Leiden University

Faculty of Humanities

A Flower in a Pile of Cow Dung

Yang Yi's *Chinese Narratology* and Narrative Structure in Jia Pingwa

Name: Stijn Thomas Wijker
Date: 16/09/2018
Word count: 24.202

1st supervisor: Prof. dr. Maghiel van Crevel
2nd supervisor: Prof. dr. Ivo Smits

MASTER'S THESIS

Specialization: Asian Studies (ResMA)
Academic year: 2018-2019
E-mail address: s.t.wijker@umail.leidenuniv.nl

Table of Contents

Introduction and Methodology

In 1997, Yang Yi 杨义 [1] (b. 1946) published his groundbreaking *Chinese Narratology* (中国叙事学, 1998), in which he expounded his ideas about a Chinese narratology that developed and manifests itself separately from Western narratology. Although this pioneering work signifies an important shift in the development of narratology in China, the work has received very little attention in the West (Shang Biwu 2014: 4), and it deserves more. I will take Yang's narratology framework as a starting point, with a focus on Yang's understanding of narrative structure, and do a close reading of the novel *The Lantern Bearer* (带灯, 2013) by Chinese author Jia Pingwa 贾平凹 (b. 1952) (the English translation by Carlos Rojas was published in 2017). I do this in order to answer the following research question:

> How does Yang Yi's narratological approach of narrative structure compare to a "Western"-narratological approach of narrative structure?

In my analysis, for Western narratology, I will focus on Mieke Bal's (1997) *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. I will argue that Yang's idea of narrative structure allows for a reading that would not be possible by using only Bal's theory of narrative structure. As a case study, I will investigate how the narrative structure of Jia Pingwa's novel *The Lantern Bearer* relates to narrative structures found in traditional Chinese fiction from the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) period.[2]

---

[1] I use simplified Chinese characters for the names of texts, their authors and citations if the text was originally published in simplified characters. Otherwise, I use full-form characters.

[2] Traditional Chinese fiction here refers to the works that C.T. Hsia (1981) has called the Classic Chinese Novels (i.e. the 14th century novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義) attributed to Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, the 14th century novel *Water Margins* (水滸傳) attributed to Shi Nai'an 施耐庵, the 16th century *Journey to the West* (西遊記) attributed to Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩, the 17th century *Plum in the Golden Vase* (金瓶梅) attributed to an author with the pseudonym Lanling Xiaoxiaosheng 蘭陵笑笑生 (which means "The laughing scholar from Lanling), *The Scholars* (儒

Methodologically, I will first compare the idea of narrative structure in Yang's and Bal's theories. I do this by explaining, contextualizing and juxtaposing key concepts in their respective theories. Thus, I point out similarities and differences between their idea of narrative structure. I then proceed to analyze Jia's novel from this perspective. The analysis is based on careful readings of Jia's novel in which I pay close attention to content as well as style and language of the work.

This thesis will help present Yang Yi's "Chinese" narratology to an Anglophone audience, and advance our understanding of Jia's fiction and its place in Chinese culture. This project was undertaken at an institution of higher education located outside China that is part of "Western" systems of knowledge production. Hence, especially since the thesis engages with Chinese literary *theory* as well as with Chinese fiction, it is safe to say (without wishing to essentialize) that the thesis may also contribute to our understanding of Chinese literature as part of world literature—here simply taken to mean literary production throughout the world, with its various relations between the global and the local and between the universal and the particular.

林外史) completed in the 18th century by Wu Jingzi 吳敬梓, and the late 18th century novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢) by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹).

1. Literature Review

Besides Wang Yiyan's (2006) book-length study, which will be used extensively throughout this thesis, there are a handful of studies directly analyzing work by Jia Pingwa in English. In Chinese, there are at least a dozen books and over 400 individual articles on Jia varying in quality and length. In 2006, Lei Da 雷达 and Liang Ying 梁颖 published a compendium of important research on Jia Pingwa. From their compendium, I have selected Chinese articles that are relevant for this research, with a focus on narratology and traditional influences; I have additionally found some articles that were published in peer-reviewed journals after 2006 and thus weren't included in Lei and Liang's collection.

Individual English-language contributions on Jia's work include Kam Louie (1991), Carlos Rojas (2006), Thomas Chen (2015) and Eugene Chen Eoyang (2017). Kam Louie (1991) examines the story "Human Extremities" (人極, 1985) by Jia Pingwa that is couched in "terms of male sexuality" instead of concentrated "on the plight of women". The story therefore represented a new direction in Chinese literature. However, Louie cannot but conclude that the story, although briefly lifting the stereotypical "real man" from his traditional masculine confines by feminizing the main character's "more unpleasant masculine qualities" (184), it fails to depart from the traditional Chinese male-centered relationship between gender, class and power, and merely solidifies and emphasizes the impossibility for lower classes to exert (political) control over ruling classes. Translator of Jia's *The Lantern Bearer*, Carlos Rojas (2006), identifies Jia's tendency to fit remnants of the past, such as the appearance of "trans-dynastic flies" and the collecting of ancient city-wall bricks by the main character, within a narrative describing the relentlessness of China's modernization. Rojas argues that Jia does this in order to "constitute trans-historical spectral presences whose imperial-period associations stand in open defiance of the forward march of modernity" (750). Within this tendency lies a profound anxiety about culture amnesia in modern Chinese culture and a view of Chinese culture from the eyes of the Other, whether the Other be flies, bricks or foreign tourists. Thomas Chen (2015) argues that the white, empty squares in Jia's 1993 novel *Defunct Capital* (废都, now translated by Howard Goldblatt as *Ruined City*) seemingly signifying "sex too hot to print" (22) are actually representative spaces of the glaring absence of

the politically highly sensitive 1989 Tiananmen square massacre and the pre-1978 socialist epoch in the novel. Thus, when in 2009 the novel was republished after being banned in 1994 and these open squares were substituted by black dots, it signified a suffocation of the interpretive potential that these open spaces once offered. Therefore, while ostensibly representing a loosening of the yoke on censorship, it actually indicated a different, more sinister form of restriction. Lastly, in a recent article, Eugene Chen Eoyang (2017) addresses the concept of *ren* 仁 in Jia's novel *Turbulence* (浮躁). Eoyang deems the translation of *ren* as "benevolence" or "virtue" insufficient for it fails to convey a "fundamental truth about human beings: that we all derive from two people and that each of our parents derived from two other people, and so on through the generations" (3). Eoyang argues that through the depiction of peasants and mountain folk as *daren* 大人 or "intelligent, honest, brave, and hard-working" instead of *damingtou de tou* 大名頭的头 or "big-shots", Jia tries to eradicate the notion of the poor or lower classes as "unworthy of notice". As becomes apparent from these studies, English-language scholarship to date pays almost no attention to the narrative structures in Jia's work.

In the Chinese-language literature, there is a clear tendency to point out Jia's double preference to, on the one hand, write about and use elements of traditional Chinese culture and, on the other, address the cultural, societal as well as literary modernization and westernization in China. (This is something Rojas (2006) also discusses at length in English.) These juxtaposed aspects both present in Jia's work are sometimes discussed separately. For instance, Chen Guohe 陈国和 (2007) points out how the novel *Shaanxi Opera* (秦腔) is a melancholic dirge about the declining countryside and defeat of rural culture and it therefore departs from traditional "native soil" narratives (传统乡土作家). However, I think it can be argued that such a pessimistic view on the development of the countryside is fueled by a deep love and understanding of its culture. For instance, Li Yongyin 李咏吟 (1995) claims that Jia actually approves of the positive development of the history of the Chinese countryside while simultaneously admiring and capturing the mystery of the native place. Through comparison with work by Mo Yan 莫言 (b. 1955), Li argues that Mo Yan has come to terms with reality and history, and feels the only way

to really alter it is through behavior imbued with a "Dionysian spirit" (酒神精神); whereas Jia feels deeply the magic of the countryside and fully appreciates the never-ending spirit "that is characteristic of Chinese culture". Furthermore, Huang Shiquan 黄世权 (2012) argues that the flattening of narrative tone in Jia's later novels is meant to signify a return to the point of view of the people, embodying the unrestrained but weakened excitement of everyday life. And Chen Xushi 陈绪石 (2000) seeks to excavate elements of Daoist tragedy in Jia's work and connects this to Jia's identity as a traditional Chinese man of letters.

A larger body of work, however, focuses on the dichotomous nature of Jia's work. Lei Da (1986) sees Jia Pingwa's work on one hand as characterized by a strong "consciousness of the people" where Jia sometimes seems to forget he is an author and passionately expresses his unconditional love for the people. While on the other hand, Jia wishes to develop his "modern consciousness" and use a modern approach to evaluate the vicissitudes of the fate of rural people. Zhao Xueyong 赵学勇 (1994) argues that both early twentieth century work by Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902–1988) and Jia Pingwa use the perspective of people from the countryside to scrutinize national culture. However, they simultaneously employ a modern consciousness and an anxious attitude to evaluate the direction of the fate of the nation. Wang Zheng 汪政 (2002), in his turn, investigates Jia Pingwa's views on nature, the urban-rural juxtaposition, literati and aestheticism. He concludes by reiterating Jia's own words that from all these perspectives Jia just wants to "use 'pretty' traditional Chinese methods of expression to realistically convey the feelings and lives of modern Chinese people" (Wang Zheng 2002: 189; Jia Pingwa 1982: 8). Wang Yiyan 王一燕 (2003), before publishing her book-length study, published an article that uses Homi Bhabha's concept of "national narration" to investigate how Jia attempts to create Chinese national identity through his literary endeavors. Wang claims that for Jia modernization has almost become synonymous for westernization or commercialization: the direct cause for the destruction of traditional culture and the loss of hometown for rural people. This is the reason that his work after *Defunct Capital* (1993) can be categorized as national stories with a bleak view on the future of modern Chinese culture. Similar to other research, Wang Yiyan stresses that Jia's pessimistic view of the future of Chinese culture arises from a deep love and sympathy for rural tradition.

From the scholarship above it becomes apparent that in his writing Jia expresses his frustration with the influence of modernity on the traditional Chinese countryside. The juxtaposition of modern influence and traditional culture is also reflected on a level of writing style and narrative structure. Jia Pingwa's work seems to rely heavily on traditional Chinese storytelling while telling a story about contemporary China. As for scholars that study Jia's narrative structure and style, Li Yuchun 李遇春 (2003; 2016), Liang Ying (2007) and Zhang Chuanping 张川平 (2001) have made interesting contributions.

Li Yuchun (2003; 2016) divides Jia's narrative trajectory over the past forty years in roughly three parts. According to Li, from 1973 to 1992 Jia's work centered around his home village of Shangzhou and his signature works are *Turbulence* and *Shangzhou Series* (商州系列). His writing style was clear and simple and showed the influence of "revolutionary realism" (革命现实主义). In this period, Jia's writing did however not yet manage to fully transcend the forced nature and structures of revolutionary writing (Li Yuchun 2003). The second period (1993-2004) was slightly more experimental in style and content and shows clear signs of influence by magical realism. Around this time, Jia started actively reflecting on modernity. His work also started to embody an earnest empathy towards Chinese modern society and a sincere care for the living conditions of the Chinese people. In his last period, which lasts until today, Jia has reached literary maturity and his work shows a strong tendency for naturalism as exemplified by works such as *Shaanxi Opera* and *The Lamp Bearer* (Li Yuchun 2016).

Liang Ying (2007) compares Jia's work with two other Shaanxi writers Lu Yao 路遥 (1949-1992) and Chen Zhongshi 陈忠实 (1942-2016) and tries to pinpoint their contribution to the development of realism (现实主义) in Chinese literature. She concludes that the work of these three authors is characterized by life-like recordings and historiographic displays of the conditions of life and the demands of the human spirit. Lastly, Zhang Chuanping (2001) does not place the narrative strategies of Jia's work within one or more of the 'isms'. Zhang identifies a narrative strategy of writing abstract [ideas] through substance or the concrete [events] (以实写虚). This is an idea originating from Daoist thought that Jia himself has stressed in his writing (1982). Since

this narrative strategy has implications for the narrative structure of Jia's writing, I will look more closely at the concepts *shi* 实 (full, concrete, actual) and *xu* 虚 (empty, abstract, virtual) in the next chapter. Zhang feels that in a great work of fiction, the structural planning and use of imagery is not overly conspicuous, but is nonetheless covertly omnipresent. Only then can content turn into meaningful form, and form can then possess in itself content, thus successfully and comprehensively intertwining the workings of content and form.

Clearly, then, several researchers have stressed traditional influences in Jia's work. However, except for chapter eight ("Old Gao Village and native place dystopia") and nine ("Remembering Wolves–the function of local events") of Wang Yiyan's (2006) book, there are to my knowledge no studies that try to comprehensively and concretely analyze and identify how these traditional influences are reflected in Jia's work on a level of narrative structure. And, as pointed out by Xu Dong 徐冬 (2014: 104), even though the mysticism, plot patterns and use of traditional dialects in Jia's work all bear traces of, for instance, Ming-Qing novels, I have found no research that identifies the similarities through close readings of Jia's work. This, then, is what I will attempt to do, by further investigating the similarities between the narrative structures in Jia's work and traditional Chinese fiction.

Jia Pingwa: life and work

Jia Pingwa is one of the most important fiction writers and essayists in modern China. He started writing seriously as a university student during the early 1970s, a tumultuous time in China's recent history. When the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) came to an end, Jia's writing started to mature and become widespread in China. At this time, the Communist Party's yoke on artistic and literary creativity started to loosen. Writing in the post-Mao era many Chinese authors felt the need to innovate. With increased freedom in subject and technique, many writers turned to Western literature for inspiration and guidance. Jia Pingwa however turned not to such "imported ideas in fashion at the time". Instead he looked within, and focused on Chinese literary tradition and local tales (Wang Yiyan 2006: 37).

However, unlike the root-seeking authors (寻根作家), Jia did not write about or reflected on his memories of being sent down the countryside during the Cultural Revolution (Martin & Kinkley 1992: 111). In fact, Jia was born and raised on the countryside of Shaanxi province. And, as can be seen from the title of one of Jia's memoirs states, he has previously even identified himself as a peasant (我是农民 [I am a peasant]; Jia Pingwa 1998b). Throughout his writings it becomes clear that Jia sees the Chinese countryside, exemplified by his hometown of Shangzhou, as the harbor of traditional Chinese culture. Somewhat paradoxically, Jia Pingwa's Shangzhou stands in contrast to the rest of China for preserving traditional values and culture in a country that is rapidly ravished by modernity on the one hand. On the other hand, Shangzhou is supposed to be a microcosm of China's history and culture as a whole. In this way, what Wang Yiyan calls Jia Pingwa's "national narration" (2006: 5), is both an ode as well as a dirge to traditional Chinese culture.

One important consequence of Jia's decision to look inside Chinese culture for literary inspiration, or "his aesthetic project of restoring and developing Chinese narrative traditions" (Wang Yiyan 2006: vii), is Jia's usage of traditional Chinese literary techniques. According to some scholars, such as Meng Fanhua 孟繁华, Jia's literary style shows especially clear traits of Ming and Qing literature (Duowei 1993: 88). Besides preserving "the beauty and musicality of the Chinese language" (25), Wang Yiyan also identifies concrete examples of traditional Chinese

literary techniques in Jia's work such as the "hero-victim trope" (40) and "talented scholars (才子)" (73-75).

But most importantly, Wang Yiyan's investigation of the abstract-concrete (虛實) narrative structure in Jia's novels *Old Gao Village* (高老庄; 1998a) and *Remembering Wolves* (懷念狼; 2000) is especially convincing (153-155; 173-174). Andrew Plaks (1977a), Yang Yi (1998), Zhang Chuanping (2001) and Sheldon Lu (1994) all recognize the importance of *xu* (empty, abstract, virtual) and *shi* (full, concrete, actual) technique in traditional Chinese narratives. For instance, Sheldon Lu shows that the most important principle of Liu Zhiji's 劉知幾 (661-721) *Generality of Historiography* (史通) is "the direct recording of events as they really are (*shih'lu* 實錄)". Liu Zhiji argues that if an author's faithfully records events, then meaning becomes "self-evident" and readers can subsequently draw the conclusions or "moral lessons" themselves (Lu 1994: 75-77).

This technique of writing concrete events to convey abstract meaning is exactly what Jia is trying to do in *Old Gao Village* and *Remembering Wolves*. As Jia himself puts it in his postscript to *Old Gao Village*: "I want my writing as *concrete* as possible and yet in total it should enhance the totality of imagery I have in mind" (Jia Pingwa 1998a: 415, as quoted, translated and emphasized by Wang Yiyan 2006: 154). In his postscript to *Remembering Wolves*, he connects this abstract-concrete idea to the story about the vessel in the classical Daoist text *Daodejing* 道德經. In this particular Daoist story, it is pointed out that the vessel is usable exactly because it's empty: the material of the vessel (the concrete) allows for its emptiness and therefore gives it its meaning (the abstract) (Jia Pingwa 2000: 271).

More recently critics of Jia's work also mentioned the presence of this narrative strategy in *The Lantern Bearer*. Han Luhua 韩鲁华 points out that even though the amount of imagery throughout the work has declined in comparison to Jia's previous work, there is still a lot of description of concrete objects, such as a spider web, lice and peach blossoms, that serve as

imagery (Han Luhua & Jia Pingwa 2016: 264). Since the "abstract-concrete narrative strategy" has already been discussed quite extensively, I don't want to spend much time on it in my close reading. I would only like to point out that the recent identification of such narrative strategies by critics is again a telltale sign of Jia's continuous engagement with traditional Chinese thought and narrative techniques. It also illuminates the connection between Jia's narrative strategies and historiographical works such as Liu Zhiji's *Generality of Historiography*.

Critical reception of *The Lantern Bearer*

Critical reception of Jia's work in general has fluctuated throughout the years. In the early 1980s Jia became a force to be reckoned with on the stage of modern Chinese literature. With ten short stories and thirty essays published, Jia was from 1982 onwards able to devote all of his time to writing professionally (Wang Yiyan 2006: 37). His first novel *Shangzhou* in 1987 started a period of remarkable productivity in which Jia wrote one novel a year (39). His writing was lauded by critics for its "subtlety of life" and a "deep understanding of Chinese traditional culture" (47; the critic quoted and translated by Wang is, again, Meng Fanhua, see Duowei 1993: 88). However, the publishing of Jia's novel *Defunct Capital* in 1993 led to one of the darker periods of Jia's career. The novel was not only, as mentioned before, banned for seventeen years in China for its "cultural configuration of China" (especially its explicit pornographic content) (Wang Yiyan 2006: 48), it was also harshly berated by the same literary critics that exalted his work earlier. This sent Jia down a brief path of decreased productivity (48). Although his fifth novel *White Nights* (白夜) did not get much attention, Jia has been slowly reestablishing his place on the literary stage since 1995. Jia's perseverance culminated in the 2008 Mao Dun Literature Prize for his 2005 novel *Shaanxi Opera*. Since *Shaanxi Opera*, Jia has published six more novels: *Happy Dreams* (高兴 2007), *Old Kiln* (古炉 2011), *The Lantern Bearer*, *Master of Songs* (老生 2014), *The Poleflower* (极花 2016) and *The Mountain Stories* (山本 2018). With his presence now firmly established in China, various audiences the West are also increasingly paying attention to Jia's writing. In 2016, a website[3] for

[3] See: http://www.ugly-stone.com/. Accessed July 31, 2018.

the *Jia Pingwa Project* was established with (sample) translations and information about the author in English. In January 2018, a Jia Pingwa MLA roundtable was organized in New York.[4]

In 2013, *The Lantern Bearer* was published. In 2017, the work was translated into English by Carlos Rojas.[5] The novel documents the travails of the beautiful and smart female cadre Daideng (literally "lantern bearer"). At the beginning of the story, Daideng has been appointed as the head of the new office of social management in a township called Cherry Town in rural Shaanxi. During her time in Cherry Town, Daideng and her assistant Zhuzi are forced to deal with countless problems: from dealing with petitioning and fighting citizens and fellow government officials to the construction of a factory and a lice infestation. The novel is divided into a short first part, "Mountain Wilderness" (山野), a long middle part, "Starry Night" (星空), that forms the majority of the book and again a short last part, "Spectral Apparitions" (幽灵). Each part is again divided into short chapters of various lengths. Each chapter is provided with a short title concisely capturing the content of the events to come.

Overall, the novel has been well-received by China's literary world. Luan Meijian 栾梅健 (2013) and Chen Xiaoming 陈晓明 (2013) give it highly favorable reviews. Luan Meijian defends Jia's work in light of negative reviews by Shi Huapeng 石华鹏 and Tang Xiaolin 唐小林. Shi Huapeng feels that the work lacks "body" and "vigor" and Tang Xiaolin argues that *The Lantern Bearer* is "old wine in new bottles": a regurgitation of subjects that Jia has already extensively discussed in previous works. Luan categorically dismisses these bad reviews. He feels that Shi

[4] See: https://u.osu.edu/mclc/2017/02/09/jia-pingwa-mla-2018-roundtable/. Accessed July 31, 2018.

[5] The translation is published by CN Times Books, a daughter company of the giant Chinese publishing company Beijing Mediatime Books. Published in May 2017, *The Lantern Bearer* appears to be CN Times' last publication to this day. I think the translation tries to remain very close to the original, which is admirable but sometimes leads to somewhat clunky dialogue. The editing on this translation however is sloppy. There are (sometimes multiple) repetition, omission and punctuation errors on pages: 20, 26, 54, 60, 68, 74, 76, 79, 85, 90, 91, 92, 93, 98, 103, 104, 110, 128, 132, 142, 151, 153, 170, 174, 188, 233, 241, 243, 247, 256, 263, 272, 277, 285, 290, 294, 295, 302, 317, 341, 380, 386, 393, 402, 405, 408, 412, 420, 423, 433, 434, 474, 476, 481, 502, 503, 510, 511, 512, 513 and 515. This is especially painful considering the original has been revised over seven times, which, according to Jia Pingwa's editor, was an unprecedented number of times (Luan Meijian 2013: 41).

Huapeng clearly did not fully understand the novel and Tang Xiaoling completely overlooks the work's new and unique treatment of a familiar topic (42).

It is exactly this new and unique perspective that is at the heart of Luan's praise. Through a quick summary of Jia's novels, Luan argues that *The Lantern Bearer* approaches an "old" topic, namely Jia's much beloved Shaanxi countryside, from an entirely different viewpoint. Jia's previous work focused on cultural and domestic problems in Chinese rural areas from an inside perspective. These works observed and demonstrated the problems through the people living and experiencing these problems. *The Lantern Bearer*, however, approaches these familiar problems from an external viewpoint. Now the problems are dissected from the perspective of governmental officials that have the task to resolve these problems. In doing so, Jia widens the scope of his investigation of China's rural culture. The novel seems to point out that the fates of rural citizens are heavily shaped through these cadres or "outsiders".

Not only the perspective has changed, also the scope of the area has increased. In contrast to Jia's previous novels, the focus is not one village in the Shangzhou area. In *The Lantern Bearer,* Jia scrutinizes the convoluted relations between the citizens of a collection of villages. All these villages are part of the township-administrative unit of Cherry Town. Luan argues that, by shifting the angle from the grievances between families towards the political system's management of these problems, Jia has created a novel that is even closer to reality (45). However, the conclusion of the novel is not very different from Jia's previous work. In the end, it is still the lower-ranked, sincere officials and the ordinary people that fail and suffer. The higher, cunning officials and citizens come out unscathed for the most part. It is this subtle critique created by the novel's new perspective and wider scope that represents a new direction in Jia's writing.

In 2006, Wang Yiyan categorized Jia's "nativist writing" as a form of cultural nostalgia similar to writings by Shen Congwen (17). Wang's critical framework is partly predicated upon the idea that it is Jia's "mission to reassert Shangzhou's place on the cultural map of China" (21). Since the scope and perspective in *The Lantern Bearer* have respectively shifted from small and internal towards wide and external, this framework has to be altered accordingly. Jia's writing has shifted towards Wang Yiyan's category of nativist writing concerned with "national defects" (15). The focus of Jia's work does no longer only lie on the "innocence" and "a passion for the land, the people and their cultures from 'within'" (17). Rather, the work starts to show some characteristics similar to the writings by Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) Su Tong 苏童 (b. 1963). In those works,

characters are “hideous and pathetic” and “hostility permeates the small town, where the residents are enemies to the extent that apathy is a virtue” (16). In fact, Wang Yiyan is highly perceptive when she points out that Jia Pingwa’s 2002 novel *Health Report* (病相报告) “shows signs of a new narrative direction”. Wang senses that Jia’s writing has become “increasingly critical of local characters, which is quite different from his previous lyrical, pastoral writings.” Novels like *The Lantern Bearer* and more recently *The Poleflower* (2016), that addresses the issue of human trafficking in rural China, demonstrate that Jia has indeed developed in that direction.

Luan concludes his review with praising Jia’s passion. When in the end, Daideng exhausted by the unfair result of all her struggles, starts sleepwalking, and when she is “like a leaf, being slapped back and forth between the walls of an alleyway, the author’s resentment and anger are spilled out on the page.” (47) With this in mind, how can one possibly dismiss the “raw” description of Daideng’s devastating failure in spite of sincere intentions as “without body” or “merely repetitive”? (47)

Whereas Luan viewed *The Lantern Bearer*’s contribution in regard to Jia Pingwa’s literary output and development, Chen Xiaoming takes a bigger step back and tries to place Jia’s work within the development of Chinese literature from the 1950s and 60s onwards. For Chen, *The Lantern Bearer* is the “conclusion of political ethical dilemmas and aesthetic idealism” (2013: 10). The idealized political figure of Daideng enters China’s rural reality, creating two thematic levels: the dilemmas of contemporary Chinese rural areas reality on the one hand, and Jia’s idealized hope of rural politics on the other (20). Chen tries to argue that because of the two thematic levels, the work resembles the political idealism of Chinese literature in the 1950s and 60s. In doing so, Chen connects a development in recent Chinese literature (a return to political idealism of the 1950s) to Jia Pingwa. One can agree or disagree with Chen’s conclusion, but the most important thing to take away is that in Chen’s eyes Jia’s work is able to take the reins of development in contemporary Chinese literature. In China, Jia is a literary force to be reckoned with.

2. Chinese narrative structure according to Yang Yi

In the following chapters, I compare Yang Yi's (1998) conception of Chinese narrative structure to the idea of narrative structure as formulated by Mieke Bal (1997).[6] I do this in order to get a better understanding of Yang Yi's idea of Chinese narrative structure and to indicate where his theory differs from the idea of narrative structure in "Western" theory of narrative. I then will use Yang's ideas to do a close reading of Jia's *The Lantern Bearer*.

As I will show, the approaches to narrative structure in these two theories are opposite to each other. Yang Yi rejects Western narrative theory and argues for a theory of structure that is unique to Chinese narratives. Although Yang does not explicitly say if his theory is applicable to non-Chinese literature, I think he implies its exclusive application to Chinese literature by stressing the importance of "cultural feeling"[7]:

> 中国特色的现代叙事学，是以渊深的文化感为其意义的密码，又以内在生命感为其形式的本质。对叙事形式的文化生命阐释，乃是本书所追求的学术品格。
>
> Modern narratology with Chinese characteristics employs a profound cultural feeling as the password to the meaning [of narratives], and also uses an internal feeling for life as the essence of the form [of narratives]. The scientific merit pursued by this book, is an explanation of the cultural life of narrative forms. (4)

[6] I use the second edition of Bal's *Narratology, introduction to the theory of narrative*. Whereas the first edition of 1985 focused mainly on written, literary narratives, the revised edition also includes close readings of narrative "texts" of other cultural products such as visual art and anthropology. Bal also stresses that in the second edition she is "trying to emphasize more the role of narratology as a heuristic tool, not an objective grid providing certainty." (1997: xiii) This is important for this thesis because a theory that is intended to be used as a rule of thumb, instead of a "grid providing certainty", leaves more room for comparison and interpretation. I have only recently managed to get a copy of the third edition, published in 2009. The revisions in the third edition mostly pertain to new examples to further clarify the theory set out in previous editions. These changes have not lead to a significant difference in my understanding of Bal's theory of narrative structure.

[7] In the case of citations from Yang Yi's book, I will quote both the original Chinese text and my English translation. This way the reader can make up their own mind about the meaning of the original text, while simultaneously get a better understanding of my interpretation of Yang Yi's argument.

As noted, Yang Yi appears to imply the exclusive applicability of his theory to literary products of Chinese culture. Bal takes the position that ideally "the academic practice of interpretation" should "include the views of those who respond to art from a less dominating social position. Such an opening up is an indispensable next step towards a better, more diverse and complex understanding of culture" (1997: 18); and, different from Yang, she emphasizes that the "notion that language is not unified provides access to bits and pieces of culturally different environments within a single text. […] Any text is a patchwork of different strata, bearing traces of different communities and of the contestations between them." (66) Bal sees the heuristic tools of narratology as a way of understanding cultural plurality. Yang Yi sees his narratology as a way of showing the alterity of Chinese culture and this culture's unique influence on narrative. These two different understandings of narratology raise pertinent questions about cultural relativism, cultural plurality and power relations; but these lie outside the scope of the present thesis.

I find that in terms of application, although not as fundamentally different as claimed by Yang Yi, his theory of narrative structure does indeed differ from Bal's understanding of narrative structure in some crucial respects. Through identifying the differences, I can confirm the hypothesis that Yang's idea of narrative structure allows for a way of reading that would not be possible by using only Bal's theory of narrative structure. This will inform my close reading of Jia Pingwa's *The Lantern Bearer*, and my comparison of narrative structure in Jia Pingwa's novel and traditional Chinese narratives.

Different approaches to narrative structure

Here, I will elaborate on the difference between Bal's and Yang's approach to narrative structure. For Bal, structure is something that a reader projects on a narrative (6). This means that "structures are formed by the investigating subject on the basis of selected events combined with other data" (193). To project structure on a narrative, a reader selects "events" and "data" from the narrative that they are "investigating". And Bal stresses that "the circumstances of [the author's] life are of no consequence to the specific discipline of narratology." (16)

Yang's approach is fundamentally different. Instead of approaching structure as an analytical tool devised by the reader to better understand and analyze a narrative, Yang starts out

by asking how an *author* conceives and constructs a narrative structure (1998: 37). In its broadest sense, Yang defines structure as the tension between how to start writing and the goal of the writing. In the writing process, structure is the first thing, and the final thing, that an author has to consider. Narrative structure should be looked at as both finished and under construction. The author has a "preconceived structure" in mind and aims to turn this into writing. Through structuring narrative, the author bestows the narrative with their ideas and experiences about life and the world (39). These ideas and experiences are not always easily identifiable in the content of the narrative, but are often hidden within its structure.

From Bal's point of view, this is problematic if not impossible. For instance, how can a reader possibly know about this "preconceived structure" of the author? And if one does not look at structure as an analytical tool conceived by the reader, but as something "constructed" by the author, is it not still true that the reader is only left with the finished structure of the narrative? How does imagining an author who conceives and structures narrative help the reader in their reading of the narrative?

Yang seems to argue that any narrative has one structure as *intended* by the author. It is the task of the reader to grasp this intended (or preconceived) structure to completely understand the meaning and significance of the specific position of characters and events in the narrative. Readers who want to use such an understanding of narrative structure in their analysis of narrative will find this creates many practical problems. It asks much of the reader. However, as I will show, Yang Yi's narratology can be used to analyze Chinese narratives without reverting to "the circumstances of the author's life". Below, I now quote a part of Yang's argument, to show how he tries to frame his theory in opposition to Western "structuralism":

> 自然也可以像西方结构主义叙事学那样，把复杂的叙事存在简约成若干个叙事函数，然后进行机械的编配，或者把一部结构宏伟的作品简约成一句话，这样不可比较的东西就可以比较了。但是恕我不够恭敬，如此简约，只不过把丰富多采的叙事世界简约成形式游戏的碎片，作者比起一生的心血被简约掉了，「字字看来皆是血，十年辛苦不寻常」的叙事结构被寻常化了，成为包治百病的万金油了。

叙事科学应该包容人类智慧，而不应该一味地删除人类智慧。因此必须如实地把叙事结构型态看作是人类把握世界（包括现实世界和幻想世界）、人生（包括外在人生和内在人生）以及语言表达（包括语言之所指和能指）的一种充满生命投入的形式，看作是人类智慧发展和积累的过程。以此为基本思路，以此为衡量标准，则不难发现，结构型态是一部由简而繁、由浅而深、由一而多、由正而变的历史，在其古往未来的曲折推衍中，往往有新旧更替，或多元并存的复杂景观，形成某种[…] 永远是有所创新，永远是开放的体系。

Naturally, one can also, like the narratology of the Western structuralists, take a complex narrative being, reduce it to several narrative formulas and perform a mechanical allocation, or take a work of magnificent structure and reduce it to a single sentence, making comparable what is incomparable. However, forgive me for being disrespectful, such simplifications merely reduce a rich and varied narrative world into the pieces of a form-game, a lifetime of painstaking work by the author is reduced to shreds, a narrative structure [that made critics cry:] "Words on the paper mix with blood / The extraordinary labor of ten years!"[8] is made ordinary, and turned into a panacea.

The science of narrative should include human wisdom, and not persistently eliminate human wisdom. Therefore, one has to, as reality dictates, regard structure as a type of form imbued with vitality of humans grasping the world (including the actual world and imaginary worlds), life (including external life and internal life) and language

[8] 字字看來皆是血，十年辛苦不尋常 are the last two lines of a poem now commonly attributed to a commentator of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Zhi Yanzhai 脂硯齋. It stems from a preface Zhi Yanzhai wrote in the Jia Xu manuscript (甲戌本). For the original English translation of these lines and further information on Zhi Yanzhai's commentary, see Ronald Gray and Mark Ferrara's translation of Zhou Ruchang's 周汝昌 book: Gray& Ferrara (2009: 176-188).

> expression (including language as the signified and as the signifier), it has to be regarded as a process of the development and accumulation of human knowledge. If one takes this as the fundamental way of thinking, as the standard of measurement, then it is not difficult to see, that form of structure is a history [that developed] from simple to complicated, from shallow to deep, from one to many and from rigid to variable. Its meandering from antiquity into the future implies that there will always be alternation between new and old, and multi-coexisting, complicated landscapes, forming a kind of system […] that will forever involve innovation, [a system that will] always be unrestrained. (97)

From this excerpt, one can see that Yang passionately argues for a fundamental distinction between his Chinese narratology and the narratology created by what he calls "Western structuralists". In his eyes, Western narratology reduces the "extraordinary labor" of authors to unconnected formulas and distinct parts. Parts that on their own, disconnected from the other parts, are devoid of meaning. Western narratology, Yang argues, therefore destroys and ignores the original beauty of the narrative structure as a whole.

I do not think this is what Western structuralists necessarily do, or that late 20th-century and early 21st-century narrative theory are "simply" structuralist. For instance, Bal notes that "it is only in a series that events become meaningful […] it is pointless to consider whether or not an isolated fact is an event" (1997: 184). She also stresses that "the point is not that meaning can be pinpointed in any simple way. But it is only once we know how a text is structured that the reader's share -and responsibility- can be clearly assessed" (11). Yang's frustration with Western narrative theory perhaps arises because he conflates analytical and evaluative approaches. Western narrative theory emphasizes the heuristic value of the tools of narratology. As such, narrative structures are only present in the narrative as far as the reader finds it useful for their understanding of the narrative. With the help of heuristic tools and concepts, a better analytical understanding and explanation of one's interpretation of a narrative can subsequently lead to a more profound evaluation of the narrative as a whole. I think that Yang does not necessarily engage effectively with "Western" narratology when he says that these theories merely "take apart" narratives and "reduce [them] to formulas", implying that in the eyes of "Western structuralists" meaning of a complex narrative as a whole is irrelevant. I would argue that Bal's point, and that of Western narratology in general, is not that narratology is only concerned with "analyzing" and "taking apart"

and never with the meaning of a work. They merely stress that meaning is always an interpretation based on structural analysis and "an interpretation is never anything more than a proposal ('I think that the text means this')" (Bal 1997: 11).

Another remark has to be made regarding Yang's frustration with a Western narratology that allegedly separates the work from the context it was written in and only works with the "data" as present in the text. This frustration undoubtedly ties in with Bonnie McDougall's observation of a closer link between author and the text in Chinese fiction compared to Western fiction. This closer link means that often "Chinese authors invite audiences to make the leap from fiction to autobiography" (McDougall 2003: 9; Wang Yiyan 2006: 4). From this perspective, one can understand Yang Yi's reservations about close readings that analyze narratives separate from the context they were written in.

However, it will become clear throughout this thesis that, although these starting points are very far removed from each other, Bal and Yang's understanding of analytical concepts also shows notable similarities. That is why, for my own analysis, I feel it is possible to take a position in between these two opposite approaches and to draw on both. On the one hand, I subscribe to the view that a reader cannot possibly know the narrative structure as "intended" by the author. On the other hand, even if I reject Yang's claim that narrative structure is devised by an author—and any notion that inasmuch as this is the case, the reader has access to it—Yang's theory of structure does offer some tools that can be used analytically to interpret a narrative, regardless of the question whether the meaning that is thus generated is one that was "intended" by the author. My analysis will use Yang's tools analytically, and will not privilege an image of the author as preconceiving the narrative's structure or substantially draw on the circumstances of the author's life. To illustrate my point, a brief look at Yang's analytical concepts *dao* 道 and *ji* 技 is warranted before I continue with a detailed explanation of his conception of narrative structure.

Concepts: *dao* and *ji*

Throughout Chinese cultural history, *dao* 道 and *ji* 技 are complex philosophical concepts and the translations I use throughout this thesis do not cover their entire spectrum of meaning and

significance. When using these terms, I merely use them as understood by Yang in this specific context.

On the upper-level structure of a narrative Yang identifies the existence of *ji*, which refers to the technical structure of the narrative (技巧性结构, literally 'structure of a technical nature'). This technical structure contains a deeper level of *dao*, or the philosophical structure (哲理性结构, literally 'structure of a philosophical nature'). For Yang, "philosophical" broadly refers to any *idea* the author is trying to bring across in their work. It is fair to say that the difference between *ji* and *dao* is analogous with the difference between analysis and meaning discussed above. Because of the dualistic nature between this technical and philosophical structure, their relation is (1) dynamic, (2) all-encompassing and (3) able to convey great thoughts (1998: 51). Some examples will help to elucidate how Yang understands and uses this dual-layered structure of *ji* and *dao*.

In the classic *Plum in the Golden Vase* (金瓶梅), an erotic novel written by an anonymous author in the 16th century, the Lion Street plays an important role in numerous scenes. On the upper-level of *ji*, this street is merely a location serving to place events into a context. However, through the repetitive use of this location throughout the narrative, this location gains a deeper meaning. In an early scene, the brother of Wu Song, Wu Dalang, is murdered on this very street. This happens in a plot conceived by Xi Menqing, the same person who cuckolds Wu Dalang. From this point in the narrative, this street will have a new, blood-stained, deeper level of meaning in any scene featuring it later on. When Xi Menqing throws one of his extravagant, lavish parties on this street, his conduct is not only ridiculously frivolous and wasteful on the surface. The deeper levels of meaning attached to this street now imply a deeper, darker level of interpretation which makes these parties gory, more disrespectful, and even blasphemous. By identifying and subsequently analyzing these inconspicuous indirect connections created by the technique of repetition (a manifestation of the technical structure of *ji*), meaning (or *dao*) of the text becomes apparent. The "recording" of these extravagant yet trivial activities of rich people, is able to reach a deeper level of meaning every time repetition occurs (Yang 1998: 54-55).

In another example, Yang goes on to explore the function of *ji* and *dao* in Lu Xun's "Medicine" (藥), published in 1919. The deeper meaning of the Lion Street in *Plum in the Golden*

Vase is easily traceable because it gradually deepens or gains momentum as the narrative unfolds linearly. From the very end of the Qing onwards, however, fictional narratives became more and more influenced by Western literary techniques. As a result, these fictional narratives often do not use a linear passage of time, but employ constant "weaving" and "folding" of time and space. However, Yang argues that the two-layered structure of *ji* and *dao* is still relevant in the analysis of Chinese narratives influenced by these Western techniques. The concepts merely find new and more intricate forms of expression. They just have to be understood slightly different in narratives with a more complex sequentiality.

In the case of Lu Xun's "Medicine", the technical structure does not manifest itself through repetition, but through a constant interplay between two opposed storylines, one "bright" (明) and one "dark" (暗) respectively. By "bright" Yang does not mean to imply that there are more positive or warm connotations attached to the one main storyline of the narrative, and negative or cold connotations to the other. In that respect, both storylines are arguably equally dark and pessimistic. The "bright" or "narrated" storyline merely refers to the storyline that is explicitly written, the one that is on the surface of the narrative. The "dark" or "implied" storyline refers to the storyline hidden within the narrative, the storyline that is implied by the "bright" storyline. In "Medicine", the "bright" or narrated storyline is represented by the character of the desperate father Hua Laoshuan, while the "dark" story line is represented by the character of the murdered revolutionary Xia Yu. The storylines unfold as follows:

> **"Bright"** or **narrated storyline**: Near the Ancient Pavilion, Hua Laoshuan secretly buys a steamed bun soaked with blood of tortured revolutionaries – the Hua family's only son eats the bun in the conviction that it will cure his disease – At the Hua family's tea house, executioner Kang brags about the therapeutic powers of the revolutionary-blood bun and tells everyone about Xia Yu torture and death – Mother Hua visits the grave of her deceased son.
>
> **"Dark"** or **implied storyline**: (Revolutionaries are tortured at the Ancient Pavilion) – (Their blood is used to soak the steamed buns) – At the teahouse, Xia Yu is talked about

and ridiculed for the fact that he was sold out by his clansmen and beaten –Xia Yu's mother goes to his grave, meets mother of the deceased boy, and discovers the flowers on his grave

Yang argues that, through such a pairing of these two storylines, Lu Xun focuses on spaces in society. The two lines are connected to each other through spaces: The Ancient Pavilion where the tortures take place ("dark") and the bun is bought ("bright"), the tea house ("bright") where Xia Yu's death and betrayal are ridiculed ("dark"), the grave where the two mothers (and the storylines) meet. The two ostensibly unconnected storylines are connected through locations. This is a manifestation of *ji*, a technical structure. Subsequently, the parallelism and juxtaposition of these storylines (the "bright" family drama vs. the "dark" heroic tragedy), created by *ji* conveys the story's *dao*: a criticism on the worrying state of Chinese society (Yang 1998: 60-64). Contrary to Yang's rhetoric, instead of saying that this is *the* meaning or *dao* of Lu Xun's story, I would say that this is Yang's interpretation of a possible meaning of Lu Xun's short story. As mentioned before, these examples illustrate how Yang Yi's theory of narrative offers tools that can be used analytically to form one's own interpretation of meaning of a narrative, regardless of whether this particular meaning was "intended" by the author.

Before Yang Yi's Chinese narrative structure can be further compared to the concept of structure in Mieke Bal's theory of narrative, I first want to discuss various perceptions of the function of narrative in the Western and Chinese traditions.

The function of narrative

What is the function of narrative? Although Sheldon Lu writes, with some justification, that "a clear definition of what constitutes narrative raises more problems than it solves" (1994: 22), I still believe that a general understanding of the different perceptions of the possible functions of narrative is useful and necessary. This is because one's understanding of the function of narrative influences one's understanding of narrative structure.

According to Andrew Plaks, a trailblazing scholar of Ming-Qing fiction, in the Western tradition, the function of narrative in its broadest sense can be simply defined as "story-telling" (Plaks 1977a: 314). In line with Plaks' observation, Bal does indeed define narrative as "cultural artifacts that 'tell a story'" (1997: 3). In contrast, the traditional function of Chinese narrative could

be said to be more concerned with "transmitting actual or hypothetical fact" (Plaks 1977a: 314). I do not want to deny the influence of story-telling on Chinese narrative and narrative structure (Eoyang 1977). However, the traditional function of narrative in China certainly put an emphasis on the transmission of fact. Similarly, Yang Yi traces the function of narrative (敘事) back to its origins of cataloging objects in a particular order (in the homonymous expression 序事). Yang draws this conclusion on the basis of the linguistic connection between the verbs to recount (*xu* 敘) and to sequence (*xu* 序; 1998: 13). To further elaborate on this preoccupation with "sequencing" and "transmitting fact" instead of story-telling, Yang goes on to compare the historical development of narrative in China and the West. According to Yang, in the West, the development of narrative can be simplified as:

Legend → epic → romance → novel

In China, the development of narrative can be loosely summarized as:

Legend → historiography → novel

So instead of legends developing into epics and romances, in China the earliest narratives were mostly concerned with the recording of historical events. Fictional narratives subsequently grew out of this Chinese tradition of historiography. This direct connection between historiography and fictional narratives in the Chinese tradition has profoundly affected Chinese fictional narrative structure. I therefore want to scrutinize this development more closely.

From historiography to fiction

Similar to the early Greek epic, fact and fiction were blended in the earliest Chinese histories and classical philosophical works. However, contrary to early western narratives, these earliest Chinese narrative writings claimed to record facts (Lu 1994: 30, 77-78; DeWoskin 1977: 24). In China, the birth of fiction therefore meant a divergence from historiography. A divergence from

recording events that are considered to have actually happened, towards writing events that are made up or imagined. Approximately from this divergence onwards, men of letters (and yes, they were overwhelmingly men) recognized that fiction could be written and read for literary ends.

Kenneth DeWoskin (1977) identifies the emergence of *zhiguai* 志怪 (roughly translatable as "recordings of the strange") during the Six Dynasties (222–589) as the start of this divergence of historiography and fiction. The first *zhiguai* writers belonged to the imported high culture of the Jin dynasty (317–420). They considered the indigenous culture of their capital in the south, Nanjing, as uncivilized (35). However, they were bound to these indigenous southern cultures by family ties. This caused a mixing of imported literary tradition and indigenous popular or folk culture. This had such a profound influence on the Chinese narrative tradition that it led to the actual "conception of a new literary genre" (36).

Especially the formal refinement of history writing left an imprint on *zhiguai.* An important form in traditional historical writings such as Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (史記) and *The Book of Han* (漢書) is the biography. *Zhiguai* writers often chose the biography as the form for their non-factual narratives. The biography form offered a good model to mix fictional and factual materials. The biography thus allowed for a transition from history-writing towards the fictional narratives of *zhiguai.* Later this development continued towards the more extensive fictional narratives of the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties. In fact, this line of thought can even be extended to the classic novels of the Ming and Qing dynasties. In order to "follow the lives of individuals and families", these novels essentially connect a number of fictional biographies of individuals (49-50).

The emergence of *zhiguai* writings paved the way to further fictionalized narratives such as the *chuanqi* 傳奇 tales (literally "transmission of the strange") of the Tang, to the vernacular short story, to oral story cycles and to the full-length narratives of the Ming and Qing (Plaks 1977a: 322). Z*higuai* writings caused wide acceptance of the idea that narratives did not have to be a factual historical record in the strictest sense of the word. However, up until the beginning of the twentieth century, most authors still preferred to have a historical foundation for their fictional narratives. And it is true that they, as well as their audiences, "were more interested in the fact in fiction than in fiction as such"; therefore, authors always placed their stories within a "specific

locale and time" and "stories and novels […] must justify themselves as truth, *however allegorically disguised*, to inculcate the kind of lesson which history teaches" (Hsia, C.T. 1981: 16, emphasis added). Authors of fiction would employ the same techniques as the historian and collected and arranged events and characters taken from a large variety of sources (Lu 1994: 47). Not surprisingly, writers of highly fictionalized narrative works such as the Qing-dynasty *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* (聊齋誌異), a collection of almost five hundred supernatural tales written by Pu Songling 蒲松齡 (1640-1715), often even directly identified themselves with the authoritative position of the historian. This all points to the fact that in the Chinese tradition, "the fiction writer's license as *fictor* was restricted" (DeWoskin 1977: 51).

Eventually, the Chinese poetics of narrative "moved away from a historiography based on authentic historical events to an aesthetics that focuses on the depiction of realistic human emotions and truthful principles" (Lu 1994: 11). However, historiography's function of transmitting and arranging fact has left its mark on Chinese fictional narratives ever since. The fact that factualness was a strict requirement of fiction illustrates this influence (Leenhouts 2015: 9). Fictional narratives tended to systematically record and arrange events, often included a narrator or storyteller that identified themselves as an historian, and extensively made use of the biography form. Furthermore, even if this is difficult to prove, the "matter-of-fact narrative style" of fiction also seems to be an inheritance from historiography (Hsia, C.T. 1981: 14). Yang Yi emphasizes the importance of this development of narrative from historiography towards fiction, and goes on to identify three important ways in which historiography influenced the structure of Chinese fictional narratives.

The influence of historiography on Chinese fictional narrative structure

In his introduction to the characteristics of Chinese narrative structure, one of Yang Yi's first examples explores how, in the *Records of the Grand Historian*, Sima Qian arranged historical events that happened over a large amount of time into a historical record. Yang Yi argues that due to the refined and well-knit structure of the *Records of the Grand Historian*, the position of a certain event within the structure gives the event its specific meaning and significance. However, this statement about events being bound to a *specific* place in the structure, raises an important

question in regard to the relationship between the narrative structure of historiography and fiction. Despite the common practice of fictionalization in Chinese historiography, the historian is to some degree bound by the historical sequence of events and their importance in the grand scheme of things. But (how) does this apply to fictional narratives?

Yang argues that narrative structures of historiographies such as the *Records of the Grand Historian* influenced narrative structure, in general, in at least three ways. (1) Structure is not homogeneous: the position of different (historical) events or characters within a structure are not necessarily equally distributed, they are *sequenced* and arranged on the basis of their respective positions in (history's "real" or fiction's "imagined") time and space. (2) The place of characters and events within the structure are entirely intentional and are therefore not interchangeable. And lastly, (3) because of this lack of equal distribution and homogeneity between different parts of the structure, there exist relationships between parts that are *connective* or *contrasting* in nature: negative-positive, primary-secondary, light-heavy, rising-falling, good-bad et cetera.

Therefore, Yang concludes, when looking at the entirety of structure one cannot just take it apart and analyze every part separately. One has to consider the immensely complex relationships between all of its constituent parts. Every bit of narrative contributes to the construction of structure, and from a structural viewpoint every bit of narration can thus be explained (1998: 41-42). In this way, Yang continues the method of traditional commentators such as Zhang Zhupo 張竹坡 (1670-1698) who wrote a fascinating commentary to the *Plum in the Golden Vase.* David Roy argues that according to Zhang Zhupo "every detail […] makes a contribution" to the work, and "the critic's task is thus a creative one, requiring nothing less than the re-creation of a work of literature through the process of analyzing its constituent elements, ascertaining the functions they perform, and demonstrating how the particular way in which they are integrated into a larger whole contributes to the impact of the work considered as a totality" (1977: 121).

According to Yang, in order to get a grip on this all-encompassing structure of a work, a reader has to be on the lookout for "twists and turns" or "disturbances" in the narrative. These disturbances manifest themselves when something happens that, from the perspective of the reader, seems "unexpected". These so-called disturbances in a fictional narrative are again partly the result of its inheritance from historiography. As mentioned above, the positions of characters and events are not equally distributed throughout the narrative. When a reader notices an extraordinary or

disproportionate distribution of events or characters, it is probably due to this characteristic of structure (1998: 44).

For instance, the main content of the classic novel *Water Margins* (水滸傳), a tale about the historical bandit Song Jiang attributed to Shi Nai'an 施耐庵 (ca. 1296–1372), revolves around the assembly of one hundred and eight heroes. However, contrary to what one might expect with such a theme, the work opens with quite a lengthy introduction of a non-hero, a character that is ostensibly insignificant for the remaining assembly of the heroes. Furthermore, the first few chapters continue to introduce characters that are relatively insignificant for the remainder of the plot. As the narrative goes on, it only slowly works its way to the introduction of more significant characters and gradually gains momentum. Because the insignificance of these first few chapters stands in direct contrast to the remaining narrative (a manifestation of what Yang calls disproportionate distribution), the first chapters stand out to the reader. From this "disturbance" of the narrative, the reader can make assumptions about the narrative structure as a whole. For instance, in this case, Yang argues that the narrative structure of *Water Margins* represents a philosophical interpretation of the development of history itself. Similar to historical development, the narrative of *Water Margins* gains momentum slowly and develops from the small and insignificant towards the grand and significant.

At the risk of being repetitive, I want to stress again that whether one agrees with Yang's interpretation is not relevant to my argument. The most important thing to take away from Yang's theory is his method of analysis. From the unexpected, the twists and the disturbances in a narrative, a reader can start to form assumptions about a structure of a work. These assumptions can subsequently be used to strengthen one's interpretation of the meaning of the work as a whole.

Fundamental components of narrative structure

What David Roy calls the "constituent elements" of a work, is what Yang seemingly interchangeably refers to as "parts" (部分), "bricks" (板块) or "units" (单元) of a narrative structure. Yang's idea of what constitutes a "part" becomes clearer in the following passage:

> 结构之所以为结构，就在于它给人物事件以特定形式的时间和空间的安排，使各种叙事成分在某种秩序中获得恰如其分的编排配置。
>
> A structure is a structure because it uses the arrangement of character events into a specific form of time and space to allow all sorts of narrative elements to find their [respective] proper configuration in some kind of order [of a narrative] (66).

Yang does not clearly define "parts". However, since he talks about arranging *characters* and *events* according to specific *time* and *locations*, I think that they can be understood quite similarly to Bal's concept of "elements". For Bal, "elements" refers to the material that constitutes the fabula (an analytical concept for the chronological reconstruction of a narrative, which I will discuss below)—i.e. events, actors, time, and locations. For now, suffice it to say that since Yang does not use the notion of fabula, I choose to not use "elements", but rather "parts". Yang continues by saying that:

> 人物事件的位置确定下来之后，必须有连接性结构要素把它们组成和一个不可分割的整体，不然各個结构单元和板块就可能是一盘散沙。
>
> After the positions of the character events are determined, they have to be composed into an inseparable whole, by the structure component of *connections*. If not, every unit or brick of the structure is just a tray of loose sand.

For Yang, an integrated or inseparable whole means the parts of the narrative structure have a certain (1) *sequence* (顺序), are (2) *connected* (联结), and form (3) *contrasts* (对比). These three fundamental components of narrative structure once again reiterate and reflect Yang Yi's understanding of the influence of historiography on fictional narrative structure in the example of the *Records of the Grand Historian* as described above.

Below, I will systematically compare these three fundamental components of Chinese narrative structure to Mieke Bal's theory of narrative. I will try to show that in Bal's theory of narrative structure, there are concepts that correspond to Yang's component of sequence. Also, there are concepts to be found that show a high degree of similarity to the component of

connections. However, there seem to be no equivalent concepts in Bal's theory that resemble Yang's component of contrasts. This underlines an important difference in their conception of what constitutes narrative structure.

Sequence

To gain an understanding of sequence in both Bal and Yang, I first have to explain Bal's use of *story* and *fabula*. Bal's narratology centrally features an analytical distinction between *text*, *story* and *fabula*:

> A *narrative text* is a text in which an agent relates ('tells') a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A *story* is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An *event* is the transition from one state to another state. *Actors* are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. *To act* is defined here as to cause or to experience an event. (1997: 5)

Again, Bal emphasizes that fabula exists only as an analytical concept and is reconstructed from the story by a reader. It is an analytical concept to help the reader understand the chronological succession of events. In the story, the chronological and logical succession of events of the fabula are presented in a certain manner and sequence. Let's take a look at one of Bal's examples:

> John rang the neighbors' doorbell. He had so irresistibly felt the need to stand eye to eye with a human being that he had not been able to remain behind the sewing machine. (80)

In this sentence, the order of events in the story is: first John rings the doorbell; then the reason why is revealed. In "reality" (fictitious or not) or in the fabula, the order would have been: "first John must have felt the desire to go and see someone; then he acted accordingly and went to ring the doorbell" (80). At times, the sequence of events in the story and the fabula overlap. But sometimes it proves nearly impossible to reconstruct the chronological order of the fabula. For instance, if the story radically distorts the chronological sequence of the fabula.

Yang does not make the analytical distinction of fabula and story. However, his understanding of sequence shows that he actually performs a reconstruction of fabula. In the following, I try to present his argument as I understand it—this includes some steps that I find difficult to grasp completely—while remaining as closely to the original text as possible. I do this to show how difficult it can be to talk about sequence without analytical concepts such as fabula and story. As noted, Yang approaches the construction of sequence from the author's perspective. An author constructs sequence by planning the time and locations of characters and events: what happens when and to whom. In *Figure 1*, point B is what Yang refers to as the point where the author "puts pen to paper" (落笔). By this, Yang refers to the beginning of a (section of the) *narrative text* (in Bal's terms), the beginning of (a section of the) *story*, the point where, in general, a reader starts reading a (certain section of a) narrative. Just to be clear, in this diagram, B does *not* represent the beginning of the fabula. The following is Yang Yi's explanation of reconstruction of chronological sequence:

> 如果把 B 作为落笔的中间位置，则 B 之前可以反溯到 A，B 之后可以推移到 C。
>
> If one takes point B as the place where the "pen is put to paper", then [the narrative] can trace back to a point A [that lies] before point B, and develop into a point C [that lies] after point B.

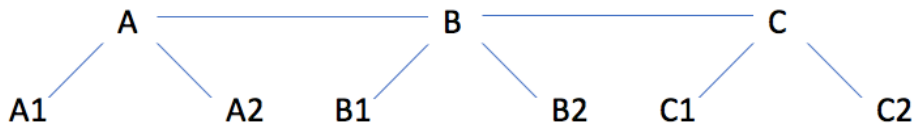

Figure 1 (Yang 1998: 69)

Now, one can imagine a narrative tracing back to a certain point that, seen from the "moment" that this tracing back takes places, lies in the past. This "tracing back" can be achieved through, for instance, a character recalling a memory or by the insertion of a song or a poem. In Yang's diagram, such a tracing back brings the narrative to point A. To clarify I summarize one of Yang Yi's examples from *The Story of the Western Wing* (西廂記), a love comedy written

during the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) by Wang Shifu 王實甫 (ca. 1250-1337). The section of the narrative that is under investigation starts with Hongniang walking in the garden. (The narrative is in point B). She starts singing a song about a passed event. (The narrative goes from point B to point A). When she ends the song, she walks to the door of room of scholar Zhang. (The narrative is back from point A into point B). Now, after a short conversation with scholar Zhang, Hongniang leaves scholar Zhang alone with his thoughts. (The narrative has developed from point B into point C).

From this short discussion, it becomes clear that it can be difficult to accurately describe concepts such as "moment", or "tracing back" without referring to a more rigid analytical tool, such as fabula. Using the analytical concepts of story and fabula to explain Yang's example, one would say that in the sequence of the *story*, point B lies before A. In the chronological sequence of the *fabula*, point A lies before point B: in 'reality' (ficticious or not) the past event narrated in Hongniang's song happened before the moment that she walked in the garden. In Yang's example, going from point B to point A represents a "tracing back" in the story, Bal refers to this as an *anachrony*: a chronological deviation in the sequence of a story (1997: 84-99).

Following the figure, Yang says that from point B the story can develop linearly into a point C further in time. The concept of time in narrative seems intuitive, but it is easily misunderstood. Again, Bal's concept of fabula presents an analytic tool that allows for more clarity. In this case, when Yang says that the story develops linearly from point B into point C, "linearly" means that in the story point B comes before point C. However, it also means that in the sequence of the fabula, point B also comes before point C: in "reality" Hongniang first talks to scholar Zhang and then leaves him alone. In this case, because point B and C are logically and chronologically sequenced in the story, the sequence of point B and C in the story is identical to the sequence of point B and C in the fabula. To be clear, going from point B to point C therefore does *not* constitute an anachrony.

The lower part of Yang's diagram again represents a reconstruction of the sequence of a narrative similar to Bal's reconstruction of the fabula of a story. When an anachrony takes place at point B, the story progresses from point B to point A1. In the example, the start of the past event recalled by Hongniang's song is represented by point A1. As the song continues, the story develops from point A1 towards point A2, the end of the song. In the chronological sequence of the fabula

point A1 comes before A2. This distance in time between point A1 and A2 is what Bal calls the *span*: the stretch of time covered by an anachrony.

By looking closely at Yang's figure, I try to show that he reconstructs the narrative into a figure (that represents the sequence of a narrative) which corresponds to Bal's concept of fabula. However, Yang does not place nearly as much emphasis on the usefulness of this concept of sequence in actually analyzing a narrative as does Bal on the usefulness of the distinction between story and fabula. One explanation why Yang does not seem to find this distinction nearly as useful as Bal, has again to do with their different understanding of the function of narrative. Seeing that an important traditional function of Chinese narrative is the (chronological) ordering of various parts, story and fabula are bound to show a high degree of similarity. Compared to a tradition where narrative's primary function is to tell a story, this analytical distinction can therefore seem less interesting and perhaps even unnecessary in the analysis of Chinese narratdives. However, parts of the structure are not only connected by their sequence, they are connected in different ways also, to which we now turn.

Connections

Because "parts" are by definition distinguishable to some degree, it is important for the unity of the narrative to have *connections* between different parts. Yang Yi distinguishes two kinds of connections: *direct* and *indirect*.

Direct connections

Direct connections roughly equivalent to what one might call transitions. There has to be some kind of transition or change to go from one part of the narrative to the next. I think that Yang's concept of direct connections between parts ties in with the concept of *event* as defined by Western narratology. According to Plaks, in the Western narrative tradition "events" are the "stuff of which existence is made" and narrative attempts to imitate the continuous succession of events in time (Plaks 1977a: 315). Similarly, but from a more analytical viewpoint, we have seen that Bal defines "events" as the transition from one state to another state, caused or experienced by actors. This definition of event emphasizes succession, transition and change. Events are marked by a change of state, a choice (often made by a character) and confrontation.

To emphasize the similarities between Yang Yi's concept of a direct connection and Bal's concept of event, I want to look closely at one of Yang's examples. A direct connection can be as simple as an encounter between two characters (the connecting of two "parts" of the narrative). In *Water Margins*, a brawl between several characters takes place and advances subsequent events. Before this scuffle, the characters are unconnected, meaning they have not met up until this point in the narrative. When one of the one hundred and eight heroes, Yan Qing, is in chase of a bird to hunt, he bumps into two other characters. He decides to steal the goods these two men are carrying to repay his debt to a fourth character. The fight that ensues and the meeting of these separated characters paves the way for the further development of the plot (Yang 1998: 71-73). In this example, Bal's criteria for "identifying events" fit perfectly (1997: 182-187). There is change: chasing of the bird, bumping into new characters. There is a choice made by a character and there is a consequence to this choice: the consequence of Yan Qing's choice to chase the bird is revealed when he bumps into the two men. The consequence of Yan Qing's choice to steal these men's goods is revealed when a fight ensues. And there is (literally) confrontation: Yan Qing fights the two men. From this comparison, it becomes clear that what Bal calls an event would for Yang be categorized as a direct connection between parts of narrative. Although different in approach, event in Ball and direct connection in Yang show an overlap between the two narratologies.

Indirect connections

However, the Chinese tradition can be said to be much more concerned with an emphasis on "the overlapping of events, the interstitial spaces between events, in effect on non-events alongside of events" (Plaks 1977a: 315). I argue that such connections as the "overlapping of events", "spaces between events" and connections between events and "non-events" are what Yang refers to as *indirect connections*. Yang spends a significant amount of time on his discussion of the indirect connections between parts of narrative. In contrast, in Bal's narratology, concepts similar to Yang's concept of indirect connections are only very briefly discussed and deemed rather unimportant for the structure of narrative as a whole. Therefore, a discussion of what exactly Yang means by indirect connections has important implications for the understanding of the difference between the conception of structure in Western and Chinese narratology.

For Yang**,** indirect connections refer to small, big, conspicuous or hidden echoes and foreshadowing between different parts of the story. If one-dimensional, linear language is

supposed to create a multi-dimensional literary world, then it has to weave all these events, characters and locations into an integrated whole. So not only do the parts need to be directly connected, as seen in the example of Yan Qing in *Water Margins* above, but they should also be indirectly connected, as seen in the earlier example of the repetition of the Lion Street-imagery in *Plum in the Golden Vase*. Indirect connections provide the necessary beams and pillars to reinforce the structure as a whole. Yang argues that if the first part of a story is completely, directly and indirectly, disconnected from the last part, then the structure as a whole loses its strength and becomes a weak chain of merely sequenced, directly connected parts (Yang 1998: 74-75).

Within indirect connections, Yang further distinguishes conspicuous and inconspicuous indirect connections. First, let's quickly look at an example of a conspicuous indirect connection. In an early chapter of the classic work *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (三國演義), a historical novel written during the Ming-dynasty attributed to Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, Zhu Geliang says he feels that general Wei Yan is an untrustworthy person. In a later chapter, Zhu Geliang gets betrayed by this very same, untrustworthy Weiyan. This is a clear example of foreshadowing. The importance here is that in a conspicuous indirect connection, the connection (in this case foreshadowing) is explicitly mentioned in the narrative, often either by a character or the narrator. In contrast, a good example of an *inconspicuous* indirect connection between narrative parts can be found in the classic novel *Journey to the West* (西遊記), an enthralling tale about the Monkey king written in the 16th century by Wu Cheng'en 吳承恩 (1506-1582). In an early chapter, Sun Wukong tipping over a burning oven on a mountain is briefly mentioned in passing. Later, "detective" Sun Wukong tries to uncover the culprit who ignited the fire on the mountain (Yang 1998: 76). The humor and irony of Sun Wukong's "detective" work only becomes apparent when the reader identifies the inconspicuous indirect connection between these two parts. In fact, this irony, or "every possible disjunction between what is said and what is meant", produced by the reader's identification of indirect connections, is what Plaks identifies as the most important rhetorical feature of the classical Chinese novel (1987: 123).

As I see it, the difference between a conspicuous and inconspicuous indirect connection comes down to the way in which they are presented to the reader. A conspicuous connection is stated explicitly (often by a character or narrator) and is therefore possibly more easily noticeable

for the reader. An inconspicuous connection is worked into the story more subtly and depends more heavily on the attentiveness of the reader in order to become apparent. However, since "attentiveness" is a subjective term, I feel that a strict boundary between conspicuous and inconspicuous connections cannot be objectively drawn. Even though the expression of doubt towards Wei Yan's character establishes a conspicuous indirect connection to Wei Yan's betrayal later on, this could also be missed by the reader. It is however stated more explicitly and therefore perhaps more easily noticeable than the ironic connection between Sun Wukong's early clumsiness and later "detective" work.

Now, let's return to the comparison between the theories of narrative structure of Yang Yi and Mieke Bal. At first sight, these indirect connections are reminiscent of Bal's definition of *anticipation*. For Bal, the theoretical, chronological sequence of fabula is ordered and presented into a certain sequence of the story. When, for instance, during the story a character recalls an event that lies in the past, as seen from the chronological sequence of the fabula, this type of chronological deviation in the story, or anachrony, is called *retroversion*. In contrast, when in the story something is revealed that will happen in the future of the story, as seen from the chronological sequence of the fabula, it is called anticipation. Retroversion and anticipation are different sides of the same anachronic coin: they are opposing types of chronological deviations in the sequence of a story. Bal actively avoids the terms "flash-back" for retroversion and "flash-forward" for anticipation because of their "vagueness and psychological connotations" (1997: 84) but I think the intuitive understanding of flash-back and flash-forward does help to understand Bal's concept of retroversion and anticipation, respectively.

To take the comparison further, similar to Yang's conspicuous and inconspicuous indirect connections, Bal also makes a distinction in type of anticipation. She identifies *announcements* and *hints*. The concept of announcements reminds one of what Yang would call a conspicuous indirect connection between parts. Announcements are explicitly stated in the narrative and the reader will know beforehand that something is almost certainly going to happen later on. Besides anticipations, hints are what Yang would refer to as inconspicuous indirect connections. Hints are more subtle clues to the reader of which the significance can almost only be perceived in retrospect (97).

However, there is an important difference between the significance of Bal's *anticipation* and Yang's *indirect connections*. Bal stresses that anticipations do not occur frequently (95).

Therefore, when using Bal's narratology in an analysis of narrative structure, one's focus is not going to be on these anticipations or, what Yang calls, indirect connections. However, if one uses Yang's narratology, these indirect connections are fundamental to the analysis of narrative structure, because together with sequence and contrasts, connections represent one of three components of narrative structure.

Contrasts

Generalizingly speaking, different from a Western reader, a Chinese reader may feel that the unity of a narrative partially derives from the contrasts in the narrative formed by "pairs of juxtaposed binary opposites that supplement each other" (Leenhouts 2015: 12). Traditional commentators of Chinese fiction, such as Yao Nai 姚鼐 (1731-1815) and Zhang Zhupo, attached great importance to contrast and binary opposed parts of narrative structure. They argued that contrast in the structure allows for rhythm, cadence and liveliness in the narrative (Yang 1998: 77-78). Following in the footsteps of these traditional Chinese critics, Yang Yi also emphasizes the fundamental importance of contrast in narrative structure. Yang distinguishes *internal* and *external* contrasts. This seems to have no equivalent in Bal's theory of narrative and truly represents a difference in the way of thinking about what constitutes structure in Chinese and Western theories.

External Contrasts

External contrasts refer to contrasts in the distribution of parts throughout the composition of a narrative as a whole. External contrast also often refers to contrasts in narrative style. For example, in the novel *The shop of the Lin family* (林家鋪子) by Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) from 1932, Yang observes a main storyline, and an implied storyline that serves to contrast the main storyline. Not unlike in Lu Xun's "Medicine", one part of the narrative body is not directly written but implied. In the story, the Lin family shop, its inevitable demise and bankruptcy form the main body of the narrative. The shop represents the side of the narrative that is "harmed". Now, in contrast to the one being harmed, there has to be a side that is "doing the harming". However, in this novel, the culprits are not overtly present but lure in the "shadows" of the novel, so to say. They are present but not directly visible. There are no descriptions of, but merely allusions to the

hoodlums that blackmail shop owner Lin or the crime boss that wants Lin's daughter as his concubine. These criminals never actually enter the stage. The contrast between these two storylines constitutes what Yang calls an external contrast. Yang argues that in order to create a strong, well-wrought narrative, the structure should carefully maintain a well-balanced equilibrium between the opposites of external contrasts like these (1998: 80).

Internal contrasts

Internal contrasts refer to contrasts in emotions, mood and conduct of different parts of the narrative. In comparison with external contrasts, internal contrasts more often deal with content of the narrative. Such contrasts include gentle versus tough, hot versus cold, dominant versus submissive etc. For instance, Zhang Zhupo argues that each chapter of *The Plum in the Golden Vase* can be roughly divided into two episodes. This results in "a juxtaposition or interweaving of two parallel or contrasting episodes" (Roy 1977: 122). Each chapter exists of one episode that is dominated by associations with pleasantries/warmness and one contrasting episode that is dominated by associations with coldness. The tracking of this type of "interweaving" or alternation between binary opposites within narrative structure can result in interesting interpretations of all kinds of Chinese narratives. For example, a hot/cold binary opposition can be observed in short stories of the *Strange Stories from a Chinese studio* (Zhang Sini 2006). Yang concludes by arguing that besides maintaining a balance in external contrasts, a good structure also knows how to maintain balance between the extremes of these internal contrasts (1998: 80).

The importance of contrast in Chinese narrative structure also lies at the heart of Andrew Plaks' notion of Chinese narrative structure. A brief elaboration of Plaks' argument will help deepen our understanding of Yang Yi's fundamental component of contrasts. Plaks argues that "Chinese narrative conceives existence in terms of overlapping patterns of ceaseless alternation and cyclical recurrence" (1977a: 335). He distinguishes two patterns that conceptualize this so-called "existential change" in Chinese narrative tradition: "complementary bipolarity" and "multiple periodicity".

Complementary bipolarity basically refers to Yang's definition of contrasts in narrative structure. In the plotting of a full-length novel, complementary bipolarity creates a "ceaseless alternation from pole to pole within a closed system" (335). Besides the examples mentioned above, such as the hot/cold bipolarity in the *Plum in the Golden Vase* and *Strange Stories from a Chinese*

studio, more refined and complex examples of two opposed poles within a closed system include: union and separation, joy and sorrow, prosperity and decline et cetera. However, any time one episode or section of a narrative is dominated by one pole of the complementary bipolarity, the other pole is not completely absent. This creates a finer web of connections between the two poles of bipolarity. This is what Zhang Zhupo refers to when he says "within hot there is cold, within cold there is hot" (Yang 1998: 79). Or what Plaks refers to as the "sense of presence within absence or strength within weakness" (Plaks 1977a: 336). For instance, a reader of Chinese narratives will notice the common occurrence of non-events: events that do not seem to directly contribute to the development of the plot. Plaks argues that non-events make up one pole of complementary bipolarity, while plot-propelling events make up the contrasting pole. To maintain a balance between these two poles, the narrative has to reflect not only the plot-propelling "action" or "events" but also the "static" or "non-events" (336).

The second pattern of existential change observed by Plaks is called "multiple periodicity". Multiple periodicity follows directly out of complementary bipolarity. The constant alternation between the poles of complementary bipolarity implies a cyclical recurrence. Different from Western narratives, Chinese narratives are often not unilinear or "one turn of the wheel". Its narrative structure is "based upon the absolute ceaselessness of periodic alternation" (336). For the perception of the reader of the narrative, an important result of this ceaselessness is a "dense web of intermingled events and non-events that obviates any sense of unilinear plot development and hence clouds the perception of artistic unity" (337)—whereas the reader of Western narratives might expect a clear beginning, middle and end. The reader of Chinese narratives finds that in many great works, the ending or climax seems to happen before the ending of the actual text. For instance, Xi Menqing, the primary focus of the narrative of the *Plum in the Golden Vase*, dies when there is approximately still two-third of the narrative left. The same goes for the final assembly of the one hundred and eight heroes in *Water Margins*, which is completed in chapter 72 out of 100. For Plaks, this is all due to the structure of narrative as a representation of the ceaseless alternation of periodicity and complementary bipolarity of life itself. Plaks describes its ceaselessness with the following diagram:  . The top of the diagram represents the climax of the narrative. However, since the narrative continuous, the diagram does not end at the top. The arrow signifies that even after the ending of the entire narrative, the cycle will continue, ceaselessly (339).

Both Plaks and Yang Yi attach a lot of importance to the analysis of (external and internal) contrasts and (direct and indirect) connections between different parts of the narrative. By identifying and analyzing these components, one is able to evaluate the strength and unity of a narrative structure. As mentioned before, this is where Yang Yi's approach to analysis of narrative structure differs from Bal the most. As I have shown, although Bal does identify the connections between different parts of the narrative (anticipations), she does not see it as a fundamental component of narrative structure. Furthermore, Bal does not discuss any concept that resembles Yang Yi's component of contrasts (or Plaks' "complementary bipolarity").

In my analysis of Jia Pingwa's *The Lantern Bearer*, I will analyze the narrative structure from the perspective of Yang Yi's three fundamental components: sequence, connections and contrasts. I will show that especially the identification and analysis of contrasts and connections in Jia Pingwa's work allows for some unique insights that lead me to interesting interpretations of the narrative's meaning. Yang Yi's idea of narrative structure is partly based on his extensive research of traditional narratives such as *Plum in the Golden Vase* and *Water Margins*, and my analysis will show that the narrative structure of *The Lantern Bearer* shows clear similarities to these traditional narratives.

3. Close reading of *The Lantern Bearer*

Sequence: chronological recording of daily routines

As mentioned before, analytically, sequence is more important in Bal's theory of narrative than in Yang Yi's narratology. In her close readings, Bal investigates how a narrative (creatively) rearranges the chronological and logical sequence of the fabula into a story. In order for a such reading to yield non-trivial results, there have to be chronological deviations present that are pivotal for the structure of the story. As mentioned before, if the chronological deviations in the story are kept to a minimum, it means that the story and the fabula show a high degree of similarity. This is precisely the case in *The Lantern Bearer*. The narrative of *The Lantern Bearer* focusses on the chronological recording of the daily routines of the office for social management in Cherry Town and its employees, mainly Daideng and her assistant Zhuzi. Therefore, Bal's emphasis on the analysis of sequence and chronological deviation does not offer much useful information for a meaningful interpretation of the narrative.

The only major example of chronological deviations in *The Lantern Bearer* happens very early in the story. Through retroversion, the reader learns important information about the plot and the background of the story. Before this retroversion takes place, Cherry Town is introduced chronologically. The narrator tells that Cherry Town is located in the Qinling Mountains and that, after a highway was extended into the mountains, a large mining district opened up nearby. Because of this mining district the economy of the area developed rapidly. However, Cherry Town has always remained cut off from this economic development. This happened because of Yuan Laohai, the patriarch of one of Cherry Town's most prominent families. At this point the story makes a jump of twenty years back in time. This is the moment the retroversion starts. A reader recognizes this retroversion because of the sentence: "The highway originally was meant to run from the Mount Mang tunnel down to Cherry Town, but Yuan Laohai took several hundred villagers to try to stop it. This ended up being his biggest achievement." (2013: 16; Translation 2017: 2) The reader is subsequently witness to the moment that Yuan Laohai took hundreds of people to stop the construction of the highway into Cherry Town, effectively securing Cherry Town's continued isolation and impoverishment.

Within the span of this retroversion, the lice infestation of Cherry Town is also introduced. During the construction of the mining district, several old buildings were taken down, which were home to countless lice. With their original habitat destroyed, the lice were swept up by the wind and blown towards Cherry Town. Since that day twenty years ago, Cherry Town has had a chronic lice infestation. The end of the retroversion can be identified by the sentence: "Although the Yuan clan was very prosperous, Yuan Laohai didn't have any children, so when he died his immediate ancestral line ended with him." (4; 18) Through this short retroversion, the story succinctly provides the reader with a good understanding of Cherry Town's miserable situation. Cherry Town not only missed out on the economic advantages of technological and infrastructural development, it also suffered the environmental consequences.

Throughout the narrative, there are only a couple of instances where there is chronological deviation at work. However, it is certainly not an important characteristic of the narrative structure. In fact, I think that the exact opposite, the lack of chronological deviation, the straightforward, chronological recording of events is a characteristic of the structure of the narrative. As mentioned before, Yang Yi does not emphasize chronological deviation and sequence in his close readings because chronological recording of events is an important characteristic of Chinese narrative structure. Therefore, by sticking closely to the chronological sequence of the fabula, the story of *The Lantern Bearer* resembles narrative structures as described in the theory set out by Yang Yi, revealing a similarity between Jia's novel and traditional narratives.

Connections: white dogs, human-faced spiders and trees

In Yang's theory, connections are woven throughout a narrative to strengthen its cohesiveness, similar to the beams and pillars of a house. Direct connections often connect parts of the narrative that chronologically follow each other in the sequence of the story. Tracking and analyzing every direct connection would be tedious and rarely yields meaningful information about the narrative. In the case of *The Lantern Bearer* it suffices to say that the office of social management and its director, Daideng, directly connect most of the events and characters in the narrative. Petitioning civilians, the allocation of funds, complaining and competing politicians and visits by higher

officials are all primarily handled by the office. In this way, Daideng, as the center of the office, directly ties the narrative together. She is the load-bearing pillar of the house.

In contrast, it often proves meaningful to closely scrutinize indirect connections in a narrative. Indirect connections connect ostensibly separate or even unrelated parts of a narrative. These parts often do not follow each other chronologically or logically in the sequence of the story, but are indirectly connected. An important indirect connection is established by recurring imagery. Like the example of the Lion Street in *Plum in the Golden Vase* in the chapter on *ji* (technique or structure) and *dao* (meaning), new information, and meaning, accumulates each time the imagery appears in the narrative. Therefore, if certain imagery appears in, for example, two scenes that are ostensibly directly (i.e. chronologically or logically) unconnected, the imagery still indirectly connects the scenes. In *The Lantern Bearer*, there are important recurring images that work as indirect connections. I choose to analyze three imageries that are especially prevalent throughout the narrative: the white dog, the spider (web) and trees and flowers.

The white dog

The white dog is explicitly mentioned about forty times. In the beginning of the story the dog's fur is dirty and greyish. At the first encounter between the dog and Daideng, Daideng decides to wash it. The dog's dirty fur is washed white and is subsequently, as mentioned by the narrator, liked by everyone (26; 13). The relationship between the dog and Daideng further grows when the dog is beaten and breaks a leg. Daideng nurtures it back to health and gains the dog's loyalty (35-36; 23). At a certain point, the dog even becomes part of Daideng and Zhuzi's conversation and slowly comes to personify a commentator of their private interactions. For example, when putting on new underwear that is embroidered with a rose, Daideng says to Zhuzi that a flower is a plant's genitals. At this point, the dog barks and Daideng feels too embarrassed to continue the conversation (51; 41). As the narrative unfolds Daideng, Zhuzi and the dog gradually start forming a trio that becomes increasingly (emotionally) intertwined.

At a certain point, the dog's tail is cut off. This act of cruelty is interpreted by Office Director Bai Renbao as a sign of the people's dissatisfaction with the work done by the local government. As a result, feeling the dog has made the government lose face, Bai Renbao ties it down and almost beats it to death (65-66; 55). Afterwards, the dog no longer plays with the female dogs in Cherry Town and stops chasing Chery Town's madman, too. The madman, Muling, runs

around Cherry Town chasing ghosts. He is generally ignored by the townspeople, but liked by the white dog. Before the dog was beaten by Bai Renbao, the dog would happily run around with the madman. However, this moment of extraordinary violence cuts the ties, in the story as well as on the level of imagery, between the madman and the white dog.

This is important because of the strong (emotional) connection between Daideng and the dog, through which the violent severance of the link between the dog and the madman indirectly indicates the existence of a connection between Daideng and the madman early on in the story. The importance of this connection reveals itself as the story progresses. When the dog's connection to the madman is cut off, Daideng has just started working for the office. At this point, she is still strong, positive and ambitious. The firmly established distance between the madman and the dog, coincides with the point when Daideng's mental state least resembles that of the madman: the distance between their mental states is the greatest. As the story progresses, and the pressure on Daideng of working at the office and dealing with all the problems in Cherry Town increases, she slowly deteriorates mentally. Slowly, her behavior starts resembling that of the madman. Eventually, Daideng starts sleepwalking. During her sleepwalks, she chases ghosts together with the madman, "effectively establishing a way of communicating" (Han Luhua & Jia Pingwa 2016: 297). This scene at the end of the story, where Daideng "communicates" with the madman, reflects the lowest point of her mental state. At this point, the distance between the madman and Daideng's mental states is the smallest. Correspondingly, the dog's fur also slowly turns back into a greyish, dirty state. First, it gets splattered when Daideng angrily throws a ball of mud at a poplar tree. The narrator says: "if it's not a white-haired dog, it's a mud dog" (不是白毛狗是泥狗; 380), a sentence omitted in the translation (403). Near the end of the story, the dog's final appearance, its fur turns grey completely because of a second lice infestation (471; 502).

The state of the dog, whether it is its behavior or its appearance, can be read as a reflection of Daideng's mental state during her work at the office of social management in Cherry Town. The moment Daideng washes the dirty, grey fur of the dog, she lifts the dog from the sphere of filth and ugliness (of the town) into that of cleanliness and beauty (of her and Zhuzi). A clean, white-furred dog that is unconnected to the madman means a clean, positive, mentally strong Daideng. A dirty, grey-furred dog, that runs around with the madman, reflects a mentally instable, tired Daideng. The white dog imagery, in connection with the madman imagery, manifests itself

cyclically, reflecting the perpetual and inevitable state of Daideng's failure, and in general, of the failure of local cadres working in the Chinese country side.

The spider (web)

The spider and its web are mentioned about a dozen times. In his afterword to *The Lantern Bearer*, Jia Pingwa says that social problems stretch across the multi-level structure of Chinese society like a spider web. He uses this metaphor to convey his worries about the growing number and complexity of problems in Chinese society (2013: 489). In the story, the first mention of the spider web is directly connected to this idea of social problems by Daideng: "social problems resemble a spider web, and if you touch it dust will immediately fall to the ground" (64-65; 53-54 and 188; 189). As mentioned before, Han Luhua sees the spider web as a perfect example of conveying the abstract through the concrete: "the spider web is written very tangibly, [but] it serves as a thing of imagery, it symbolizes the state of this real life that we are in." (2016: 264) The spider web reflects China's social system because when a problem arises at the lowest administrative level (the spider web is "touched") it resonates throughout the entire country, up to the capital ("dust will immediately fall"). This puts an enormous pressure on the work of the cadres at the lowest level, especially on those at the office of social management. Or as Daideng herself puts it:

> Accordingly, the government puts considerable emphasis on social stability, which is why we have an office for social management in the first place. The office of social management functions as a buffer zone for the implementation of a national legal system, but in reality it merely represents a process of applying a lubricating agent to a dried-out society. (65; 54)

This critical attitude of Daideng towards the current system is interpreted by Chen Xiaoming (2013) as a reflection of Jia's disappointment with current rural politics.

If the spider web symbolizes China's societal system, the spider at the center of the web symbolizes Daideng's unobtainable, elusive love: Yuan Tianliang (whose name means "bright sky"). Yuan Tianliang is an ambitious cadre who was born and raised in Cherry Town, but now works as a county-level cadre. Because of his political position, he is located at the center of the bureaucratic web. Throughout the story, Daideng sends letter-length text messages to Yuan

Tianliang, who she has only seen once briefly. Daideng sends the first message merely out of curiosity, assuming Yuan Tianliang would not reply. Unexpectedly, he does reply and praises Daideng's well written message (58; 47-48). This sets off Daideng's obsession with and desire for Yuan Tianliang. When the black spider in the web changes into a human-faced spider, Daideng interprets it as a message from Yuan Tianliang (89; 80). From this point onwards, she turns to the web in search of solace or advice (133; 128); directly speaks to it as if it is Yuan Tianliang (146; 143); misses the spider when it's gone (191; 192-193); and is joyous when it's back (364; 385).

In this way, besides being a metaphor of the pervasive social system of the Chinese government, the spider and its web also connect Daideng's clandestine communication with Yuan Tianliang to the reality around her. In a reality that is mostly concerned with solving other people's problems, these instances of imagery remind the reader of her loneliness and her unfulfillable desire for Yuan Tianliang. Although Daideng is technically married, her husband left Cherry Town to chase his dream of being a painter, leaving Daideng alone. Her love for Yuan Tianliang seemingly exists in and offers a different reality, a reality where she can briefly escape her problems and loneliness. It is also interesting that when her husband briefly returns to Cherry Town for the last time, accompanied by a painter named Bi 毕 (whose name means "to complete" or "to finish", as if to suggest the definitive end of Daideng and her husband's relationship), the two men are fully dressed in white. Daideng is quick to point out that "the day Yuan Tianliang returned, he was dressed all in black" (275; 286), just to articulate once more the striking contrast between Yuan Tianliang (her desire) and her husband (her reality).

Finally, when a destructive flood hits the town, the spider and its web are washed away (378; 402). The flood cuts the connection between the spider and Daideng, and therefore between Daideng and Yuan Tianliang. It increases the distance between Daideng and Yuan Tianliang to a point that any hope of fulfilment of her desire is effectively wiped out. The alternative reality has been closed off. Daideng captures this sentiment beautifully when she sings a scene from a Shaoxing opera rendition of *Dream of the Red Chamber* (紅樓夢), a classic novel written by Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 in the 18th century. Against Zhuzi's expectations, Daideng chooses to sing the part of male protagonist Jia Baoyu instead of the part of Lin Daiyu:

> You are a perfect piece of white jade that has sunk into the mud. So how could I possibly be the one clear stream following the muddy water? From now on you are beneath the ground, forever regretful and alone, and the root of my resentment and sorrow will never be removed. In life it is difficult to become an entwined couple, so I will meet you outside the mortal realm, to bear fruit and blossoms! (365; 386, translation modified)

The relationship between Daideng and Yuan Tianliang does not belong to "the mortal realm", and like a "piece of white jade that has sunk into the mud" Yuan Tianliang has slipped away, leaving Daideng angry and sorrowful. The web's destruction, similar to the soiling of the dog's fur, symbolizes the painful realization that all hope is lost and all efforts were in vain.

At certain points in the narrative the spider imagery intersects with other imagery. For example, when Daideng notices that the spider is absent, she hugs the white dog and feels like smoking (191; 192-193). Important to note here is that Daideng got into the habit of smoking because she saw Yuan Tianliang doing it (52; 42). The reader now knows that Yuan Tianliang is on her mind (she looks in the direction of the spider web, she wants a smoke), but she is saddened by his absence (the spider is gone) and she needs solace (hugging the closest thing to a friend). The conjunction of these imageries subtly creates a powerful image of loneliness and unfulfilled desire. Furthermore, later in the narrative, Daideng is worried that the dog might stumble on the human-faced spider and destroy its web (302; 317). This can be read as a sign of Daideng's apprehensiveness about anything "destroying" her private bond with Yuan Tianliang. Through these instances, the spider and its web are woven through the fabric of the narrative, connecting the ostensibly separated realities of, on the one hand, Daideng's work and, on the other hand, her desire for Yuan Tianliang.

Trees and flowers

By far the largest amount of imagery is concerned with flowers and trees. The straightforward recording of the daily problems of the office of social management is regularly interrupted by descriptions of lush pines, peonies, poplars, apricots, toons, plumbs, gingkos, fingernail polish plants, cherry trees, orchids, roses, walnut trees, reeds, cypresses, chinaberries, camphorwood trees, willows, elms, oaks et cetera. However, when I closely traced the amount of trees and flowers imagery, I noticed a sharp drop right around the middle of the story. This decline in imagery

coincides with an increasingly bad drought in the narrative (201; 203). Because of the abundance of trees and flowers in the first half of the narrative, the reader gets used to Cherry Town's lush, green setting. Therefore, when the trees and flowers suddenly fade away, the drought feels even more urgent and palpable. The reader thoroughly realizes that the loss of the one thing that Cherry Town had going for it, its "good air, water, and scenery" (204; 208), even further exacerbates its already deplorable situation.

When the rain finally comes (367; 389), Daideng mentions in one of her messages to Yuan Tianliang that "after the rain, the grass began growing like crazy, and the leaves of the green birch and oak trees began clapping in the wind." (381; 404) However, this brief moment of joy quickly turns into grief when the large amount of rain causes a flood—which has been foreshadowed in the beginning of the book. An early passage on Cherry Town says they "received a hundred thousand yuan from the provincial office of poverty relief to reinforce the river embankment". But two years passed and the town government did nothing to reinforce the dikes. The county mayor therefore warns: "You should all pray that there isn't a flood […] if there is a flood and the embankment collapses, there won't be anything I can do to protect you!" (22; 9) It is particularly painful that the flood could perhaps have been less destructive, or even prevented entirely, had the town government done its job properly.

That the severity of the drought and flood are connected to the incompetence of the government ties in with another theme of the book: heaven expressing its will through the weather. Every night, Daideng watches the news, and especially the weather report, very attentively. One night Daideng says to Zhuzi:

> The will of heaven is the weather. If the will of heaven wants your country to be prosperous and its people to be at peace, then the weather will consist of wind and rain at the proper time; if the will of heaven wants you to be miserable, then the weather will consist of year after year of drought or floods. You've studied history in school, right? Every time a dynasty collapsed, you could say that it collapsed on account of a backwards social system, a corrupt court, or a foreign invasion, but [the] most important factor was always natural catastrophe resulting in crop failures and widespread famine. (107; 99)

From this point of view, both the drought and the flood are clear signs of heaven's dissatisfaction with the current leadership. In fact, these natural disasters are indirectly responsible for Daideng's demotion. To facilitate the construction of a factory in Cherry Town, the Yuan Family decides to build a much-needed (and highly profitable) sand plant. When the flood destroys the sand plant, the Xue family takes advantages of the chaos to build their own sand plant. A feud ensues which finally leads to the climax of the story, an epic fist-fight between the Yuan and Xue family. Daideng and Zhuzi get involved but are unable to properly resolve the situation. In the end, a team from the capital comes to investigate the fight and blames the local government for not reacting adequately. Deputy Mayor Ma is told to write a self-criticism and Zhuzi receives an official demerit. But Daideng, despite all of her good intentions, suffers the most. She receives two official demerits and is removed from her position as director. Even Daideng's professional trajectory is cyclical: at the end of the story, she is back where she started. Similarly, the abundance of trees and flowers imagery in the first half of the narrative and the decrease in the second half further strengthens the cyclical structure as indicated by the white dog and spider web imagery.

To an extent, this cyclical structure can be seen to symbolize the perpetual fate of the Chinese countryside: things seem to go well for a while and then deteriorate, eventually returning to a state of misery and backwardness. At the end of the story, the town is flooded, the factory's construction comes to a halt, the economy remains stagnant, the higher officials get off scot-free and the lower cadres and townspeople suffer the consequences. Everything turns out to be an inescapable cycle, signifying rural China's perpetual demise.

Contrasts: a flower in a pile of cow dung

The most conspicuous contrast in *The Lantern Bearer* is formed by, on the one hand, the description of the problems that Daideng has to deal with and, on the other, her messages to Yuan Tianliang. These parts of the narrative structure form contrasts in several different ways. First, they differ externally, in Yang's terms, or in style: the messages are set in a different font, written in very ornate language and appear regularly approximately every thirty to forty pages. Second, they differ internally or in content: the 'subjective' or 'emotional' reality created by the messages stands in stark contrast with the 'objective' reality described in the rest of the narrative. The messages offer a glimpse into Daideng's mind as she talks to Yuan Tianliang about her love and yearning

for him, her feelings about working for the government and her daily routines. As mentioned before, for the most part these 'realities' are kept separate and are only occasionally connected through recurring imageries. To further increase the feeling of separate, contrasting realities, Yuan Tianliang never actually makes an appearance in the story beyond his status as the recipient of Daideng's messages. Even though Yuan Tianliang's presence is never directly written, his presence is still felt throughout the narrative: not only is Yuan Tianliang the focus of the alternative reality of Daideng's inner world, he is also revered by the townspeople. Therefore, he gains an almost mythical appeal of inaccessibility and exclusivity. So, similar to Yang Yi's reading of bright/dark storylines in Lu Xun's "Medicine" and Mao Dun's *The shop of the Lin family*, there is one part that is written and one part that is implied. This written/implied contrast in the narrative structure accentuates that Daideng's love for Yuan Tianliang is unidirectional, unrequited and 'unrealistic'. And because Yuan Tianliang works for the county government, his almost mythical status and elusiveness also symbolize the distance between township and county governments: seemingly close and connected but actually belonging to entirely different realms.

In contrast with the elaborate descriptions of nature's beauty in the florid messages, the straightforward recording of events hints at a structure of contrast that is pervasive throughout the entire narrative. In a conversation with Han Luhua, Qin Yanping 秦艳萍 refers to this as "the beautiful-ugly dialectic" (美丑二分法; Han Luhua & Jia Pingwa 2006: 293-294). To remain consistent with Yang Yi's terminology, I refer to it as a contrast. By reading the narrative with this beautiful-ugly contrast in mind, the narrative's rhythm, imagery and climax become much more meaningful. Of course, the "beauty" of the ornate language in the messages, as distinct from the straightforward delivery of the rest of the narrative, comes under subjective experience. However, there are several instances where "beautiful" and "ugly" find meaning within the specific context of the narrative. By closely looking at these instances, a beautiful-ugly structure can be identified that runs through the narrative. This contrast is introduced the first time Daideng arrives in Cherry Town:

> There were mutilated bodies of grasshoppers, toads, hares, rats, and snakes, all of which quickly decomposed and filled the air of Cherry Town with a nauseating stench. […] Daideng arrived, and the recently plowed earth had developed a thin shell, from which

> wheat sprouts and weeds were peeking out. Daideng saw the leaves of the saxifrage plants were covered with white fuzz, the sow thistle plants had white flowers, the *renhan* weeds were dark red, and the clover was dark green and had row upon row of sparkling blue flowers. She couldn't help sighing, "It is as though all different colors were mixed up in the black earth and then revealed in the form of flowers." (24-25; 11)

The contrast of the colorful flowers within the black earth echoes Daideng's arrival in a town filled with "mutilated bodies" and "nauseating stench". This is the introduction of the contrast between Daideng's beauty and the "ugliness" of the town. To set up this contrast, people in the town often stress how beautiful Daideng is. For instance, just after Daideng arrives, her physical appearance is commented on by Officer Wu ("Are all beautiful women this cold?" 26; 13), Officer Zhai ("She is so radiant." 27; 14) and the narrator ("She had long hair, which shimmered like clouds when she walked." 31; 19). Furthermore, Daideng, and Zhuzi's, appearance is also commented on in relation to their work at the town government. Office Director Bai Renbao ("You also can't become an official. […] You're too pretty." 25; 12) and Yuan Xieyan ("Why is it that all pretty girls work for the town government?" 39; 27) both stress the anomaly of beauty in local government. However, the most vivid metaphor of the beautiful-ugly contrast is made by a group of "idlers" who think Daideng is "the most beautiful girl they had ever seen", but take pity on her for working at the local government. When Daideng asks why she shouldn't work for the town government, they reply: "It's like sticking a beautiful flower into a pile of cow dung." (32; 20, translation modified)

Daideng and Zhuzi not only stand out in terms of physical appearance but also in personal hygiene. For instance, it is significant that Daideng and Zhuzi try their hardest not to get lice. Everyone in Cherry Town has lice, except for Daideng and Zhuzi. At one point, Zhuzi says:

> I'm reminded of the stone lion in *Dream of the Red Chamber*. Jiao Da said that the only thing that were clean in the Jia household were the two stone lions in the entranceway, the same way that in Cherry Town you and I are the only ones who don't have lice! (86; 75)

Similar and related to their beauty, it is their personal hygiene that makes them different from everyone else. Other examples include Zhuzi and Daideng taking baths and applying make-up frequently. Because of these examples, the beautiful-ugly contrast can be extended into a contrast

of beauty/clean versus ugly/dirty. Here ugly/dirty can also be interpreted broadly, as in "dirty jobs" or "ugly problems". For instance, at one point Party Secretary Huang arrives in Cherry Town to congratulate the town on a good year, a huge honor for the small town. Instead of welcoming the Party Secretary, Daideng and Zhuzi have to keep their eyes peeled for possible troublemakers. This leads Yuan Heiyan to remark: "Why is such a beautiful person as yourself always doing the government's dirty work, while they don't even include you in a prestigious event like escorting a visiting dignitary?" (361; 382)

The office of social management is the focal point of dirty work. It "has truly become a concentration camp for ugly problems, and we must spend our entire day interacting with these people" (65; 54). This even makes Daideng say that working there has made her and Zhuzi "dirty" and they should "take a bath!" (118; 112) When Daideng has a conversation with a manager of the hotel where she often goes to take long baths, she reiterates that the office "is like a concentration camp full of dark problems, and I'm really sick of it!" This instance the hotel manager once again emphasizes the beautiful-ugly contrast by saying: "If you really were sick of it, would you still be wearing such bright clothing, and would your complexion still be so good, and your hair so neatly arranged?" (119; 113) This signals that Daideng is still fighting the problems, literally contrasting herself with the dark, ugly problems by wearing bright, beautiful clothes.

The dark/dirty/ugly problems in the town are not only contrasted by Daideng herself (remember, *daideng* literally translates as "lantern bearer"), but also by the beauty of the town's scenery. The name of the town refers to its wealth in cherry trees surrounding it. The abundance of trees and flowers imagery mentioned before contributes to the reader's feeling of being surrounded by the town's pretty scenery. So, despite the terrible social situation of the town (examples include, a vivid description of a woman getting a forced sterilization (30; 17), or the vicious beating of frequent petitioner Wang Housheng by Officer Wu, Officer Zhai, Deputy Mayor Ma and Director Bai Renbao in an outhouse that leaves Wang covered in blood and feces (423-429; 451-457)), its scenery is gorgeous. This contrast is formulated aptly by construction workers who come into Cherry Town to build the factory. They wonder "how a location with such beautiful scenery could have residents who were so deceitful?" (260; 270)

The scenery not only forms a stark contrast with the ugly problems that Daideng and Zhuzi have to deal with, but it is also contrasted with Cherry Town's lack of economic and industrial development. This theme is introduced very early in the book through the retroversion featuring

Yuan Laohai. Yuan blocked the construction of a highway primarily to preserve Cherry Town's extraordinary scenery. Playing on the idea of cyclicality, the generation in Cherry Town after Yuan Laohai is again faced with a big infrastructural project: the factory. At a certain point, Yuan Heiyan says: "The reason why my uncle [Yuan Laohai] blocked the construction of the highway was on account of Cherry Town's scenery, while I am assisting in the construction of the factory on behalf of the town's wealth and prosperity!" (261; 271) It is this balance between preserving beauty and gaining wealth and prosperity that forms another level of the beautiful-ugly contrast throughout the narrative. When Daideng and Zhuzi arrive at a certain village that is part of Cherry Town, they are struck with the beautiful trees in this area. When Zhuzi describes the scenery as "beautiful and rich", Daideng remarks:

> Actually, the qualities of beautiful and rich are rarely found together. For instance, the mining district lacks water and has been stripped of its trees, and therefore is hardly beautiful, but is nevertheless very rich. Conversely, East Fork Village is very beautiful, but isn't at all rich." Zhuzi said, "If only Cherry Town had a factory, it would surely become rich." Daideng said, "But if it became rich, maybe it would no longer be beautiful? (125; 119)

To alleviate the town's economic pressure, creating much needed economic and societal stability and most likely a subsequent decrease in dark/ugly problems, the factory needs to be built. However, the factory, just like the mining district has done, will bring with it the destruction of environmental beauty: besides the possible pollution of the factory, it takes the place of a beautiful plum garden and the "poplar, willow and cherry trees stretching from plum garden to the base of the hill to the north [are] also destroyed." (245; 253) This sets up an ironic example of environmental sacrifice for economic gains. When houses and trees need to be removed to facilitate the construction of the factory, the factory offers money per removed tree as compensation. Ironically, to make a little extra money, the townspeople start "planting" a lot of trees (even rootless ones) in order to reap the rewards for digging them out only hours later. The monetary compensation for removing trees is a prime example of sacrificing (and manipulating) nature for economic gains.

Zhuzi connects this contrast between economic development and environmental preservation to the idea of cleanliness, physical appearance and dark/ugly problems in the following comment:

> "Whenever I heard people saying that Cherry Town has good air, water, and scenery, I would feel it was similar to complimenting a poor household for being neat and orderly, or telling someone who is unattractive that they have a nice figure. Because we are poor, Cherry Town therefore has many petitioners, and if this drought persists for another year or two, you'll see even more of them." (204; 208)

Zhuzi ponders on the question if it is really an advantage to be clean, orderly or beautiful when you're in financial trouble. Variations of this question resonate throughout the narrative: Is Daideng and Zhuzi's beauty an advantage in a town and government filled with ugliness? Is Cherry Town's beautiful surrounding an advantage when it is isolated from the country's economic development?

In light of the tension between environmental preservation and economic gains it is especially ironic, and depressing, that the end of the drought is followed by a flood. It is ironic because during the drought, all everybody wants is rain. When the rain finally comes, the environmental and economic consequences are arguably worse than those caused by the drought. The rain, similar to how the ostensibly benign actions of Yuan Laohai inadvertently worsened the town's situation, once again ensures Cherry Town's continued economic isolation. The analogy between the unsuccessful construction of the factory and the highway even extends to the lice infestation. Now that the factory cannot be built in Cherry Town, a different location is selected. In order for the factory to be build there, several old buildings have to be taken down. Again, just like over twenty years ago, the lice residing in these old buildings are set free and blown towards Cherry Town. Similar to the cyclical narrative structure indicated by the dog, spider and trees and flower imagery, Cherry Town epitomizes the perpetual infrastructural and economic backwardness of China's country side.

As mentioned before, it is the flood and the destruction of the sand plant that form the reason for the fighting scene right at the end of the story. When Lao San of the Yuan family is almost beaten to death by Labu of the Xue family, the Yuan family wants to take revenge. Daideng

and Zhuzi arrive at the Xue house, the location of the final fight, before the Yuan family does. When Daideng and Zhuzi arrive, the scene is set as follows:

> All along the courtyard wall there were flower pots with roses, peonies, coxcombs, canna blossoms, and plum blossoms. Meanwhile, on the steps leading up to the main hall, and under the windows of each of the wings, there were layers upon layers of small flower pots, in which there were an assortment of orchids and chrysanthemums blooming red, yellow and pink. Zhuzi was astonished, and had just exclaimed "Wow!" when Daideng coughed discretely. Zhuzi stood up, and saw that Daideng appeared somber, whereupon Zhuzi also adopted a somber expression. (449; 478)

The trees and flower imagery accumulated throughout the narrative reaches its apex in this scene's introduction. The courtyard is an explosion of natural beauty. The view is even focalized by Zhuzi. This gorgeous setting is the perfect background for a sanguinary and hideous fight. The scene that ensues is almost cinematographic, as if directly taken from Zhang Yimou's 2002 martial arts film, *Hero* (英雄):

> The five of them fought furiously, as the petals of the flowers in the courtyard rained down, the flower stand was knocked over, and flower pots were scattered everywhere. (454; 486)

The ugly fight is draped in flower petals. The fight is the best example of dark/dirty/ugly problems, set in a place exalted for its beauty. In this way, the Xue family's courtyard serves as a microcosm for the entire situation of Cherry Town. The fight perfectly ties together the themes of ugly problems instigated by financial gains with a backdrop of beautiful scenery.

It is also fitting that the fight simultaneously (1) ends Daideng's career at the office of social management, (2) represents the moment when her inner and outer world mix and, eventually, (3) dissolves the contrast between Daideng and the rest of the town. As mentioned before, Daideng's demotion ensures that she is professionally no further than at the beginning of the story. Furthermore, after the fight, where Daideng falls on her head and suffers a concussion, she starts sleepwalking. I have shown above how sleepwalking ties Daideng to the madman. But when she starts sleepwalking she also stops writing to Yuan Tianliang. In a conversation with Han Luhua,

Chu Zhaowen 储兆文 mentions that when the two separate, contrasting parts of Daideng's inner and outer world mix, the need for writing the messages to Yuan Tianliang also dissolves (Han Luhua & Jia Pingwa 2006: 262). When the two parts of the narrative structure mix, the tension created by their separateness disappears. In the last part of the book, "Spectral Apparitions", Daideng's inner world and outer world are no longer separately written. Not only are there no more messages to Yuan Tianliang, the language has also markedly changed. Daideng gives a speech that is in style and content very close to her messages to Yuan Tianliang. This finally resolves the tension between the realities that Daideng had tried to keep separate desperately throughout the narrative. She now talks as if she is still writing messages. Analogously, Daideng also loses her distance from, and contrast with, the rest of the town and its people. It is therefore significant that when Daideng and Zhuzi get lice during the second infestation, they stop trying to fight it and get used to it quickly. In the conclusion of the narrative, the insistence on personal hygiene and physical appearance is gone and the distance and the tension of the contrast of beauty/clean versus ugly/dirty is resolved.

Conclusions and suggestions for further research

By reading the narrative through the beautiful-ugly contrast it becomes clear that beauty/cleanliness/brightness are contrasted with ugliness/dirtiness/darkness. This reading reveals external rhythm in terms of narrative style and internal contrast in terms of content. However, it is important to keep Zhang Zhupo's saying in mind: "within hot there is cold, within cold there is hot": Within ugliness (the town's social and economic state) there is beauty (Daideng and Zhuzi and the town's surrounding nature), within dirtiness and darkness (dirty jobs and dark problems) there is cleanliness and brightness. Similarly, the florid language, imagery and emotional content in Daideng's messages to Yuan Tianliang is reflected in the trees, dog and spider imagery spread throughout the straightforward, 'objectively' narrated reality of the social problems in Cherry Town. In this way, the imagery works as indirect connections between parts of the narrative that are not directly (logically or chronologically) connected. Furthermore, because of the analogies between the beginning and the end of the story (the dog's fur, Daideng's employment and mental state, the spider web, the amount of tree and flower imagery, the failure of construction projects, the lice infestations), the narrative conveys a feeling of cyclicality that is reminiscent of Plaks' "multiple periodicity". The cyclicality reads as a comment on the perpetual isolation and backwardness of China's countryside.

In conclusion, *The Lantern Bearer* is a tragic tale about the modern Chinese countryside told with traditional Chinese narrative techniques. Its success lies in its subtlety. The narrative techniques are woven into the story inconspicuously and do not keep the reader from surrendering to the story. Because of this, a reader unfamiliar with Chinese narrative traditions can read the story fairly easily and empathize with Daideng's tragic professional and personal trajectory. However, if the inconspicuous nature of the narrative techniques allows for the importance of contrast and imagery to go unnoticed by the reader, they may not realize—in both senses of the word—the story's richness and depth. In that case, an important aesthetic appeal of *The Lantern Bearer*, and Jia's writing in general, is lost.

Because of Jia Pingwa's prominent place in contemporary Chinese literature, the identification of traditional narrative features in his work tells us something about the state of tradition in contemporary Chinese literature as a whole. However, any conclusions about the extremely versatile and heterogeneous literary stage in China that one can draw from this research

must remain preliminary. Further research on different authors over a longer period of time is needed to more definitely track the vestiges of traditional narrative in contemporary Chinese literature. I think that Yang Yi's theoretical framework could provide a great starting point for such an endeavor.

To further the discussion of differences in the conception of what constitutes narrative structure in Western and Chinese studies of narrative, it would be exciting to do readings of "Western" narratives with a focus on Yang Yi's concepts of contrast and (indirect) connections. This would offer an interesting perspective on the relationship between cultural identity and notions of narrative.

Bibliography

Bal, Mieke. 1997: *Narratology, introduction to the theory of narrative,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press (2nd [rev.] ed., first published 1985)

Chen Guohe 陈国和. 2007: 〈《秦腔》:乡村文化的溃散〉 [*Shaanxi Opera*: the dilution of village culture], in 《咸宁学院学报》 27-4: 45-47

Chen, Thomas. 2015: "Blanks to be filled: Public-making and the censorship of Jia Pingwa's 'Decadent Capital'," in *China Perspectives* 2015-5: 15-22

Chen Xiaoming 陈晓明. 2013: 〈萤火虫、幽灵化或如佛一样——评贾平凹新作《带灯》〉 [Fireflies, spirits or Buddha-like —— Review of Jia Pingwa's new work *The Lantern Bearer*], in《当代作家评论》2013-3, 10-21

Chen Xushi 陈绪石. 2000: 〈论贾平凹创作中道家悲剧意识〉[Discussing consciousness of Daoist tragedy in Jia Pingwa's work], in Lei & Liang 2006: 296-303

DeWoskin, Kenneth J. 1977: "The Six Dynasties *Chih-kuai* and the Birth of Fiction," in Plaks 1977b: 21-52

Duowei 多维 (ed.). 1993: 废都滋味 [Sensations of *Defunct Capital*]. 郑州: 河南人民出版社

Eoyang, Eugene Chen. 1977: "A Taste for Apricots: Approaches to Chinese Fiction," in Plaks 1977b: 53-69

——— 2017: "Jia Pingwa, the Concept of Ren 仁, and the Reading of Fiction," in *Comparative Literature: East & West* 1-1: 1-10

Gray, Ronald & Ferrara, Mark. 2009: *Between noble and humble: Cao Xueqin and the "Dream of the red chamber"*, New York: Peter Lang

Han Luhua 韩鲁华 & Jia Pingwa. 2016: 《穿过云层都是阳光：贾平凹文学对话录》 [It's sunny behind the clouds: Record of Jia Pingwa's literary dialogues], 北京: 联合出版公司

Hsia, C.T. 1981: *The Classic Chinese Novel- A Critical Introduction*, Taipei: Caves Books, LTD

Huang Shiquan 黄世权. 2012:〈日常说话与民间狂欢: 论贾平凹作品的叙事语调〉 [Everyday speech and revelry among the people: discussing narrative tone in Jia Pingwa's work], in 《清华大学学报: 哲学社会科学版》2012-5: 122-128

Jia Pingwa 贾平凹. 1982: 〈“卧虎” 说〉 [Talking about the “Crouching Tiger”], in Lei & Liang 2006: 7-8

——— 1998a:《高老庄》[Old Gao Village], 西安: 太白文艺出版社

——— 1998b:《我是农民：在乡下的五年记忆》[I am a peasant: memoirs of five years in the countryside], 长春: 吉林人民出版社

——— 2000:《怀念狼》[Remembering Wolves], 北京: 作家出版社

——— 2014:《带燈》[The Lantern Bearer], 台北: 麥田出版社 (edition in traditional characters, originally published 2013)

——— 2016:《极花》[The Poleflower], 北京: 人民文学出版社

——— 2017: *The Lantern Bearer*, translated by Carlos Rojas, New York: CN Times Books

Leenhouts, Mark. 2015: *Chinese literatuur van nu: Aards maar bevlogen* [Contemporary Chinese literature: *Earthly yet inspired*], Breda: De Geus (revision, first published 2008)

Lei Da 雷达. 1986: 〈模式与活力〉[Form and vitality], in Lei & Liang 2006: 55-63

——— & Liang Ying 梁颖 (eds.). 2006:《贾平凹研究资料》, 济南: 山东文艺出版社 (第 1 版)

Li Yongyin 李咏吟. 1995:〈莫言与贾平凹的原始故乡〉[Mo Yan and Jia Pingwa’s native place], in Lei & Liang 2006: 104-114

Li Yuchun 李遇春. 2003: 〈拒绝平庸的精神漫游——贾平凹小说的叙事范式的嬗变〉[Refusing mediocre wandering of the spirit: evolution of narrative patterns in Jia Pingwa’s novels], in Lei & Liang 2006: 399-412

——— 2016: 〈守望及变革——论贾平凹四十年小说创作轨迹〉[Vigilance and transformation: Discussing Jia Pingwa’s trajectory of forty years of writing novels], in 湖北大学学报: 哲学社会科学版 43-1: 22-27

Liang Ying 梁颖. 2007: 〈自然地理分野与精神气候差异——路遥、陈忠实、贾平凹比较论之一〉[Division of Physical Geography and Differences in Spiritual Climate: a comparative discussion of Lu Yao, Chen Zhongshi and Jia Pingwa], in 陕西师范大学学报: 哲学社会科学版 40-1: 114-121

Louie, Kam. 1991: “The Macho Eunuch: The Politics of Masculinity in Jia Pingwa's ‘Human Extremities’,” in *Modern China* 17-2: 163-187

Lu, Sheldon. 1994: *From historicity to fictionality: The Chinese poetics of narrative*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press

Luan Meijian 栾梅健. 2013:〈论《带灯》的文学创新与贡献〉[Discussing *The Lantern Bearer*'s literary originality and contribution], in 当代作家评论 2013-3: 41-47

Martin, Helmut & Kinkley, Jeffrey C. 1992: *Modern Chinese writer's self-portrayals*, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe

McDougall, Bonnie S. 2003: *Fictional Authors, Imaginary Audiences: Modern Chinese Literature in the Twentieth Century*, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press

Plaks, Andrew. 1977a: "Towards a Critical Theory of Chinese Narrative," in Plaks 1977b: 309-352

——— (ed.). 1977b: *Chinese narrative: critical and theoretical essays*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press

——— 1987: *The four masterworks of the Ming novel: Ssu ta ch'i-shu*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press

Rojas, Carlos. 2006: "Flies' Eyes, Mural Remnants, and Jia Pingwa's Perverse Nostalgia," in *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 14-3: 749-773

Roy, David T. 1977: "Chang-p'o's Commentary on the *Chin p'ing mei*," in Plaks 1977b: 115-123

Shang, Biwu. 2014: "Reception and Variations of Classical Narratology in Chinese Scholarship," in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 16-6: 1-9

Wang Yiyan 王一燕. 2003: 〈说家园多情谈国族身份〉[Talking about affection for the homeland and national identity], in Lei & Liang 2006: 370-383

——— 2006: *Narrating China: Jia Pingwa and his fictional world*, London: Routledge

Xu Dong 徐冬 2014: 〈20 世纪 90 年代以来贾平凹小说研究述评〉[Review of research on Jia Pingwa's novels since the 1990s], in 和田师范专科学校学报 2014-5: 100-104

Yang Yi 楊義. 1998:《中國敘事學》 [Chinese Narratology], 嘉義: 南華管理學院出版 (edition in traditional characters, originally published 1997)

Wang Zheng 汪政. 2002: 〈论贾平凹〉[Discussing Jia Pingwa], in Lei & Liang 2006: 169-189

Zhang Chuanping 张川平. 2001:〈贾平凹小说的结构迁衍及其意象世界〉[Structure development and imagery world of Jia Pingwa's novels] , in Lei & Liang 2006: 329-336

Zhang Sini 张四妮. 2006:〈《聊斋志异•莲香》的传统叙事艺术〉[The art of traditional narration in “Lian Xiang” from the *Strange Stories from a Chinese studio*], in 十堰職業技術學院學報 19-5: 33-35

Zhao Xueyong 赵学勇. 1994: 〈“乡下人”的文化意识的审美追求〉[Cultural consciousness and aesthetic pursuit of “countryside people”], in Lei & Liang 2006: 95-103