

The Function of Repetition in Zhang Tianyi's Art

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ABSTRACT

One of the salient features of Zhang Tianyi's art is a series of paradigms of repetition in the narrative. Repetition can be viewed as a manifold effort to make a point or to create an effect, and it is also a device to regulate material and to generate meanings in a certain designated way. As a result, the intrinsic being will emerge. This article demonstrates how repetition can transform stereotypes by means of rhetorical subtleties of literary utterance so as to progressively generate or diffuse tensions in the text. It examines the play of repetition and signification by exploring the theoretical implications of essential linkages between seemingly separated or isolated parts in Zhang's narrative. Various roles and modes of repetition are identified such as effacement, replacement and so on. What is apparently ephemeral may be perpetuated and vice versa, which suggests the important role repetition plays in literature.

KEY WORDS

types of repetition
thematic repetition
language destroyed
fragments and moments

paradigms of repetition
identity and effacement
meaning and signification
narrative strategies



1. Repetition Defined

Repetition as a literary device is often consciously exercised for the purpose of creating rhetorical flourishes or gaining access to truth. Since truth is not always apparent and can be elusive, repetition makes it possible for the reader to observe a process of demonstration so that truth will emanate. It is common for the ineffability of truth to be left to a series of images in literature. The deepest truth emerges through recurrence, which in general works either obtrusively or imperceptibly to provide the reader with the necessary insights. For the sake of clarity and emphasis as well as to avoid misunderstanding, repetition or recurrence is perforce omnipresent; this is a matter of everyday experience. Notably, repetition is inextricably bound to realism. If something, however insignificant, recurs again and again, it is invested with a representational quality. It is no longer incidental through its suggestive force; it becomes a contributory factor in bringing about social or political change. Not all repetitions are empty rhetorical testimonials; some of them are solid actualities that may be part of a significant social current. It seems axiomatic to state that repetition must necessarily follow some prior existence, but if we can talk about reality in "its existential sense," as Edward Said remarks,¹ it may be deduced that repetition is about the reconstruction of reality.

1.1. Principal Types of Repetition

Given that repetition creates patterns of meaning and imagery in

literary works, it may be helpful to provide a summary of several major types of repetition. In literature repetition takes a multitude of forms and occurs at different levels. Some of the common repetitive elements can be summarized as follows:

Repetition as a literary device can occur within a) one text, and b) the oeuvre of a particular writer. And in this respect, some of the functions of repetition may fall within the following categories:

- 1) to unify a text or a group of texts (as in a collection of similar stories or trilogies)
- 2) to sustain certain themes and characters (involving identical repetition and repetition with a difference)
- 3) to weaken or practically efface certain words or phrases in order to replace them (involving identical repetition and repetition with a difference)
- 4) to produce difference with each repetition; there may be a reflection of the author's anxiety over influence (obvious borrowings), or of his creative or colonizing impulse (avoidance of, or minimizing absolute sameness)

- An author may repeat certain words, phrases, syntax, images and characterizations for rhetorical effects and other purposes within the same work.
- The earlier behaviour of characters can be repeated to indicate continuity or mere consistency in character development. There can be also imitation (repetition) of the earlier behaviour of characters by other characters within the same work.
- It is perfectly natural for writers to imitate earlier authors. It is fairly common to discern the relations between a genealogically paternal precursor and a filial latecomer. This close imitation is no doubt a most common form of repetition.

Some of these features and techniques will be examined together with several other aspects of repetition. Due to Zhang Tianyi's (張天翼) compelling and extensive deployment of repetition in his literary

works, I shall investigate the patterns of his art of repetition.

1.2. Intratextual Repetition

As already mentioned, repetition can occur within the same text. This is a common literary device. Often in Zhang Tianyi's writings, even an occasional repetition is of pivotal importance and emblematic of the underlying theme of the story. In "Baoshi fuzi" (The Bao father and son), for instance, the two main characters, father and son, are said to "xiao"² on different occasions. When Old Bao hears a compliment on his son's great future, he only shows "a wisp of smile" because he immediately tries hard to "repress the inner mirth" in an attempt to deny such a possibility (2: 4).³ In the second part of the story, Old Bao goes to his son's school to pay for his new uniform. With many taunting school pupils in the same room, he twists his mouth into "a wry smile as if to greet them" (2: 9). As the clerk in the registry reprimands him for begging to let his son wear the same uniform so that he need not buy a new one, "his cheeks begin to ache; he is not sure whether he should let the smile stay on his face or retract it" (2: 12).

Meanwhile, his son is portrayed as capable of a spectrum of "xiao." Young Bao unwittingly offends his rich classmate, Guo Chun, who threatens to hit Bao in front of every one for trying to steal one of his ties. Overcome with embarrassment, Bao laughs awkwardly and "the smile stays with difficulty" on his face for quite a while (2: 34). Here the smile is strongly reminiscent of the equally embarrassing smile on his father's face quoted in the preceding paragraph. It is by no means a casual repetition; it purports to point to the essential sameness of father and son. Later on, greatly excited by Guo's invitation to look at a love letter, Young Bao "chortles with his shoulders quivering," and in order to fawn on his master, he "gives a gentle pat on Guo's cheek" (2: 35). But the latter is nettled by this apparently affectionate gesture, and gives Bao a mighty push. "The back of Bao's head bangs against the wardrobe. It really hurts. Blushing, he smiles . . ." (2: 35). Half seriously and half jokingly, Guo shows his fist, "Don't you dare to touch me again!" (2: 36). Everybody looks at them and tries to pacify

Guo. "Alright, alright. Be quiet. Quiet." Bao's tone sounds as if it were choked with his laughter (2: 36). Hence, time is well controlled to allow characters to "xiao" in a variety of ways and with different lengths of time, although the time factor can also be effaced through repetition.

Commenting on *The Blacks*, Kawin observes the disappearance of the time factor through repetition:

The *time* between repetitions disappears just as the characters who in a sense are repetitions of each other come together. In identity, space, and time, repetition unifies; but it also allows for progress, as in the succession of identical performances of *The Blacks*, or of rebegun instants in the continuous present.⁴

In "the Bao Father and Son," a series of "xiao" certainly unifies the two characters. Essentially, they are the same, even though they appear to be so different, and once again, it is the repetition of the sameness that brings out the central theme of the story. For both father and son, in the oscillation of "xiao" with its variants, are brought together in "the continuous present." The focalized present annuls the difference of moments and is riveted by "xiao." This series of "xiao" generates determinate meanings. "Xiao" calls explicit attention to the shared degradation of father and son. In addition, the obliteration of time is important in joining the seemingly disconnected episodes of momentary nature through recurrences of thematic imagery. The manipulative power of repetition is not difficult to see, and almost casually, the narrator acts as if he could objectify the process of narrative as many of the repeated elements are self-evident, and when the seemingly disparate strands are woven into an aesthetic wholeness through uninterpreted juxtapositions, because structurally the story is full of references to these interrelated "xiao," it becomes uncannily self-interpretative.

1.3. Intertextual Repetition

In Zhang Tianyi's world of fiction, repetition is promoted as a compositional strategy. Zhang's art of fiction is characterized by sustained concentration on moments. Despite the ephemeral nature of moments, they contribute to attendant situations, and as a result, new meanings are generated. The new meanings grow out of the situations instead of being imposed on the text by the author. Aside from the situations which have transference functions, the way in which the author makes these situations connect with one another makes a profound difference, for the reason that a sense of isolation engendered by the fragmentary nature of moments remains to be overcome. And by making connections, repetition is capable of overcoming this isolation. A literary text explores a labyrinth of connection, interrelation and extension, all of them depending, to some extent, on repetition. This is one way in which meaning can be generated through "repetition." For the reader, the experience of reading is in a way tantamount to living or reliving someone else's life, and to repeat someone else's experience even in imagination and to make sense of it, can be a rather daunting task. Perhaps not so surprisingly, the text at times resists the attempt of the reader who is anxious to make connections. With its alternatives and sheer unparalleled imagination, repetition in literature makes reading a demanding exercise, and thus the understanding of meaning more gratifying since the process of reading is like re-reading and rediscovery. Repetition, in a sense, counterbalances the conceivable enormity of the task sometimes faced by the reader of experiencing everything firsthand. But because his daily activities are full of repetition, repetition as encountered in reading is reassuring, since it connects with the familiar based on or acquired through instant recognition. The act of making such connections that includes interlocking repetitions not only generates meaning, but also metamorphoses the experience of reading itself into a more meaningful and rewarding one.

The capacity to make connections, especially "new and unexpected" ones, is said to be related to creativity.⁵ Scrutinizing the processes of making such connections by the author will open up rare vistas

to some of the elements of composition. In his article, "Notes on 'The True Story of Ah Q,'" Zhang Tianyi comments on the shaping of the character of Ah Q, and attributes it to a range of conditions of Ah Q's time. He contends that the typicality of Ah Q cannot transcend time and space, for the reason that unless there had existed the requisite conditions, Ah Q could not have been produced.⁶ Identical or similar conditions give rise to repetitions.⁷ Zhang concludes, "the character of Ah Q is not an existence in isolation" (10: 68-69). According to Zhang Tianyi, artists draw a multiplicity of ingredients from Ah Q, and their own characters, as a result, contain different levels and forms of reproduction that tend to highlight different aspects of the character of Ah Q (10: 69).

But it can be argued that it is possible to transcend time and space, irrespective of whether there are similar determining conditions, for even conditions, though assuming different forms and with varying degrees, tend to repeat themselves.⁸ In an article (1942) on *Hamlet*, Zhang Tianyi makes a most interesting observation—in retrospect it throws light on his own compositional strategy. His attention focuses on Hamlet's most celebrated soliloquy beginning with the line: "To be or not to be." Again, for Zhang Tianyi, the soliloquy does not happen in isolation, as he affirms that since this is the epitome of "Hamlet's spirit," all of his hesitations and despondency prior to and after this soliloquy "can be regarded as its expansion and illustration" (10: 275). Hamlet's actions or lack of them, in parallel to many instances of repetition, seem to execute a circular trajectory returning to the same starting point. Yet, strictly, it is no longer the same starting point, and by then the cumulative effect has changed the primary meaning of the entire experience of the "demented" prince. In a practical sense, for Zhang Tianyi, once the author has embarked on a central theme, which has a bearing on reality and which also appeals to the readership, it is to his advantage to build up variations on that tested central theme. In spite of the shift and change of "starting point," certain elements in human nature remain relatively unchanged and stable. Social, economical and political conditions do change; otherwise, there is little point, for instance, rewriting Ah Q so far as other Chinese writers in-

cluding Zhang himself are concerned. Because of the changes in conditions, there is the necessity and indeed opportunity to repeat Ah Q. When *Hamlet* was “re-created” (repeated) by Shakespeare,⁹ he provided a different set of conditions. The otherwise “sameness” of Hamlet is thus debilitated in the process of repetition. While the basic character remains unaltered in any significant way, the conditions in Shakespeare’s play are very different, which naturally furnish new dimensions to the character of Hamlet, who ends up being a very different Hamlet, compared with the character in the source of the play.

1.4. Allusion as Repetition

More specifically, in the realm of literature, repetition is usually used in a non-intrusive but systematic way. First of all, it has to be said that whatever the motive the author may have, repetition is an unavoidable component of literature because, in a very broad sense, literature is characterized by allusions, and certain types of literature are practically teeming with them. The author counts on the reader’s familiarity with what is mentioned in the text, without any explanation. Allusion is repetition; at least it is one form of repetition with the effectiveness of allusions depending on knowledge and memory shared by author and reader. It goes beyond the circumference of a given text, which is then linked to other texts. The reader, therefore, as Steven Connor asserts, is “continually” sent to “the other texts.”¹⁰ The “other texts” of course also include those by the same author.

Why is it necessary to send the reader to the other texts?¹¹ The advantage is obvious enough: to double the significance of the word, phrase or sentence being alluded to, and to confirm the scope and relevance of the reader’s experience. Further, repetitions of this nature comfortably engender a sense of confirmation and an extra dimension from which the reader can examine the same or similar situation so that his understanding is deepened. Also in this respect, it is not difficult to see how this form of repetition can enhance the clarity and referentiality of text. In discussing repetition, perhaps it is salutary to differentiate between external allusions, as evidently meant by Connor, and internal

allusions, which refer to the fact that the author repeats himself in an indirect or implicit way.¹² Intratextual and intertextual allusions represent one form of repetition. Yet paradoxically, such repetition avoids unnecessary repetition of what may be unruly superfluity of material, for not all detailed information contained in other texts or other parts of the same text requires repetition. Yet simultaneously, as a by-product, repetition adds extra significance and gives poignancy to a given text.

In a loose sense, repetition restores the past to the present, or conversely, it reminds the reader of the past or at least the existence of a certain past in the sense that the author invariably refers the reader to the past (sends him there) when repeating some prior presence. It would seem obvious stating that the other texts' mentioned by Connor, must have been in existence earlier. So in this sense repetition is about recollection. Presumably, the reader of a given text is supposed to resort to his past experience of reading other texts. However, Edward Said holds an opposite view, proclaiming without explanation, "Repetition is not recollection, and it is not longing for something not there."¹³ There seems to be an irreconcilable contradiction in his statement. In what sense is something "not there"? Even if something does not happen to be right there in front of someone, it does not necessarily mean that it has never existed. Rather, it may be a somewhat different case: it is no longer there because it has faded from one's memory. But this is precisely where repetition comes in to recover what is lost. We know that something is there partly through direct observation and partly through recollection. Moreover, immediately after this rather puzzling remark, Said quotes Søren Kierkegaard's definition of repetition, which is "*return, conceived in a purely formal sense.*"¹⁴ If repetition does not involve recollection, how can one know where to return? The implicit assumption of Kierkegaard's remark is that there must be something in the first place to be repeated, and as to whether the repetition is a "purely formal" one, it is a different matter.

In many ways, repetition is about memory. Part of the discussion of repetition, as I shall deal with later, centres on the effacement of the original, which shows that the author may at times intentionally erase recollection of the reader. Obliquely, it reveals that memory, or loss of

it, plays an important role in the procedure of repetition. In this connection, the time factor has to be taken into account. Roughly speaking, repetition explores the workings of the reader's memory to re-establish meaning within a framework made of repetitive elements consisting of intratextual and intertextual references. Raw existence is ephemeral but it can be sustained through repetition; it then influences the reader's thinking subliminally. The author is in a position to play with this temporal distance, which provides him with the space to make subtle, or if necessary, imperceptible changes. Time fragments memory and causes it to become disjointed, yet repetition transcends fragmentation to enable the reader to see the wholeness of life, for no literature, no matter how ambitiously intended, can compete with life in completeness. Repetition works through selection outlining the contour and showing the structure of a piece of work. Naturally, repetitions serve as reminders to bring back distant memories for the sake of retention, although such reminders can be highly selective so that they should be seen only as partial reminders, hence partial repetitions. In effect, the original perspective also changes accordingly. Often, a series of genealogical repetitive cycles is represented in literary works. If something survives because of or despite repetition, it makes a point about its everlasting value, though it is sometimes a "transformed" value. It remains fresh.

2. Repetition as a Compositional Strategy

In his article "How I Wrote 'The Time of Pure Brightness'" (1936), Zhang Tianyi postulates that in modern Chinese literature, many works can be seen as attempts to rewrite "The True Story of Ah Q."¹⁵ He further points out that the particular character of Ah Q is "also one of the elements" constituting one of his characters, Mr. Xie in "The Time of Pure Brightness" (9: 38). Similar rewritings are no doubt not simply confined to Mr. Xie; they can be found in a series of Zhang's works, particularly in his early fiction.¹⁶ Essentially, however, rewriting necessitates repetition of one kind or another—a concept which not only helps us to map out the whole of Zhang's oeuvre, but also forms

part of the compositional strategy of his writing: certain themes are focused on, dealt with, and expanded again and again so that certain types of characters can be developed, and furthermore, considering the limited and sometimes limiting scope of the short story—Zhang's favourite genre of writing—we may assume that repetition is a particularly apt strategy for his composition. This does not imply in any sense that Zhang Tianyi resorts to repetition merely to boost literary output, because quite often each repetition is not a copy or a displacement of an original but rather it comes up with a difference. And the difference, in turn, warrants and invigorates repetition. Like sameness that is characterized by continuity, difference is a matter of survival and can lay claims to legitimacy and "independence."

2.1. Blackness

Even a cursory examination of Zhang Tianyi's earlier writings reveals his preoccupation with a particular theme at a particular time as shown through repetition in some of the pieces composed during a particular period. In 1926, he published a piece under the title "Hei de chandou" (The vibration of darkness).¹⁷ Its central image "darkness" seems to be nebulous and unspecified, though this may well be deliberate, since the piece is, as Bedford rightly calls it, symbolic.¹⁸ There is indeed a simile: "the way he walks resembles that of an old man" (4: 306). Here, the personification as represented by the pronoun "he" stands for darkness. The image of an old man appears only once and seems to be in isolation. However, the isolation is nullified by its befitting connection with death. But it is not death in the ordinary sense of the word; it is spiritual death. It is not old age that verges upon death but a destructive force that "shatters the souls of all living things" (4: 310). References to death are inseparable from the "soul" of the character; for instance, "my soul has been snatched away and I die completely, together with my soul" (4: 310).

Evidently, this piece does not seem to do sufficient justice to the theme Zhang Tianyi intended to express. It was followed in 1927 by a similar story, "Zouxiang xin de lu" (Towards a new road). In spite of

the title, which strikes a positive and hopeful note, it "also stresses darkness and death, and uses a similar vocabulary."¹⁹ Again, the threat of death is ubiquitous and likewise, death is embedded in and symbolized by the image of darkness. Oddly enough, the vocabulary is rather dissimilar, for instance, the darkness in the story is interspersed with bright colours, such as "the bright white curtain" due to the sunlight and "the bright red" imagined by "her"—the central character. In the end, however, it is the reoccurrence of darkness that dominates her soul, even though there is still sunshine, which is poignantly repeated, too. Yet the repetition of sunshine is neutralized by her morbid fear of death as embodied by the repetition of darkness, although this time darkness is a great deal more tangible—she suffers from an undiagnosed disease. More specifically, the first-person narrator (there are no other characters) in "The Vibration of Darkness" seems to show signs of mental abnormality. "I" in this piece is ailing mentally whereas "she" in "Towards a New Road" is ill physically—at least primarily so. It is the image of darkness that makes connections between the two stories. "She sees black wheels before her eyes" in one of her hallucinations, which also appear in "The Vibration of Darkness," and Bedford discerns such a similarity: "before my eyes there appeared those regular, design-like patterns, white and black, some with winding lines, some with tiny circles . . ." ²⁰ In both pieces, Zhang Tianyi repeatedly uses the word "hei" (black).

Fear of death is anything but treated as a peripheral theme by Zhang Tianyi. It is relentlessly pursued yet again in "The Smile of Darkness" published in 1928. The theme as well as the concomitant image of darkness is repeated. So is the image of an old man. Again, hallucinations preponderate the story and are concomitant with darkness and the central character's fear of it. Unlike the "old man" (the personification of darkness) in "The Vibration of Darkness," the old man in this story is its central character. He is not a simple repetition of the old man in "The Vibration of Darkness," who is only part of a simile but rather, a transcendent expansion: he is a man brought into full operation. Moreover, the image is much sharper and more specific: he is 73 and death menaces him portentously. A coffin is made ready

for him in the next room. It is euphemistically referred to as "a black box" (4: 327). Some of his hallucinations should be more accurately called meditations on the nature of death like those by Hamlet, and accordingly death is compared with sleep and dream as well.

2.2. Repetition of Ah Q

In terms of composition, as a result of Zhang's preoccupation with certain themes, repetition often appears in a series of disparate stories. To start with, he eschews the repetition of the prevalent formula of "love plus revolution."²¹ Instead, he continues the tradition of analyzing the national character epitomized in Ah Q. His well-known grey characters may be seen as variations of this immortal character created by Lu Xun. Comparing Zhang's town-dwellers with those of Lao She, Wang Chengguo remarks with perception the fact that many of Zhang's characters trying to move upwards in the city have freshly arrived from the countryside. This is a "new abstraction of the image of Chinese urban petty bourgeois."²² The rural roots of his characters are linked with those of Ah Q, who also comes from the countryside and is thus endowed with many of the characteristics of Chinese peasants. This is an important prototype for repetition, since it is also accompanied or followed by development and concurrently, difference. The development is none other than urbanization: most of Zhang's grey characters or "social climbers" are from the countryside so that the author is able to continue the practice of probing into the national character typically embedded in the Chinese countryside. As to what constitutes the so-called national character, it is difficult to encapsulate, but among other things, it consists of ignorance, self-deception, boastfulness and the instinct to be mobile upwards, as exemplified in many of Zhang's grey characters.

Reading from some of the stories in *Cong kongxu dao congshi* (From emptiness to fullness),²³ Zhang's first collection of short stories, the reader knows for sure that repetition of Lu Xun's character of Ah Q is subtly and manifestly enacted. Many of Zhang's characteristic grey characters, on whom are imprinted the traits of Ah Q, are cast against

impact on the readership. Cumulatively, the reader is ushered to a familiarized territory. Near the end of Zhang Tianyi's career as a creative writer for adults, he published *Three Sketches*, which, though disconnected in story-line, resembles a trilogy, since the three pieces deal with characters who do little or practically nothing about what they purport to do—oppose the Japanese invasion. Not only do the three stories repeat each other thematically, but also, as observed by Bedford, in one of them "New Life," Zhang Tianyi returns to a particular type of grey character to be found in its "precursors" such as "Dream of a Three and a Half Days," "Zhuchangzi de beiai" (Piggut's chagrin), "San xingdi" (Three brothers) and "1924-1934."²⁶

The most famous short story of *Three Sketches* is "Mr. Hua Wei," which, in many aspects, is a repetition of "Tan Jiu xiansheng de gong-zuo" (The work of Mr. Tan Jiu), despite some noticeable differences between the two stories. It is as if after writing "The Work of Mr. Tan Jiu," Zhang Tianyi felt that he had not done justice to such people like Mr. Tan Jiu, and created a Mr. Hua Wei as a duplication or a reincarnation of Tan Jiu. Through the repetition, the hypocrisy of certain politicians is thoroughly exposed, and the image of Hua Wei and the like (including Mr. Tan Jiu, of course) has imprinted itself indelibly on the reader's mind. This repeated exposé of someone like Tan Jiu in "Mr. Hua Wei" suggests that such seemingly harmless little characters, though comic and absurd, cannot be treated lightly. The repetition of Tan Jiu in another story and the fact that the two stories are incorporated into one collection indicate that the author wished to demonstrate that these characters are representational. These "harmless" petty bureaucrats can be extremely dangerous in undermining anti-Japanese work. Roughly speaking, they are not fundamentally different from Zhang's other grey characters. Compared with them, Tan Jiu and Hua Wei are "successful" grey characters. Ironically, it is the new conditions created by the Anti-Japanese War that brought about their "success."

Through repetition, Zhang Tianyi concentrates on a rather limited spectrum of greyness showing the different shades and kinds of greyness at different times and under different conditions. Such continuity of greyness was provided or planned to be provided by Zhang himself

and later writers. Zhang planned in 1957 to write a play which was to repeat the successful archetype of Hua Wei. In the early eighties, Mr. Hua Wei was transmuted into a woman in a story entitled "Hua Wei nüshi" (Ms Hua Wei).²⁷ And in 1985 someone wrote an article in a Shanghai newspaper, appealing for "a sequel to Mr. Hua Wei."²⁸ Just more than a year later, there came a new story "Hua Wei xiansheng de jinkuang" (The recent developments of Mr. Hua Wei), in which Hua Wei is portrayed as appearing frequently on television, this time not with anti-Japanese blathering but speaking of "reform."²⁹ Repetition can indeed generate new meaning and Mr. Hua Wei's potential usefulness is duly recognized. Most tellingly, this rewriting of Mr. Hua Wei makes evident the lasting appeal of repetition, and confirms once again its relevance to compositional strategies in general.

3. Paradigms of Repetition

3.1. Repetition and Identity

It may be said that repetition is intimately related to identity, for it is assumed that identity makes life "apprehensible" and things easier to recognize.³⁰ It is a human instinct for survival. In a sense, identity is also representational, saying something about essence. For if identity fails to represent essence, it cannot survive for long as identity. Repetition helps to bring to the surface the revelatory quality of identity. Connor examines the relations between repetition and essence: "If repetition requires something that is already fixed and finished, already constituted as an essence, then it is equally true that originality or essence can never be apprehended as such unless the possibility exists for it to be copied or reiterated."³¹ Connor's supposition contained in the first part of the sentence (the subordinate clause of condition) is plainly cogent, except the problematic word "requires." His stance is that unless that "something" is recognized as "an essence," it does not deserve to be repeated. Only an essence is repeated; apart from the fact that it is worth repeating, it may at times be necessary to repeat it in case its quality is shifty. This is true in some cases, for instance, after Lu Xun

created Ah Q as an epitome of the Chinese national character, it was quickly perceived as an essence, resulting in a massive number of repetitions. Nonetheless, Connor's argument fails to encompass the antipodal possibility; namely, sometimes the process is reversed, in which only after many repetitions have occurred, not by design, but by chance, does "something" become "fixed and finished and an essence."

On the other hand, an essence should have a recurrent identity, which, quite commonly, antedates people's shared recognition and acceptance of it as an essence. In brief, repetition does *not* necessarily require something already finished as an essence. Repetition makes it possible for an identity to evolve into an essence. To "copy" or "reiterate" an originality not only gives it a chance to be understood, as Connor argues, but also to develop into an essence, even though during the process some modification (difference) is involved. However, the remaining part of the sentence quoted above shows that Connor is begging the question. To copy or reiterate an essence can help the reader to apprehend it, and further, if it turns out to be an essence, repetitions will follow naturally. Even though for some reasons, it gets neglected or suppressed, it is not accurate to say that it "can never be apprehended."

Thus repetition can be a precondition for the recognition of an essence and indeed concerns the survival of an essence, but not necessarily its apprehension, although, admittedly, its apprehension and survival are entwined. In a different context, Connor raises a very important point about repetition, namely, its power of negation of language: "So repetition is not only a form of survival in language, it is a way of negating it, for, if repetition is the sign of the endlessness of language (it is always possible to say something again), then repetition is a strategy for turning language against itself, using words to erase other words."³² Here, it is true that Connor is speaking of "language" and "words." But what do they stand for? Essences? To what end is language turned against itself? Connor does not tackle such questions. However, it seems that in the process of signification, the signifier is divorced from the signified. We may consider his assumption, "If repetition is the enabling principle of all language, then it is also inimical to language."³³ He means that mindless or senseless repetition of lan-

guage will render language invalid. But sometimes writers, out of the consideration of a certain artistic effect, may deliberately turn language against itself. In this respect, Lu Xun's "Zhufu" (New year's sacrifice) is a case in point. Its tragic heroine Sister Xianglin has lost her only son, who was taken away and eaten by a wolf. Full of remorse, she blames herself for negligence—she did not realize that "wild animals could come to the village in springtime." She keeps saying to anyone in the street, "I was stupid. Really I was." It is then followed by her sad tale.³⁴ At first her experience aroused genuine sympathy among people, but after its repeated re-telling, "almost everyone in the town can recite her words" and grows sick of them.³⁵ After numerous repetitions, though her words are not forgotten—on the contrary, everyone remembers them—the meaning is quickly lost and the effectiveness of her tale utterly annihilated. In like manner, in Zhang Tianyi's short story "Jiangli" (Reason), the abominable woman repeats many meaningless words because she does not comprehend what "reason" means. She uses many different words simply to mean "you can't prohibit a child from shitting" (4: 22-27). When language in this case negates itself through repetition, meaning is lost. And the original meaning of the title of the story "Reason" is entirely effaced, although its replacement is never openly stated but clearly implied.

3.2. Repetition as Effacement

In another story by Zhang entitled "Banlü" (Companion), the protagonist Huang Monan is a grey character, who is too disheartened to take any action to climb socially, though he aims high. He is unemployed and lives off his wife Du Yunnan, a school teacher. Huang is tormented by memory: he has repented of his "sins" in front of his wife (4: 156). He is said to be afraid of mentioning his sins (which are his verbal enthusiasm for work and complete lack of action) and tries to suppress the thought by imagining what he can do the next day (4: 156). When he wakes up the next day, however, he is reminded by a note left on the desk by his wife. It reads, "I got up too late. So I couldn't buy you soya-bean milk. Be a good boy and get some work done. I'll expect

to see the result when I get back. I'll bring back some oranges"(4: 156). At this moment, he "repeatedly examines this note" (4: 156). Yet his repeated examination of the note is to negate the phrase "get some work done," as he asks himself in exasperation, "Get work done? What does she expect me to do?" (4: 156). His repeated reading the note has conveniently left out the part that reads "I'll expect to see the result when I get back." So he twists her meaning by concluding that his wife only fears that he will be bored. Then it dawns upon him that maybe he has become repugnant. Still, he is determined not to do any work: he picks up Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and after leafing it over, he throws it away, "So what if I am repugnant. I refuse to translate stuff like this!" (4: 157). This pattern of repetition negates language by persistently inducing loss of memory. When his wife gingerly reminds him of the possibility that he can write some short essays for a newspaper, he only responds icily (4: 161). His wife's suggestion has been repeated many times. "She must have remembered what he did in the past." (Rather, what he repeatedly said what he would do). It turns out that these are what he promised to do but never brought himself to do (4: 161). Perhaps the loss of memory, though sometimes desperately desirable, is not always easy. His repeated promises are intended to vitiate her repeated pleadings.

Nonetheless, it is not at all simple or even salutary to attempt the effacement of an original. It should be made clear that difference stems from the recognition that the conscious effacement of an original due to an anxiety to establish a new identity must not be assumed too readily. Difference signifies a point of departure that provides an avenue to refreshing comprehension and consequently, to new areas for exploration. A difference, in this sense, is preceded or accompanied by repetition, which is not as smooth as it may be assumed. For, as observed by Bruce Kawin, "Out-and-out repetitions are an aesthetic challenge; masking them in novelty is often merely a dodge—artistically insincere, proceeding from a lack of faith in one's material or audience."³⁶ To be sure, the nature of repetition determines that there is always an original to be "copied" or "duplicated." In this respect, it must be admitted that perfunctory repetition without any traits of innovation is not

genuine or serious artistic creation; it only gives rise to triteness. Repetition is no excuse for what Kawin calls "fundamental lack of invention."³⁷ Therefore, it is fair to say that repetition, though a putative literary device, still engenders anxiety about originality, although repetition can be manipulated in such a way so as to replace the original.³⁸ For a purpose, naturally.

The idea that repetition is utilized to erase words is a fascinating one. Strictly, Connor means specifically one type of repetition—exact repetition, as he explains, "it is . . . impossible to say anything if one merely repeats oneself."³⁹ In other words, if one repeats oneself verbatim, one deprives words of meaning as exemplified in Sister Xianglin's repeating her sad story. Meanwhile, however, there is another possibility. Referring to the motto of the protagonist of Samuel Beckett's first novel, *Murphy*, Connor mentions "the density of their repetitions retards and confuses meaning."⁴⁰ As a result, either there is no meaning, or there is only confusing meaning. In either case, it shows the erasing function of repetition.

Nevertheless, there is a third possibility, which Connor fails to address adequately, although he mentions parenthetically, "it is always possible to say something again." But unless one says something not merely again, but again and again, leaving little time in between, there must be a different kind of repetition; repetition with a difference, which borders on a replacement, in order to *erase* earlier words, or else it is not erasure but affirmation or confirmation.

Should such a case arise, it is not just erasure, but replacement, for the repetition must mean something, unless as Connor implies, identical repetition amounts to nullification of meaning. In order to cajole the reader into accepting such replacement, there must be imperceptible shifts or subtle changes of meaning manipulated by the author. The reader here means the adult reader. This brings out the distinction between identical repetition and near-repetition. Sigmund Freud discriminates between adults and children in their responses to repetition. For adults, identical repetition annihilates pleasure, but it is identical repetition that children always tend to take delight in: "And if a child has been told a nice story, he will insist on hearing it over and

over again rather than a new one: and he will remorselessly stipulate that the repetition shall be an identical one and will correct any alterations of which the narrator may be guilty . . .⁴¹ It does not mean, however, that identical repetition is irrelevant to adults. On the contrary, although he may not find it a source of pleasure as children do, he is likely to lose interest in the story altogether and suffers a fading memory by virtue of his instinctive hostility to the boredom induced by identical repetition. Thus, from the author's point of view, identical repetition is designed for the purpose of either erasure or affirmation, and either to annoy or to please the adult reader.

Of course, time can play a role in reducing the reader's displeasure when encountering identical repetitions. One effect of identical repetition, if it becomes a habit—that is to say, if repetition becomes a routine—is that it becomes destructive. According to Kawin:

Certainly when we come to habit, we have come to the most destructive effect of repetition, for it is the doing of things over and over, each time with less energy and less interest, that is the root of repetitiousness in literature—on the way to anesthesia: the cliché we do not even notice, the dead word, the dead work, the zombie.⁴²

Though unspecified, when Kawin uses the word “repetition,” he seems to refer to identical repetition, even though not necessarily in form or appearance (as far as one can see Kawin does mean the same or similar form or appearance), otherwise there is no reason to assume that there should be diminishing energy and interest.

3.3. Repetition Destroys Language

Zhang Tianyi's short story “Gui xun pian” (Inner chamber instructions) is an unusual narrative piece. It consists entirely of a monologue: the mother's garrulous speech. She at first forbids her daughter (aged nineteen) to interrupt and then after the latter is completely silenced, tries in vain to make the supposed interlocutor utter a

word. The story begins with "Shut up! Shut up!" (4: 69) This is repeated several times (4: 70, 71, 74). It seems that the verbatim repetition of "Shut up!" is the only sentence that works effectively in the story. Ironically she accuses her daughter of "duozui" (talking too much) several times (4: 69, 70, 71, 74). However, this is completely groundless since her daughter is denied the chance to say a single word! The identical repetitions of "talking too much" merely underpin the mother's own loquacity. As to the "content" of her lecture, though not exactly identical repetitions in diction, it is a typical example of how language negates itself when it becomes unstoppable due to the compelling repetitions of and allusions to old sayings. First of all, it is confusingly proverbial and allusive. The mother quotes repeatedly from Mencius and Confucius or thinks she quotes from them. On one occasion, she misattributes a famous saying from *The Analects* to her husband (4: 70). Repeatedly, as if to garble everything she quotes, she is shown to attribute erroneously to Mencius a number of sayings and proverbs as well as quotations from Confucius.⁴³ Apparently, she takes great pride in her classical learning and presses her daughter to read the Four Books and the Five Classics.⁴⁴ But this most patronizing nonsense she indulges in is meant to be devoid of substance. The hackneyed and antiquated ideas are utterly disconnected, and are totally irrelevant to the young girl's "problem." So it is no surprise that they are ignored as empty rhetoric. The sheer prosaicness of language because of wearisome repetition of the same old platitudes makes the whole monologue meaningless. Most tellingly, at the end of the story, the disappearance of her daughter signifies the destruction of language itself precisely because of the repetitive nature of the moralizing sermon. While demonstrating that the supposed listener is not listening, the author makes listening (reading) impossible (painful), but deliberately so.

3.4. Repetition Destroys Life

Almost all of Zhang Tianyi's grey characters lead perpetually and repeatedly unfulfilled lives. There is certainly a paradigm of routine in their lives: they make repeated attempts to promote themselves. Their

humiliation is repeated so many times and so intensely that it becomes “anesthesia” and it cannot cause *them* pain, thereby making their behaviour plausible. In truth, repetition does not benumb the reader to the same extent as it does to the characters in fiction. That is why they make repeated efforts to achieve what seems to be completely pointless from the reader’s point of view. Not only do we as readers feel the pain, but also, because of the repetition, feel it more acutely. However, they (Zhang Tianyi’s grey characters) are bereft of a sense of shame—they have lost it through repetition (effacement), and their intense and painful experience is negated by repetition. They continually rebegin but never reach a climax in any part of a given story. It is of course frustrating, but the frustration is created and aggravated by the author, yet ironically, the outlet their frustration takes is also repetition: it is certainly a vicious circle, hence the destructive effect of repetition, which pinpoints the inevitability of the grey characters destroying themselves.

Through repetition greyness evolves into the grave, which indicates another paradigm of repetition: greyness is distinguished by a lack of vitality or sheer impotence, whilst the grave, of course, epitomizes death, though not necessarily physical demise. Impotence that invites ineffable humiliation is manifested and exacerbated through repetition—it is ultimately responsible for comprehensive impotence because it saps energy, which accounts for greyness (one of its principal symptoms is lack of vitality). The vicious circle suggests a meaningless life. Over and over again, Zhang Tianyi’s fiction shows us precisely how impotence works or rather, fails to work in his characterization of greyness. There is unconscious absurdity—the grey characters are unaware of their impotence. For instance, the pathetic and obnoxious character, Li Yitai in *One Year*, who purports to be able to conquer women with his devastating charm, is oblivious to discomfiture and mortification. He is a profoundly tragic character, yet he himself does not feel the pain at all. His impotence lies in his powerlessness to actualize what he claims repeatedly—women chase him lasciviously. Or, what happens amounts to the same thing: he is not allowed an opportunity to prove his potency. In the end, his putrid fantasies and thoughtless

adventures send him to the grave.

3.5. Repetition Destroys Love

Through carefully controlled and deployed repetition, many seemingly insignificant details add more dimensions to fiction. Let us examine in detail "Lackadaisical Love Story." The narrator or "story-teller" rubs his hands apologetically at the outset of the story before he starts his "story" (1: 161). He is not quite sure whether he should proceed because the story is "not interesting, and scarcely has any twists . . ." With a pause, he rubs his hands a second time (1: 161). The repetition of rubbing his hands seems to suggest the lack of "excitement" in the story-line. Then he introduces the heroine first: her name is Zhu Lie, "merely by chance similar to a foreigner's name" (1: 161). This is an allusion to Shakespeare's Juliet, intended to be a parody of a noble love story. She studies art and music at university. Though orphaned with only a brother, she is said to be very wealthy (1: 161). The hero of the story is a friend of the story-teller, and can be loosely called a poet, which purports to "distinguish him from a businessman, an old man and a Jew" (1: 161). He has inherited a considerable sum of money from his father. His name is Niu, but after becoming Juliet's boyfriend, he gives himself a nom de plume, Romeo. As if he were cognizant of the possibility of being accused of giving nothing but repeating the curricula vitae of his characters, the story-teller begins to rub his hands again—for a third time (1: 161).

It is not until then, after he finishes rubbing his hands three times, when he announces the beginning of his story. The story-teller seems to know that his mode of story-telling causes his listeners pain, contrary to what Kawin has claimed.⁴⁵ On the one hand, the story-teller seems to say that this is a parody (and a deliberate repetition) of "Turgenev's method" (1: 161), and on the other, the narrator teasingly uses hesitations and repetitions as if he wished to issue a discouraging admonition to his listeners that the story will not be told in a suave manner, and what is more, it is likely to be dull, as if reminiscent of the title of the story. The marked clumsiness with which the story is started should be

viewed to betoken the content of the story. It simply shows that the story-teller does not know how to tell a story about these two people. Manifestly, the story-teller lacks enthusiasm in telling the story, in contrast to the unflagging zest a story-teller is expected to exhibit in order to capture the attention of his listeners.

Nonetheless, this is a calculated move adopted by the author, who takes the risk of alienating the reader. Surely, this is more than making a point about signifying undisguised aversion to Turgenev's modes of narration. The procrastination of telling the story proper confirms the listener's fear that the story will not be exciting. (There is a point for that, of course). But oddly enough, this rather unusual way to start a story serves to excite the reader's curiosity. Besides, this introductory section is not as mundane as it appears to be, for among other things, it alludes to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Zhang Tianyi's two principal characters are not in the least like the young lovers in Shakespeare's play. But the reader does not know that yet, even though he may have his suspicions.⁴⁶ Thus, the reader is kept in suspense, since the introductory section has already provided him with some important biographical details. With a serious purpose in writing this story, Zhang Tianyi is determined to show the mundane life of his grey characters and the emptiness in their so-called love.

Repetition works for a series of intended effects. In this story, there is an unrestrained playfulness with Zhang's characteristic jocund transliteration of a Japanese critic's name as "Chuzi" (cook). His name is repeated a couple of times. "Romeo" at first carps at "the cook" for his statement that love is nothing more than lust and finds it most "disappointing" (1: 162). The young lover claims that he feels well disposed to "spirit" and "art" (1: 162). On a different occasion when he is regaling himself with wine, he refers to "the Japanese cook" again, in an effort to start a philosophical discourse on the meaning of life on a firm "spiritual" footing. Some days later when "Romeo" takes a picnic with "Juliet," the girl repeats his earlier "aphorism" that love means spirit being congruent with flesh (1: 169). In response to this repetition of his own hackneyed adage, "Romeo" "gets a bit excited," and raving on about spirit and art, he repeats his reference to "that Japanese cook"

yet again (1: 170). Ironically, his repetition of and insistence on "spirit" in his relationship with "Juliet" appear as an antipode to his exuberant rhetoric.

But the repetition of his insipid speech pattern indicates that he has no real understanding of life. Once, when eating at a restaurant, he is once again on his favourite topic: "We must make life richer and we need other things apart from the necessary material things. Take this wine bottle for example, and this glove, this glove, glove . . ." (1: 165). He cannot continue his prolixity. The pointless repetition of "glove" is poignantly designed to underline the inherent banality of "Romeo," who only pretends to speak of "spirit," whereas he cannot be unencumbered from the mundane reality. The choice of "glove" in his discussion is utterly irrelevant to what he purports to discuss and its paltriness reflects the pettiness of his mind and worse still, its repetition gives further prominence to his greyness.

On the other hand, however, Romeo's insistence on the form of repetition is also shown to gain him advantages. While spluttering about "spirit," he is attracted to his "Juliet" amorously. At one point, it occurs to him that he wants to kiss her. The story-teller, in a tone of irony, calls "Romeo" a hero, or rather, someone who behaves like one, for "his head drops and moves his mouth to hers" (1: 171). But she pushes him away. Her noncompliance is a blow to him. He paces to and fro (an act of repetition) and then concludes, "her refusal was nothing but a kind of art." "He nestles up against her the second time: while holding her neck, he presses his lips on hers" (1: 171). This repetition of his attempt to kiss her is fiercely gallant: he smothers her with a prolonged kiss. Even this action of kissing is repeated to create humour: "her mouth is so big that he kisses her three times, lest he fails to take care of her entire mouth" (1: 171).

For the reason that the story-teller is apparently overburdened with massive details and statistics, he decides not to repeat them in his story because they amount to just routine. "As usual, they chew chocolates, drink wine, watch films, write poetry, frequent parks and take picnics" (1: 172). Such repetitiousness must be excruciatingly irksome and unexciting. However, a brief summary of what the couple

me the same question. I'm sick of it! . . .” (2: 139). But the fact that she does absolutely nothing seems to be an apt response to the exactly same question being repeated many times. With the number of repetitions in abundance, the sameness of the question naturally leads to self-negation. And at this point, with a tempestuous fury, she drives the man away, but chases him after he takes his leave, saying that she did not mean what she said. In turn, he repeats his theory on their relationship. She believes him once more. But the topic reverts to “those books and materials again” (2: 140). As a matter of fact, the man has counted the number of times he has asked her about it—twelve times (2: 141).

Though expected to behave in a tender manner by the woman, the man has become tired of tenderness, and has degenerated into a victim strained by repetition. Even kissing has become a traumatic routine. The wretched man, while kissing her, thinks to himself: “After they begin to cohabit, how many times must he kiss her everyday? Thirty times . . . Oh, sorry, maybe thirty five times” (2: 141). Their relationship is becoming progressively suffocating because of frivolous repetition. It has become an imperative ritual to repeat certain things (including kissing, of course), or else he is accused of not loving her any more (2: 141). When they part (perhaps this act will not be repeated), “they kiss many times: sorry, perhaps more than thirty five times” (2: 143). Even the repetition of “sorry” is significant, as it is repeated several times shortly afterwards. After they part, Lao Bo thinks aloud: “I'm liberated, sorry.” At once, in a rush of guilt he almost changes his mind, but he tells himself: “Sorry, please control yourself” (2: 143). Mixed with relief and guilt, he tries to get some work done the next day, and speaking to the narrator, who is addressed as Lao Zhang (Old Zhang), he apologizes again: “Sorry, I must do some work. Yes, some serious work. Yes, yes, sorry. Oh” (2: 144).

These groveling apologies, be they sincere or affected, conscious or unconscious, made repeatedly either to himself or to the narrator, seem to be a decoded message, which, despite or due to its inconsistency, reflects the inner conflicts of Lao Bo; he wrestles repeatedly with the decision whether to continue his relationship with his equally grey mistress. Apology is a form of excuse to quell his dimly felt sense

of guilt but as the excuse is not even plausible to himself, he needs repetition to convince himself, and once he is released from the burden of guilt, "with a smack, he shouts in relief" an apology (2: 144). But this time it sounds like a celebration of his regained freedom. Repetition is part of his endeavour to rebegin and to put an end to a wearisome routine and a lacklustre life assuming a puerile form of repetition. Repetition, as presented in the story, is no doubt pedestrian, yet it is through repetition that Old Bo secures his new beginning or, depending on how one looks at it, the end of his repeated misery.

3.6. Repetition Destroys Human Dignity

In his analysis of the eponymous hero Lu Baotian (1937) in another short story by Zhang Tianyi, Bedford makes references to some of Zhang's earlier short stories, pointing out that Zhang tends to single out and then to concentrate on a particular idiosyncrasy, which is referred to "repeatedly."⁴⁷ This is indeed the case, but it should also be made manifest that many of Zhang's short stories are not based on humdrum repetition of a single or a limited number of idiosyncrasies. The character of Lu Baotian is a repetition and development of a series of similar characters to be found in "The Leather Belt" and "Inviting Guests." Deng Binsheng, for instance, hallucinates in a *variety* of ways over his gleaming prospect of promotion. It is the repeated cumulative idiosyncrasies that bolster and sustain the characterization of a grey panjandrum. For instance, in spite of its short scope, the story "Inviting Guests" shows a multiplicity of idiosyncrasies, some of which are truly surprising, like the sudden rush of the host to take money by force from one of his guests, Lao Ye (2: 326).

Compared with Zhang's earlier stories, "Lu Baotian" is a more complex story, replete with more elaborate paradigms of repetition. Lu Baotian is a pathological sycophant, calculating and preoccupied with the prospect of his promotion. But his bootlicking fails to gain him any advantage. He is a victim ultimately of himself. Mentally, he is a deformed character, being totally blind to reality, and physically, as if there were a parallel, he is very ill, suffering from tuberculosis. The story is

fraught with repetitions of images, references, words and actions, all of which, in a medley of manners, are related to diseases, mental or physical, and they surround the central character, culminating in his profound humiliation. However, it is a mainly self-induced humiliation and destruction, to which he chains himself, although the malevolence of his curmudgeonly superiors and colleagues, with the sole exception of Ling Datou, also plays a role.

Lu Baotian is a copy-clerk in an office. Overhearing the gossip made by some of his colleagues about Secretary Fan (樊), who is their superior with important connections, Lu seizes on this opportunity to curry favour with Secretary Fan by informing against his colleagues. In order to enhance the value of his information, he refers to it as a “secret” and meanwhile, he makes his attitude unmistakably clear, so he also calls the “secret” “a rumour” (4: 196). Overawed by the sight of Secretary Fan, he becomes tongue-tied, “I’ve something to report . . . a secret . . . a, a rumour” Perhaps he is taut with a sense of guilt, because what is to be reported can scarcely be substantiated. Thus he sounds hesitant, spluttering, “They are starting a rumour about you. They said . . . said” At this juncture, the clicking of leather shoes from the outside corridor interrupts this inarticulate report, although he repeats himself hopelessly. The author suggests the adverse effect of involuntary repetition that gives away Lu’s guilty conscience.

Hostility begins to brew at the beginning of the story. Because of his tuberculosis, Lu Baotian is naturally allergic to cigarette smoking. One of his colleagues, a Mr. Fan (範), leaves a lighted cigarette in the office on purpose, and when requested to put it out, he refuses to comply (4: 191). He even argues that passive smoking is good for Lu’s lungs. The conversation regarding smoking serves to introduce another colleague of Lu’s, a Mr. Lin, nicknamed “Big-headed Lin” not because he is conceited but because he has a large-sized head. He turns out to be a big-hearted man, but is mistakenly viewed as an enemy by Lu. It is a slight mishap that Lin in all innocence happens to agree with the maliciously intended statement made by Fan (範) earlier by repeating, “Smoking can indeed sterilize things but can also destroy tissues in the body” (4: 192). In spite of Lu’s repeated protests and distinct signs of

suffering (Lu coughs furiously), Fan (範) still smokes in the office. The act of smoking is repeated on a different occasion when hearing Lu cough again, he lights another cigarette with knavish nonchalance, and after puffing at it twice, he places it on a match-box (4: 194).

The repetition of smoking takes a different turn later in the story. The chief of the department, Mr. Fan (樊), who also smokes (4: 198), forces Lu to ride a horse and the wretched man is then thrown by his steed. Before the incident, Chief Fan, who is related to Secretary Fan (樊), offers Lu a cigarette. Lu tries to decline but to no avail. Chief Fan coerces him into accepting the cigarette. Unduly flattered, Lu lights the cigarette while laughing, "with his eyebrows dancing repeatedly—as if they were to fly away" (4: 213). However, a colleague whose name is Liang shouts that he is supposed to inhale the smoke. Lu is upset not by the malevolent exhortation, but by Liang's inadvertent mistake in addressing his rank. Chief Fan, however, interrupts the altercation between the two. The chief is not in the least interested in the fortuitous oral "demotion" of Lu by Liang. He begins to loutishly bully Lu: "We just want Lu Baotian to give us a performance—drawing the smoke into his lungs. Come on! Give it a puff! Or else, I'll hit you!" (4: 213). But this is a moment of pride for Lu, for "he is so proud that his heart nearly jumps out." He puts the tobacco pipe into his mouth, but is at once convulsed with "a violent fit of coughing; he shakes so violently that he can barely hold his balance" (4: 213). Thus the repetition of smoking reaches its mordant climax. Lu has repeatedly tried to avoid the atmospheric contaminant of cigarette smoke, but eventually has to smoke a cigarette himself and chokes on it—in order to please his superior and to take pride in what he sees as an appreciative gesture of Chief Fan.

Coughing is not only an outward symptom that Lu shows repeatedly throughout the story, but also an encoded sign to suggest his mental health or lack of it. At the beginning of the story, Lu "coughs huskily for some time" before imploring Mr. Fan (範), one of his colleagues, to put the cigarette out (4: 191). Later on when everyone laughs about a joke, Lu joins them, but immediately starts coughing (4: 193). The repetition of coughing, in this case, rather like an idiolect, functions to

identify Lu, whom is thus differentiated from others. But no doubt he is a genuine valetudinarian; though it is already early spring, the cold is too much for Lu, who feels the chill from under the floor and coughs more severely (4: 204). Coughing stigmatizes Lu, and when Big-headed Lin's kind concern is construed as hostile and provokes his ire, he tries to stifle coughing for fear that his tuberculosis will be known (4: 209). Sometime later after forcing Lu to smoke a cigarette, Chief Fan orders him again to gulp down a glass of alcohol. While drinking, Lu watches Chief Fan's face and utters, "It is for the sake of friendship, you and I . . ." (4: 226). Then suddenly "he coughs like mad. And for two or three minutes, he does it non-stop. His head feels heavy and inflated and he coughs as if all his insides were to be thrown up" (4: 226).

Occasionally Lu coughs deliberately. For instance, when he learns that Chief Fan will have a birthday party and all his colleagues are busy planning to buy him gifts but he knows nothing about it, he is distressed and "coughs several times to attract attention" (4: 217). Finally, he manages to find out about the birthday and feels greatly relieved. He boasts about his resourcefulness to his wife that evening and exaggerates his relationship with Chief Fan. In the end he almost chokes himself in a state of vainglory: "He coughs continuously for two minutes" (4: 219). At night he cannot fall asleep, visualizing himself being a close friend of Chief Fan, and eventually making friends with foreigners. The reverie is soothing for him because he "continuously coughs and gasps" (4: 219). The repetitive coughing debilitates the infirm man completely, both physically and spiritually.

The hapless Lu is torn between coughing repeatedly and his repeated attempts to suppress it for fear of people knowing about his tuberculosis, since such knowledge will be detrimental to his ambition to be promoted. Nevertheless, his colleagues are ruthless in exposing his tuberculosis, though at the same time, it may be argued that Lu deserves the insensitive treatment because of his craving to inform on them in exchange for his own advancement. Thus to suppress coughing for him seems to signify futile concealment of a double guilty secret: Lu wishes that his colleagues knew nothing about his ailment, and

about his less than honourable act of informing on them.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that his colleagues want to expose him by concentrating on his tuberculosis. In the office, numerous sly remarks are made by his colleagues concerning his lungs. Mr. Fan (範) even has the effrontery to tell Lu that second-hand smoking is good for his lungs and then supports his homespun theory by expounding, "... the smell of cigarette smoking kills germs. Lung germs are particularly vulnerable to it" (4: 191). This ill-disguised animosity causes hilarious laughter that breaks a lengthy "silence of more than ten minutes in the office" prior to the dialogue (4: 191). The repetition of the taboo word assumes a more abominable form in the addressing of a clerk called Qian, who simply calls Lu "Mr. Lungs" before introducing him to a new colleague standing next to him, "Mr. Zuo, let me introduce him to you. This is an angel spreading tuberculosis: we call him 'Mr. Lungs'" (4: 197). Soon the beleaguered Lu is surrounded by innuendoes about lungs in the office (4: 222-23). Before long, his superior, Chief Fan also calls him "Old Lungs" (4: 225, 228).

References to Lu's tuberculosis are encrypted and repeated audaciously by a young man whose name is Wen working in Section Three. He calls Lu Mr. 5151. Wen used to work as a clerk at a telegraphic bureau and he "often shows off his skill: 5151, 4016, 1129 and 3769" (4: 198). According to the footnote provided to the story, these figures stand for "the king of tuberculosis" (4: 198). Wen uses the telegraphic code repeatedly when he sees Lu, calling him "Mr. 5151!" and "4072," which is a variation.⁴⁸ However, the telegraphic codes are not just designated to refer to tuberculosis euphemistically; they are also likened to the other "symptom" displayed by Lu. When overhearing Lu trying to tell Chief Fan, Wen speaks to himself: "7456, 1445," which means "sycophant" (4: 215). Thus Wen makes the telling connection between Lu's tuberculosis and his sycophantic inclination. The name of an ailment has become a sign assigned to the man, whose moral health is equally impaired. The connection is repeated when Wen learns that Lu is keen to join other colleagues in organizing a birthday party for Chief Fan, "What? Mr. 5151 also wants to be in?" He does not mince his words in telling Lu his objection, "If you are in, there will be the smell

he is responsible for his own fall and destruction. Instead of effacement, this is a clear case of amplification; repetition as used in this story only adds to and reinforces the central motif intended by the author.

Repetition can be seen as part of the author's endeavour to weave a pattern for the purpose of the affirmation and the progression of a motif, which, based on the reiteration of certain related elements, penetrates all the way to the inmost core of the story—Lu's intransigence over his "career." Through the repetitions of the prominently representational words, codes, acts and colours which are interlocked to formulate a labyrinth of linkages, the true character of Lu is unraveled, and the manipulation of the narrative system is therefore of great practical value. Such patterns of sameness emphatically testify to the futility of Lu's pursuit of promotion, to the way in which he destroys his own pursuit and is destroyed by it, and to the source of his inability to confront the truth about himself.

Conclusion

Repetition in its various forms plays a pivotal role in Zhang Tianyi's narrative art. Either consciously or unconsciously, Zhang uses repetition to organize the material for and develop the themes of his fiction. Through repetition, certain themes are thus amplified and repetition also draws the reader's attention to the focal points or areas so that patterns of perception have emerged. In spite of Zhang's recurrent fragmentation, repetition helps to establish a sense of continuity by providing vital links to otherwise disconnected fragments. As a result, a continuous cycle of something considered by the author to be sufficiently significant to deserve recognition is likely to be taken seriously by the reader, and what is designed to be the most important is imprinted on his mind due to the cumulative effect of repetition.

NOTES

¹ Edward Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (London: Vintage, 1991) 114.

² The basic meaning of “xiao” is smile but “xiao” in Chinese can also be laugh, grin, beam, giggle, chuckle, chortle and so on, depending on the adjectives or adverbs. Thus it is often the repetition of the same character “xiao” in different contexts that engenders different meanings.

³ The text of Zhang Tianyi's works I have used is the Shanghai Wenyi Edition, *Zhang Tianyi Wenji* (The Collected Works of Zhang Tianyi) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1985-1993). Volume and page references are enclosed in parentheses.

⁴ Bruce F. Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* (Colorado: UP of Colorado, 1989) 85.

⁵ Lawrence S. Kubie, *Neurotic Distortion of the Creative Process* (New York: Noonday P, 1961) 141.

⁶ These remarks were made in the 1960s and 70s, and it is not difficult to see his point: he attempted to aver the conditions he talked about only existed in the past, certainly not in new China after its liberation. This is not true, of course. It is very arbitrary to demarcate between the conditions before 1949 and those after that year when the Communist regime was established. Nonetheless, he was right in saying that if the conditions are the same or similar, whatever emerges shows some resemblance.

⁷ However, different conditions prohibit the same repetition or rather, the exact repetition of the original cannot be enacted unless the conditions are the same or similar.

⁸ It is interesting that in an article Ye Junjian points out that the character of Mr. Hua Wei, “as a typicality, is not subject to the restrictions of time and space and even ideology.” In 1938, he translated the story into English and sent to *New Writing* in London, *Story* in New York and *International Literature* in Moscow. The three magazine published “Mr. Hua Wei” in the same year. Ten years later, Ye incorporated the same story into a collection with three short stories by Mao Dun entitled *The Seasons* and had it published in London. Ye recalls the story was also well received when it was published the second time in English. See “Zhang Tianyi tongzhi” (Comrade Zhang Tianyi), in *Zhang Tianyi lun* (On Zhang Tianyi), ed. by Wu Fuhui, Huang Houx-

ing, Shen Chengkuan and Zhang Daming (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1987) 4-5.

⁹ Various sources for this famous play by Shakespeare have been proposed, among them a lost play usually referred to as *Ur-Hamlet* on the same subject.

¹⁰ See *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 2.

¹¹ Connor does not elucidate the necessity and importance of repeating certain parts of “the other texts.” More curiously, allusion seems to be taken for granted as part of literature. Scholars such as J. Hillis Miller and Bruce F. Kavin do not even treat it as a form of repetition in their important works on repetition in literary texts: *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982) and *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* (Colorado: UP of Colorado, 1989).

¹² According to the Concise Oxford English Dictionary (9th edition), allusion is defined as “an indirect or passing reference.”

¹³ *The World, the Text and the Critic* 120.

¹⁴ *The World, the Text and the Critic* 121. Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, trans. Walter Lowrie (1941; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1964) 88-89.

¹⁵ See *Zhang Tianyi Wenji* (Collected Works of Zhang Tianyi) 9: 38. In 1951, Zhang Tianyi gave a long speech entitled “Lun Ah Q zhengzhuan” (On *The True Story of Ah Q*) at the Central Research Institute of Literature, which was then published in *Lu Xun Yanjiu* (Studies on Lu Xun) (3-64). He collected his notes taken in 1960, 1973 and 1974 and put them under the title, “Du Ah Q zhengzhaun zhaji” (Notes on *The True Story of Ah Q*). The article was first published in *Lu Xun danzhen yibai zhounian* (Articles in memory of the centenary of Lu Xun’s birth) (Hunan: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1981) 67-79.

¹⁶ See Qi Puyang, “Chongxiezhe ‘Ah Q zhengzhuan’—shilun Zhang Tianyi xiaoshuo de guominxing sixiang” (The Rewriting of “The True Story of Ah Q”—Tentative Commentary on the National Character in Zhang Tianyi’s Fiction), *Anqing shifan xueyuan xuebao*, 2 (1983) 61-67. Qi argues that even Zhang’s “first” short story was

inspired by Lu Xun's writing and his subsequent works such as *The Time of Pure Brightness*, "Smile" and "The Bulwark" also repeat the image of Ah Q to some extent. Moreover, Qi also mentions "The Leather Belt," "Lu Baotian" (Lu Baotian), "The Bao Father and Son," "Tuanyuan" (Reunion), "After Walking Out" and so on.

¹⁷ Bedford's translation of the title is "Vibration of the Darkness." See his Ph.D. dissertation (52). My version differs slightly from his, because darkness in this context is indeterminate, hence its fear-inspiring effect. Moreover, though 'hei' in this piece literally means 'blackness', it is essentially associated with darkness, which 'comes everyday' (4: 306)—an act of repetition, and which is also inimical as it destroys souls.

¹⁸ See his Ph.D. dissertation (52). However, the fact that Bedford calls it a story can be disputed. It is not strictly a story, as it has no plot and scarcely any development of the so-called character.

¹⁹ Bedford 56.

²⁰ Bedford 57.

²¹ Many Chinese critics have repeatedly made this point, including Bao Cang and Liu Zaifu, in *On Zhang Tianyi* 21-28.

²² "Guoren linghun de riqing xidi—lun Zhang Tianyi dui shimin xingxiang de gou zhu" (The enthusiastic cleansing of Chinese soul—on Zhang Tianyi's construction of the image of town-dwellers), *Beifang luncong* (Northern forum) 6 (1987) 43.

²³ The collection includes "The Dream of Three and a Half Days," "Mr. Ji Ye" and "Three Brothers."

²⁴ In Chinese, the word *liang* (light) is often applied to the bald head, hence a taboo for bald-headed people.

²⁵ According to an old Chinese tradition, unless the marriage is blessed by the man's parents, it is not "permissible," at least in the eyes of the parents and the relatives.

²⁶ Nigel Bedford, "Zhang Tianyi," Ph.D. dissertation (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1986) 294.

²⁷ See Bao Zhi, *Changan* (Long peace) 1 (1983): np.

²⁸ Yi Zhang, "Hua Wei xiansheng yingyou xupian" (There should be a sequel to Mr. Hua Wei), *Xinmin wanbao* (Xinmin evening news),

May 3, 1985.

²⁹ Jing Dizhi, *Chongqing wanbao* (Chongqing evening news), August, 15, 1986.

³⁰ Kawin argues, "It is even possible to say that we reduce the life force we represent to a logically apprehensible 'identity,' that we make ourselves Mr. B or Miss L as a defense against the immensity of life in and around us" (173).

³¹ Connor 3.

³² Connor 16-17.

³³ Connor 16.

³⁴ See *LXQJ* 2: 15-19.

³⁵ See *LXQJ* 2: 18.

³⁶ *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* 10-11.

³⁷ *Telling It* 10.

³⁸ See Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford UP, 1973). This point will be pursued and explored further in the second section of this chapter.

³⁹ Kawin 10.

⁴⁰ Kawin 10.

⁴¹ *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, tran. James Strachey (New York: Liveright, 1924) 44-45.

⁴² Kawin 20-21.

⁴³ The author is at pains to point out in the footnotes what and how she has misquoted.

⁴⁴ The Four Books are *The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius*. The Five Classics include *The Book of Songs*, *The Book of History*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rites* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*.

⁴⁵ Cf. Kawin 20-21.

⁴⁶ According to Hu Xingliang, Zhang's purpose of borrowing of names from Shakespeare is to contrast the two vulgar characters in his story with Shakespeare's two characters, who are in pursuit of pure love. See "Lun Zhang Tianyi qianqi de fengci xiaoshuo" (On Zhang Tianyi's early satirical fiction), *Nanjing daxue xuebao* 4 (1986) 108.

⁴⁷ Ph.D. Dissertation 271.

⁴⁸ According to the footnote on 4, p. 214, it means "tuberculosis."

⁴⁹ Notice the repetition of "orange red" here to be contrasted with his earlier hope.

