in forming a full revolutionary consciousness. Pavel Korchagin and Wu Yunduo are two frequently-cited inspirational models.[1] Both Tina Mai Chen and Xu Hangping believe that Pavel Korchagin's and Wu Yunduo's enduring devotion to revolutionary development by overcoming physical impairments promoted the revolutionary consciousness and subjectivity desired by the CCP (Chen 2012: 168-9; Xu 2018: 71). Xu further criticises the practice of establishing the two heroes as inspirational models because it turned "persons with disabilities into an object of catharsis and awe" (*ibid*.: 94).

Bringing to the fore several understudied literary and cinematic works and other narratives, this article seeks to complicate the understanding of both paradigms by examining two topics that have not been fully discussed in previous scholarship. To avoid studying socialist cultural production as an essentialised entity based on one or two classical novels or films, this article includes a variety of less discussed texts that are largely representative of the two paradigms and contain variants to provide new perspectives for understanding socialist representations of disability (Wang 2014: 12-3). Then, inspired by the method of "integrating close readings (…) into historical examinations of the changing discursive structures in the Maoist campaigns," this article will conclude some narrative patterns in chosen texts through close textual analysis and comparisons and interpret these patterns' formation, development, and even deviation under specific medical, political, and ideological contexts at different phases during the socialist period (*ibid*.: 13).

To be more specific, for the first paradigm, I will shed light on the mutually constitutive interaction between love and disability, an officially idealised structure regulating the production of disability narratives. Enduring

1. Pavel Korchagin is the disabled hero in the Russian novel *How the Steel was Tempered* (1933) by Nikolai Ostrovsky. His continuing devotion to the communist cause by overcoming bodily disability inspired a great number of Chinese readers. Wu Yunduo was one of them. Losing four fingers and having both eyes injured during the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War, Wu still devoted himself to military weapon production. Because of his achievements, he was called "the Chinese Pavel," and his autobiography *Everything for the Party* (*Ba yiqie xian gei dang* 把一切獻給黨, 1953) was circulated nationwide by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

affection helps a person with an impairment overcome psychological inferiority and social discriminations; this love is therefore valued as sublime by the dominant ideology. However, regardless of its prevailing existence, I argue that heterogeneous voices were available to challenge this officially sanctioned way of writing. This paper therefore challenges the conventional perception that socialist cultural works were nothing but repetitive stories conveying tightly regulated doctrines.

The scholarship has tended to focus on the full-fledged form of the second paradigm of miraculous recovery during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976): although these disabled characters suffer from vision, hearing, or speech loss, they all recover thanks to Chinese medical treatments inspired by Maoism. However, this paradigm of storytelling did not appear in a vacuum. How was a "miraculous cure" achieved at different times? How did Sino-Soviet relations influence this representation of disability? For what purpose must the patient be cured? By tracing the paradigm's development from the beginning of the socialist era, I contend that the miraculous recovery narrative resulted from the dynamics among disability, medical practices, international relations, and the personality cult of Mao Zedong 毛澤東.

The parallel examination of the two different paradigms makes it possible to distinguish some subtle changes: both dominated the production of disability narratives throughout the socialist years, but the first one gradually lost ground to the second one during the Cultural Revolution. In the conclusion, I will explain that this paradigm shift might be ascribed to new political and aesthetic ideas regulating cultural production proposed at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, which also suggested that socialist culture was not a static project.

Love and disability

In the 1950s, many characters in Chinese literature and film become disabled because of war-related service: either fighting against the enemy directly in wars that result in the CCP's victory or getting involved in accidents when producing munition used in these wars. Because of this sacrifice for the revolution, their bodily loss is constructed as a symbol of glory. While they are widely celebrated as inspirational models for overcoming physical limitations, there are moments when they become depressed and unconfident because of their disability, which may undermine their inspirational power. When this crisis arises, love oftentimes comes to the rescue.

For instance, Luo Muming 羅木命, whose eyes were hurt in an explosion when producing weapons used in the Korean War (1950-1953), was also known as a Pavel-like worker, and his story was adapted into the drama *The Party Brought Light to My Life* (*Dang chonggei le wo guangming*, 黨重給了我光明, 1958). In the drama, when Luo Muming returns to the factory after the accident, he is not able to work as well as he used to. Upon hearing his fellow worker's complaint about the inconvenience that he causes, Luo feels frustrated with himself and then his marriage. In order not to "waste her beauty and youth," he wants to break up with his wife Xiulan 秀蘭 by saying: "I cannot become your burden and you should not sacrifice your happiness for me" (Ma *et al*. 1958: 18). However, Xiulan explains that "she appreciates his personality" and expresses resolutely and emotionally that "she will stay forever with him" (*ibid*.). While the disability makes Luo Muming feel inferior to his partner, Xiulan's unfailing love empowers Luo and recreates an equal intimacy.

While the repeated appearance of the paradigm in literary works was indicative of the communist authorities' preference,[2] an article published in the CCP's official mouthpiece *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日報) by Xie Juezai 謝覺哉, a high-ranking leader in charge of legislation, provided an explicit official recognition of this way of writing. Entitled "Sublime Love," this article discussed what sublime love was and argued, "in contrast to capitalist love, which relies on money and appearance, love in a socialist society like the People's Democratic Society (*Renmin minzhu shehui* 人民民主社會) is based on the couple's mutual commitment to the state and socialist development" (Xie 1953). In order to exemplify his point, Xie introduced two Luo Muming/Xiulan-type stories as sublime because the protagonists "combined the love for an individual with the love for the state, society, and the nation" (*ibid*.).[3] The relationship between love and disability was mutually constitutive: love not only cheered up disabled heroes and re-established their confidence, but was therefore also defined as revolutionary and sublime.

Although disabled veterans were widely celebrated as heroes who deserved respect and happy marriages during the socialist years, the heroes' physical conditions, in reality, circumscribed their marital status. Large numbers of veterans experienced difficulty getting married or maintaining their marriage, especially in the 1950s, when the Party-state relaxed divorce-related legal provisions (Diamant 2009: 214-5). Impairments further reduced a veteran's chance to match with a partner. Under this context, the motivation to marry a disabled veteran became suspicious to others. An article in *People's Daily* recorded discrimination that a veteran experienced because of his disability. After Guo Bingqing 郭炳清, visually impaired, returned from the Korean War, "his fiancée attempted to break their engagement" (Ding 1957). Although they finally got married after "local cadres' persuasion," Guo was quickly abandoned because of his disability (*ibid*.). Attracted by Guo's revolutionary spirit, Huang Guangrong 黃廣榮, a progressive youth, decided to marry Guo after convincing the latter that disability did not take away from a good marriage. However, others began to doubt her intentions. While some villagers believed that "she was attracted to Guo's money," others told her directly, "You will have no future if you marry this blind man" (*ibid*.). Even worse, some local Party cadres perceived Huang and Guo's relationship as "messing up the sexual relationship" (*luangao nannv guanxi* 亂搞男女關係), a serious accusation at that time. Fortunately, Huang's decisiveness about their marriage not only helped Guo overcome his feelings of inferiority, but also helped them survive the bias. Thanks to higher authorities' intervention, their reputations were restored, and those local cadres were punished for "persecuting a disabled revolutionary soldier" (*ibid*.).

Considering the social prejudices against disabled veterans, and because in most cases, these veterans were males, Luo Muming/Xiulan-like stories were morally and ideologically charged with gender inequality: for disabled veterans, as long as they devoted themselves to the revolutionary cause, they would be awarded a happy marriage. Meanwhile, females should value male veterans' revolutionary spirit over imperfect physical appearance and love them wholeheartedly. In so doing, females also contributed to the revolution. Regardless of the seemingly satisfying relationship, the heroines were given little chance to show any other possibilities of their subjectivity. With a full revolutionary awareness, they were condensed into instruments expressing the Party's indoctrination. Accordingly, "sublime love" had to be

2. For a similar pattern, see Yang Lvfang 楊履方's drama *Cuckoo Sings Again* (*Buguniao you jiao le* 布穀鳥又叫了, 1957: 58-9).
3. Xie particularly balances the gender dynamics by mentioning a disabled female/nondisabled male marriage. However, regardless of his emphasis on this story, disability narratives during the socialist years focused dominantly on disabled male/nondisabled female marriages partly due to the disproportionate sex ratio in the CCP army.

described in a transcendent way: relevant depictions should be deprived of erotic desires, romantic feelings, or spiritual compatibility, and the couple should act like political comrades rather than intimate partners.

So far, my observation has attested to the popular assumption of socialist revolutionary culture as a part of an overwhelmingly repressive mechanism, allowing no contested gender construction and little authors' agency. However, by following Liu Jianmei's practice of reading gender implications as "fluid constructions" rather than "passive recipients of political power" (Liu 2003: 166), I seek to unearth heterogenous voices in socialist disability narratives through Feng Deying 馮德英's novel *Jasmine* (*Yingchun hua* 迎春花, 1959). I contend that the novel not only destabilised the harmonious revolutionary association between love and disability, but also demonstrated diverse gender representations and the writer's agency against the draconian censorship during the socialist period.

At first glance, *Jasmine* bears no great difference from other analysed narratives in terms of how love motivates the disabled hero to overcome psychological burdens and social discrimination. For instance, after learning that Shuxian 淑嫻 loves him, Jiang Shuishan 江水山 "turns sombre and touches his empty sleeve on the left side with a bitter smile." Unusually, he sighs, "No matter whether she likes me or not. Let's leave this issue aside" (Feng 2007b: 296). He further confesses, "It is no good for her to marry me" because he does not "want to become a burden" (*ibid*.: 296-7).[4] Shuxian's uncle, who raises her after her father's death, also disapproves of her affection for a disabled man. Nevertheless, Shuxian's sincerity finally moves Shuishan and pushes them together.

However, the author gives Shuxian richer subjectivity. Her emotional struggle with two men complicates the dynamics between love and disability underlying the Luo Muming/Xiulan-like representations and destabilises the officially sanctioned paradigm. Unlike previous heroines, Shuxian does not have a politically predestined mindset, and she displays an alternative reaction toward a disabled hero. Shocked and uncomfortable, she originally views Shuishan's empty sleeve as "a terrible marker of disability" instead of "a sign of glory," revealing an awareness at odds with what is encouraged by the Party (*ibid*.: 192-4). Although she quickly overcomes this feeling thanks to the help of Cao Chunling 曹春玲, a Party representative in the novel, her original response indicates her lack of resolute revolutionary consciousness.

While Shuxian is not brave enough to confess her feeling to Shuishan, she becomes indecisive after hearing that her uncle has arranged for her to marry Sun Ruoxi 孫若西, an elementary school teacher. Sun turns out to be an opportunist and a hypocrite who only pretends to be revolutionary. Shuxian's vacillation between the two males therefore becomes an issue of whether she will stray from the revolutionary path. Her deficiency of rebellious spirit results in her inability to argue against her uncle and leaves her vulnerable to sexual coercion by Sun, who rapes her. Not owning a revolutionary will as strong as Cao Chunling, who was also pursued by Sun and able to discern his deception, the writer portrays Shuxian's loss of virginity as a punishment for her wavering stance between the two men and her irresolute devotion to revolution.

The premarital sex leaves Shuxian no choice but to accept Sun, who later breaks the engagement. Shuxian's loss of virginity and the broken engagement disturb the revolutionary logic of previously discussed disability narratives. In a traditional rural culture, which places a high value on female chastity, Shuxian's experience makes her and her family morally worse off. She feels ashamed, believing that she no longer deserves Shuishan; her uncle, who originally disliked the disabled veteran, regrets the situation and says

Figure 1. Illustration from *Jasmine* (*Yingchunhua* 迎春花 , 1961) by Feng Deying 馮德英 . Pages: 292-3. Credit: Scan provided by the author.

that "If Shuishan would marry my niece, he would be my great saviour!" (*ibid*.: 543). Now Shuxian is seen as unworthy of the disabled hero, who is morally and politically pure. Although Shuishan does not mind the loss of virginity and decides to marry Shuxian after hearing that she is more politically motivated, their postponed union conveys a different implication compared with the previous cases. Instead of describing a girl's unfailing love as a trophy promised to a disabled hero, the textual arrangement in *Jasmine* makes the marriage like a trade-off: only after Shuxian loses her virginity can Shuishan be equal to her, because both lack something physically. As a result, this "equal" partnership completely reverses the previous revolutionary rationality behind disability narratives: rather than serving as a redemptive power to remove the disabled veteran's concern, this marriage redeems the girl's humiliation.

With more complex subjectivity, Shuxian is a unique heroine among similar stories featuring disabled/nondisabled couples, which could be ascribed to the author's understanding of writing. In an interview, Yu

4. I failed to find an original 1959 edition, so the direct citations are cited from a 2007 reprint, which the writer confirms in the preface is reprinted from the 1959 version.

Chunling 俞春玲, a scholar who studies modern Chinese literature and culture, asks Feng Deying why he insisted on reflecting characters' complex inner world, such as detailed portrayals of one's feelings and emotions, in his *Bitter Flowers* (*Ku caihua* 苦菜花, 1958), while many other writers had decided to delete or avoid similar depictions at that time. In response, Feng replies that "he could not simplify life in his writing and should use true and vivid depictions to increase the novel's attractiveness (*ganranli* 感染力)" (Yu 2015: 56). Although this part of the interview focuses on another novel, Yu's observation and Feng's explanation also help us understand Shuxian and her love story in *Jasmine*. At a time when artists had already undergone considerable pressure from censorship, Feng Deying retained a certain agency in creating his novels and characters.

The Party-state noticed *Jasmine*'s disturbing nature immediately after its publication. As Feng Deying recalls:

> No sooner had the novel been published than it sparked a hot debate. The focus of the debate was on the description of the relationship between the two sexes. It was believed that such a description showed a serious naturalist style, was too erotic, and exerted a negative influence. (...) Under the instruction of some leaders, I revised several parts of the book and had the new version reprinted in 1962 with fifty thousand words deleted. (2007a: 2)[5]

My discussion on love, rape, and disability can serve as an example to understand the problem here cited. As I will further contend, the revision did not completely eliminate the tension between the novel and official ideology.

In the 1961 version, the author preserves Shuxian's original shocking response to Shuishan's disability and her vacillation between the two men with minor changes, but he replaces the rape with a kiss. After Sun Ruoxi lies to Shuxian about Shuishan falling in love with another girl, he kisses her. Although the kiss is not as serious as the rape, this does not alter the fundamental logic of the story. Shuxian is still trapped in the same moral restraints: she remains "ashamed to face others," and her uncle insists that "her life is ruined" because of the kiss and the broken engagement (Feng 1961: 455, 467). Shuxian and her family's agreement that she is morally defective continues to weaken the redemptive power anticipated by the authorities for the disabled veteran: Shuxian is still the object instead of the subject of the redemption.

Although Feng Deying agreed to revise the book "under the instruction of some leaders," the unchanging heterogeneity behind his disability depiction provides an example to suggest a degree of complexity regarding cultural production in a most regulated environment (Feng 2007a: 2). The heavy censorship and the author's willingness to revise the book could not easily transform his work into an ideal propaganda material required by the Party. Starting in late 1963, Jiang Qing 江青, Mao's third wife, who became increasingly powerful in the cultural realm from the 1960s onward, frequently criticised *Jasmine* as "a bad one," but this time Feng showed his agency again by refusing to make revisions according to Jiang Qing's instructions (Yu 2015: 49-51). As a result, at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, this novel and Feng's two other works were criticised mercilessly and banned as "poisonous weeds" (*ducao* 毒草) because they contained "unhealthy erotic descriptions" (*huangse dusu miaoxie* 黃色毒素描寫), and promoted such values as "capitalist humanism" (*zichan jieji renxing lun* 資產階級人性論), "class conciliation" (*jieji douzheng de tiaohe lun* 階級鬥爭的調和論), "pacifism of the terror of revolutionary wars" (*geming zhanzheng kongbu de heping zhuyi* 革命戰爭恐怖的和平主義), and "the supreme nature of love" (*aiqing zhishang* 愛情至上) (Feng 2007a: 2). Accordingly, Feng Deying was also attacked and punished.

By reading *Jasmine* against the officially preferred paradigm for representing love and disability and by exploring Feng Deying's creation experience, this section suggests that the repressive revolutionary ideology failed to fully control Shuxian's gender implications, such as her personal feelings and private desires, and the author's agency. In so doing, my analysis participates in the scholarly effort to challenge the idea that revolutionary culture during the socialist period was monolithic and homogeneous and that it can be interpreted from no other perspective than a totalising one (see, for example, Liu 2003: 162-92; Braester 2008: 119-40; Mittler 2012; Wang 2014).

Miraculous recovery

At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, almost all literary and cinematic activities were suspended, and they were not restored until the early 1970s (Xiao 2012: 28). With this new wave of cultural activities, a group of fictional characters with impairments also rose to prominence. Rather than having lost a body part or physical ability in war-related activities, these new disabled characters suffer from vision or hearing loss, which are mainly associated with the old society and class enemies. In most cases, their disabilities are successfully cured by Chinese medical innovations inspired by Maoism. Once the disabled have their ability to see, hear, and speak restored, the first thing they want to see is Mao's picture and the first thing they desire to say is "Long Live Chairman Mao!" This way of representing disability was so popular during the Cultural Revolution that in addition to literature and cinema, it was also widespread in other propaganda materials such as official newspapers and documentaries. However, this method of storytelling was not a unique Cultural Revolution practice, and its formation, which can be traced to the early 1950s, was influenced by the interaction among disability, medical achievements, Sino-Soviet relations, and the Mao cult.

One of the earliest prototypes linking eyesight recovery with Chairman Mao is in the movie *Bright Again* (*Dadi chongguang* 大地重光, 1950), the story of a unit of the CCP-led New Fourth Army. A soldier with both eyes injured is carefully taken care of by his comrades in a series of battles in spite of the additional trouble. His eyesight gradually recovers in parallel to the CCP's military success. Before an important battle, upon hearing that his unit has received a letter with Mao's picture in it, he insists on seeing the picture regardless of the kind reminder, "You are unable to see now." After he begins holding the picture, the following shots demonstrate how a blurry image gradually turns into a clear vision of Chairman Mao, corresponding to the complete recovery of the soldier's eyesight (Figures 2 and 3). His wound is not only a testament to revolutionary brotherhood, since he is never abandoned by his comrades, but also signals his respect for Mao's leadership.

This was not the only example in the early 1950s; the drama *Bright Skies* (*Minglang de tian* 明朗的天, 1954) by Cao Yu 曹禺 also presents two blind patients, a worker and a military officer. *Bright Skies* was first published in two parts in the September and October issues of *People's Literature* (*Renmin wenxue* 人民文學) in 1954; however, due to the writer's dissatisfaction, the original version underwent major revision before it was published as a separate edition in November 1956.

5. There was probably a mistake of the author's recollection because the novel was reprinted in 1961.

Figures 2 and 3. Still from *Bright Again* (*Dadi chongguang* 大地重光 , 1950) by Xu Tao 徐韜 . Up: 1:10:22. Down: 1:10:24. Credit: Screenshots provided by the author.

A comparison between the two editions reveals that international relations became an important element shaping the narrative on blindness, which is demonstrated from two perspectives. First, Soviet medical knowledge and experts play a significant role in successfully curing the patients and thereby change the minds of those doctors who are strongly influenced by American imperialism and claim that blindness is incurable. Second, in the original script of Cao Yu's drama, after the corneal transplant, the eyesight of Zhao Shude 趙樹德, the worker who became blind in the old society, is restored on 1 October 1952, the third anniversary of the founding of the PRC. The first thing he wants to see is Mao's picture, and then, "holding the picture for a while and crying," he says, "Oh, Chairman! Chairman!" (Cao 1954b: 124). However, in the 1956 version, the desire and excitement at seeing Mao's picture is deleted and Zhao is briefly mentioned as being cured, looking "around with curiosity like a child" (Cao 1956: 110). As I will demonstrate later, this change reflected the curtailed cult of Mao, impacted by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

While *Bright Again* gives no hint of how the injured soldier is cured, the "how" question becomes important in *Bright Skies*. In addition to the ideological consideration of fighting against capitalist influence, Soviet medical knowledge and the choice of eye surgery in the texts were closely related to the Russian doctor Vladimir Petrovich Filatov and his growing popularity at the beginning of the 1950s in China. During the honeymoon period in Sino-Soviet relations, several Soviet scientists, together with their theories, had been widely introduced to China as the only legitimate scientific authority, and Dr. Filatov, a famous ophthalmologist known for his development of tissue therapy and his pioneering contribution to corneal transplantation, was one of them.

Although Dr. Filatov's theory was accessible in CCP-controlled areas before 1949, it was not until the early 1950s that the CCP began to widely circulate it. According to Liz P. Y. Chee, in March 1951, "the Chinese Health Ministry released a notice promoting the use of tissue therapy nationwide" (2018: 199). Other official and intellectual endorsement also accelerated this promotion. On 17 May 1951, an editorial in *People's Daily* introduced Dr. Filatov's tissue therapy and encouraged the wide promotion of this theory.[6] One day later, Ge Shaolong 戈紹龍 wrote a detailed introduction in the same newspaper, explaining the development of the tissue therapy from such aspects as how it was proposed initially, its achievements, how to prepare and apply the materials, and the theory behind it.[7] Tissue therapy also exerted a considerable influence on the development of Chinese medicine, such as the innovation of new acupuncture (Taylor 2005: 27, 55-6). It also laid a partial theoretical foundation for the practice of injecting chicken blood into human bodies as a treatment (Chee 2018: 198-200). In particular, China embraced, with great enthusiasm, Dr. Filatov's technique of corneal transplant, on which the proposal of tissue therapy was based. The fact that he cured the eyes of Wu Yunduo, whom the CCP sent to Moscow in 1949, also heightened his authority in China.

On the other hand, the editing out of the worker's adoration of Chairman Mao was due to the secret report delivered by Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the CPSU from 1953 to 1964, during the 20th Congress of the CPSU on 25 February 1956. Khrushchev's fierce denunciation of Stalin resulted in a discussion about the cult of the individual throughout 1956 in China, and alerted the CCP against the worship of individual leaders (Leese 2011: 38-46; Shen 2013: 407-8, 413). The Mao cult, which can be traced back to the late 1930s and early 1940s, was correspondingly circumvented (Chen 1965: 211-12; Schram 1966: 233; He 2005). During the Eighth Party Congress held in September 1956, neither Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇 nor Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 referred to "Mao Zedong Thought" in their political reports, and other delegates also avoided the term in their speeches (Shen 2013: 408). As a result of this Congress, "Mao Zedong Thought" was deleted from the Constitution and the Party Rules (Schurmann 1968: 122-3; Leese 2011: 44-5; Shen 2013: 408). Considering that the second edition of *Bright Skies* was published in November 1956, Cao Yu was more than likely aware of Khrushchev's secret report and its reverberations in China, leading to his revision regarding the worker's admiration.

This change, together with the circumvention of the Mao cult, was made possible because the initial responses of the CCP leadership, particularly Mao's, to Khrushchev's political report "were far less negative than we had assumed" (Li 2012: 24). However, with the deteriorating socialist unity between China and the Soviet Union from the late 1950s, Mao began to attack the "revisionism" of Khrushchev and the Soviet Union in a series of political and ideological debates. Mao also became vigilant against

6. "推廣組織療法" (*Tuiguang zuzhi liaofa*, To Promote Tissue Therapy), *Renmin ribao* (人民日報), 17 May 1951.
7. Ge Shaolong 戈紹龍, "組織療法的發展" (*Zuzhi liaofa de fazhan*, The Development of Tissue Therapy), *Renmin ribao* (人民日報), 18 May 1951.

the emergence of revisionism within China, and when he believed that revisionism was "in fact an imminent danger to China's political life," he decided to deal with it through a radical movement later known as "The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (Li 2012: 130). He identified his successor Liu Shaoqi as the source of China's revisionism and criticised Liu as "China's Khrushchev."

The Sino-Soviet split and the effort to counter revisionism within China influenced literary and cinematic representations of disability in two significant ways. On the one hand, Chinese doctors no longer relied on Soviet medical resources to cure patients.[8] Instead, literature and film began to place a high value on Chinese healing methods such as acupuncture. On the other hand, disabled characters' inability to receive proper treatment was always blamed on Liu Shaoqi's anti-revolutionary and revisionist medical guideline. Meanwhile, Mao' own change of attitude toward the cult of personality in 1958 and renewed support from Lin Biao 林彪 in the early 1960s restored the Mao cult, which reached its heyday during the Cultural Revolution. These changes overwhelmingly regulated relevant literary and cinematic content during the Cultural Revolution.

Figure 4. Cover of *The Journey* (*Zhengtu* 征途 , 1973) by Guo Xianhong 郭先紅 .
Credit: Scan provided by the author.

For instance, as one of the earliest new novels published after 1972, *The Journey* (*Zhengtu* 征途, 1973) tells the stories of rusticated youths (*zhiqing* 知青) in Heilongjiang Province. In this novel, Grandpa Guan 關爺爺's eyes became blind because of a class enemy's conspiracy. But thanks to the barefoot doctor Zhong Fenghua 鍾風華, his eyes recover after several months of acupuncture treatment. Now, "the old man is able to see again the picture of the revered Chairman Mao in the frame and also see Zhong Fenghua" (Guo 1973: 717). Instead of first looking for the one who cured him and who is standing next to him, Grandpa Guan's attention is attracted to Chairman Mao, revealing the continued influence of the Mao cult on literary representation.

In addition to blindness, "deaf-muteness" was another frequently mentioned disability in similar depictions.[9] Like eyesight recovery in the early 1950s, the increasingly frequent appearance of "deaf-mutes" was also related to a medical achievement in the late 1960s. From 1968 to 1969, one of the few media still available to the public, *People's Daily*, published a series of articles describing how the Mao Zedong Thought Medical Team of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Unit 3016 cured "deaf-mutes" at the Liaoyuan special school.[10] According to these reports, in addition to linking disability to the old society, capitalist medical "authorities" and "experts" were also blamed for the failure of relieving the pain of the disabled students because they claimed that "deaf-mutes" were "incurable" in accordance with Liu Shaoqi's anti-revolutionary medical guideline. Inspired by Mao Zedong Thought, the medical team led by Zhao Puyu 趙普羽 developed a new way to cure "deaf-mutes" through acupuncture: there was an acupuncture point called *yamen* (啞門, literally mute-gate point) that was essential to restoring the hearing and speaking faculties, but it was labelled as a "restricted point" (*jinqu* 禁區) in old acupuncture books because inserting the needle too deep at this point would be lethal. Considering that failing to insert the needle to the proper depth would reduce the effect of the treatment, and in order to defeat those capitalist authorities and experts who "only learned knowledge from books and followed foreigners' theories," Dr. Zhao experimented on his own body and successfully inserted the needle more than two *cun* (寸) deep, which was impossible according to traditional experience. By adopting this method, 149 students out of 168 in the "deaf-mute" school were cured and could shout, "Long Live Chairman Mao!" Some of them could promote and praise Mao Zedong Thought by singing *The East is Red* (*Dongfang hong* 東方紅), a song that replaced the PRC's official anthem during the Cultural Revolution. The medical group further "examined more than ten thousand patients from 29 other provinces, cities, and autonomous regions, and the recovery rate was 80%."

News of this medical achievement was widely circulated not only through *People's Daily* but also through other media such as the short documentary film *A Song of Triumph for Chairman Mao's Proletarian Line on Public Health* (*Mao zhuxi wuchan jieji weisheng luxian de shengli kaige*, 毛主席無產階級

8. The 1962 edition of *Everything for the Party* was one of the few places in the realm of cultural production where Soviet medical skills were still preserved. However, Wu's medical experience in the Soviet Union, which had been introduced as a chapter-length story in previous versions, was considerably edited and shortened to only one paragraph with five lines.
9. Because of its negative implications, I will use "deaf-muteness" or "deaf-mute" in quotation marks as a direct translation of the Chinese term *longya* 聾啞, referring to people with hearing and speech impairments.
10. Shi Liu 石流, and Si Qi 思齊, "靠毛澤東思想打開了聾啞'禁區' – 三0一六部隊衛生科毛澤東思想醫療宣傳隊在遼源聾啞學校治療聾啞病的事跡" (*Kao Mao Zedong sixiang dakai le longya "jinqu": sanlingyiliu budui weisheng ke Mao Zedong sixiang yiliao xuanchuan dui zai Liaoyuan longya xuexiao zhiliao longya bing de shiji*, Relying on Mao Zedong Thought to Open Up the "Restricted Point" for the Deaf and Mute: The Deeds of the Mao Zedong Thought Medical Propaganda Team of the Department of Health of the 3016 Unit in the Treatment of Deaf and Mute Disease), *Renmin ribao* (人民日報), 30 October 1968; Zhao Puyu 趙普羽, "無綫忠于毛主席就能創造人間奇迹" (*Wuxian zhongyu Mao zhuxi jiu neng chuangzao renjian qiji*, One Can Create a Miracle as Long as One is Boundlessly Loyal to Chairman Mao), *Renmin ribao* (人民日報), 19 May 1969; Zhao Puyu 趙普羽, "靠毛澤東思想打開聾啞'禁區'" (*Kao Mao Zedong sixiang dakai longya "jinqu,"* Mao Zedong Thought Breaks the "Restricted Point" of Deaf-mute), *Renmin ribao* (人民日報), 24 October 1969.

衛生路綫的勝利凱歌, 1969).[11] Literary and cinematic creation was also an important channel for relaying this miraculous recovery. Therefore, the "deaf-mute" youth Gao Fang 高放 in *The Journey* is excited about his recovery through the new acupuncture method, and in a letter to his friend, he writes "after I can speak, I will shout 'Long live Chairman Mao!' in front of you" (Guo 1973: 591).

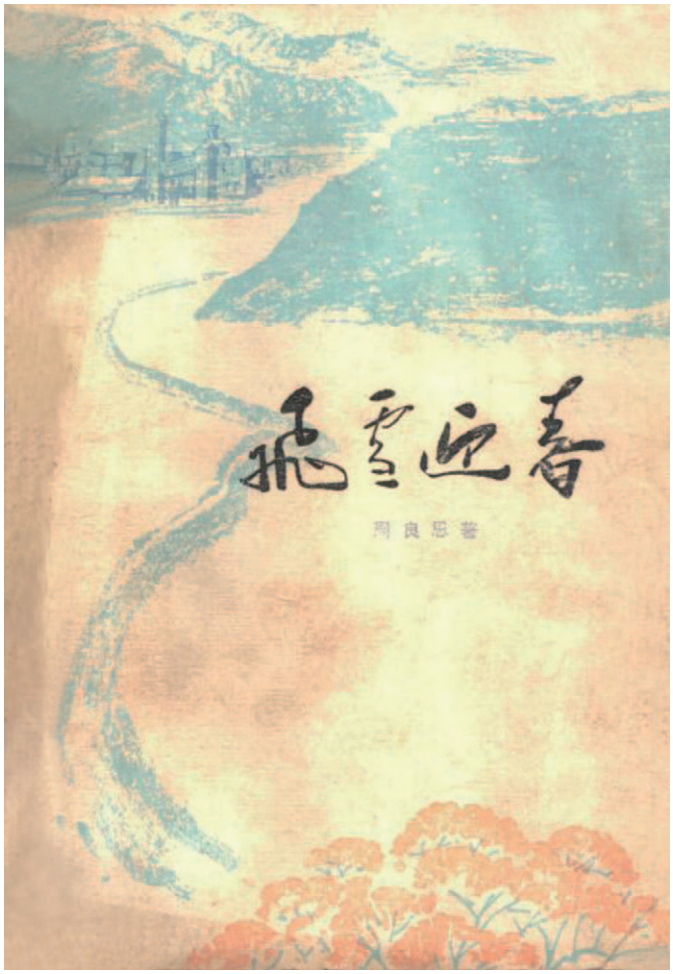

Figure 5. Cover of *Welcome Spring in Snowy Days* (*Feixue yingchun* 飛雪迎春 , 1975, 2nd edition) by Zhou Liangsi 周良思 . Credit: Scan provided by the author.

The appropriation of the "deaf-mute" old man in the first volume of the novel *Welcome Spring in Snowy Days* (*Feixue yingchun* 飛雪迎春, 1972) is more creative and central to the plot. The illiterate old man happens to learn of a class enemy conspiracy to destroy the mines, and is therefore poisoned, losing his hearing and speaking abilities. Although this old man's story was never completed, it is implied that he will be cured through acupuncture and that his recovery is essential to exposing the conspiracy. The originally-planned second volume was never published; instead, in the postscript of the second edition published in 1975, the author Zhou Liangsi 周良思 explained that "after hearing opinions from workers, farmers, soldiers as well as amateur writers (...) we decided to change the plot, some clues, and some characters, and (...) combined the originally-planned two volumes into the current one volume" (1975: 693). Unfortunately, the "deaf-mute" old man, together with the relevant plot, was deleted, but the descriptions in the original volume leave traces revealing how the medical achievement affected the literary writing.

The miraculous healing of impairments, particularly those related to the eyes, might remind one of the early practices by Western medical missionaries in late-Qing China, who "concentrated on surgery and treatment of the eye disease of trachoma (...) as their primary medical services" (Bu 2017: 34). Ari Larissa Heinrich explains that this was because missionaries "aimed to use medicine as a vehicle for spreading the gospel," and eye surgery could effectively "provide ocular evidence of their medical (and spiritual) superiority to a doubtful and often illiterate Chinese clientele" (2008: 40-1). Ironically, whereas missionaries early on had attempted to spread the gospel and demonstrate the power of God through Western medical skills, Chairman Mao in the socialist period was celebrated in a similar way but through Chinese medical skills, which were able to cure what Western-style doctors could not. In addition to the association with Western missionary practices, similar healing stories, according to Emma Victoria Stone, might also be found in Chinese Daoist mythology (1998: 144). Missionaries' work and traditional Chinese religion were usually linked with imperialism and feudalism, and therefore criticised in socialist China; however, the socialist method of curing blindness made use of the religion-like practice of worshipping Mao as a god in the communist regime, which should have been atheist.

In summary, this section contextualises the socialist representation of blindness and "deaf-muteness." In most cases, CCP-sponsored medical practices – Soviet or Chinese – played a key role in the restoration of vision and hearing. Meanwhile, the successful recovery made Chairman Mao the subject of the patient's gratitude and respect. In addition, Sino-Soviet relations not only decided what medical skills should be counted upon to cure patients, but also temporarily constrained the Mao cult. As a result, without taking international relations into consideration, one cannot fully explain some changes in literary and cinematic portrayals of disabilities.

Conclusion

Although narratives of non-disabled heroes were dominant during the socialist period, the CCP also included disabled characters in mainly two ways to serve different political and ideological agendas. The propaganda machine distinguished among different types of disabilities and appropriated them accordingly. Cultural practitioners depicted those with apparent bodily losses as inspirational models who deserved happy marriages because of their sacrifice and whose spirit of overcoming physical limitations should be valued. Meanwhile, writers and filmmakers developed a separate way of representing some carefully selected disabilities, such as blindness and "deaf-muteness," that had a chance of being cured so that patients could become completely non-disabled and prove that Chinese socialism was superior to Western capitalism, and later to Soviet socialism.

Although in the 1950s, disabled veterans were the main heroes in those inspirational stories, and they sometimes appeared in miraculous recovery narratives as patients suffering from visual, hearing, or speech impairments, the appearance of veterans with serious bodily impairments, at least in literary and cinematic scenarios, became limited during the Cultural Revolution. Correspondingly, compared with miraculous recovery narratives that the communist authorities had favourably circulated through various media, the first paradigm was not as popular as it used to be. This phenomenon revealed some political and aesthetic changes. From

11. This short film, which is discussed in Sarah Dauncey's article (2007: 489), introduces the miraculous cure of deaf-mutes in another school by another unit; however, the fundamental narrative is no different from that in *Renmin ribao*.

February 1966, high-ranking regulators such as Jiang Qing gradually set up new rules to monitor cultural production and prescribed that artists should avoid depicting the cruelty and terror of revolutionary wars.[12] Many works, such as *The Spring of Battle* (*Zhandou de qingchun* 戰鬥的青春, 1958), were severely criticised for failing to do so (Liu 2009: 17). While a disabled veteran's bodily loss was a glorious sign in the 1950s, it became a reminder of how devastating the war had been during the Cultural Revolution. To borrow Sarah Dauncey's term "the politics of looking good" (2007: 481), a veteran with visible disabilities did not look as good as a blind or "deaf-mute" patient who could recover in a way that did not leave them with any markers of disability.

This article mainly focuses on the representation of disabilities in socialist China, but it serves as a good starting point to advance the topic beyond the national border. For instance, how did the Soviet Union promote Dr. Filatov's medical achievements? Did it contribute to the cult of Stalin? Meanwhile, recent scholarship on the writing of Soviet Red Army female veterans also allows us to wonder how we could benefit from a comparison between similar representations of the two communist regimes in terms of gender and sexuality (Baker 2020: 77). Attempts to answer these questions will lead to a better evaluation of the socialist cultural production related to disabilities from a transnational perspective.

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12. See "林彪同志委托江青同志召開的部隊文藝工作座談會紀要" (*Lin Biao tongzhi weituo Jiang Qing tongzhi zhaokai de budui wenyi gongzuo zuotanhui jiyao*, Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing).

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