Genealogies of Literary Form in Contemporary China
Naples 22-23 June 2022

Sala Conferenze Palazzo Corigliano
Dipartimento Asia Africa Mediterraneo
Università Orientale di Napoli

June 22nd, Wednesday, 11:00 – 13:00 (panel chair: Paolo Magagnin)

1) Paola Iovene (University of Chicago), "Reading Beyond Books: Airing Lu Yao"

2) Marco Fumian (Oriental University, Naples), "Methods of Distancing and the Limits of Realism in Contemporary China"

3) Nicoletta Pesaro (Ca' Foscari University, Venice), "From the Avantgarde to the Unnatural Narrative: Can Xue's Fictional World and its Political Meaning"

June 22nd, Wednesday, 15:00 – 17:00 (panel chair: Lena Henningsen)

1) Shuyu Kong (Simon Fraser University), "Female Chastity Soup 女贞汤: Literary Collage and the Crisis of Representation"

2) Wendy Larson (University of Oregon), "Not Italian Opera: Mo Yan's *Sandalwood Death* and the Scourge of Western Literary Models"

3) Paolo Magagnin (Ca' Foscari University, Venice), "Chinese Stories for Global Young Readers: a Look at the Cao Wenxuan Phenomenon"

June 23nd, Thursday, 10:00 – 12:30 (panel chair: Wendy Larson)

1) Pamela Hunt (University of Oxford), "A Wider and Stranger Space": Xue Yiwei's World-Shaped Literature"

2) Astrid Møller-Olsen (Lund University and University of Stavanger), "Fragments of Hong Kong: Collage, Archive, Dictionary"

3) Jiwei Xiao (Fairfield University), "The Talk of the Town: Chitchats in *Xijie xiaoshuo* and Cinema"

4) Lena Henningsen (University of Freiburg) "Transformations of a Literary Giant: The Re-Writing of Lu Xun and his Works in Chinese *Lianhuanhua* Comics"

June 23nd, Thursday, 14:30 – 16:30 (panel chair: Paola Iovene)

1) Daria Berg (University of St. Gallen) and Giorgio Strafella (Palackí University, Olomouc), "Chinese Dreams and Nightmares: The Genealogy of Utopia and Anti-Utopia in China's Mediasphere"

2) Martina Codeluppi (University of Insubria, Como), "What about Climate Change? The Underdeveloped Branch of Chinese Cli-Fi"

3) Mingwei Song (Wellesley College), "New Wonders of a Nonbinary Universe: Genders of Chinese Science Fiction"

Chinese Dreams and Nightmares: The Genealogy of Utopia and Anti-Utopia in China's Mediasphere

Daria Berg (University of St. Gallen) and Giorgio Strafella (Palackí University, Olomouc)

The literary depiction of utopia has a long tradition in China, going back as far as pre-imperial times (before 221 BC). Utopia is a neologism based on Thomas More's treatise of the ideal state entitled *Utopia* (1516). Punning on the Greek words for "good place" (*eu topos*) and "nowhere place" (*ou topos*), utopia connotes the ideal place that exists nowhere. Utopianism also exists in the indigenous Chinese traditions. The Chinese utopia is an ideal place that draws on the ancient Confucian and Daoist concepts, such as the Great Sharing (*datong*) in the *Liji* (*The Book of Rites*), the realm of Supreme Harmony (*taiping*) first depicted in the *Zhuangzi* (*The Book of Zhuangzi*), and the legendary happy land of Huaxu in the *Liezi* (*The Book of Liezi*). Its opposite, anti-utopia, appears in the ancient myth of the Great Flood as a warning to society in the *Shangshu* (*The Book of History*). Since Tao Yuanming's *Taohua yuan ji* (*Record of the Peach Blossom Spring*) from the fifth century, literary utopias and anti-utopias have enjoyed popularity throughout the centuries, often in times of political upheaval such as the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasty in the seventeenth century. This paper investigates the development of utopia and anti-utopia in contemporary China's mediasphere, including works of literature and visual arts in the traditional and digital media by writers and artists such as the Utopian Team, Cao Fei, Jiang Zhi, and Chen Qiufan. It investigates how such works express nostalgia for the lost paradise of the past and apocalyptic satire on present conditions. It places the works into their socio-political context of Xi Jinping's utopia of the China Dream. Visions of utopia and anti-utopia provide insight into the dreams and nightmares of Chinese citizens, shedding light on the vernacular culture as opposed to the official culture of China.

What about Climate Change? The Underdeveloped Branch of Chinese Cli-Fi

Martina Codeluppi (University of Insubria)

In the last years, the impact of climate change on humanity has increasingly attracted global attention, reaching its peak with Greta Thunberg's movement "Fridays for Future". During this time, we have also witnessed a rise in the literary production and criticism concerning climate change that evolved into a specific form, starting from the recognition in 2013 of the literary term "Cli-Fi" as designating a subgenre of science fiction dealing with environmental issues and their impact on human society. The increase in studies on this particular "genre" is noticeable also in China, yet the majority of such research concentrates mostly on foreign literature. One of the reasons of this lack of studies can be found in the limited amount of primary sources. Why is China falling behind in the production of Cli-Fi? This paper aims to investigate the production of literature on climate change in China, exploring its connections with the political context in which it emerged. How do the Chinese government's vision of an *ecological civilization* and, more recently, its guidelines for the development of science fiction impact the literary form that narrate climate change in China, molding the image of China vis-à-vis the fictional representation of the ecological crisis? How does the scarce amount of literary works that can be considered Cli-Fi portray the human response to it? I will tackle these questions by analyzing a selection of contemporary literary works dealing with environmental issues, pointing out which sides of the problem they represent and the solutions they propose, as well as the modalities through which they are pursued.

"Methods of Distancing" and the "Limits" of Realism in Contemporary China

Marco Fumian (Oriental University of Naples)

This presentation aims to (re-)explore the ways in which the main Chinese literary movements of the Post-Mao Era reconstructed the uneasy relationship between reality and form carving up some acceptable spaces of representation by means of a strategic work of formal restructuring.

In particular, it focuses on how Chinese literary critics and writers set out to work "around" the problem of realism, so as to challenge the monopoly over the historical and social truth administered through this literary mode by the authorities.

As socialist realism, with its positive focus on the alignment between man and history, and critical realism, with its negative tendency to unmask social and historical abuse, were both for opposite reasons two spaces too inconvenient to occupy, in the course of the Post-Mao Era many critics and writers joined hands to develop a dominant anti-realist poetics whose purpose was probably much less aesthetic than ideological (as it was claimed) in its attempt to conjure up some new and critical ways to re-imagine literature's engagement with the world.

Thus I will try to lay out a very brief genealogical reconstruction of the anti-realist movements by which critics and writers managed to progressively distance Chinese literature from the normative terrain of realism, describing them as a series of de-territorializations that progressively dissolved the core representational and epistemological principles of realism. These include the appropriation of modernist obscurity as a method to allegorize the present, the root-searching mythicization of culture as a way to create de-historicized representations of reality, the avant-garde emphasis on textual constructedness to create an epistemology of uncertainty, and, finally, the "new realist" and "individualizing" trends of the early Nineties as procedures to blur the social totalities surrounding individual life in the present.

My claim is that these movements in the end served the purpose of making available a variety of thematic and formal devices that could be selectively incorporated, when Chinese literature (partially) returned to realism since the Nineties after the experimentalist phase of the previous decade, to treat the otherwise intractable ideological problems of reality by means of several modes of "distancing". To analyze the most typical of these "methods of distancing" will be one of my tasks.

Transformations of a Literary Giant:
The Re-Writing of Lu Xun and his Works in Chinese *lianhuanhua* Comics

Lena Henningsen (University of Freiburg)

To this day, the status of Lu Xun and his works remains undisputed, even though (or maybe because) interpretations of his life and of his works changed significantly over time, turning him from modernist writer to revolutionary fighter. In my presentation, I will set off from these transformations and inquire into Chinese *lianhuanhua* adaptations of Lu Xun's biography and his works, published during the era of High Maoism, during the early post-Mao years and far beyond, attesting to the continued popularity (or at least assumed popularity) of the author and his works and to the power that his works continue to exert on the adaptors of his works. In tracing characteristics of these works, including changes in plot and language, visual representation and tropes, text-image relation etc., I aim at delineating the changes in the perception of Lu Xun and his works over time. In addition, I argue that the transformation of Lu Xun and his works that takes place in this process of transmediation illustrate the power of *lianhuanhua* which offered both propagandists and artists possibilities to reinterpret and rewrite the works (and life story) of Lu Xun. This transmediation is a transFORMation in a literal sense: the works appear in different form, the real-life person is turned into a sign in the comics. The adaptations thus not only point to the continued importance of the author and his works. They also invite us to rethink the importance of form in the reception of the

author: What does a reader mean when referring to the "Diary of a Madman"? The famous short story published in 1918 – or a Mao-era comic version of it, or a post-Mao reinterpretation of the text? What is the name "Lu Xun" refering to? The authorial voice that speaks to us through the form of the essays, poems and short stories authored by Zhuo Shuren or the vivid portrayal of the revolutionary author as represented in the *lianhuanhua*. However, despite what may be seen as the unifying force of the form, I will argue against the propagandistic power of *lianhuanhua* and in favor of their artistic powers: *Lianhuanhua* were seen by the party as a tool to combat illiteracy and to propagate its political messages. At first glance this seems to work: the *lianhuanhua* biographies further the image of Lu Xun as a fighter for the revolution; the literary adaptations make them available to a broad readership. However, as a medium combining concise text with (often) straightforward and expressive images, the texts are by no means unified. Rather, they provide readers with pluralistic images of Lu Xun and his works – they fracture the seemingly solid image of the literary giant into different incarnations of the author and his texts, and they do so by help of the means afforded to them by the form of the comic.

"A Wider and Stranger Space": Xue Yiwei's world-shaped literature

Pamela Hunt (University of Oxford)

This paper considers the work of Xue Yiwei (薛忆沩 born 1964)**.** Whether it is through reference to his emigration to Canada, or the translation of his works into English, or his repeated discussion of Western authors in his writing, most critics have highlighted Xue's global outlook. However, to date, there has been little discussion of the ways in which his engagement with the global has shaped Xue's writing.

This paper takes as its starting point a statement that appears in the opening to Xue's 2017 novel *Dr Bethune's Children*: that the narrator wishes to "transcend the boundaries of language" and "discover a wider and stranger space for literature". I consider the topography of this "wider and stranger space": what are its contours? Where can we locate this space in relation to the concept of the world and World Literature? Where does the idea of the nation belong within this space? How, finally, does this preoccupation with a "wider and stranger space" shape not only the content, but the very form of his works?

Drawing in particular on Walkowitz's concept of the "born translated" and "world shaped" novel, I trace the ways that Xue Yiwei's works reflect a world that is built out of circulations, border-crossing and multilingualism; and how we might think of his work not as tied to a nation but instead as product and part of a global literary field. At the same time, I point to those spaces where the "nation", especially "China" remain, arguing that it lingers in tenacious ideas about the meaning of literature and in the after-effects of traumatic historical events.

Reading Beyond Books: Airing Lu Yao

Paola Iovene (University of Chicago)

Lu Yao's three-volume *Ordinary World* (*Pingfande shijie*, 1986-88) became one of the most popular novels of the 1990s, and its fame has only grown since it was televised. Barely mentioned in literary histories published before 2000, academic debate on Lu Yao's work has also grown exponentially in the last two decades, mostly revolving around concepts of realism (*xianshizhuyi*), resonance (*gongming*), and popularity (*tongsuxing*). Today, Lu Yao is no longer just a Shaanxi-born novelist who was awarded the 1991 Mao Dun Literary Prize and prematurely died a year later, at the age of 42. Rather, he epitomizes the figure of the common readers' writer whose aesthetics are staunchly antithetical to those of academic elites. Lu Yao's name conjures up a notion of literary writing understood as a form of physically consuming, life-depleting labor, calling for a mode of reading

based on the complete identification between main characters, readers, and author. He is perceived as a model of endurance in the face of adversities, and as the personification of the rural other rejected by urbanites. While no single factor alone can account for the multifaceted development of Lu Yao's persona, the production of the author as a model of writing, reading, and living might not have been possible without the radio, particularly the program Radio Fiction Series, which broadcast *Ordinary World* at least three times. It would be an overstatement to say that the radio created the author. Nonetheless, the radio narrator Li Yemo profoundly influenced *Ordinary World*'s reception, bringing Lu Yao's work to many more readers than books alone would have reached, to the point that Li's voice came to be perceived as that of Lu Yao himself. How exactly did this happen is the main question addressed by this paper. The "talking books" broadcast by Radio Fiction Series were an important component of socialist Chinese literary culture, facilitating an engagement with literature that differed both from academic criticism and from leisure reading in print and other visual media. The series played a considerable role in the shaping of mainstream values and literary taste well into the late 1990s, offering a different angle from which to reconsider the enduring appeal of realist modes of writing.

Female Chastity Soup 女贞汤: Literary Collage and the Crisis of Representation

Shuyu Kong (Simon Fraser University)

As one of the most vocal and persistent Chinese Avant-Garde writers from the 1980s, Liu Suola's literary experiments found their most radical expression in the novel *Female Chastity Soup* 女贞汤, which first appeared in 2000 with the title *Little Stories of the Great Ji Family* (Italian translation: *La piccola storia della famiglia Ji*; French translation: *La grande île des tortues-cochons*, 2006). A direct response to revolutionary historical novel and the political persecution of her parents as Chinese Communist officials/writers, 女贞汤 casts an irreverent and suspicious eye on literature's attempt in representing history. Presented as a historiography of Big Island and the legendary Ji family, the whole novel is nevertheless structured as a playful literary collage where history is replaced by a multi-voiced text.

In this presentation I will focus on discuss how collage and allusion are used to juxtapose many different styles or modes in representing the past and experience, constantly reminding the reader of the constructedness of all narrative. I argue that beneath Liu's post-modern playfulness lies a serious literary discourse that not only critiques the revolutionary historical novel but also questions the whole realist mimetic tradition of modern Chinese literature.

Not Italian Opera: Mo Yan's *Sandalwood Death* and the Scourge of Western Literary Models

Wendy Larson (University of Oregon)

In China, heated discussion of how to develop a modern culture with Chinese characteristics has spanned the 20th century and shows no sign of disappearing in the 21st. Published in 2001, *Sandalwood Death* (Xiangtan xing 檀香刑) is one compelling example of a novel that tries to Sinify modern fiction. This goal is directly stated by the novel's author and Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan 莫言, who writes in an Afterword that *Sandalwood Death* is unlikely to be a favorite of Western readers, just as Maoqiang 猫腔 (Cat tunes; originally 茂腔), which is central to the novel in many ways, cannot be performed alongside Italian opera. Mo Yan also relates how he rewrote some of the best parts of the novel to move them away from magic realism, thus creating a purer Chinese style. Invoking local native performance and sensibility, *Sandalwood Death* is a deliberate challenge to the supremacy of the modern Western novel, in both formal and thematic elements. The dichotomy of Chinese/Western—subsumed under the dueling sounds of the German-sponsored railroad and

Maoqiang opera—forces itself into every cranny of the writing. In my presentation, I use textual analysis to tease out the way this contradiction unfolds; through investigating critical response, I argue that Mo Yan's self-styled "step backward" not only fails to produce a novel that is unreadable for Westerners—and appreciated only "by those who have an affinity for the common man"—but in fact does the opposite. And finally, I contend that author has assembled a deconstructionist knowledge within the novel, recognizing the failure of his goals. However, when set within a life-long effort to produce authentic deeply nativist modern literature, *Sandalwood Death* is clearly one of the author's most powerful pieces of writing.

Chinese Stories for Global Young Readers: a Look at the Cao Wenxuan Phenomenon

Paolo Magagnin (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

My contribution aims to provide an overview of the "Cao Wenxuan phenomenon" and its implications for the building of a "China narrative". First, I will attempt to pinpoint the ideological and intellectual background, as well as the nature of China's editorial policies, which drove the international promotion of the works of the celebrated Chinese author of children's and young adult literature. To do so, I will outline the dynamics of artistic and cultural promotion that led Cao to be identified as the "spokesman" of national children's literature and the ideal candidate for export. I will also briefly touch upon the publishing mechanisms that led to the translation and publication of some of his works, as well as their consecration by the Andersen Prize awarded to Cao in 2016. Secondly - and more importantly -, in order to identify the characteristics and relevance of Cao's works against the background of China's self-representation strategies addressed to a global audience, I will focus on the image(s) of China that his translated works conjure with regard to the Chinese history, culture, society, and value systems (e.g. views of gender roles, family relationships, institutional education, individual character development). I will specifically investigate the overt and covert ideological implications of the dissemination of Cao's works in translation and, ultimately, I will seek to assess in which ways and to which extent the national image that Cao's works convey is embedded in the discourse of self-narration promoted by the Chinese officialdom.

Fragments of Hong Kong: Collage, Archive, Dictionary

Astrid Møller-Olsen, Lund University and University of Stavanger

Ackbar Abbas has famously described Hong Kong as a space of transit, creating "an urban landscape that mutates right under our noses [and] making the question of spatial identity particularly problematic."[1] As recent protest movements testify, this ephemeral spatiality seems to foster, rather than preclude, a plethora of identity-formation projects. Indeed, as Wayne C. F. Yeung notes, contemporary Hong Kong writers "stripped of any illusion of primordial identity, […] cannot avoid addressing the ongoing, open-ended negotiation of collective identity."[2]
In this paper, I trace a tendency towards fragmented formats in contemporary literary works from Hong Kong and relate it to ongoing identity politics in the city. Through narrative analyses of Sai Sai's 西西 "Strange Tales from a Floating City 浮城誌異" (1986), Dung, Kai-cheung's 董啟章 Atlas 地圖集 (1997), and Hon Lai Chu 韓麗珠 and Dorothy Tse's 謝曉虹 A Dictionary of Two Cities I - II 雙城辭典 I-II (2012), I arrive at a typology of fragmented formats that includes the collage, the

[1] Abbas, Ackbar. *Hong Kong: Culture and Politics of Disappearance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997: 64.
[2] Yeung, Wayne C. F. "Poetics of the People: The Politics of Debating Local Identity in Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and its Literature (2014-16)" *Modern Asian Studies* 55 (6), 2021: 1880.

archive, and the encyclopedia, and which represent different but related strategies for literary experimentation with polyphonic, anti-essentialist approaches to Hong Kong identities.

From the Avantgarde to the Unnatural Narrative: Can Xue's Fictional World and its Political Meaning

Nicoletta Pesaro (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

In my paper I will analyse Can Xue's coherent, albeit somewhat marginalised, literary project, which since the 1980s deliberately eschewed the generally accepted paradigm of realism, by convincingly exploring the possibilities of the unreal and pushing it to its limits.

Can Xue's fiction in the first phase – during the so-called high culture fever period – participated in the avantgarde movement by means of a revolutionary use of modernist and postmodernist techniques, including hallucinatory and fantastic landscapes, disturbed and disturbing narrators, entirely atemporal and atopic storyworlds as well as paranoid explorations of the clash between self and society. Also in the last decades, ignoring the "neo-realistic" turn which occurred in Chinese literature at the beginning of the 1990s, she kept on exploring the infinite repertoire of "unnatural narrative". Carrying on her research on modern and postmodern narrative from the Western tradition, she deeply delved into Kafka, Borges and Calvino's literary universes, but she has been also drawing from the ancient tradition of spirits and lyrical imagination of her own homeland.

The Cultural revolution and the tense political events of China's recent past are disguised and subtly metaphorised behind the absurd and violent plots and the uneasy characters of Can Xue's early works. In her recent novels and short stories, she has erased even the slightest trace of a historical background, just leaving some feeble hints of a geo-social milieu, building on her concept of "literature of the soul": her style is a fusion of subjective and objective, where human and magic coexist coherently and become the channel to convey a philosophical reflection on human life, emotions and relationships. However, hers is not an unpolitical or apolitical stand. Interestingly enough, as other Chinese writers, her vision of literature is also a negotiation between Western influence and the quest for a Chinese space in the "world republic of letters". In this paper, building also on Can Xue's critical essays (*pinglun*), I wish to analyse and give some meaning to her literary politics in the context of Chinese and Sinophone literature.

New Wonders of a Nonbinary Universe: Genders of Chinese Science Fiction

Mingwei Song (Wellesley College)

Does science fiction have gender? As genre fiction, at least, it is marked with a series of binary categories—such as "Golden Age" vs. "New Wave" in SF history, "hard SF" vs. "soft SF" as subgenres; as well as, in other words, technological SF vs. social SF, SF surnamed "science" vs. SF surnamed "humanities…" and so on and so forth. Of these binaries, the former side is usually seen as masculine characteristics by SF fans. In turn, it is a so-called masculine SF that is usually dominant in SF discursive spaces.

But after the success of Liu Cixin's Three Body Novels, I have discovered the newest generation of women and nonbinary authors, who are decades younger than Liu Cixin. Their visions of the "Möbius" time-space without beginning or end and their identifications with "chimera" as the monstrous self-other combination create new breakthroughs for the new wave Chinese science fiction's posthuman turn that began with Liu Cixin, Chen Qiufan, and Han Song, but these new writers are those who truly make kinship in a nonbinary posthuman universe, with more radical notions about sex, gender, class, cyborgian constructions, transspecies lives, symbiosis and sympoiesis. This younger generation comprises Tang Fei 糖匪 (b. 1983), Wang Kanyu 王侃瑜 (b. 1990), Peng Simeng 彭思萌 (b. 1990),

Shuangchimu 双翅目 (b. 1987), Gu Shi 顾适 (b. 1985), Mu Ming 慕明 (b. 1988), Duan Ziqi 段子期 (b. 1992), Wang Nuonuo 王诺诺 (b. 1991), and Liao Shubo 廖舒波 (b. 1988).

This paper tries to redefine science fiction from a nonbinary point of view and proposes to read Chinese science fiction as fundamentally a break with the old-fashioned dualist thinking and mimetic realism. I will not only analyze the new writings by these women and nonbinary authors, but also attempt to reread the so-called "masculine SF," even *The Three-Body Problem*, from a nonbinary perspective. This paper identifies the female temporality (deep time) and a nonbinary posthuman structure in Liu Cixin's trilogy. What I will do in this paper is an experiment to examine science fiction as a posthuman nonbinary genre.

In a nutshell, I describe the new wave as an audacious experiment with novelty, which entangles quantum poetics with a baroque infinity. The new wave rises with a curiosity about the unknown, uncertain, and unpredictable, a gesture of transgression across borders between the familiar and nonexistent, an act of dreaming about the alternative and beyond. I contend that at its most radical, the new wave has been thriving on an avant-garde cultural spirit that calls into question commonly accepted ideas and observed rules regarding morals, ideologies, and knowledge about the self and the world, the human and the universe. It generates new modes of literary discourse that estrange what we take for granted in the familiar, open our eyes to insurgent knowledge and subversive images, and evoke an array of (un)real or virtual sensations ranging from chthonic to sublime, from uncanny to spectacular, inebriate to exuberant, transcendental to apocalyptical, human to posthuman, and so on. The harbinger of a larger epistemological shift, the new wave breaks apart the binary correspondence between reality and representation. When looking both outward and inward, the new wave brings out unorthodox nonbinary forms such as cyborg, chimera, heterotopia, singularity, hyper-dimensionality, multiverse, sympoiesis, and metaverse, which transgress the borderline between reality and representation, dismantle exclusive identities and dichotomies across categories such as gender, class, race, hierarchy, and ideology, recasting the human self in or as the posthuman other—so that "I" can have or be an invisible "monster" residing in a nonbinary universe that shines with a Neo-Baroque[3] splendor, which illuminates infinite possibilities and may never settle in a *certain* reality.

The Talk of the Town: Chitchats in *Xijie xiaoshuo* and Cinema

Jiwei Xiao (Fairfield University)

"*Xijie xiaoshuo*," or "the novel of details" in Chinese, is a loose term to refer to any detail-rich narrative fiction. In my book, *Telling Details: Chinese Fiction, World Literature*, I use this familiar but fuzzy term to categorize a strain of narratives in which details exceed their conventional supporting roles, so much so that they become the drivers of the novel, decentering the plot and forming the core interest of the text. They are "telling" when they reveal the dynamic of seeing and hearing, the mind that vibrates with the world, and the imperative to recognize the minute, the humble, and the hidden in a most modern way. Understanding this detail-centric form, I argue, sheds light on a vital dimension of the Chinese realist novel in representing the concreteness and opacities in feelings, memories, and other intangible experiences.

In this presentation, I hope to further explore the concreteness and opacities of the open form of *xijie xiaoshuo* in its social-ethical dimension. It is a phenomenon that in a typical *xijie xiaoshuo*, individualities of a character are often NOT shown through singular actions and self-contemplations, but rather slowly revealed through interpersonal and social interactions. Sometimes the subject is even absent in the scene or only obliquely referenced in other people's "chitchats" (*xianhua*), which are also inevitably tainted with the speakers' own personal biases and problems. In terms of function, these conversations are not really "idle talks"; they shift and complicate a reader's understanding of

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[3] I have borrowed the concept of "Neo-Baroque" from Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of Times*, with additional philosophical connotations drawn from Gilles Deleuze's two books *Foucault* and *The Fold*.

the characters, their social milieu, and the story itself. An intricate use of these non-dramatic everyday scenes appeared early in Chinese *xijie xiaoshuo* and has been further developed in modern and contemporary times—as we see it in the works by Eileen Chang and Jia Pingwa. Intriguingly, the centrifugal, polysemic, dialogic form of *xianhua* resonates with the mise-en-scène in certain types of modern cinema, in which details thicken and coalesce: they show spatial simultaneity and perspectival multiplicity and mobility, while at the same time also bringing together the (invisible) flows of consciousness from different directions. In my presentation, I will use film clips and examples from *xijie xiaoshuo* to show how the chitchat form works across the two mediums and how it reveals the narrative as a "socially symbolic act" in different contexts.