

THREE FACES OF A SPACE:

THE SHANGHAI PAVILION ROOM (*TINGZIJIAN*) IN LITERATURE, 1920-1940

by

Jingyi Zhang

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## Abstract

From the 1920s to the 1940s, the pavilion room, or Tingzijian—the small room above the kitchen in an alleyway house—accommodated many Shanghai sojourners. Tingzijian functioned as lodging and as a social space for young writers and artists. For many lodger-writers, the Tingzijian was a temporary residence before they left around 1941. In the interim, Tingzijian life became a burgeoning literary subject, even a recognized literary category.

This study explores what meanings people ascribed to Tingzijian, and the historical and the artistic function of the space in Chinese literature of the 1920s and 1930s. Scholars have traditionally viewed “Tingzijian literature” as the province of leftist “Tingzijian literati” (*wenren*) who later transformed into revolutionaries; this study reveals the involvement a much greater variety of writers. We find a cross section of the literary field, from famous writers like Ba Jin 巴金 and Ding Ling 丁玲, for whom living in a Tingzijian was an important stage in their transition from the margins to the center of the literary field, to a constellation of obscure tabloid writers concerned less with revolution than with common urbanites’ daily lives.

This study illustrates the heterogeneity of “Tingzijian literature” by identifying three trends in use of Tingzijian as a trope: 1) **Shelter**: exhibiting quotidian life in Tingzijian, thereby generating an iconic imaginary of “petty urbanites” 小市民 as a distinct socio-economic class; 2) **Tomb**: narrating the sense of confinement engendered by these cramped spaces, and connecting such physical, mental, and emotional entrapment to intellectuals’ social and psychological oppression; 3) **Stage**: mocking the “Tingzijian literati” via diagnoses of their pathological shortcomings, especially bogus expressions of revolutionary ardor or patriotic commitment—a

backlash against the Tingzijian writer, who had become a recognizable, if contested, cultural figure.

I base my conclusions on close textual and contextual readings of primary materials, including periodicals such as *Shen Bao* 申报, *Modern Times* 现世报, and *Shanghai Guide* 上海生活, diaries, memoirs, literary works, movies, and stage plays. Secondary sources include studies of Shanghai culture, architectural history and Chinese literary history.

## Lay Summary

This study focuses on 1920s and 1930s literary representations of the Tingzijian, or “pavilion room”—a small, cramped space found in Shanghai alleyway houses. Writers from all over China lived and socialized in pavilion rooms during the 1920s and 1930s. Representations of this unique space appear in various literary and artistic genres. We can find the cultural imaginary of Tingzijian in contemporary drama, film and literature in and beyond mainland China.

The present study examines textual representations of pavilion rooms, expanding the definition of “Tingzijian literature” to include writings about revolution and quotidian life by writers of different generational and ideological backgrounds. I identify three trends, which I call Shelter, Tomb, and Stage: exhibiting common urbanites’ daily lives; representing intellectuals’ sense of confinement; and mocking the revolutionary and patriotic self-images of pavilion room writers. The study shows how a space was culturally constructed as having three faces and how it shaped lodger-writers’ identity and literary practices.

## Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Jingyi Zhang.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Lay Summary .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Preface.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction: Tingzajian as Space, Trope, and Symbol.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two: A Brief History of Tingzajian and Shanghai’s Writer-lodgers .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.1 Architectural and residential features of alleyway houses and Tingzajian.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.2 Lodger-writers and their social connections .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.3 Lodger-writers’ living experiences .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Tingzajian in Literature .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.1 Shelter: writing of quotidian life in Tingzajian .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3.2 Tomb: writing of confinement .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>3.3 Stage: mocking the Tingzajian literati.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Epilogue: The Cultural Afterlives of Tingzajian Since 1949 .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>96</b>

## List of Figures

FIGURE 1.1 THE CROSS SECTION OF SHIKUMEN, HE YOUZHI 贺友直 (1922-2016) .....	24
FIGURE 2.1: SITE ONE: AROUND AVENUE FOCH AND SEYMOUR ROAD, MAP OF SHANGHAI IN 1932 (THE LOCATION OF SHANGHAI COMMON WOMEN’S SCHOOL 上海平民女校 AND SHANGHAI UNIVERSITY 上海大学).....	31
FIGURE 2.2: SITE TWO: AROUND ROUTE HERVE DE SIEYE, MAP OF SHANGHAI IN 1932 (THE LOCATION OF SHANGHAI NANGUO ART ACADEMY 南国艺校).....	34
FIGURE 2.3: SITE THREE: AROUND DARROCH ROAD, MAP OF SHANGHAI IN 1932 (THE RESIDENTIAL AREA OF A CLUSTER OF CULTURAL CELEBRITIES SUCH AS LU XUN AND YOUNG LEFTIST WRITERS SUCH AS ZHOU LIBO AND ZHOU YANG.) .....	37

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Zhang Jingyi, May 2017

In a Tingzijian-sized room, Vancouver



## Chapter One: Introduction: Tingzijian as Space, Trope, and Symbol

In 1938, at the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) base in Yan'an, Shaanxi province, Mao Zedong, the Party's leader, gave a speech at the Lu Xun Art Academy 鲁迅艺术学院 in which he compared "people from Shanghai pavilion rooms" 亭子间的人 with "people from the hilltops" 山顶上的人, namely intellectuals with a rural background.<sup>1</sup> Four years later, on a more formal occasion, the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art 延安文艺座谈 (1942), he had this to say about writers who had come to Yan'an from Shanghai:

Many comrades have come from Shanghai garrets [pavilion rooms], and the passage from garret to base area involves not just two different localities but two different historical eras. One is a semifeudal, semicolonial society ruled by big landlords and big bourgeoisie, the other is a revolutionary new democratic society under the leadership of the proletariat.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are two records of Mao Zedong's speeches at Lu Xun Art Academy in 1938. One is an excerpt of his speech on April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1938:

What people from pavilion rooms create are not always delicious, while what men from the hilltops create are not always all that good-looking. Some people from pavilion rooms think "I'm number one in the world, or at least number two." Some people from hilltops also put on rustic airs, always saying things like, "I went through the twenty-five-thousand-mile Long March..."

亭子间的人弄出来的东西有时不大好吃，山顶上的人弄出来的东西有时不大好看。有些亭子间的人以为“老子是天下第一，至少是天下第二”；山顶上的人也有摆老粗架子的，动不动，“老子二万五千里”……

This excerpt is from the 1992 edition of *Mao Zedong on Art and Literature* 毛泽东论文艺 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1992). However, no official collection includes this speech. In another speech dated April 28<sup>th</sup> 1938, Mao points out that since many writers just sit in their pavilion rooms and lack life experience, they are not familiar with the vivid language of the masses. See Stuart R. Schram ed., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), Vol. 6, 300.

<sup>2</sup> See Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Art and Literature", *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949*, Vol. 8, 130.

同志们很多是从上海亭子间来的，从亭子间到根据地，不但是两种地区，而且是两个历史时代。一个是大地主资产阶级统治的半封建半殖民地社会，一个是无产阶级领导的革命的革命的新民主主义社会。<sup>3</sup>

“Garrets of Shanghai” refers to Tingzijian, or “pavilion rooms” found in alleyway houses in Shanghai’s foreign settlements. The Tingzijian is located above the kitchen and below a flat roof and is usually no larger than ten square meters. The room, which lacks air-conditioning and heating, is extremely hot in summer and freezing cold in winter. The Tingzijian was initially designed as a storeroom or maids’ room, yet in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many residents of the alleyway houses sublet Tingzijian to new migrants, as demand for accommodation increased rapidly with Shanghai’s population growth.<sup>4</sup>

Tingzijian were home to many writers and artists who flocked to Shanghai beginning in the early 1920s. Some people were drawn by Shanghai’s modern schools and job opportunities; some were escaping the warlord government in Beijing; others came from Japanese-occupied Manchuria. For many young intellectuals, lodging in a Tingzijian was a temporary and transitional measure. The rent was affordable and the foreign settlements, which fell under foreign law, offered a cultural environment with more freedom of speech than areas under Chinese administration. Typically, a migrant would live in a Tingzijian for a few months or years before moving to pursue a career elsewhere. Some lived in Tingzijian until part of the city was occupied by the Japanese army in 1937 and then left for Yan’an, or the Great Rear Area, or went overseas. For writers such as Ba Jin 巴金 (1904-2005) and Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986), living

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<sup>3</sup> See Mao Zedong’s “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Art and Literature” 在延安文艺座谈会上的讲话, Takeuchi Minoru ed., *Collected Writings of Mao Tse-Tung* 毛泽东集, Vol.8 (Tokyo: Sososha 苍苍社 1983), 147.

<sup>4</sup> From 1910 to 1927, the population of Shanghai increased from 1.289 million to 2.641 million. In 1937, the population reached 3.852 million. See "Shanghai Chronicles", Vol. 3, <http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2247/node4564/index.html>

in a Tingzajian was an important stage in their transition from the margins to the center of the literary field.

Tingzajian writing flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, when life in Tingzajian became a common focus of modern Chinese fiction, movies, and stage plays. In *A Night Deeply Drunk on the Spring Breeze* 春风沉醉的晚上 (1924), Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896-1945) tells the story of a young writer who shares a pavilion room with a female factory worker. Though nothing romantic happens, the female worker's care for the writer makes the space a warm shelter. Three years later, in *Two Poets* 二诗人(1927), Yu Dafu created a negative vision: two lazy, hedonistic buffoons living in Tingzajian pretend to be talented revolutionary poets and use their fake reputation to swindle the landlady out of money. Even in one writer's work, Tingzajian could have multiple faces.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, Tingzajian also became an important living space for revolutionary writers, especially leftists. In 1930 the League of Chinese Left-Wing Writers 中国左翼作家联盟 was established in Shanghai, and the city became a center for left-wing writers and artists. Often, they created fictional characters who shared their struggles for the cause. Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰 (pen name Mao Dun 茅盾, 1896-1981), for example, in 1927 hid in a pavilion room in Jingyun Alleyway 景云里 to avoid capture by the Kuomintang (KMT) government. There he wrote his famous novel trilogy *Eclipse* 蚀三部曲: *Disillusion* 幻灭, *Wavering* 动摇, and *Pursuit* 追求 (1927), whose depressive female protagonist leaves her small room in an alleyway house and joins the revolutionary army. Many other writers created plot line featuring young elites feeling depressed in the cramped space of Tingzajian, which seems to symbolize a host of complaints. Their dissatisfaction might be with the failure of the nation, their impotence of changing the social injustice, or the difficulty in creative writing—in any case, feeling oppressed and confined by the sociopolitical climate, they leave their pavilion rooms to join the revolutionary cause. This scenario appears in Ba Jin's novella *Destruction* 灭亡 (1929); in Ding Ling stories such as "Spring in Shanghai, 1930 (I)" 1930年春上海之一; and in Jiang Guangci's

蒋光慈 (1901-1931) novella *The Moon Coming out from the Clouds* 冲出云围的月亮 (1930). All three authors lived in Tingzajian for a while as young writers.

Besides writers, common Tingzajian tenants included bank clerks, primary school teachers, factory workers, and prostitutes. Local and some national periodicals carried articles on residents' daily life in this new type of living arrangement. Such pieces were usually penned by anonymous or pseudonymous writers who would describe a tough and mundane daily life with a light touch. Their stories told of a small space that witnessed disease, prostitution, marriage, and even childbirth. Columnist Houshishi 后史氏 (Post-History), for example, contributed several articles to the entertainment page of a local periodical about how as a Tingzajian resident he was afflicted by bugs and diarrhea.<sup>5</sup> Tingzajian and alleyway houses are the stage of common urbanites' lives in stage plays such as Xia Yan's 夏衍 (1900-1995) *Under the Roofs of Shanghai* 上海屋檐下 (1937) and films such as *Children of the Storm* 风云儿女 (1935), *Street Angel* 马路天使 (1937), and *Crows and Sparrows* 乌鸦与麻雀 (1949). The Tingzajian prostitute was a popular subject of pulp literature in wartime Shanghai, most famously in Zhou Tianlai's 周天籁 (1909-1983) *Miss Tingzajian* 亭子间嫂嫂 (1942). Approximately the same time, Xiao Hong 萧红 (1911-1942) published the novel *Ma Bole* 马伯乐 (1941) where the antiheroic protagonist leads a ridiculous refugee life in a small room of the alleyway house even before the war starts. Ma Bole's parroting of wartime slogans reveals the formulaic revolutionary narrative and the bogus patriotic commitment.

Tingzajian, in short, loom equally large in the Shanghai imaginaries of entertainment tabloid writers, restless leftist writers, and critics suspicious of the revolutionary narrative.

Mao spoke of Tingzajian writers as people of bourgeois disposition who lacked connection with the masses. Yet ironically, when Mao labeled these writers as "Tingzajian literati" 亭子间

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<sup>5</sup> See his series of "Tingzajian Essays" 亭子间随笔 in *Modern Times* 现世报, 1938.

文人, most of them had already left that space and were no longer “Tingzijian literati” in a literal sense. In ensuing decades, communist literary critics nevertheless continued to quote Mao’s speech and use the term to accuse migrants from Shanghai of harboring bourgeois mentality and having not thoroughly remolded their thoughts. For targeted writers such as Shao Quanlin 邵荃麟 (1906-1971), “Tingzijian literati” was a putative identity that had been imposed upon them.

Why would a space so unfavorable for living be so amenable to representation and so beneficial to Communist discourse? Why did Mao, on the vast loess plateau in the middle of a war, invoke this tiny urban space? What is the significance of Tingzijian, historically and artistically, and what made it attractive to entertainment writers and Communist polemicists alike? If we look at the 1920s and 1930s—before “Tingzijian” was reduced to a political symbol—we find that there existed no integrated group of writers that can be labelled as “Tingzijian literati” and that literary writings on the subject of Tingzijian varied widely. I argue that Tingzijian were not only the site of a modern living experience but also a locus of cultural production and circulation. Specifically, Tingzijian is a literary trope with both quotidian and revolutionary meanings. As Mike Crang has pointed out, cultures are contested; they mean different things to different people, and different groups might attribute very different meanings in the same place.<sup>6</sup> The goal of the present study is to show what meanings people ascribed to Tingzijian, and what Tingzijian literature tells us about the modern Chinese literature of the 1920s and 1930s.

Through a close reading of Tingzijian writings of two decades, this study shows how Tingzijian became 1) an iconic space of Shanghai daily life characterized by a collective identity of residents; 2) a symbol of young intellectuals’ feelings of confinement; and 3) a symbol of patriotic cultural posturing devoid of real revolutionary meanings.

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<sup>6</sup> See Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (Routledge, 1998), 4.

## Redefining “Tingzijian Literati/Writers” and “Tingzjian Literature”

The historical use of “Tingzijian literati (文人)/writers (文学家)” is problematic, as its definition changed with the historical context. Before Mao’s 1938 speech, “Tingzijian literati” or “Tingzijian writers” did not appear as a set phrase. Period sources from the 1930s refer to residents variously as “Tingzijian writers” 亭子间的文学家, “sojourners in Tingzijian” 亭子间的流浪人, and “ladies of the Tingzijian” 亭子间的嫂子.<sup>7</sup> The phrase “Tingzijian writer” implied that one had gained a foothold in the city and paid rent mostly by writing. To become a “Tingzijian writer” was the dream of obscure writers newly arrived in Shanghai, as it meant that they eventually obtained a position as professional writers in the Shanghai literary field.<sup>8</sup> As early as 1932, some periodical writers began to regard Tingzijian residents as a distinct class of people and to connect Tingzijian writers to leftists. A 1932 essay published in the newspaper *Shen Bao* [Shanghai News] on “The Tingzijian Class” 亭子间阶级 tells one story of how the class came into being. According to the author, Ding Nu 丁奴 (a pen name), after the imperialist economic invasion, China’s society and economy collapsed, which resulted in an increasing number of unemployed and urban sojourners who formed the “Tingzijian class.” Many college graduates could not find a job or adapt to society and retreated to Tingzijian, like soldiers

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<sup>7</sup> See Cheng Luding 程鲁丁’s “Tingzijian” 亭子间, *Shen Bao* 申报 [Shanghai News], 1932.10.21, No. 21387, 13. Established in Shanghai in 1872, *Shen Bao* was one of the earliest modern Chinese newspapers and played an important role in shaping public opinion. Another example of reference to a Tingzijian residence appears in Chang Geng 长庚’s poem “Tingzijian” (1936), in which he juxtaposes artists, scholars, workers, poets, and mistresses. See *Female Resonance* 妇女共鸣, vol.5, No. 7 (1936): 52.

<sup>8</sup> One example is Chen Baichen 陈白尘, discussed in the next chapter. See his *Farewell to the World* 对人世的告别 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian 三联书店, 1997), 331. Some scholars also point out that the pavilion room represented a first step to getting into the literary field. See Fu Xiuhai 傅修海 and Lin Gang 林岗, “The Pavilion: Thoughts on Quartering in Metropolis—Focusing on Shanghai of the 1930’s” 亭子间：都市蜗居的思想史——以 20 世纪 30 年代的上海为中心, *Research of Chinese Literature* 中国文学研究 No.3 (2011.9): 42-45.

retreating to a last line of defense. Ding also points out that proletarian writers (he does not name names, but these might include Ba Jin, Qu Qiubai, Ye Lingfeng) used Tingzijian to write masterpieces calling for the rise of the worker and peasant classes. S/he regards Tingzijian as illustrative of China's socioeconomic condition.<sup>9</sup> Though we lack information about the author, his/her remarks reveal clear influence of Marxist class analysis.

After Mao's speech, Marxist critics mentioned "Tingzijian writers" no longer in reference to individual cases but to broader identity politics. Curiously, their attitude was the opposite of Ding Nu's. Since 1949, Communist critics have habitually described "Tingzijian writers" as the residue of bourgeois mentality—not as proletarians—and thus contrary to the ideology Mao promulgated at the 1942 Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art. Dissenters within the Chinese Communist Party, such as Shao Quanlin who opposed the heroic portrayal of peasantry, were often labelled as former Tingzijian writers, and their Tingzijian backgrounds was portrayed as the root of their "mistakes."<sup>10</sup>

This political prejudice has weighed on the term so powerfully that even in the post-Mao era, the definition of "Tingzijian literati/writers" in literary and intellectual history studies is either too broad or too narrow. For example, in *Tingzijian: A Group of Literati and Their Careers* 亭子间：一群文化人和他们的事业 (1991), an early study of Tingzijian literati, Zhang Qing describes the formation of the field of Tingzijian literature in pre-war Shanghai, but he includes within it almost all cultural practitioners, such as the Crescent Society 新月社 that involves Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1897-1931) and Wen Yiduo 闻一多 (1899-1946); this scope is too broad to see any unique features.<sup>11</sup> In some other studies, by contrast,

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<sup>9</sup> See Ding Nu 丁奴's "The Tingzijian Class" 亭子间阶级, *Shen Bao* 申报, 1932.01.21, No.21118, 17.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter Four.

<sup>11</sup> See Zhang Qing's 章清 *Great Shanghai: Tingzijian -- A Group of Literati and Their Vocation* 大上海——亭子间：一群文化人和他们的事业 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1991), 40-45.

“Tingzijian literati” refers only to left-wing writers and artists of the young generation, or even narrower, just writers from the later period of Creation Society 创造社 and the Sun Society 太阳社.<sup>12</sup> Many Tingzijian lodger-writers were indeed leftists, but others, such as the anonymous tabloid writers, also contributed to a thriving Tingzijian culture in their own way. Focusing only on leftists understates the heterogeneity of Tingzijian culture, even divergences among revolutionary writings.

Some scholars exclude works of the elder generation, such as Yu Dafu, Guo Moruo, and Mao Dun, from the category of Tingzijian literature for the reason that these renowned writers had a better financial condition or higher social status than the younger generation.<sup>13</sup> Yet categorizing writers by prestige ignores that some senior literati did live in pavilion rooms for some time. Even those who enjoyed a comparatively commodious living space also wrote about Tingzijian life; their works should not be neglected. Besides, writers of different generations coexisted in the same era and sometimes the same places. As described in Chapter Two, these senior literati played important roles in building social connections among Tingzijian writers. I also detect similarities in their living experience, psychology, and mentality, irrespective of economic conditions. They shared in their writing, for example, a sense of confinement, as well as other

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Liang Weifeng 梁伟峰, “The Relationship between ‘Tingzijian Youth Culture’ and Shanghai Culture in the 1930s” 论三十年代“亭子间”青年文化与上海文化的关系, *Journal of Hainan Normal University (Social Science)* 海南师范大学学报 (社会科学版), Vol. 27, No. 7 (2014.7): 9-14; Fu Xiuhai and Lin Gang’s study mentioned in footnote 6.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Ye Zhongqiang 叶中强 “From the Margin of the City to the Center of the Literary Circles: An Interpretation of Tingzijian Writers and their Culture” 从城市边缘走向文坛中心——“亭子间作家”及其文化释义, *Journal of Sun Yat-sen University (Social Science Edition)* 中山大学学报 (社会科学版), Vol. 46, No. 5 (2006.10): 15-20.



similar feelings and experiences. Yu Dafu pointed out that many young people, himself included, were in “a condition of incarceration” 幽闭状态.<sup>14</sup>

Therefore, by “Tingzijian literati/writers” I refer to all writers and artists who lived in pavilion rooms (as well as attics, kitchens, and other small rooms) in alleyway houses during the 1920s and 1930s. All writings that represent the space of Tingzijian and the life of Tingzijian writers I classify as “Tingzijian literature.” I discuss in this study works not only of famous intellectuals but also of obscure or anonymous entertainment writers, and some later famous writers. These definitions cut across lines of generation, fame, and even literary schools, preserving the heterogeneity of Tingzijian culture, and consequently, illustrating the various potentials of modern Chinese literature during those two decades.

### **Tingzijian and Tingzijian Literati in History**

I analyze from both sociohistorical and artistic perspectives 1) how space and writing interact with each other and 2) which symbolic powers were invested in the trope of Tingzijian. The sociohistorical perspective brings to light the residents’ everyday experience and social networks, which help us to understand the contexts where the lodger-writers’ formed/transformed their identities and produced the literary works.

In Chapter Two, I investigate how Tingzijian contributed to the cultural production and circulation of the 1920s-30s Shanghai. In doing so, I draw on studies of the history and architecture of the alleyway house. Hanchao Lu and Gregory Bracken, for example, trace the evolution of the Shanghai alleyway house’s architectural and residential features back to the

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<sup>14</sup> See Yu Dafu’s “Confession” 忏悔独白, *The Plough*, 北斗, Vol.1, No.4 (1931.12): 55-57.

mid-nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Architecture scholars Chunlan Zhao and Samuel Y. Liang focus more on the transition of the structures, and layouts of Shanghai alleyway houses.<sup>16</sup> Liang points out that the combination of residence and shops in alleyways radically reconfigured traditional residential and commercial spaces and thus subverted the traditional spatial order and hierarchy. Zhao claims the alleyway houses played a transitional role in Chinese urban history. These studies not only illustrate the physical uniqueness of alleyway houses but also show how it influences residents' lives.

Tingzijian and alleyway houses offered residents a new living experience, which I discuss in relation to other new urban spaces. In *Shanghai Modern* (1999), Leo Ou-fan Lee introduces several iconic spaces of Shanghai to remap the urban culture, including the western architecture at the Bund, cafés, ballrooms, parks, racecourse, and Tingzijian. He depicts Tingzijian lodger-writers' lifestyle as "Bohemian," an impoverished lifestyle which they usually romanticized in their writings.<sup>17</sup> Scholars often describe the Tingzijian writers as "Bohemian,"<sup>18</sup> but this picture is incomplete. Many lodger-writers did not hang out with friends at cheap Russian cafés or go to the cinema every night. The average resident's life was not romantic or Bohemian but humdrum.

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<sup>15</sup> See Hanchao Lu's *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1999); Gregory Bracken's *The Shanghai Alleyway House: A Vanishing Urban Vernacular* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> See Samuel Y. Liang's "Where the Courtyard Meets the Street: Spatial Culture of the Li Neighborhoods, Shanghai, 1870-1900", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol.67, No.4 (2008): 482-503; see, also, Chunlan Zhao's "From shikumen to new-style: A Rereading of Lilong Housing in Modern Shanghai", *The Journal of Architecture*, Vol.9, No.1 (2004.3): 49-76.

<sup>17</sup> See Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 32-36.

<sup>18</sup> See for example, Ge Fei 葛飞 *Drama, Revolution and Urban Vortex: the Left-Wing Drama Movement and Dramatists in Shanghai 1930* 戏剧，革命与都市漩涡：1930年代左翼剧运、剧人在上海 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社，2008); Zhang Hongsheng 张鸿声 *Urban Culture and Modern Chinese Urban Fiction* 都市文化与中国现代都市小说 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe 河南大学出版社，2009).

While Leo Lee's study has been criticized for representing only a bourgeois or capitalist map of Shanghai modern,<sup>19</sup> Hanchao Lu's and Jie Li's studies focus on quotidian aspects. Lu details life in Shanghai's residential quarters for the middle and lower-class during the first half of the twentieth century, for example, acoustic experience. Lu depicts the soundscape in alleyway houses, including the vendor calls and sound of brushing out chamber pots every morning.<sup>20</sup> Due to poor soundproofing, the sounds in the alleyways, noise from the neighbors, of automobiles on the street, and from the factories constituted an important part of lodgers' living experience. Writer Pan Hannian 潘汉年 (1906-1977) even nicknamed his Tingzijian "The Chamber of Automobile Sounds" 听车楼.<sup>21</sup> Chapter Three shows how the soundscape shapes the lodger-writers' perception of urban space (sometimes in contrast to an idyllic hometown). In addition, as I will discuss later, sound was an important narrative device in Tingzijian literature.

Jie Li's *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life* approaches alleyway houses not from the outside but from the intimate perspective of "home." Looking into the mentalities and lived experiences of the Shanghainese over seven or eight decades,<sup>22</sup> she focuses on private life as the domain of personal experience—the personal meanings invested into texts, artifacts, spaces, and human relationships. Li's understanding of private life, which underscores the plurality of personal histories woven into domestic spaces, also applies to my study of Tingzijian writers.<sup>23</sup> I refer to their relevant personal histories and social connections, when available, to go deeper to the more subjective, affective, and emotional relationship of the lodger-writers to the space.

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<sup>19</sup> See Kuang Xinnian 旷新年, "Another Type of Shanghai Modern" 另一种“上海摩登”, *Modern Chinese Literature Studies* 中国现代文学研究丛刊, no.1 (2004): 288-296.

<sup>20</sup> See *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 189-286.

<sup>21</sup> See Pan Hannian 潘汉年 (pen name: Yaling 亚灵)'s "Essays in the Cabinet of Automobile Sound" 听车楼随笔, *Oasis* 幻洲, Vol. 2, No.2 (1927.10): 88-92.

<sup>22</sup> See Jie Li's *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 11.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Besides personal history, I also delve into the social dynamics among the various groups and individual writers in Tingzajian. Tingzajian was not merely a living space for them, but also a working and social space. Previous studies on the literary field of Shanghai tend to classify writers into collectives, such as literary societies and schools. Leo Lee's *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, for example, shows shared values and agendas between the Literary Association and the Creation Society. Following T.A Hsia's *The Gate of Darkness*, Wang Chi-Wong traces the different phrases of the League of Left-Wing Writers from 1927 to 1936.<sup>24</sup> Inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of literature, Michel Hockx and Kirk Denton, along with other scholars,<sup>25</sup> have shown how literary societies and schools were formed and the roles they played in the formation of the literary field. Hockx and Denton's works cover a wide range of literary groups, including prominent Shanghai-based ones such as The Creation Society, Tian Han's Nanguo Society, the Crescent Moon School and the League of Left-Wing Writers. They emphasize that modern Chinese literary practice in the 1920s and the later decades is characterized by collectivity. But they pay little attention to the function of specific space such as Tingzajian. Combining intellectual history and social history, Wang Xiaoyu 王晓渔 and Xu Jilin 许纪霖 investigate modern intellectuals' public communications both among individuals and collectives to demonstrate the intellectuals' social life and the dynamics of the literary field in urban space, especially in Shanghai.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Wang-chi Wong, *Politics and Literature in Shanghai: The Chinese League of Left-Wing Writers, 1930-1936* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> See Michel Hockx. *Questions of Style: Literary Societies and Literary Journals in Modern China, 1911-1937* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Michel Hockx, and Kirk Denton. eds. *Literary Societies of Republican China*. Lanham, (MD: Lexington, 2008); Michel Hockx, ed. *The Literary Field of Twentieth-century China*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> See Xu Jilin 许纪霖, *The Public Communications of Modern Chinese Intellectuals (1895-1949)* 近代中国知识分子的公共交往 (1895-1949) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 2008) ; Wang Xiaoyu 王晓渔, *Intellectuals' "Civil War": The Cultural Field of*

My focus on gathering spaces helps us to trace the interactions among intellectuals of different backgrounds who, as the above scholars have shown, did not restrict themselves to schools or societies. They socialized in places such as Tingzijian and the living rooms of celebrities who convened cultural salons.<sup>27</sup> Tingzijian also served as school dormitories and editorial offices where young writers gathered and exchanged ideas, and where various types of knowledge were circulated. In Chapter Two, I study three sites as examples to see how the lodger-writers communicated and exchanged ideas with each other in Tingzijian, between generations and groups.

### **Tingzijian as Trope**

This study also deals with Tingzijian as a cultural imaginary. As Mike Crang has pointed out, literature does not simply describe places and spaces; it also helps to invent them by shaping people's geographical imaginations.<sup>28</sup> Scholars of Chinese cities have addressed the relations of the urban space of Shanghai and its representations.<sup>29</sup> Yingjin Zhang, for instance, uses the

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*Modern Shanghai (1927-1930)* 知识分子的“内战”——现代上海的文化场域 (1927-1930) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 2007).

<sup>27</sup> For the cultural celebrities' living rooms that held salons, typical examples are Zeng Pu 曾朴's living room and Shao Xunmei 邵洵美's drawing room 花厅. See Leo Lee's *Shanghai Modern* and Fei Dongmei 费冬梅 *Salon: A New Urban Culture and Literary Production in China, 1917-1937* 沙龙：一种新都市文化与文学生产 (1917-1937) (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> See Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London: Routledge, 1998), 43-44.

<sup>29</sup> For studies on the urban space of Shanghai and its imagination in the twentieth century, see, for example, Sherman Cochran ed., *Inventing Nanjing Road: Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Zhang Hongsheng 张鸿声 *Imagination of Shanghai in Literature* 文学中的上海想象 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe 人民出版社, 2011); Sun Shaoyi 孙绍谊 *The Imaginary City: Shanghai in Literature, Film, and Visual Arts (1927-1937)* 想象的城市——文学、电影和视觉上海 (1927-1937) (Shanghai: Fudan University

concept of “configuration” of text and space. According to Zhang, images of the city are inscribed in literature and film, and cognitive, perceptual, and conceptual apparatuses<sup>30</sup> are operative in the process of inscribing the city in and through the text.<sup>31</sup> Alexander des Forges’ *Mediasphere Shanghai* illustrates how the formal characteristics of Shanghai narrative gave shape and coherence to Shanghai residents’ and visitors’ sensory and emotional experiences of the city, and how the Shanghai novel “constructed” the city, and did not merely reflect it.<sup>32</sup>

This study adds to the above studies of text-and-space relationship by turning a more detailed micro-lens on the Tingzijian. Equally importantly, I offer a richer understanding by paying attention to not only coherence but also inconsistencies. Literary representations did not give Tingzijian a single shape but rather a multifaceted one motivated by divergent agendas. In Chapter Three, I outline three subgenres of Tingzijian writing where the space operates as a literary trope: 1) exhibiting quotidian life in Tingzijian, 2) narrating confinement, and 3) mocking “Tingzijian literati.”

Focusing on aesthetics, I examine what experiences lodger-writers chose to focus on, what types of narrative arc they created, and what motifs and scenarios they employed. I discern psychic experiences such as repression and claustrophobia and symbolic power invested in the spatial relationships within literature and how the space was so constructed. I locate Tingzijian

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Press, 2009); Bao Yaming 包亚明, Wang Hongtu 王宏图, *Shanghai Pubs: Space, Consumption and Imagination* 上海酒吧——空间，消费与想象 (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe 江苏人民出版社, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Various strategies dealing with ideological and gender differences, such as idealizing the countryside or projecting male fantasies.

<sup>31</sup> Yet he bypasses the conventional tripartite literary-historiography--biographical note, textual analysis, and historical/artistic evaluation—by foregrounding the individual texts. This choice leaves out some useful information if we also try to investigate the Shanghai literary field. See Yingjin Zhang’s *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>32</sup> See Alexander des Forges, *Mediasphere Shanghai: The Aesthetics of Cultural Production* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 4.

literature within modern Chinese literature of the 1920s-1930s as a whole, identifying both unique regional features and narrative features that Tingzijian writings share with other writings.

The first type of writing is characterized by exhibitionary displays of the common daily trivialities of the private life. The narrators are consistent with the figures of “petty urbanites” common in Shanghai imaginaries. Lu Hanchao points out that “petty urbanite” was a blanket term popularly known and liberally used to refer to “city or town people who were of the middle or lower-middle social ranks.”<sup>33</sup> It excludes the elite at the top and the urban poor at the bottom. Lu also quotes Perry Link’s and Wen-hsin Yeh’s definitions of petty urbanites as consisting of small merchants, various kinds of clerks, shop assistants, factory workers, housewives, elementary and normal school teachers, and other modestly educated urbanites. Petty urbanites they define not only by economic rank but also by their consumption of popular literature and tabloids and their residency in alleyway houses.<sup>34</sup> In this subgenre, we see how the writing formed a collective identity of Tingzijian lodgers through which the lodger-writers recognize themselves and others.

Cramped in small space with neighbors, petty urbanites had limited privacy and endless complaints. Even so, they could still find something enjoyable or amusing, opportunities to “seek joy amidst bitterness” 苦中作乐. In writing of quotidian Tingzijian life, narrators and/or residents tend to either complain about their lives in a self-mocking tone or actually express enjoyment. This attitude is expressed by fictional characters in other genres, such as the residents in the stage play *Under the Eaves of Shanghai* (1937), in the movie *Crows and Sparrows* (1949), in the Shanghai comedy 滑稽戏 *Seventy-two Tenants* 七十二家房客 (1958).

Confinement appears as an important trope in revolutionary fiction, in which young intellectuals in the room feel oppressed both physically and figuratively. From the anarchist

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<sup>33</sup> See Hanchao Lu’s *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

movement which Ba Jin was involved in<sup>35</sup> to Kuomintang's purge of the Chinese Communist Party members (1927) during the Northern Expedition (1926-1928), revolutionary causes faced setbacks and many young leftist intellectuals felt impotent to reform society. The depressed lodger-writers projected their psychic interiority onto the small spaces in which they lived. They described Tingzajian as a tomb-like, isolated space that would bury or suffocate them. In narratives, the feeling of being suffocated is a catalyst. The protagonists' struggle for air foreshadows their choice of action at the climax. Such representation is quite different from that in writing of quotidian life in Tingzajian, in which the small space is a shelter, however poor.

This sense of confinement is symptomatic of a broader pattern found in many New Literature works of the 1920s and 1930s, a recurring motif signifying young intellectuals' oppressed social conditions. What is unique here is that Tingzajian is not an absolutely isolated space, as the streets offer lodger-writers (and their protagonists) a way out. They leave the pavilion rooms to attend actual mass movements. "From the Tingzajian to the streets" became a stock scenario in fiction, which anticipated that in reality, many young writers left Tingzajian in Shanghai for the Communist base of Yan'an or for the Great Rear Area to participate in revolutionary movements. This subgenre of Tingzajian literature captures a transitional moment of young writers transforming from bourgeois elites to leftist revolutionaries.

Another common scenario in this type of writing is writer's block: A young writer sits in a small room, forcing him/herself to create something but ends up with frustration and anxiety. In a study of sojourner-writers 侨寓作家 of the 1920s, Jiang Tao 姜涛 argues that the feeling of claustrophobia resulted from the inherent crisis of the early period of New Literature (from the

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<sup>35</sup> As a teenager in 1920, Ba Jin joined the anarchist movement. Anarchism was popular in China at that time. Yet when he went to France in late 1920s, he faced the worldwide decline of anarchism, discussed in Chapter Three.



beginning of the New Cultural Movement to the early 1930s).<sup>36</sup> By “sojourner-writers” he refers to those young writers who were inspired by New Literature, came from small towns to big cities such as Beijing/Beiping and Shanghai, and lived a relatively poor life.<sup>37</sup> He finds this scenario in the works of Ding Ling 丁玲 and Shen Congwen 沈从文 (when they were in Beijing), Chen Yi 陈毅, Gao Changhong 高长虹, Wang Luyan 王鲁彦, Peng Jiahuang 彭家煌, and others. All had the experience of getting stuck in a cramped space while forcing themselves to write something. Jiang thinks that it is because their limited life was enclosed in a cycle of cultural production and consumption of New Culture ideology, rather than involving actual sociohistorical activities. He also points out that how to break the confinement and resolve the crisis became the impetus of New Literature and precipitated the literary divisions of the late 1920s. Tingzjian writings exemplify this phenomenon, as the trajectory “from Tingzjian to the streets” suggests the lodger-writers’ responses. The conceptual category of “Tingzjian literature” allows us to see both the common writing crisis and the divergences contained in modern Chinese literature of the 1920s-30s.

Mental and writing problems that the Tingzjian literati encountered reflect a fraught relationship between self and society. A sense of suffering and depression, or *kumen* 苦闷, as Jing Tsu has pointed out, permeated Chinese social and cultural life in the 1920s and 1930s. She recalls that in the early 1920s, narcissistic and sentimental first-person narratives in New Literature constituted an exploration of modern self-consciousness. Then the torment of *kumen* shifted from being psychological to social. She argues that to writers and intellectuals increasingly politicized toward class revolution in the 1920s and 1930s, the individual and societal torment of *kumen* suggests “a powerful way of reconciling literary artistry with social

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<sup>36</sup> See Jiang Tao 姜涛, *Towers in the Apartments: Chinese Literature and Youths in the 1920s* 公寓里的塔：二十年代中国文学与青年 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Jiang Tao also names them “indoor writers” 室内作家.

reality.”<sup>38</sup> A reading of Tingzitian literature of this genre will show the tension in the reconciliation, and that the awareness of the gap between the individual elites and the masses can also cause *kumen*.

The third type of Tingzitian writing is not as common as the previous two in terms of quantity, yet it provides a critical dimension. “Revolution” became such a popular buzzword that some literati used it for self-promotion without really devoting themselves to the cause. Living in Tingzitian, a place that accommodated many revolutionaries and talented writers, one could create an idealized alter ego. This provoked a backlash from writers critical of the imposture and the abuse of revolutionary terms. As mocking representations of Tingzitian literati, comic antiheroes either retreat to their room or wander on the street, seeking nothing but entertainment. Unlike the authors of writing in confinement, these mocking writers never identify with their protagonists, instead deliberately keeping a critical distance from them through an omnipotent third-person narrative voice.

In all three categories, I read Tingzitian in relation to streets or alleys. Juxtaposition of interior and exterior spaces appears in all the three types of representations. Protagonists either get out of Tingzitian to wander onto the streets or retreat from the streets into Tingzitian. What happens on the streets and alleys can also penetrate residents’ private space. Alexander des Forges investigates the space of alleyways in a study of cinema spectatorship since the 1930s. Using theatricality to analyze city space and cinematic representation in twentieth century Shanghai, he points out that Shanghai alleys can be understood as fundamentally theatrical. He analogizes the gaze down from the box seats to a spectacle below in the theatre to the view from

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<sup>38</sup> See Jing Tsu’s *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 198-199.

the second-floor windows and balconies overlooking alleys.<sup>39</sup> He also takes writer Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 (1876-1973)'s memoir, *Recollections of Bracelet Shadow Studio* 钏影楼回忆录, as an example. Bao living in the pavilion room always caught sight of his neighbors across the alley when he looks out his window. He could not ignore the noise outside when he was writing. The spatial uniqueness grants him an audience position to observe.

The gaze from Tingzajian creates more than a relationship between audiences and the show. The spatial relationships also embody the relationships between the writers and the masses. Writers about quotidian life in Tingzajian were “petty urbanites”; rarely do we find the spectatorial gaze from Tingzajian in this genre. Some narrators are not used to the boulevards of automobiles and gorgeous architecture and prefer to retreat to a safe shelter. Elites’ writings, in contrast, often feature Tingzajian spectatorship. Their gaze offers what I call “the upstairs perspective,” which suggests a class difference between the elites on the one hand and the petty urbanites and the underclass on the other. As I show in Chapter Three, elite lodger-writers expressed sympathy for the masses yet from a subtle remove. The distance can only be overcome when they go onto the streets, descending to the same level as the masses. Interestingly, in the third sub-genre I analyze, the mocked protagonists shift back and forth between the two spaces, as if neither really suits them. Some cannot tolerate writer’s block in the cramped space, so they go to the street in search of inspiration; yet typically what they actually seek is entertainment. The unsettlement between the spaces indicates the uneasiness in their identity.

Another prevalent element in Tingzajian representations is acoustic experience. Writers represent the soundscape of Tingzajian in two ways, which I call “foreground sound” and “background sound.” “Foreground sounds” are listened to consciously and described in detail.

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<sup>39</sup> See Alexander des Forges’ “Shanghai Alleys, Theatrical Practice, and Cinematic Spectatorship: From Street Angel (1937) to Fifth Generation Film”, *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2010.9), 29-51.

They can be disturbing, like the arguments between Lu Xun's neighbor A Jin and her lover that interrupt Lu Xun's work.<sup>40</sup> "Background sound" is not consciously discerned. The writers describe it as faint to create a sense of distance or isolation. In descriptions of quotidian life, "foreground sounds" represent the residents' daily trivialities. The sound constitutes an important part of the residents' sense experience in this modern urban space. Comparatively, in writing in confinement, the "background sound" appears when the protagonists withdraw from the outside world to the pavilion room and indulge in their own feelings and emotions. The remote sound suggests the distance between the protagonists and the world of the masses. It demarcates an interior space of the protagonists and highlights their inner lives. "Foreground sound" also connects to the normal people's mundane life, but it may disrupt the lodger-writers' writing and add to their creative difficulties, or jolt them out of their self-absorption and back to a hard reality. In the narrative, this tends to happen as protagonists' resentment towards society moves towards a climax. Disturbing sounds also function to trigger storytelling, with many a story said to have been overheard from a neighbor.

The thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter Two approaches the Tingzijian from a sociohistorical perspective. I argue that physical, social, and perceptual features made the Tingzijian a unique living space in which knowledge flowed, and which shaped lodger-writers' aspirations, identities, and cultural production. To prove it, I look into the cultural milieu of the pavilion rooms, starting with a historical review of pavilion rooms and Shanghai alleyway houses, including their architectural features and how they influenced the residents' daily and social lives. I then profile the personal backgrounds of the lodger-writers in the 1920s and 1930s' Shanghai and their social worlds. I also examine their living experiences in pavilion rooms, with special emphasis on sound.

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<sup>40</sup> See Lu Xun's "A Jin" 阿金, *Petrel* 海燕, No.2 (1936): 17-18.

After exploring how Tingzajian writers' daily and social lives were patterned in this space, I move to its artistic function. To demonstrate how the space operates as an artistic trope, and illustrate the heterogeneity of Tingzajian literature, Chapter Three focuses on three subgenres of Tingzajian representations where the writers attached various meanings to the space. For writing of quotidian life, I examine articles from local magazines such as *Modern Times* 现世报 (1938-1940) and *Shanghai Guide* 上海生活 (1937-1941) to show how contributors exhibited petty urbanites' lives. For writing of confinement, I analyze Ba Jin's first novella *Destruction* 灭亡 (1929) and its sequel *New Life* 新生 (1932). I also discuss works of Ding Ling, Jiang Guangci, and other leftist writers to demonstrate how the motif of confinement and some common scenarios operate in this type. For the third type, I read Yu Dafu's *Two Poets* 二诗人 and Xiao Hong's *Ma Bole* 马伯乐 as examples of mocking Tingzajian literati.

The epilogue tells how Tingzajian reappeared in later narratives. Tingzajian not only appear in the popular pulp literature in the 1940s, but also in Mao's speech at the Yan'an Forum, invoked for a specific political meaning. Communist critics constantly used "Tingzajian literati" in their criticisms, making it the metonymy of the bourgeois or reactionary ideology. Since the 1980s, when the Shanghai municipal government started to demolish the majority of the alleyway houses, Tingzajian and the alleyway houses has become the space of cultural nostalgia, preserving and evoking people's memory of Shanghai of decades past.

## Chapter Two: A Brief History of Tingzijian and Shanghai's Writer-lodgers

The Tingzijian first of all functioned as a lived space that was “engendered by crossings, reciprocities, assemblies, the intersections of gazes, and the flow of knowledge and opinions.”<sup>41</sup> Living in Tingzijian in proximity to a *mélange* of residence in the alleyway houses was still a novel urban experience in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when modern and urban perceptions came into being. In this chapter, I read the space and the lodger-writers within a larger sociohistorical context in order to better understand the Tingzijian's significance. The chapter introduces the cultural milieu of Tingzijian literature and the lodger-writers. After a brief overview of the architecture, I examine the writers' social connections, as well as their accounts of their living experience. The unique architectural and residential features shaped the lodger-writers' perception of the space and their lifestyle, which further influenced their self-identity and cultural production. Meanwhile, Tingzijian served as magnetic spots for social connections, making it possible for the intellectuals to exchange and sustain ideas.

### 2.1 ARCHITECTURAL AND RESIDENTIAL FEATURES OF ALLEYWAY HOUSES AND TINGZIJIAN

Shanghai alleyway houses first appeared in the foreign settlements in the mid-nineteenth century. The British and Americans built these row houses to accommodate refugees from the Boxer Rebellion. By the 1870s, many of these poorly built houses were dilapidated. The newly built row houses were made of not only wood but also cement and brick.<sup>42</sup> Alleyway houses became quite common across the city but were particularly concentrated in the central and northeastern parts of the International Settlement.<sup>43</sup> Generally speaking, the bookstores, presses, schools, and commercial sites often located in the central area, while factories and ports were built to the northeast of the Huangpu River. Educated youths consequently tended to live in the

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<sup>41</sup> I borrow the definition of lived space from Linda Rui Feng's study of Chang'an in Tang dynasty. See *City of Marvel and Transformation: Chang'an and Narratives of Experience in Tang Dynasty China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015), 1.

<sup>42</sup> See Hanchao Lu's *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 138-143.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

central part, while factory workers lived in Yangshupu 杨树浦, the dock and factory area. Yet the two groups did overlap. As stories discussed in the next chapter suggest, many educated youths transformed into factory workers or participated in the labor movement.

Alleyway houses were often grouped in compounds, with walls to form a residential compound surrounding rows of houses. Between the rows were paved “alleys” 弄堂, plied by vendors. Each compound had an entrance with a stone portal gate and the name of the alleyway carved on the gate. The verb “hoop” is *gu* 箍 in mandarin Chinese. In Shanghai dialect, the pronunciation of *gu* is very close to *ku*, therefore, the “gate hooped by stone”, or *shigumen*, is pronounced as *shikumen*. Gradually, the misnomer *shikumen* 石库门, became the name of the Shanghai alleyway houses organized in compounds with a stone portal gate at the entrance.<sup>44</sup> The units at the front rows in every compound face the street. People can enter the living rooms at the first floor of these units directly from the sidewalk, thus these rooms usually serve as shops.

*Shikumen* houses transformed from multi-bay styles to single-bay styles between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s.<sup>45</sup> What did not changed much is the location of Tingzijian. The kitchen 灶披间 is always on the ground floor and right above it is the Tingzijian. The small room situated between the first and second stories faces the back alley. Above it is a flat roof for drying clothes. Without a modern air-conditioning system, in summer, the rooms are like an oven heated from both below and above.

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<sup>44</sup> See Zhang Hongsheng 张鸿声, *The Literary Map of Shanghai* 上海文学地图 (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe 中国地图出版社, 2012), 130.

<sup>45</sup> For inner structure and the floor plans, see Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 146-156.

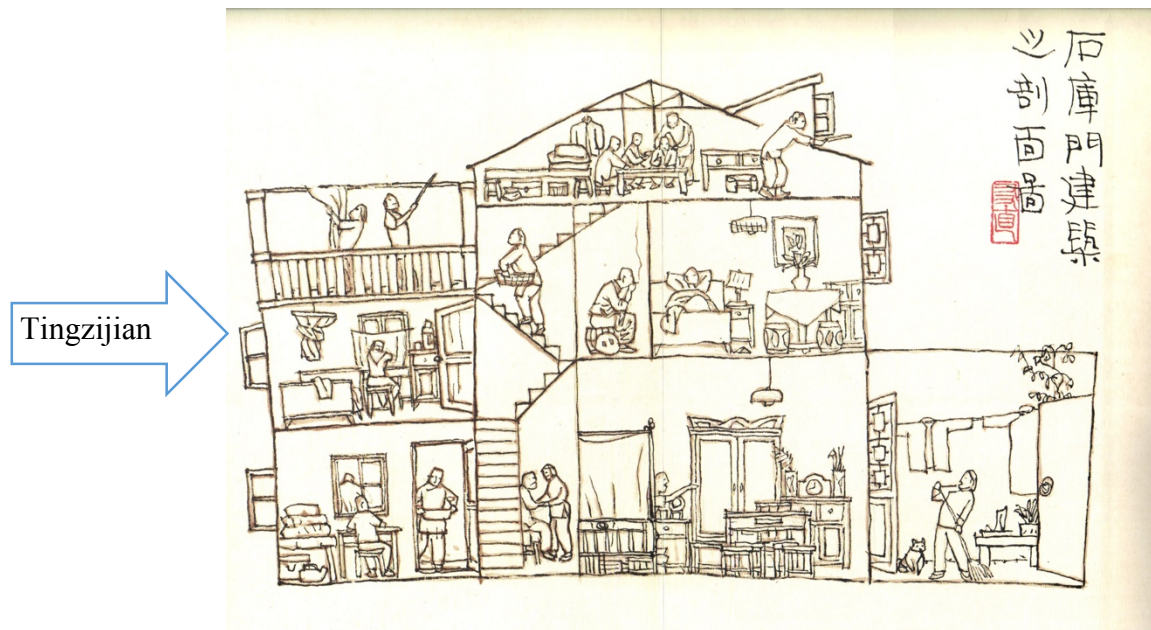


FIGURE 1.1: THE CROSS SECTION OF SHIKUMEN, HE YOUZHI 贺友直 (1922-2016), *THE OLD SHANGHAINESE IN THE ALLEYWAY HOUSES* 弄堂里的老上海人 (SHANGHAI: RENMIN MEISHU CHUBANSHE 人民美术出版社, 2010)

Though the alleyway house was initially designed for the accommodation of one family, facing an acute housing shortage, tenants subdivided the houses into several dwellings and let them to sojourners. As early as the early twentieth century, subletting had become a common practice; those tenants were called “second landlord” 二房东. Compartmentalized alleyway houses attracted all walks of life, from low-ranking company employees to bank clerks and primary school teachers, members of the middle and lower-middle classes. Rent for a pavilion room was relatively low because of the poor living conditions.<sup>46</sup> Thus pavilion rooms became the choice of new college graduates, obscure writers, factory workers, and prostitutes. The small rooms accommodated not only bachelors, but also young couples, or even small families. Poor as

<sup>46</sup> Before the wartime, the rent for a whole alleyway house was at least 60 silver dollars 银圆, while the rent for a pavilion room was around 10 silver dollars. For reference, the salary for a primary school teacher was 30-90 silver dollars monthly. Living expenses totalled 60 silver dollars. See Chen Mingyuan’s 陈明远 *The Economic Life of the Literati* 文化人的经济生活 (Xi’an: Shanxi renmin chubanshe 陕西人民出版社, 2013), 254-257.



they were, they could at least afford the space in alleyway houses. That is to say, their life was more stable than the abject poor who lived in wooden bungalows or straw shacks in shantytowns, or on the streets.

The *mélange* of residents found in alleyway houses inspired works like Xia Yan's *Under the Roofs of Shanghai* 上海屋檐下(1937) and the film *Crows and Sparrows* 乌鸦与麻雀 (1949). The set of Xia's play is a cross section of an alleyway house, which allows the audience to see what is going on in every room simultaneously. The house is divided into five compartments. The second landlord's family lives in the living room; a primary school teacher's family lives in the kitchen. On the second floor, a prostitute lives in the front room, an unemployed former bank clerk lives with his wife and a newly-born child in the pavilion room. An aged newspaper vendor whose son died in the war lives in the attic. One's room reflects one's economic circumstances. Cookware and diapers hang out the pavilion room's window. A simple kerosene stove sits on the stairwell, where the residents of the pavilion room cook. It shows that the former bank clerk's family is leading an orderly life. Comparatively, the living room is neat and tidy. The desk and the closet transformed from a bookcase indicate that the owner used to be an intellectual and is now a factory worker. The arrangement of residents in *Crows and Sparrows* is similar to that in Xia Yan's play. The film is set in 1948 when the Kuomintang (KMT) was about to lose its control over Shanghai. A vendor's family lives on the ground floor; the mistress of a Kuomintang officer lives on the second floor; a secondary school teacher lives with his family in the pavilion room. The similarity shows that by the late 1930s and 1940s, the Tingzijian was known for hosting a variety of walks of life—a mistress/prostitute, petty-intellectuals, and vendors—and that this social structure was appealing to storytellers in multiple genres.

The transformation and compartmentalization of alleyway houses reflect the growing population and housing demand in Shanghai and embodies the transition of people's ways of living. Residents no longer lived with a traditional extended family in places like courtyard homes 四合院 in Beijing. Especially for Tingzijian dwellers, they tended to live with a nuclear

family or just with a partner. The economic bond with the second landlord replaced kinship ties in daily life. Moreover, as people lived in a mixed space, they were likely to cross class boundaries in daily contacts. For example, in *Crows and Sparrows*, the KMT officer has forcibly taken possession of the entire building. Because of the unfavorable political situation, he plans to sell it and escape, so he tells the residents to move out. The residents gather in the kitchen to discuss tactics. They count on the secondary school teacher to negotiate with the officer, yet the teacher is distinctly uncomfortable with the idea. Putting on airs as a lofty literatus, he is also afraid of getting into trouble. His wife, however, plays mahjong with the officer's mistress and the vendor's wife, sitting around the same table. The *mélange* of small families in one house forced people of different strata to interact, and in turn inspired artistic creation.

Alleyway houses also entailed a reconfiguration of commercial spaces. According to Samuel Liang, in later imperial China, the courtyard and the street were antithetical spaces separated by walls. "The one represented the elite order and the other the amorphous and vulgar; the one was the center and the other always marginalized in Confucian ideology."<sup>47</sup> Alleyway houses reversed this spatial hierarchy. Residents welcomed vendors into the alleys and sometimes bought food from them without leaving the residential compound. The compound itself consisted of "stores outside and alleyway houses inside" "外铺内里. The demarcation of commercial activities and domestic life was no longer clear-cut. As shown below, this transformation brought lodgers new living experiences and new perceptions of space.

## 2.2 LODGER-WRITERS AND THEIR SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

The 1920s and 1930s saw intellectuals and writers flock to Shanghai; many chose pavilion rooms because of the affordable rent. Before the wartime, Shanghai was attractive thanks to its

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<sup>47</sup> See Samuel Y. Liang's "Where the Courtyard Meets the Street: Spatial Culture of the Li Neighborhoods, Shanghai, 1870-1900", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol.67, No.4 (2008.12), 482-503.

commercial development, relative freedom in foreign concessions, and the prosperous cultural industry consisting of new schools, bookstores, and presses, and a relatively favorable political climate.

Young students left their hometown for Shanghai with the hope of learning new knowledge in the city's modern schools. Schools and publishing houses also provided job opportunities for the literate. Primary school teacher Ye Shengtao 叶圣陶 (1894-1988), for example, once taught in Shanghai Shangong Primary School 尚公小学 and also worked as an editor at Commercial Press in the 1910s. In the early 1920s, he went to Shanghai again to run a literary association and teach in a public school.<sup>48</sup> In 1921, Guo Moruo (1892-1978) and Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 (1897-1984), two founders of the Creation Society 创造社, were invited to Shanghai from Japan by the manager of Taidong Bookstore 泰东图书局, Zhao Nangong 赵南公 (1882-1938). Zhao was planning to reshuffle the Bookstore in order to cater to readers' demand for New Literature, so he sought the help of Guo Moruo and the Creation Society. The Bookstore then published Guo's

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<sup>48</sup> Ye Shengtao 叶圣陶 (autonym Ye Shaojun 叶绍钧), born in a county at Jiangsu province, was an influential writer, educator and publisher in modern China. After graduating from a secondary school at Suzhou, he worked as a primary school teacher, until he was dismissed by the school in 1914. In the next year, he went to Shanghai to teach in Shangong Primary School. The school established in 1906 was affiliated to the Commercial Press 商务印书馆, mainly for the children of the employee of the Commercial Press as well as some workers and merchants. Ye also worked for the Commercial Press as an editor of primary school textbooks. From the summer in 1919 to July 1921, he stayed in a small town close to Shanghai. In January 1921, Ye, along with other writers, established one of the earliest literary societies of the New Cultural Movement: Association for Literary Studies 文学研究会. They advocated that "literature is for life" 文学为人生. Later, the association moved to Shanghai. Ye Shengtao was among the core leading group. In September 1921, he received the invitation to teach in China Public School 中国公学 at Shanghai. See Shang, Jinlin 商金林's *Ye Shengtao Biography* 叶圣陶传论 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe 安徽教育出版社, 1995), 180-227.

anthology of poems, *The Goddesses*, among other works of the Creation Society.<sup>49</sup> The Society established its office in Shanghai and later attracted Yu Dafu (1896-1945), another founder, to come in late 1926.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was established in Shanghai in 1921, and this attracted communists and revolutionaries, such as Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899-1935), Pan Hannian 潘汉年 (1906-1977), and Zhou Yang 周扬 (1907-1989) who worked in propaganda. The CCP also built up Party schools for educating young students. Students and teachers including Ding Ling 丁玲, Wang Jianhong 王剑虹 (1901-1924), and Shi Cuntong 施存统 (1899-1970), came from all over the country. Another reasons for the communist intellectuals to come is the break of the First United Front in 1927. The CCP had to shift from cities to rural areas to launch armed uprisings, meanwhile some young leftists went to Shanghai to continue their cause in the cultural field. After the Shanghai Massacre of 14 April 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek's military force violently suppressed the CCP members, some CCP members were wanted by the KMT government; Tingzjian in the foreign concessions became their refuges. Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰 (pseudonym Mao Dun 茅盾, 1896-1981), for instance, hid in a pavilion room at Jingyu Alleyway 景云里 in 1927 to escape from being captured. There he wrote his *Eclipse* trilogy 蚀三部曲: *Disillusion* 幻灭, *Wavering* 动摇, *Pursuit* 追求.

Some literati fled Beijing around 1926 to escape unfavorable conditions under the rule of the militarist-run Beiyang 北洋 government. The government could no longer fund the schools, and

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<sup>49</sup> See Chen Fukang 陈富康's "The Founders of Creation Society and Taidong Bookstore: A Study Report on Zhao Nangong's Diary of 1921" 创造社元老与泰东书局：关于赵南公 1921 年日记的研究报告, *Historical Materials of Chinese Literature* 中华文学史料, Vol. 1, (Shanghai: Baijia chubanshe, 1990), 25-56. See also Guo Moruo's "Ten Years of Creation" 创造十年, *The Complete Works of Guo Moruo (Literature)* 郭沫若全集 (文学编), Vol. 12, (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1992), 94-97.

universities could not pay the faculty. What was more unbearable was the political oppression. Intellectuals had chafed at government censorship of New Literature since 1924. The final straw was the March 18th Massacre of 1926, when the government army killed and injured many demonstrators, prompting many literati to head south. Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) left the Peking University for Xiamen 厦门 and Guangzhou 广州, before he eventually settled in Shanghai in 1927. Writers of the “Modern Criticism School” 现代评论派, such as Xu Zhimo 徐志摩 (1896-1931)<sup>50</sup>, Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988), and Chen Yuan 陈源 (1896-1970), also moved to Shanghai around 1926 and 1927.

After the Mukden Incident of 1931, the Japanese army occupied Northeastern China, sending more writers southward. For instance, in 1934, the Communist writer Luo Feng 罗烽 (1909-1991) was arrested by the Japanese regime in Manchuria. After he was bailed out, he went to Shanghai with his wife, writer Bai Lang 白朗 (1912-1994); later the couple joined the League of Chinese Left-Wing Writers 中国左翼作家联盟. Around the same time, another young couple in Harbin, Xiao Hong 萧红 and Xiao Jun 萧军 (1907-1988), published their anthology *Arduous Journey* 跋涉 (1933), which was censored by the Manchukuo government, and in 1934 the couple fled to Qingdao 青岛. Later the same year, they moved to Shanghai.<sup>51</sup>

Focusing on spaces like Tingzijian—rather than individuals or literary societies—helps us to trace patterns in how these writers made social connections after arriving in Shanghai. As mentioned above, previous studies on literary societies, such as Hockx and Denton’s *Literary Societies of Republican China*, have shown the formation and the role of literary societies as agents in the literary field. That said, interpersonal interactions were not restricted to a particular literary society or motivated by its collective agenda. My social space approach brings to light more types of interactions among the literati, which could be motivated by certain political

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<sup>50</sup> Xu married Lu Xiaoman in Beijing in October, 1926. They lived at Xu’s hometown Haining for a while, and headed to Shanghai in December.

<sup>51</sup> See Howard Goldblatt’s *Hsiao Hung* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976).

agenda, shared interests in certain artistic topics, or for the purpose of passing down knowledge. In addition to literary societies and schools, gathering space also contributed to the formation of literati groups. Pavilion rooms account for a large proportion of the dwellings of Shanghai literati in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>52</sup> Tingzijian and alleyway houses, senior literati's homes or school dormitories, became gathering spaces for them to discuss literature, politics, and to build social connections. These magnetic spots not only influenced the concentration of lodger-writers, but also provided space for ideas to be produced, exchanged and sustained. Below, I introduce three sites in different concessions as examples to show the significance of pavilion rooms in the literati's social connection and cultural production. These sites are: around Avenue Foch and Seymour Road in the International Settlement, around the Route Herve de Sieyes in the French Concession, and around Darroch Road close to extra-settlement roads, respectively.

As some colleges established in concessions, alleyway houses used as school buildings and dormitories attracted the literati. Students lived in the rooms, where they could freely interact with each other and with their teachers. The first example was in the International Settlements (see Figure 2.2.1)<sup>53</sup>. By mapping two adjacent schools that Ding Ling attended during two years,

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<sup>52</sup> Chen Mingyuan divides the Shanghai literati into four ranks. First-rate writers, such as Lu Xun, earned enough to rent a whole building for about 60 silver dollars per month. Second-rate writers, including Ye Shengtao during 1927-1932, might rent up to three rooms in the alleyway houses for more than 20 dollars; the living area might be 88 square meters. Third-rate writers with a little fame, such as Ding Ling in 1933, could rent a front room and a pavilion room for about 15 dollars; the living area would be 60 square meters. Obscure literati could only afford a pavilion room for about 10 dollars. See his *The Economic Life of the Literati* 文化人的经济生活, 256-257. His divisions make perceivable the literati's hierarchy both in terms of reputation and economic situation. Yet I refuse to label the literati with any rate, as their "rates" are fluid. Some writers of second or third rank also lived in the space no larger than a pavilion room before they gradually won their reputation. Those who were once comparatively well-off to rent several rooms were also possible to move to a smaller space in response to the soaring living expense, or to escape from the government's chase.

<sup>53</sup> This and the following two pictures are from "The Latest Map of Shanghai" 最新上海地图, *Osaka Asahi Newspaper* 大阪朝日新聞, 1932.3.5. Access via Virtual Shanghai: [http://www.virtualshanghai.net/Asset/Preview/vcMap\\_ID-245\\_No-1.jpeg](http://www.virtualshanghai.net/Asset/Preview/vcMap_ID-245_No-1.jpeg)

one at Avenue Foch (now Yan'an Road) and the other at Seymour Road (now North Sha'anxi Road), we can see that the schools were the hotbed for communist cultural workers and students.

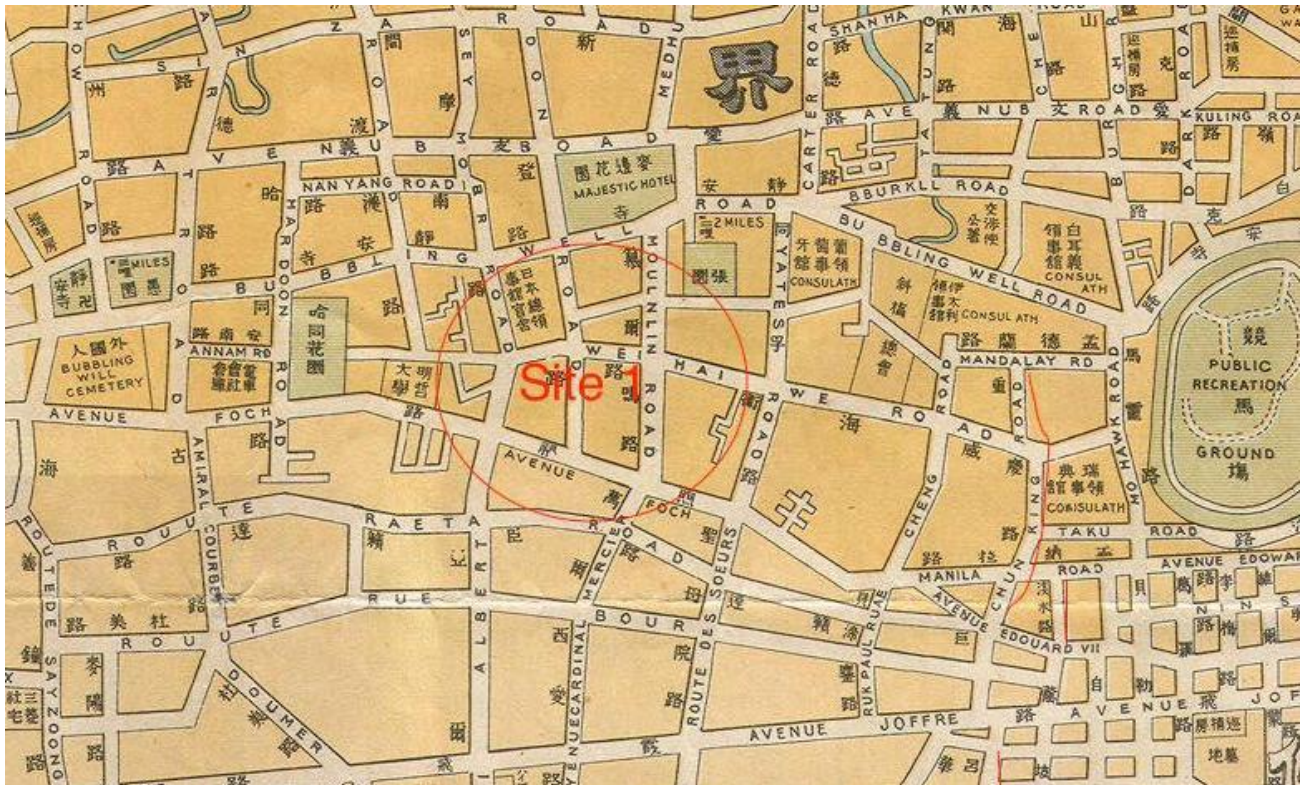


FIGURE 2.1: SITE ONE AROUND AVENUE FOCH AND SEYMOUR ROAD, PART OF THE MAP OF SHANGHAI IN 1932

The CCP set up a women's school to train female cadres for the party: Shanghai Common Women's School 上海平民女校. To save the rental expense in the concession, the principal found a two-base alleyway house in Fude Alley 辅德里 on Avenue Foch as the school building. The house also served as a clandestine meeting place for the party members.<sup>54</sup> Teachers of the school included linguist Chen Wangdao 陈望道 (1891-1977), writer Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun), revolutionary socialist Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942) and politician Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898-1969). Ding Ling, who soon became famous for her story "Miss Sophia's Diary" 沙菲女

<sup>54</sup> The site of the school is marked as No.7, Old North Chengdu Rd. 老成都北路 7 号 now, though it is on the Yan'an Road (M.). According to Ding Ling's memoir, however, the name of the alleyway was Fuxu Alley 福煦里. See *Complete Works of Ding Ling* 丁玲全集, Vol.10, 302.

士日记 (1928), attended the school with her friend Wang Jianhong in 1922, when she was eighteen. There she started to read Soviet literature and encountered the CCP cultural workers.

In late 1923, Ding Ling and Wang Jianhong left the school to attend Shanghai University for more formal education. The university established in 1922 was an outcome of the first United Front between the KMT and the CCP. Many teachers there were famous artists and scholars such as Yu Pingbo 俞平伯 (1900-1990), Tian Han 田汉 (1898-1968), Shen Yanbing, and Chen Wangdao. Qu Qiubai, the head of the Department of Sociology, just returned from Russia to take charge of the CCP's propaganda. Students included Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905-1950) and Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 (1905-2003), later a famous modernist poet and writer, respectively. At first, the school was at Tsingtao Road<sup>55</sup>, Zhabei district. The school dormitory was a single-base alleyway house on the Tsingtao Road. Ding Ling and Wang Jianhong lived in a pavilion room. Their teacher Shi Cuntong<sup>56</sup> lived next door, and Ding and Wang often visited him. Qu Qiubai frequently came to their pavilion room to chat and later fell in love with Wang. In 1924, the school moved to alleyway houses on Seymour Road<sup>57</sup>. Ding Ling and her schoolmates lived in a larger alleyway house on Moulmein Road<sup>58</sup>, close to Seymour Road. By that time, Qu Qiubai and Wang Jianhong had married. They lived upstairs, while Shi Cuntong and his wife lived downstairs. Ding Ling lived with them in a small room.<sup>59</sup>

Ding Ling's memory of the interaction with her colleagues centers on her room. In her memoir, she regards Qu Qiubai as the best teacher among the faculty, because he came to their

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<sup>55</sup> Today's Qingyun Road.

<sup>56</sup> Shi Cuntong (aka. Shi Fuliang 1899-1970) was born in Zhejiang Province. He was active in the New Culture Movement. In 1920 he went to Shanghai, where he met Chen Duxiu and turned into a communist. He spent the following two years studying in Japan, before he was expelled. By the time of January, 1924, he was the leader of the CCP's Shanghai Executive Commission 中共上海区执行委员会. Then he became the teacher of Shanghai University.

<sup>57</sup> Today's North Shaanxi Road.

<sup>58</sup> Today's North Maoming Road.

<sup>59</sup> See *Complete Works of Ding Ling*, Vol.10, 305.



living place after school almost every day to talk about literature ranging from classic to modern, Chinese to foreign. He would tell them Soviet stories and teach them Russian by reading aloud Pushkin. After his marriage with Wang Jianhong, Qu would still visit Ding Ling regularly. As Ding Ling recalls, when the couple would come to her room on winter nights, she would always turn off the light so that the room would be lit only by the dim flame of the stove. Through a small hole in the lid, the flame projected a flower-like pattern onto the ceiling, creating a beautiful atmosphere in the room, in which Qu would tell them the anecdotes about contemporary writers like Xu Zhimo and Yu Dafu or relate arguments between the Creation Society and the Association for Literary Study. Ding Ling recounted that it was from Qu that she learned about romanticism, naturalism, and realism, as well as the difference between the slogans “literature is for life” and “literature is for art.”<sup>60</sup> Interestingly, Ding Ling wrote the memoir in 1980 to commemorate Qu Qiubai. After many decades, what she recalled was not necessarily Qu’s exact words, but the domestic scene of chatting in a pleasant atmosphere. Moreover, she subtitled the reminiscence of her interaction with him during that period of time “Moulmein Road”—the name of the road where she lived.

Ding wrote that Qu gave her not only knowledge but also life guidance. When she asked him what she should learn and what she should do in the future, Qu encouraged her to learn whatever she likes, to pursue whatever she wants: “Just fly; fly as high as you can, as far as you can. You are like a bird soaring to great heights. That’s it.”<sup>61</sup> His coming makes the pavilion room a lively place; he also evokes Ding Ling’s passion for literature and gives her courage and confidence to pursue it. In 1932 Ding Ling joined the Communist Party. In 1936, she escaped from the KMT’s custody to Yan’an, the Communist base, where she became influential as the director of the Chinese Literature and Arts Association and editor of the party’s official newspaper. No doubt her career originated from her early life in Shanghai.

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<sup>60</sup> See *Complete Works of Ding Ling*, Vol.6, 41.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

The small rooms in alleyway houses allowed the teachers and students to congregate and interact more frequently, thus transmitting ideology and knowledge. When looking back more than a half century later, Ding Ling unfolds the memory of her early experience within that particular and concrete space.

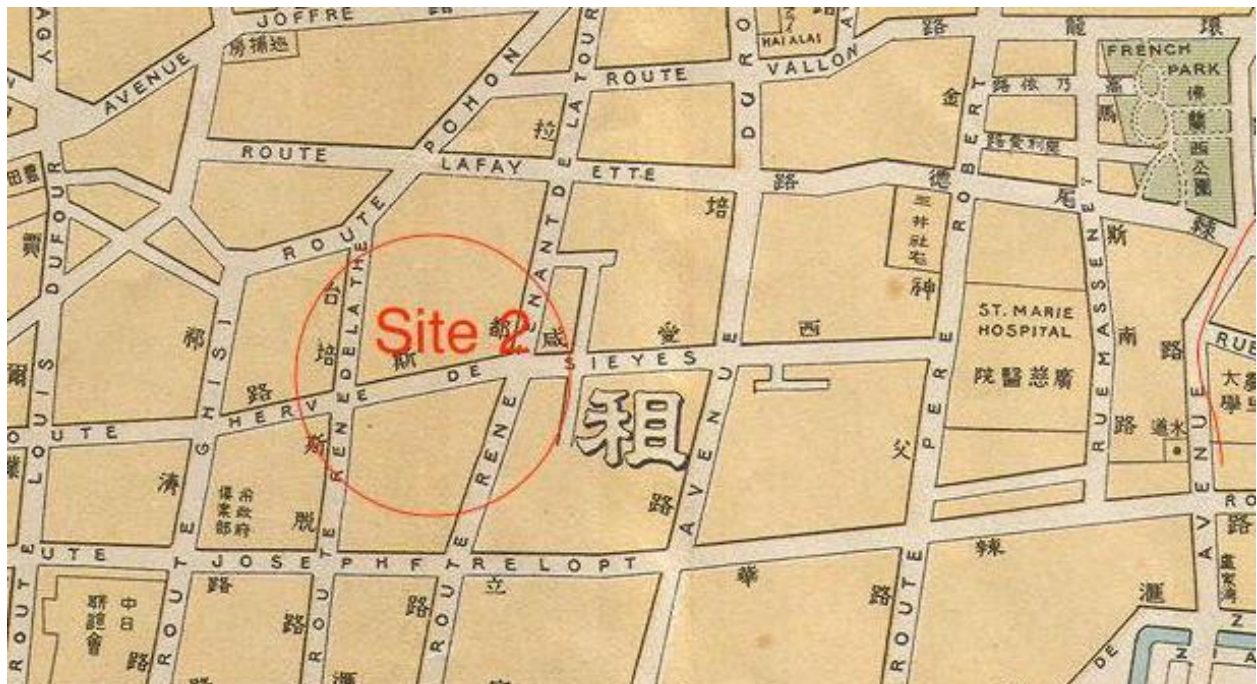


FIGURE 2.2: SITE TWO AROUND THE ROUTE HERVE DE SIEYES, PART OF THE MAP OF SHANGHAI IN 1932

The spatial aggregation effect and the spiritual influence can last longer than the school itself, as seen in my second example: Shanghai Nanguo Art Academy 南国艺校 on Route Herve de Sieyes<sup>62</sup> in the France Concession. The school was established by Tian Han, a leading left-wing dramatist and screenwriter. In 1927, Tian Han set up Nanguo Society consisting of artists in literature, drama, film, music, and painting. Members included dramatist Ouyang Yuqian 欧阳予倩 (1889-1962), writer Xu Zhimo, painter Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿 (1895-1953), and the artist of Peking Opera Zhou Xinfang 周信芳 (1895-1975). In late 1927 and early 1928, when the

<sup>62</sup> Today's Yongjia Road.

Shanghai Art Academy 上海艺术大学 was experiencing financial crisis, Tian Han was the principal. He relocated the school to Route Herve de Sieyes to cut expenses. French policemen, however, confiscated the school's assets. Under such circumstances, Tian Han resigned his position and established the Nanguo Art Academy, simply transferring all the teachers and students from the previous school to the new one. New teachers included dramatist Hong Shen 洪深 (1894-1955) and the literary scholar Chen Zizhan 陈子展 (1898-1990).<sup>63</sup> Tian Han advertised an enrollment notice on *Shen Bao* 申报 to call for students who were interested in the art movement<sup>64</sup>. He also transformed the alleyway house and even built a small stage inside it.<sup>65</sup>

The academy was independent of government funding and “capitalist” sponsorship. It insisted on operation by “plebian youth” 无产青年 and creative independence from the authorities. The school, consequently, was vulnerable to politics and constantly in financial difficulties. In spite of these obstacles, the academy did cultivate artists and enliven the desolate Route Herve de Sieyes. As I mention in the next section, the “plebian” students wandered the street, mimicking a Bohemian lifestyle.

The artistic atmosphere did not completely fade away with the short-lived academy, nor did the pursuit of the art movement. After the school closed in late 1928, many students and teachers were still the members of the Nanguo Society and continued to stage performances. Chen Baichen 陈白尘 (1908-1994), a student of the academy did not leave the site, as he dreamt of becoming a “Tingzjian writer.”<sup>66</sup> He recalls later in his memoir that the education at the academy made him into “a haughty would-be artist” who fantasized that he could live on writing

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<sup>63</sup> See *Farewell to the World* 对人世的告别, 303-309.

<sup>64</sup> He writes in the advertisement that they lack comrades to launch art movements, so they establish a private school. The purpose is to cultivate young artists who can share the weal and woe with the era “与时代同呼吸共命运的艺术青年”. See the advertisement on *Shen Bao* No. 19900, 1928.08.10, 5.

<sup>65</sup> See *Farewell to the World*, 304-305.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

and “pure romance.”<sup>67</sup> He lived with his beloved fiancée in a small room on the second floor of an alleyway house. The house was in the first row of the compound, Route Herve de Sieyes. Real life was, of course, tougher than he imagined and he had to constantly write stories in order to make a living. Beyond that, when his classmates left for performance in other places, the deserted street made him feel lonely. In the dark silence, light shone only from his room. He felt as if he was living on an islet, without connection to the outside world.<sup>68</sup>

Then he left Shanghai for Nanjing, Japan, and many other places to take part in art movements, until he was arrested by the KMT in 1932 due to his involvement in revolutionary activities. In 1935 he was released and returned to Shanghai, where he decided to settle down—again, at Route Herve de Sieyes. “Probably motivated by nostalgia”, he chose his first residence “a stone’s throw” from the former site of the Nanguo Art Academy.<sup>69</sup> He changed his residence several times but all around the same road. In a room on the “fake third floor 假三层楼” above a Russian restaurant, he hosted lots of artists and critics in literature, drama, and film, making Route Herve de Sieyes, again, a lively gathering spot for artists. Zhang Tianyi 张天翼 (1906-1985), Jiang Muliang 蒋牧良 (1901-1973), Shao Quanlin, Shu Qun 舒群 (1913-1989), Sha Ting 沙汀 (1904-1992), and Ai Wu 艾芜 (1904-1992) were among his regular guests. Because his place was well-hidden, leftist dramatists often had meetings there. Once they decided to stage a grand play. Thus Chen told them the story of Shi Dakai 石达开, a general in the Boxer Rebellion who gave up resistance, dismissed the Taiping Army, and ended up getting executed by dismemberment. The story was well received by the audience; in 1936 Chen adapted it into a four-act historical play *The Dead End of Shi Dakai* 石达开的末路 to criticize the policy of nonresistance.<sup>70</sup> In the winter of 1935, Chen moved to a pavilion room, eventually realizing his

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 482.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 482-484.

dream of becoming a “Tingzajian writer”. To him, living in a pavilion room meant that he was eventually accepted by the city and that he was able to be a professional writer.

Chen’s story shows that during the tumultuous years, a school might be set up and closed in a couple of months for financial or political reasons, but the artists’ social connections continued. Also, the school’s artistic and revolutionary spirit did not disappear with it, but moved to the pavilion rooms.

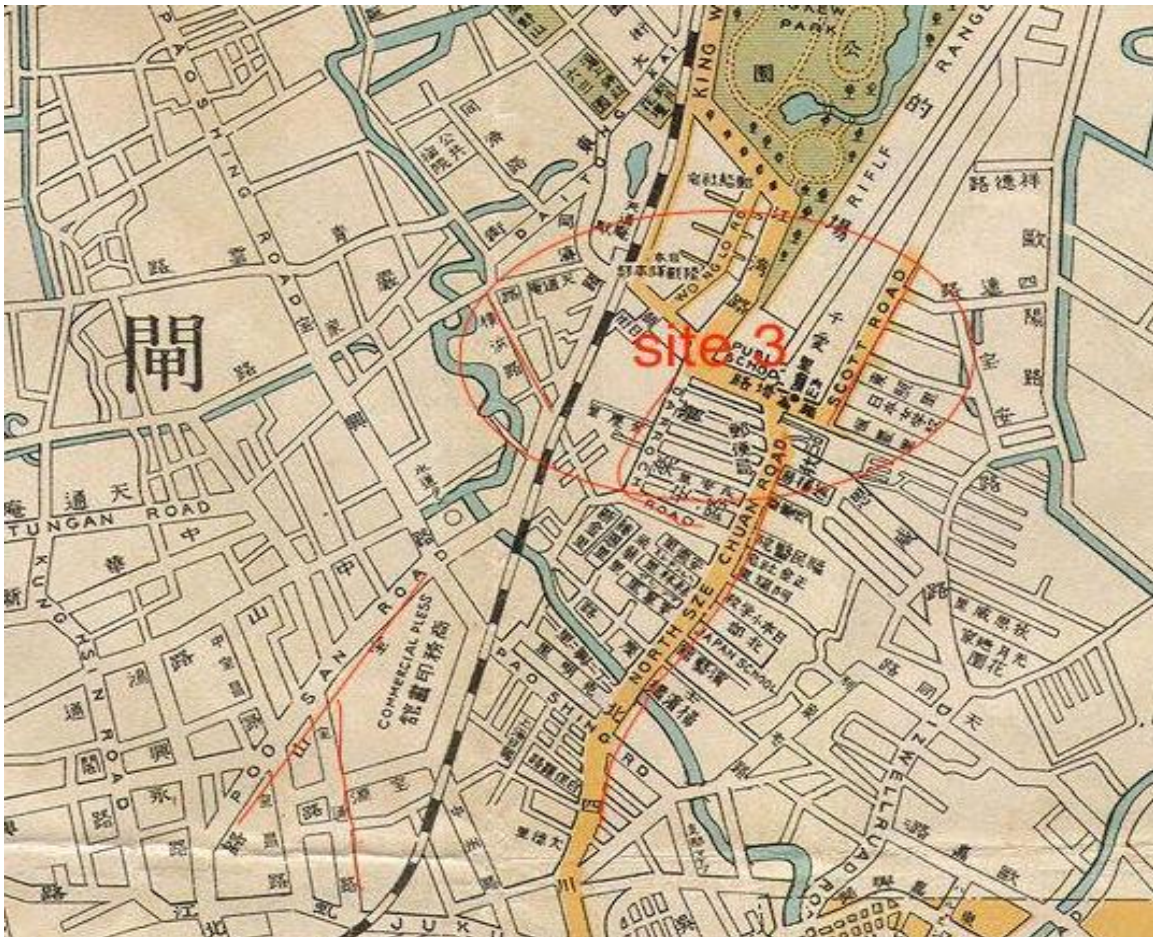


FIGURE 2.3: SITE THREE AROUND DARROCH ROAD, PART OF THE MAP OF SHANGHAI IN 1932

As Chen Mingyuan points out, some cultural celebrities lived in more commodious houses, while the obscure lived in pavilion rooms.<sup>71</sup> The living space seems to symbolize the lodgers’

<sup>71</sup> See Chen Mingyuan’s *The Economic Life of the Literati*, 256.

status. If so, then my last example shows the relations between the “large houses” and the “small rooms.” The latter surround the former in the same neighborhood, which made possible interaction among the writers of different generations and various backgrounds.

The third site under investigation was around Darroch Road<sup>72</sup>, covering East Hengpang Road and part of the two nearby extra-settlement roads 越界筑路<sup>73</sup>: North Szechuan Road and Kelm Scott Road (now Shanyin Road). It was located in the Hongkou district where many Japanese people concentrated. Rooms were more affordable to rent, and residents enjoyed more freedom in this area, as the foreign policemen would not detain or arrest residents as frequently as those in other foreign concessions. Moreover, Oriental Library affiliated to the Commercial Press and Shanghai theatre were close by; Thinking Bookstore, specializing in translated sociology books, was on the North Szechuan Road. Therefore, the site became popular during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Many senior intellectuals and young writers clustered here. Residents of Jingyun Alleyway on East Hengpang Road, for example, included Mao Dun (during 1927-1933), Lu Xun (during 1927-1929), his younger brother Zhou Jianren, and Ye Shengtao (during 1927-1932). Coincidentally, in De'en Alleyway on the same road, lived three younger writers born in the early twentieth century: Zhou Libo 周立波 (since 1928), Sha Ting (during 1929-1930), and Ai Wu (since 1931). In 1930, Lu Xun and Sha Ting moved to North Szechuan Road. Three years later, Lu Xun and Mao Dun moved to Continental Terrace 大陆新村 on Kelm Scott Road, living at No.9, Alley 1 and No.9, Alley 3, respectively. In the same year, Qu Qiubai moved to a pavilion room at No. 12 Dongzhao Alleyway, right across the road. And these writers are just a tip of the

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<sup>72</sup> The road, now known as Duolun Road, has become a protected “Street of Cultural Celebrities 文化名人街” since 1999.

<sup>73</sup> During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Shanghai International Settlement built roads outside the settlement area and owned power of administration to a certain degree. So the roads were regarded as “quasi-settlement”. Darroch Road, Kelm Scott Road, North Szechuan Road were all extra-settlement roads. When Lu Xun lived there, he entitled his anthology of essays “Qiejie ting 且介亭”. “Qiejie” is half of the characters “zujie 租界”, meaning his residence half belonged to the foreign settlement; and “ting” refers to Tingzijian.

iceberg. In fact, the place attracted numerous literati, especially leftists. In 1930, The League of Left-Wing Writers was established at Zhonghua Art Academy 中华艺术大学 on Darroch Road.

The presence of cultural celebrities such as Lu Xun contributed to the concentration of literati in this area. Lu Xun's place was an epitome of how senior cultural celebrities and the younger generation interacted. His diary shows that his residence hosted visitors almost every day in the late 1920s. His regular visitors included people from various walks of life, different literary or political camps, and multiple generations. Publishers such as Li Xiaofeng 李小峰 (Beixin Bookstore) and 吴朗西 (Cultural Life Press), writers such as Yu Dafu, Lin Yutang, Zhang Yiping 章衣萍, and Ye Shengtao, scholars and translators such as Zhao Jingshen 赵景深 were among the most frequent visitors. Lu Xun also welcomed college students, such as those from Daxia College and Guanghua College (1927.10.10). In the 1930s, his disciples Hu Feng, Xiao Hong, and Xiao Jun also became regular guests.

Among those who were in contact with him, many young writers lived nearby. For example, in 1929, Sha Ting moved to De'en Alleyway with his friend, the leftist dramatist Xiao Chongsu 萧崇素 (1905-?)<sup>74</sup>. Xiao lived in the front room on the second floor, and Sha lived in the pavilion room. Next door were Zhou Libo (1908-1979),<sup>75</sup> Zhou Yang, and Zhao Mingyi 赵铭彝

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<sup>74</sup> Xiao Chongsu was born in Sichuan. In 1929, he went back from Japan and participated the Left-wing drama movements in Shanghai. He attended "Modern Society" 摩登社 to launch drama movements in schools. He also established with other members the *Modern Monthly* 摩登月刊 at the same time.

<sup>75</sup> Zhou Libo, autonym Zhou Shaoyi, is famous for his novels *Baofeng zhoyu* 暴风骤雨 and *Shanxiang jubian* 山乡巨变. He went to Shanghai with Zhou Yang in 1928 and then attended Shanghai Labor School. He went to Yan'an in 1939. In the 1960s, he published his anthology of essays on leftist literary theories, titled *Inside Tingzijian* 亭子间里.

(1907-1999).<sup>76</sup> The alleyway was only about a hundred meters away from Lu Xun's residence. Xiao Chongsu participated in the leftist drama movement and intended to introduce Sha Ting to Nanguo Art Academy. Unfortunately, by the time Sha arrived, the school had closed; yet through him, Sha Ting got acquainted with leftist artists, especially members of Nanguo Society, and audited courses at Zhonghua Art Academy. After the League of Left-Wing Writers was established, Sha attended Lu Xun's lecture at the academy. In 1931, his friend Ai Wu moved to live with him, and they read, discussed and wrote stories together.

On their road to becoming professional writers, Sha Ting and Ai Wu received much help from senior cultural celebrities. Before they published any stories, they wrote a letter to Lu Xun to ask him questions about how to choose subjects. In December 1931, they received his reply<sup>77</sup> and thenceforth started to exchange letters with him, sometimes attaching their manuscripts. In January 1932, Lu Xun returned their manuscripts with his reply to their residence in person. In 1933, after Ai Wu was arrested, Lu Xun paid fifty dollars to bail him out.<sup>78</sup> Mao Dun also gave them support. When Sha Ting published his first collection of short stories *The Illegal Passage* 法律外的航线, Mao Dun wrote an encouraging review in *Literary Monthly* 文学月报 (1932).<sup>79</sup> Later when Sha Ting became the secretary of the League of the Left-Wing Writers, a meeting of the standing committee was held at his home. Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Zhou Yang attended. On that occasion, Mao Dun gave Sha Ting important guidance on writing.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> He went to Shanghai in 1926, studying at Shanghai University. In 1928 he attended Nanguo Art Academy and participated in the drama movements and performances. With Chen Baichen and other colleagues, he established Modern Society.

<sup>77</sup> See "About The Subject of Stories" 关于小说题材的通信, *Complete Works of Lu Xun* 鲁迅全集 (Beijing: renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 2005), Vol.4, 375-378.

<sup>78</sup> See *Collected Works of Sha Ting* 沙汀文集, vol.7 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyichubanshe 上海文艺出版社, 1992), 94-100.

<sup>79</sup> See *The Literary Monthly* 文学月报, No.5-6 (1932.12): 167-169.

<sup>80</sup> See *Collected Works of Sha Ting* 沙汀文集, vol.7, 451.



Compared to Sha Ting and Ai Wu, Xiao Hong and Xiao Jun had even more extensive interactions with Lu Xun. In November 1934 they wrote a letter to Lu Xun from a pavilion room on Route Tenant de la Tour<sup>81</sup> and soon received his reply. Then they were invited to Lu Xun's home. They spent an hour on the road, and when they chatted late, there would be no bus to take. In order to visit him more conveniently, in 1936 (Lu Xun's last year of life) they moved to North Szechuan Road and thereafter often went to his home and dined with him, establishing an intimate relationship.

Pavilions rooms and other small spaces in alleyway houses allowed many aspirants to live in the same neighborhood with cultural celebrities. Such spatial aggregation promoted the formation of a certain literary culture of intimate proximity, and gave fledgling writers a sense of belonging.

The three sites above show that Tingzijian as a private-social space not only provided refuge for the lodger-writers but also allowed the literati to exchange ideas through dynamic interactions. Moreover, the three sites are not isolated but connected. Some names appear in all three places, such as Qu Qiubai (in sites 1 and 3), Sha Ting and Ai Wu (in sites 2 and 3). Individuals' mobility connected different circles, as did institutions such as Shanghai University. The social connections centered on these sites contribute to the production of modern Chinese literature and culture. The lodger-writers' personal living experience examined in the next section also make contribution, mainly in terms of the subject matter and the narrative pattern.

### 2.3 LODGER-WRITERS' LIVING EXPERIENCES

If urbanites' everyday life was patterned geographically across different sites, then the Tingzijian was a site where residents shared lived experiences. The transformation of space and

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<sup>81</sup> Today's South Xiangyang Road.

living modes brought them new sensations and lifestyles. The space is also a key context that (trans)formed their identities, and shaped their writings. This section recounts the lodger-writers' living experiences in pavilion rooms, with a special focus on its sonic dimensions. I then introduce the most famous lifestyle of the Tingzijian artists: the "Bohemian." These two elements recur in both fictional and autobiographical writings.

Alleyways were awash in urban noise. Sounds of vehicles, mahjong games, vendor calls, children's crying, neighbors' arguments, and brushing out chamber pots were all a regular part of lodger-writers' aural experience. Through the soundscape,<sup>82</sup> they not only formed their perception of the space but also connected their personal life to the people of different social strata. Description of the sonic environment is ubiquitous in Tingzijian literature.

Vendor calls were the most prominent acoustic signals.<sup>83</sup> They appeared at any time in a day: in the morning, peddlers sold breakfast and fresh groceries; at night, they sold refreshments for night owls; during the day, hairdressers, manicurists, knife sharpeners, collectors of old things, and other craftsmen roamed the alleys to fulfill residents' daily needs. Food peddlers sold fruits and snacks throughout the day.<sup>84</sup>

These vendor calls deeply impressed the lodger-writers. They even raised their social concerns. For instance, Ye Shengtao recalls that after nine o'clock in the evening, the main entrance to the compound is closed, but a small door is kept open for returning residents and vendors. During sleepless nights, he would often listen to vendors hawking their goods. Their calls made Ye imagine the customers: gamblers, opium smokers, night journalists, and so on.

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<sup>82</sup> According to R. Murray Schafer's definition, we may speak of an acoustic environment as a soundscape. He contends that we can isolate an acoustic environment as a field of study just as we can study the characteristics of a given landscape. See *The Tuning of the World* (McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Signals are foreground sounds that are listened to consciously. *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> See Tim Min Tieh's *Street Music of Old Shanghai*, collected by University of Washington library.

Manual laborers working at night, such as workers in tofu shops and rickshaws, he thought, would never have enough money to buy those midnight refreshments.<sup>85</sup> As an adherent of realism, he would represent these vendor calls and foods in his fiction mainly to criticize the leisure class and reveal the hardships of the labor class. Lu Xun also recalled what he heard in the Zhabei 闸北 district in the early 1930s, expressing regret that he did not document the sound earlier. Had he written down all the calls, he would have recorded twenty or thirty kinds of food. He is surprised at how much Shanghai residents are fond of snacks. Ready-to-eat foods included lotus seed congee with almond and Job's Tears, shrimp wonton and noodles, white sugared rose cake, and so on. Merely hearing the vendor calls would make people's mouths water. Years later, many of them could no longer be heard. Their disappearance indicates the deteriorating political and economic situation after the Japanese invasion, an index to the decline in the residents' living standard.<sup>86</sup>

Vendor calls might call to mind social issues; for Dr. Tim Min Tieh, they were an aesthetic experience. Tieh was an educator and agricultural technologist who was born and grew up in Shanghai. Vendor calls, for him, were Shanghai's street music. In the 1940s when he was in the wartime Europe, listening to the sound of vehicles outside, he thought of the sounds of his hometown and started to write down various vendor calls he had heard in his childhood. He then set the calls to melodies and translates them with musical notation. He even added sketches to illustrate the vendors and their commodities.<sup>87</sup>

Unlike the local Shanghai resident Dr. Tieh, most writers concerned were sojourners. They not only describe the soundscape of alleyways, but also constantly compare it with that of their

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<sup>85</sup> See Ye Shengtao's "Foods at Midnight" 深夜的食品, *Literature* 文学(旬刊), No.137 (1924.9): 3-4.

<sup>86</sup> See Lu Xun's "Business in Alleyways" 弄堂生意古今谈, *Manhua Life* 漫画生活, No.9 (1993.5): 3.

<sup>87</sup> See Tim Min Tieh's *Street Music of Old Shanghai*.

hometown, usually in rural areas. The comparison is based on their perceptions of two different spaces; the juxtaposition of life in city and countryside also conveys a sense of nostalgia.

In the autumn of 1923, Ye Shengtao wrote a prose comparing the sound in the alleyways and in the countryside. Ye was born and grew up in a small town near today's Suzhou 苏州. He prefers the peaceful life in water towns. He likens the alleyway houses to pigeon houses; he thinks the former is more boring, as there is no insect buzz in autumn. No matter how hard one tries, he can only hear the children's crying, music played by neighbors at night, and the sound of the vehicles running over the stone path in the morning. It is not because the sound of insects is overwhelmed by these sounds, but because there are no insects. He misses the autumn at the countryside, where stars and the moon are shining, and the cool breeze fills the night. At that peaceful moment, the only thing that moves one's heart is the ensemble of autumn insects. They chirp with various pitches and tempos, like a well-organized orchestra. The chirp of autumn insects is poetry, which evokes people's sentiment. Gloomy as it may be, it has a certain flavor 滋味 / 趣味. By contrast, urban life in an alleyway house is insipid. The courtyard is like the bottom of a well and the cement floor have already driven the insects away.<sup>88</sup> In his writing, the country life is represented as Arcadia, while the urban life is deprived of poetry and savor.

In another prose, Ye listens to the call of a vendor selling roasted ginkgoes from an aesthetic perspective and finds the voice unsatisfactory. Roasted ginkgoes are sold both at his hometown and in the Shanghai alleyways. The call in the tranquil evening is suitable for one to appreciate and empathize. However, he thinks the call at the alleyways is not as good as the one in his hometown, not just because of the vendors' poor tone, but also the surrounding noise. Drowned out by the sound of automobiles and factory machines, even the music of excellent musicians cannot fully express its beauty. As mentioned before, alleyway houses concentrated at the city

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<sup>88</sup> See Ye Shengtao's "A Place without Autumn Insects 没有秋虫的地方", *Literature* 文学, No.86 (September 1923): 0-1.

center and near factories, and residents could not escape noise pollution from congestion and industrialization. The same vendor call gave Ye Shengtao and Tieh different aesthetic feelings. What a local Shanghainese enjoyed as music might not be enjoyed in the same way by a sojourner.

Some writers' first experience of the city was the sounds they heard every morning. A college instructor under the pen name of Dufu 独夫 [Single Man] moved from countryside to a pavilion room and wrote for *Shishi Zhoubao* 时时周报 (1930) of his new life, of his occasional loneliness and frequent insomnia. Lying on the bed awaiting the dawn, he finds that morning in Shanghai has a special atmosphere 情调. As a child, every morning he was awoken by sparrows' chirps and cock's crowing in the yard. Now, he can only hear the sounds of brushing out chamber pots, vendor calls, and bargains.<sup>89</sup> Like many other writers, he experiences the Shanghai morning through the sounds heard from his pavilion room.

The binary perception of the countryside as the idyllic space and urban as boring or lifeless space is partly based on sojourners' living experience in pavilion rooms, especially aural experience. Their comparisons and complaints reflect a transformation of sonic environment that represents a transition to modernity, including modern living mode, modern transportation, and industrialized manufacturing. They also imply that this urban space was still psychologically alien to them. If Shanghai was for gamblers, opium-smokers, and rich people who lived in the center rooms of alleyway houses, who lingered in ballrooms, at the racecourse, and in upscale restaurants, these lodger-writers were the marginal residents of Shanghai living in undesirable rooms of alleyway houses.

Since Leo Ou-fan Lee's *Shanghai Modern*, it has become well-known that young lodgers, especially leftist artists, led a "Bohemian" lifestyle. The journal *Shanghai Guide* 上海生活,

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<sup>89</sup> See Dufu's "Life in Tingzijian" 亭子间的生活, *Shishi Zhoubao* 时时周报, Vol. 2, No.29 (1931.7): 10-12.

(1937-1941)<sup>90</sup> published an array of articles on Tingzijian life, mostly complaints about poor living conditions, such as the heat in summer and chill in winter. Yet one pseudonymous writer, Siying 斯英 denied experiencing and bitterness and emphasized that life in Tingzijian is “so much fun” 有趣得很:

My dates with women were all in pavilion rooms [...]

After supper, my friends would always come to chat with me. The small room would be jammed with people. Stools and the little iron bed were all occupied by their bottoms. We smoked, talked cheerfully, making noise freely and wantonly. None of us was restrained, nor were our topics... We talked about everything from Sun Yat-sen's revolution to Chen Jiongming's betrayal, from Mussolini to Stalin and Roosevelt, from Manchukuo to the Japanese warlords [...]

When it wasn't rainy, we would carry our conversations from indoors to the streets and from streets back indoors. We chatted until midnight, then till dawn. We had endless topics for us to hurl invective at, to criticize, and to laugh at. Every day brought fresh topics.

Whenever we were a bit well-off, we all chipped in for a drink and a meal. We'd drink to our hearts' content in that pavilion room and often would end up sharing the floor as our bed [...]

The dynamic Tingzijian life increased our courage; it made us forget the vexation in life, forget the miseries in the vagabondage; it also made our friendship everlasting.<sup>91</sup>

我和女人们谈恋爱，便都是在亭子间里谈着的.....

每当晚餐过后，一班寂寞的朋友便来找我谈天了。小小的房子里挤满了人，凳子和小铁床都给一个个的屁股占据着。抽烟、谈笑、吵闹，谁都没有拘束，自由地、放纵地，谈笑话题更不受限制.....从中山先生革命谈到陈炯明叛变，从墨索里尼、希特勒谈到史丹林和罗斯福，从“满洲国”谈到日本的军阀.....

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<sup>90</sup> The comprehensive journal was established by Groupe-Chine Advertisement Company. It publishes all kinds of serious writing varying from political, economy, medical information to film, drama and literature.

<sup>91</sup> See Siying's "Life in Tingzijian", 亭子间的生活, *Shanghai Guide* 上海生活, Vol.1, No.1 (1937.3): 24-25.

要是天不下雨，我们便会从房里一直谈出街头，又从街头谈回房里，谈到夜深，谈到天明。我们的话头永远是无穷尽的，谩骂、批评、嬉笑，题材日日都那么新鲜。

当大家的经济充裕一点的时候，便合资沽酒买菜，在亭子间里痛饮一场，地板时常是我们公共的卧床……

这活跃的亭子间生活使我们增加着做人的勇气，忘却了生活的苦恼，忘却了流浪生涯的悲哀，也使我们的友情永远联系着。

The passage encapsulates the so-called “Bohemian” lifestyle. The narrator’s life is full of romance, debate, conversation, hanging out with friends, alcohol, and roaming. The lifestyle features freedom and good cheer.

Sometimes it is hard to tell whether such narrated behaviors were natural or theatrical. As the leftist artist Chen Baichen recalls, when the American movie *La Bohème*<sup>92</sup> became popular, many students of the Nanguo Art Academy regarded themselves as Bohemian artists and mimicked the characters’ appearance and narcissistic behaviors. Some male students wore long hair; some passionately read aloud poems; some chatted freely with members of the opposite sex, turning Route Herve de Sieyes into Shanghai’s “Latin Quarter.”<sup>93</sup>

Given the great amount of literature on the involuntary awful living experience and more quotidian daily life in Tingzajian, the “Bohemian” lifestyle depicted above is not the most representative. In fact, the “Tingzajian Bohemian” was more of a temporary status during that period. Scholar Ge Fei points out that after some revolutionary artists turned ideologically

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<sup>92</sup> Made in 1926, the film *La Bohème* is an American silent drama film directed by King Vidor. It was based on Giacomo Puccini’s eponymous opera. Lillian Gish and John Gilbert star as ill-fated lovers.

<sup>93</sup> See Chen Baichen’s *Farewell to the World* 对人世的告别, 310.

leftward and got their position in Shanghai literary field, they were no longer “Bohemians.”<sup>94</sup> Yet Bohemians or pseudo-Bohemians become a character archetype in Tingzajian literature. As introduced in the next chapter, some jobless loiterers or pleasure seekers pretended to be Bohemian artists. To distinguish them, some writers created antiheroic characters to criticize their insincerity.

Bohemian or not, the Tingzajian writers, as new Shanghai residents during the 1920s and 1930s, led an unconventional urban life and were economically and socially marginalized. They incorporated this marginalized position into their self-identity, and this became a standpoint from which to represent the mundane life and criticize the society. The physical and residential features of the Tingzajian, the lodger-writers’ social network, and their living experience formed the cultural context all influenced their literary representations and self-identity. The following chapter shows how the lodger-writers represented the space and appropriated them to express their own ideas.

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<sup>94</sup> Ge Fei 葛飞, *Drama, Revolution and Urban Vortex: the Left-Wing Drama Movement and Dramatists in Shanghai 1930* 戏剧，革命与都市漩涡：1930年代左翼剧运、剧人在上海 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe 北京大学出版社，2008), 96-97.



## Chapter Three: Tingzjian in Literature

To explore how the Tingzjian functioned artistically, this chapter introduces three types of literature where the Tingzjian space operates as a literary trope. Though sharing similar living experiences, the lodger-writers show different attachments to the space and ascribe divergent, if not contested, meanings to it. The first two subgenres offer a contrast in writers' attitudes to the space: some view the space as a protective shelter for daily life, where they established a collective identity as common urbanites; while some image the space as a tomb that would bury them alive. For the latter, Tingzjian witnessed how they transformed into revolutionaries and broke out of confinement. The third one mocks bogus "Tingzjian literati" by making the room a stage where the antiheroes behave ridiculously and abuse revolutionary terms. Together, these three trends illustrate that Tingzjian literature is more heterogeneous than scholars have recognized.

### 3.1 SHELTER: WRITING OF QUOTIDIAN LIFE IN TINGZJIAN

As living in Tingzjian became more common in the early 1930s, articles about them proliferated in various kinds of periodicals. Some journals set up columns named for Tingzjian<sup>95</sup> and recruited columnists who tended to be obscure writers rather than celebrities; most used pseudonyms that cannot be traced to any famous writers. At first, columns with names like "Tingzjian Talk" or "Tingzjian Essays" ostensibly emphasized social criticism on issues of public interest. Yet private life in pavilion rooms constituted an important part of the content. Some periodicals specifically solicited essays about Tingzjian life, which collectively formed a

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<sup>95</sup> See for example, in 1932, *Weekly Comments* 星期评论 had a column named "Tingzjian Essays" 亭子间随笔; in 1930, writer Liao Chongqun 廖崇群 contributed to *Literature and Art* 文艺月刊 an array of social commentaries titled "Tingzjian Talk" 亭子间的话; in 1932, *Sheng Tsen* 生存月刊 published Shi Jie 士杰's articles in another column called "Tingzjian Essays" 亭子间随笔.

trend of exhibiting private lives and spaces. I argue that the exhibition of privacy helped to form a collective identity of Tingzijian lodgers, and enabled the writers to get involved in the public sphere.

Writers would share intimate details of their everyday lives, whether with complaints or with gratitude. For example, *Jilian Huikan* 机联会刊, a fortnightly established by the famous novelist and entrepreneur Chen Diexian 陈蝶仙,<sup>96</sup> launched a writing competition in 1931 with awards for the best articles about Tingzijian life. The journal was sponsored by Shanghai Machinery Manufacturing National Product Industry Association 上海机制国货工厂联合会 and published commercial and industrial information, as well as advertisements promoting national products. Targeting ordinary office and factory workers, the magazine also offered social commentary and tips for enhancing career prospects and improving family life. The magazine adopted a generally patriotic and encouraging tone, encapsulated in slogans such as “Citizens who want to survive in the world must be very diligent,<sup>97</sup>” and “working in a perfunctory manner is the shortcut to national subjugation.”<sup>98</sup>

Yan Kemin, a junior clerk and amateur contributor, won First Prize: a dozen towels and ten issues of the fortnightly. The essay was published in the column “Portrait of Society” 社会写真 in issue 43. The theme of that issue seems to be family life, as Yan’s article is among others such as “How to be a Mother?” and “How to Organize a Happy Family?” In his essay Yan details his

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<sup>96</sup> The chief editor Chen Diexian 陈蝶仙 (1879-1940) was a versatile cultural entrepreneur. He was known as the founder of Household Industries 家庭工业社, a literatus famous for his love stories of Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School, and a successful businessman with the popular brand and trademark for his toiletry products such as “Peerless Toothpowder” 无敌牙粉 which are manufactured and marketed by his pharmaceutical empire. See chapter Three of *the Business of Culture: Cultural Entrepreneurs in China and Southeast Asia, 1900-65*, Christopher G. Rea and Nicolai Volland, eds. (Vancouver: UBC, 2015).

<sup>97</sup> See *Jilian huikan*, No.1 (1930.1).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, No.43.

daily life, including household income and expenses: how much he spends on lunch and rent, and how he uses spare money to buy food or go to cinema with his wife. His panoramic exhibition of domestic life in Tingzijian ends on a rather positive note, with an expression of gratitude for his wife who has always been mild-mannered and supportive and worked hard to manage the home. He concludes that he enjoys life as an ordinary person, relatively poor but not indigent. Compared with the rich, he is free of social burdens. His gratefulness and harmonious family life are in line with the basic tone of the magazine.

As Michel de Certeau has pointed out, home is a protected space where “the pressure of social body on the individual does not prevail.”<sup>99</sup> At home, Yan is able to avoid external pressures, thanks not least to a woman’s domestic work. So did many sojourners, who sought shelter or consolation in their Tingzijian, especially when shocked by the complicated and sinful world of Shanghai. Dufu’s “Life in Tingzijian,” mentioned in the last chapter, is representative of the refuge impulse. After sleepless nights, the narrator wanders on the street in the morning and complains that he has suffered enough arrogant insults on the street from wealthy people with cars and rich women. At night, the sight of grandiose architecture makes him think of the sins of the night and insolence of the rich, and he says he would rather leave the streets and return to his Tingzijian.

Few Tingzijian writer-residents were as optimistic as Yan Kemin. More complained about their poor living conditions, especially after the Japanese army occupied Shanghai. People rushed to the foreign concessions, the cost of living soared, and the alleyway houses became even more crowded.

In 1938, a writer under the pseudonym Houshihi 后史氏 [Post-Historian?] wrote a series of “Tingzijian essays” on the “Tofu Shop” 豆腐店 page in *Modern Times* 现世报. The weekly,

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<sup>99</sup> See “Private Spaces,” *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau, Luce Giard, et.al. Timothy J. Tomasik trans. (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 146.

established in 1938 after Shanghai had fallen to Japan's occupation, offered political, social and economic information, and international news, especially reports on the Anti-Japanese war. It also offered recreational articles, including humorous essays published on the "Tofu Shop" page. Houshishi published more than fifty articles, most of which were contributed to *Modern Times*, on issues varying from social commentary to everyday amusements, but especially his personal life in a Tingzajian. In these articles, he complains about the bedbugs, the paucity of household goods, even the difficulty his wife underwent giving birth to a boy in the narrow room.

Most conspicuous is his repetitive writing on defecation. He indulges in describing the sound and the feeling of shitting in a narrow space with poor soundproofing. In two articles he describes how he and his eldest son suffer from diarrhea. They sit face to face on the chamber pots, with distorted expression. Then he compares himself with those corrupt officials who milk ordinary people: if they suffered from the same disease, they would rhetorically "excrete" what they have exploited from people. Being poor himself, he can only excrete plain and oil-free soil as what he eats contains little grease.<sup>100</sup> In another essay, he likens the sound of urination to the sound of drizzle, tides and beautiful music. He uses the lyrical imagery and language conventionally applied to classic poems to create an ironic and hilarious effect.<sup>101</sup>

Such domestic triviality contributes to the writer's identity and self-consciousness. Dominique Laporte probes into the domestication of bodily waste in France and points out that it played a role in creating familial intimacy. He further argues that to touch on the relationship of a subject to his shit "is to modify not only that subject's relationship to the totality of his body, but his very relationship to the world and to those representations that he constructs of his situation in society."<sup>102</sup> When analyzing the works of Bloomsbury group, Victoria Rosner also maintains

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<sup>100</sup> See Houshishi's "Tingzajian Sleeping Essay" 亭子间睡笔, *Modern Time* 现世报, No.19 (1938.9): 16-19.

<sup>101</sup> See Houshishi's "Tingzajian Essay" 亭子间随笔, *ibid.*, No.4 (1938.5): 17-18.

<sup>102</sup> See Dominique Laporte's *History of Shit* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 28-19.

that household dirt has a distinct and intimate relationship to home dwellers. “It is both proprietary and individualized” and thus has ontological implications for the domestic subject.<sup>103</sup> When suffering on the chamber pots together with his son, Houshishi asserts not only a family bond with his kid, but also his own social position together with other suffering residents and opposite those “corrupt officials.”

Houshishi relates a common scatological experience. Before the availability of flush toilets and running water in every ordinary household, residents used chamber pots every day. It was a daily routine of all alleyway residents to dump and clean their wooden chamber pots in a special public area every morning.<sup>104</sup> Hence Tingzijian writers frequently mention the sounds of urination and cleaning chamber pots, making them the foreground sound of Tingzijian life.

Other domestic activities, such as conjugal relations between the writer and his wife, are all subjects of the articles. Why are these writers keen on writing about their private life in such an exhibitionist manner, especially when real life might be prosaic? I maintain that the significance of the phenomenon is beyond a simple record of personal life. The most fundamental reason is likely that the majority of these writers lived by their writing and needed to produce articles continuously. Analyzing works of the sojourner-writers 侨寓作家 of the 1920s, Jiang Tao finds the typical figure of a young writer living in an enclosed space and trying very hard to create something yet ending with anxiety, suspicion, and frustration. He names the crisis of writing as “forced writing” 硬写, which he thinks was apparently due to the writers’ financial straits but rooted in the inherent crisis of the early New Literature.

The term “forced writing” came from Lu Xun. In his reply to the questions on creative writing from the magazine *The Big Dipper* 北斗, he shares his writing experience in several

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<sup>103</sup> See Victoria Rosner’s *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 66.

<sup>104</sup> For more information about the chamber pots, nightsoil men and how they collected and cleaned the chamber pots, see Lu Hanchao’s *Beyond the Neon Lights*, 190-198.

rules. One is that “when you have nothing to write, do not force yourself to do so” 写不出的时候不硬写。<sup>105</sup> A comic embodiment of this maxim is his short story “Happy Family” 幸福的家庭 (1924), in which a young writer sits in his room trying hard to write a story about a happy family in order to earn the royalty. But he fails to situate the family in any real time and space, as the entire country is in turmoil. His wife and children, meanwhile, constantly interrupt and distract him from his writing.<sup>106</sup> Jiang Tao argues, however, that noisy living conditions and national turmoil are not decisive to the protagonist’s failure. Rather, “forced writing” was an inherent crisis of the early New Literature. First, the literary field consisted of literary societies, new publications, and student readers. Young writers were enclosed in the cyclic chain of cultural production-consumption-reproduction. This enclosed circulation reduced the New Literature from a vocation 志业 to a means of livelihood 生计。<sup>107</sup> Second, young writers awakened during the May-Fourth era lacked effective participation in the historical process and led to their depression.

Jiang’s first observation is more relevant here, while the second is more applicable to the next phenomenon I discuss. When many young graduates were restrained by their limited life experience, their imagination relied on printed words. Faced with the need to make the ends meet, many young writers turned to selling their personal life. By exhibiting their privacy, these writers made their personal life in Tingzajian an exchangeable commodity. In Ding Ling’s “Diary of Suicide” 自杀日记 (1928), for example, the female protagonist lives alone in Shanghai. She cannot bear her miserable life and writes in her diary that she has decided to commit suicide. Yet, when the landlord comes for the rent, instead of committing suicide, she tears some pages

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<sup>105</sup> See Lu Xun’s “Reply to the Questions from *The Plough*” 答北斗杂志社问, *Complete Works of Lu Xun*, Vol.4, 373-374.

<sup>106</sup> See *Complete Works of Lu Xun*, vol.2, 35-45.

<sup>107</sup> See Jiang Tao 姜涛’s *Towers in the Apartments*, 185-201.

out of her diary and exchanges them for money. Her inward world, just as the interior life of many other Tingzajian writers, is transformed to commodity for exhibition.

Jiang's theory of "forced writing" partly explains the exhibitionist trend in this type of Tingzajian literature, as well as in other literatures. Nevertheless, for obscure tabloid writers, exhibiting their private life did not just help them make a living; it also had social significance.

The press market in Shanghai had prospered since the late Qing, and publishing articles was an efficient way to obtain both economic and cultural capital. Besides financial profit, exhibitionist writing was a way to get involved in social issues and formulate a collective identity. What the writers represent is more than personal experience or reflection on their own identity. They make their individual life a "kind" of life that is representative and can be shared and commented upon by many. Yan Kemin, among other writers, tends to end his articles by shifting from a personal perspective to a collective one, from the single subject "I" to the plural form "we ordinary people" or "we proletarians"—a plural subject opposed to "the rich" or "the officials." Such opposition is quite common in this type of writing.<sup>108</sup> By creating the foil of "the Other" class, Tingzajian writers expressed a sense of collectivity as people from an inferior class. In theorizing the idea of "intimate public," Lauren Berlant points out that what makes a public sphere intimate is an expectation that the consumers already share a world view and emotional knowledge, marked by a commonly lived history.<sup>109</sup> Some tabloid commentators argue that residents should not give birth to a child in Tingzajian, or that a woman should not leave her husband after their marriage in Tingzajian; other writers enjoy or complain about their tough daily life in Tingzajian. All these works were written both by and for the residents. They form a

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<sup>108</sup> Besides aforesaid articles of Houshishi, Yan Kemin and Dufu, we can also find such opposition in Xingzi's "Shanghai's Air and Sunshine" 上海的空气和阳光, *Shen Bao* 申报, 1932.1.11, No.21108, 15.

<sup>109</sup> See Lauren Berlant's *The Female Complaint: the Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), viii.

sphere where identification, in Berlant's words, "promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion"<sup>110</sup> about how to live as Tingzajian writers.

Tingzajian writers connected the space of intimate life to the public sphere, and not just through commercial engagement with the print industry. Even in Houshishi's description of defecation, what neither Laporte nor Rosner has considered is that producing and disposing of household waste can still have public facets. Writing in the tabloids about one's scatological experience, such as dumping out chamber pots together with neighbors, denotes the shared identity of a class or, to be more specifically, the shared identity of the alleyway house residents. Therefore, the writer narrates the experience not as his own story but "as a part of something social."<sup>111</sup>

This connection warrants further attention to their mobility between the private and public spheres. Writers' personal lives, appearing on a page or column of social issues, represent the life of all pavilion-room residents. They complain about the intense indoor heat in summer, the poor soundproofing and ventilation, the cramped space as a part of a collective experience and a social issue. They appeal explicitly to the authority of Sun Yat-sen, who ranked housing problems high among the key components of "People's Livelihood."<sup>112</sup> By giving out their private life, the writers get involved in the public sphere and give voice to the masses. And as long as they amplify residents' collective feelings, they attract more readers.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., x.

<sup>112</sup> Sun Yat-sen 孙中山 (1866-1925), the revolutionist and the founding father of the Republic of China, promoted the "Three Principles of the People" consisting of nationalism, democracy, and the people's livelihood. In Ma Zhongshu 马仲殊's short story "Shanghai's Heat" 上海之热, the narrator regards living in Tingzajian as a response to Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles. See *Shen Bao*, 1929.7.31, No. 20243, 22.



Compared to the writers discussed below, these writers are not even known by their real name. Yet, but for their writings, we would never have had the panoramic view of daily life in Tingzijian. The leftist elites also complained about life in pavilion rooms. But what made them uncomfortable was not the specific material conditions—but the general social conditions.

### 3.2 TOMB: WRITING OF CONFINEMENT

For leftist and revolutionary writers, the pavilion room was not a shelter, but a symbol of physical, mental and emotional oppression. Tingzijian living engendered a sense of confinement, which they spoke about as congruous with their oppressed social situation and impotence to effect actual social progress. To break out of the confinement, some chose to leave the pavilion rooms and take to the street—this trajectory became a common scenario in revolutionary narratives. Through a close reading of Ba Jin’s novel *Destruction* and its sequel *New Life* 新生, along with other similar writings, I argue that the motif of confinement represents a significant trend in Tingzijian literature.

Ba Jin 巴金, born Li Feigan 李芾甘, was a well-known writer, translator, editor, and novelist famous for two novel trilogies: the “Love” Trilogy 爱情三部曲: *Fog* 雾 (1931), *Rain* 雨 (1933), *Lightning* 电 (1935) and the “Torrents” Trilogy 激流三部曲: *Family* 家 (1933), *Spring* 春 (1938), *Autumn* 秋 (1940). Many of his novels have been adapted to films, TV dramas and stage plays. However, after the founding of the PRC he gave up fiction and turned to nonfiction writing. Born into a gentry’s family, at the age of fifteen, he read Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin’s *An Appeal to the Young*, which converted him to anarchism. Soon he joined the local anarchist organizations, the Shi Society 适社 and Jun Society 均社, whose members published magazines, pamphlets and leaflets to propagandize their ideology. Ba Jin took an

active part and anarchism influenced his learning and writing in the ensuing years.<sup>113</sup> He entered Chengdu Foreign Language Specialist School 成都外语专门学校 in 1920, right after the May Fourth Movement. In 1923, he left his home to study in different schools, floating through cities such as Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing. In late 1925, Ba Jin moved into a small room in Shanghai's French Concession. In 1926 while living at Kangyi Alleyway 康益里, Rue County 康悌路, he translated Peter Kropotkin's *The Conquest of Bread* (“面包略取” in Chinese). He went to France in 1927, only to face the global collapse of anarchism: in China, the recently founded nationalist government arrested and killed anarchists and broke down the labor movements. Wu Zhihui 吴稚晖 and Li Shizeng 李石曾, the doyens of the Chinese anarchism betrayed the revolution and collaborate with Chiang Kei-shek. Meanwhile, his “guider” Bartolomeo Vanzetti, along with another Italian-born American anarchist Nicola Sacco, was executed in the electric chair for the conviction of murder.<sup>114</sup> Overwhelmed by the blow, he thus embarked on his first novella *Destruction*. At the end of 1928, he returned to Shanghai and lived in Zhabei district, until it was bombed by the Japanese (1932.1). In 1929, he published *Destruction* in *The Short Story Magazine* 小说月报. Mingwei Song recaps the background of the story as follows:

...the intense antagonism between the revolutionaries and the authorities strongly suggests a brutal social environment after the 1927 Shanghai massacre and, on an international stage, an abysmal situation for revolution after the Sacco-Vanzetti execution.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> See Ba Jin's “My Youth” 我的幼年, *Complete Works of Ba Jin* 巴金全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1987), Vol.13, 8-12.

<sup>114</sup> See the preface to *Destruction*. The following citations of the story are all from *The Complete Works of Ba Jin*, Vol.4.

<sup>115</sup> See Mingwei Song's *Young China: National Rejuvenation and the Bildungsroman, 1900–1959* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 204-205.

For this reason, despair and anger to the social reality shadow the story and are expressed through the protagonist who seeks revenge. Li Leng 李冷, a college student from a well-off family, lives with his sister Li Jingshu 李静淑 in Shanghai. One day at the site of a car accident, he meets Du Daxin 杜大心, a pessimistic poet who lives in a pavilion room. Li follows Du to his place and finds him in great pain. Du Daxin's anguish results from the social inequity the underclass, such as the victim of the accident, is suffering from. Besides, he discovers that the lady in a car that has just crushed a poor man is his former lover. They were forced to separate because of a marriage imposed on her by her feudal-minded parents. Later Du falls in love with Li Jingshu, but he has made up his mind to fight against the social injustice at the cost of his life. In an unsuccessful assassination, he eventually sacrifices himself. His death greatly shocks Li Leng and his sister, Jingshu, who ends up the leader of workers' strikes.

Ba Jin finished the sequel, *New Life*, in August 1931. The first edition was supposed to be serialized in the same journal in January 1932. However, the work was destroyed in the Shanghai Incident (1932.1.28-3.3), when Imperial Japanese Army bombed the headquarters of the Commercial Press. In July 1932, Ba Jin rewrote the story from memory. He claimed that the two editions were almost the same except for slight differences. When he wrote the second edition, he recalled, his mind was haunted by Japan's atrocities. He thus wrote slowly, word by word, as if he was digging into his own heart and squeezing out his own blood. He confessed that sometimes he expressed his personal feelings in the protagonist's diary.<sup>116</sup>

*New Life* is narrated in diary style from the perspective of Li Leng. After Du's death, Jingshu works in a factory and sticks to her faith. Li Leng, however, cannot find his. He writes articles for his friends' journals reluctantly, as he does not believe they will be effective in transforming the society. Instead, similar to Du Daxin, he is eager for some kind of "power" to "destroy

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<sup>116</sup> See *Ba Jin's Autobiography*, 巴金自传 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe 江苏文艺出版社, 1995), 128.

everything.” Yet he has no idea of how to realize it or how to improve society. He even doubts whether it is possible. Not until he is arrested and sentenced to death does he find his faith. In prison he meditates and dreams of his mother. Eventually, he transcends death by linking his own life to the whole mankind. According to Ba Jin’s own words, he transforms himself “from an individualist to a collectivist.”

Tingzijian in the story not only provides the setting but also forms motifs that relate to the young intellectuals’ confined social situations, the relationship between the elites and the masses, and the tension between thought and action. Some thematic issues can also be found in other literary works of the 1920s and 1930s.

#### From shelters to tombs: the sense of confinement

Stories set in the pavilion rooms usually offer a realistic description of the physical space, in order to reveal the (low) social status of the lodger. Sometimes the interior also embodies the lodger’s innermost life. In *Destruction*, Du Daxin’s room is surveyed and depicted for the first time from Li Leng’s perspective:

The room was very small, with almost no decorations. A bed stood against the wall on the right, covered with a thin sheet. It had a frame but no bed-curtains. In front of a window on the wall opposite the door was a desk strewn with piles of old books, an inkbottle, several pens and writing papers. The desk took up one third of the left wall and was flanked by two chairs. In the middle of the wall hung a huge framed photo of a kindly-looking woman in her forties. In the corner between this wall and that with the entryway sat three trunks. That’s all the room contained, at least as far as Li Leng could see.<sup>117</sup>

房子很小，也没有什么陈设。靠着右边的墙壁安置了一张架子床，上面放着薄薄的被褥，虽有床架，却没有帐子。对着门的一堵壁上开了一个窗洞。窗前便是一张方桌。桌上乱堆着旧书，墨水瓶，几管笔，一些原稿纸。左边的墙壁被方桌占

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

去了三分之一的地位，桌子两边放着两把椅子。在这堵墙壁底正中挂了一个大镜框，里面有一个四十多岁的慈祥的妇人底照片。这一堵墙壁和开着门的一堵墙壁底邻近的角落里放着三口箱子。这屋子里所有的东西就是这些了，至少在李冷看来就只有这些。

This description of a Tingzjian writer's room is archetypical. The messy books and papers indicate the lodger's profession, the paucity of luggage his low financial status. From the first glance of Du Daxin's room, we can infer his affection for the middle-aged woman.

Such representations of space are not just physical, as they allude to characters' psychological experience, especially a sense of incarceration. Young writers, real and fictional, often expressed a feeling of confinement and reported various symptoms.<sup>118</sup> In *Destruction*, Du Daxin even manifests symptoms of claustrophobia. After the car accident, he lies in bed but cannot fall asleep. The gruesome and bloody scene of the car accident in which a poor and shabby man was rolled over by a dignitary's car constantly haunts him. He fails to get rid of the horrible scene. With eyes wide open, he stares at the boundless darkness as if he could look through it and see the boundary, but he could not.

The walls of the small room and the furniture inside the room all disappear. He suddenly finds himself in a dark boundless wasteland, alone. He feels infinite horror. He tries to figure out where it is in the darkness but he cannot tell. It is the same darkness everywhere, as if nothing were there. His eyes are of no use at all, so he feels with his hands and feet. To his great surprise, he finds barriers everywhere—cold, hard things like stones and wood. He struggles in the hope to find a way out among the intangible barriers. He again feels with his hands but finds wall here, a barrier there, and here again a block of wood. Then he realizes that he is not in the boundless waste but in a cramped prisoner's cage, which is closing in on him. It becomes smaller and smaller and his breath becomes urgent. Something soft but heavy presses upon him. He struggles desperately, sweating and gasping for breath. "Let me out!" he screams, his voice labored. But it

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<sup>118</sup> For more examples, see the female protagonists in Ding Ling's stories, such as Sophia in *Miss Sophia's Diary* and Yi Sa in *A Diary of Suicide*. They show the suicidal impulse.

seems that the sound cannot break out of the cage. It bounces back, striking against the walls, shattering into shreds and wafting faintly in his ear. He yields to despair.<sup>119</sup>

这小小房间底墙壁，以及房中的家具都不见了。他忽然觉得自己是在一个黑暗的无垠的大荒原中，而且现在只有他一个孤零零的生人。他感到无限的恐怖，他想明白这里究竟是黑暗中的哪一点，但他终于分辨不出来。到处都是一样的黑暗，好像是一无所有。眼睛连一点用处也没有了。他使用手摸足触，很惊奇地发现到处都是栏栅，到处都是冷的，硬的，石头和木头一般的東西。他努力挣扎，想在这无形的栏栅中找一条出路。他再用手摸，这里是墙壁，那里是栏栅，这里又是木块。他才明白自己并不是在这无边的荒原中，只是在一个狭小的囚笼里面。他又觉得这囚笼愈缩愈小，他底呼吸也愈急促了。什么软软的、沉重的东西压着他。他拼命挣扎，出了汗，喘着气，嘶声叫道：“放我出去！”这声音好像也冲不出囚笼，退回来，撞在墙壁上，碎了，碎成一丝一丝，在他底耳边无力地飘荡着。他绝望了。

The car accident is an embodiment of social injustice he faces, which invokes his resentment towards society as a whole. Nevertheless, he cannot topple the social order. Society is in the “boundless darkness” and whenever the young attempt to transform it, they encounter only obstacles as hard as “stone barriers.” The illusion that he is alone in a wasteland reflects Du’s loneliness and helplessness. The room as a suffocating prison is a double metaphor. First, the narrator likens the pavilion room to a cage that confines Du both physically and psychologically. Second, the narrow space also denotes the oppressive social reality that stifles the young. Du’s claustrophobia manifests the mental crisis shared by many educated youths.

The room is no longer a shelter or a refuge, but a space that might figuratively take their life. Later in the sequel, Li Leng sits in the room alone, not knowing what to do to save the society, and likens his room to a tomb that would “bury” him.<sup>120</sup> The analogy recurs throughout the remainder of the novel and also appears more than once in Ba Jin’s other writings. In his second

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<sup>119</sup> See *Complete Works of Ba Jin*, Vol.4, 18-19.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

author's preface of 1932, he confesses that he has locked himself in the tomb-like room for quite a long time. The summer in Shanghai is torrid. He can tell that the summer is coming yet he still sits in his tomb-like room. There is fire outside the "tomb," so the room becomes a steamer. The "fire" here refers not only to the weather but also to the firebombing of Zhabei. He sits at the window and writes incessantly in the intolerable heat, forgetting even to eat or move. The heat steams him nearly to death and he guzzles cold water to put out the fire in his heart.<sup>121</sup> Over that period of time, Ba Jin repeatedly said he felt that he was in a tomb, not only when he lived in the pavilion room. When he was in France in 1927, he recalls in his autobiography, he felt the room was as quiet as a tomb. At midnight, it was too dark to discern the walls. "I was lying on the bed, pressed down by my quilt so that I could not move, just like I had died."<sup>122</sup> The pressing quilt resonates with Du Daxin's feeling.

This analogy appears in other writers' work during the 1920s-30s, and in other types of room. For instance, Chen Yi 陈毅 (1801-1972), the marshal of the CCP and a man of letters, compares his room at West Hills 西山 to a coffin. Chen Yi went to France in 1919 to learn social theories and there read a wide variety of literature. When he came back in 1923, he joined in the CCP and studied in l'Université Franco-Chinoise at the West Hills 中法大学西山学院 in Beijing. During his stay there, he started to write literary works under the pseudonym of Qu Qiu 曲秋. To him, these four boring years were a waste of life. In his essay "Buried at the West Hill" 西山埋葬 (1925), he likens his life there to being buried. At first, he had hoped to find some isolated and peaceful place to rest, as he was tired of his wandering life. The West Hills seemed to be an ideal place for him to lead a poetic life like Tao Yuanming (465-427), the poet famous for his "recluse" poems in the Six Dynasties period (220 CE – 589 CE). The beautiful natural scenery, however, cannot comfort Chen's depression and inner struggles. Whenever the strong wind blows, he is irritated and goes to the center of the yard, yelling. His friends laugh at his

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

<sup>122</sup> See *Ba Jin's Autobiography*, 96.

craziness. He replies, “Can’t I revolt when the wind oppresses me?” He figuratively expresses his discontent and interior uneasiness. Still considering himself as useful, he cannot stand the dolefulness. He thinks the place he stays for four years effaces his talent, as if it had buried him in a coffin.<sup>123</sup>

Such representation of space recalls Lu Xun’s author’s preface to *Call to Arms* 呐喊, his first collection of short stories, in which he recounts his stay at a deserted hostel in Shaoxing 绍兴, where he copied ancient inscriptions day by day during 1912-1919. Qian Xuantong 钱玄同, his friend and the editor of the magazine *New Youth* 新青年, called on and asked him to write articles for the magazine. Lu Xun hesitated and told him his allegory of the “iron house.”

Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast asleep inside who will soon die of suffocation. But you know since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn?<sup>124</sup>

“假如一间铁屋子，是绝无窗户而万难破毁的，里面有许多熟睡的人们，不就都要闷死了，然而是从昏睡入死灭，并不感到就死的悲哀。现在你大嚷起来，惊起了较为清醒的几个人，使这不幸的少数者来受无可挽救的临终的苦楚，你倒以为对得起他们么？”

It has been widely thought that the “iron house” symbolizes the decaying Chinese society at that time. Yet in the following decades, his national allegory became a prophecy. Du Daxin, Ba Jin and Chen Yi, among others, are from the younger generation that has been influenced by the

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<sup>123</sup> See Chen Yi 陈毅 (pseudonym Qu Qiu 曲秋) “Buried at the West Hill” 西山埋葬, *Literature* 文学旬刊, No.37 (1925.6): 1.

<sup>124</sup> See *Complete Works of Lu Xun*, Vol.1, 441.



New Cultural Movement.<sup>125</sup> They were awakened only to find themselves in a cage that they could never break. Du Daxin's illusionary suffocation, Li Leng and Chen Yi's feeling of being buried in a tomb, and Ba Jin's experience of being "steamed" all reflect "suffering" and "agony" exactly like what Lu Xun had anticipated. In this type of writing, the pavilion room is not a home but a real-life "iron house." The writers often project their emotional sufferings to the cramped physical space, making the latter as fatal as a "tomb."

Depression resonates in Lu Xun's words too. During his stay at the hostel as a sojourner, after he failed in his first attempt to join in the cultural movement, Lu Xun said he wished only to kill the boring days. The daily growing dolefulness is like a viper entangling his soul. Lu Xun expresses his feeling of being in a boundless wasteland, totally at loss—a sentiment later echoed by Ba Jin and his protagonists. This resemblance also reminds us of Jiang Tao's second aspect of the New Literature's inherent crisis: the inability to take personal part in the historical events.

Here we see how the young writers' claustrophobia or sense of confinement resonates with their historical situation. On the one hand, they lived in a time when the Chinese society was declining due to a numb populace, oppressive political climate, and prevalent social injustice. Reality suffocated the young. On the other hand, faced with the darkness, these awakened youths were not able to change it. On the contrary, they were enclosed in the circulation of cultural consumption and reproduction. The new ideas and knowledge they learned from the West, which supposed to make them "useful," reduced to the consumable signifiers. For some writers, registering impotence through imagery and symbols was not enough. This anxiety not only resulted in writing and mental crises but also catalyzed a common scenario: from the Tingzijian to the streets.

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<sup>125</sup> In his autobiography, Ba Jin tells how he and his siblings greedily bought and read periodicals about the New Cultural Movement. They also held meetings to discuss the social issues. Ba Jin himself accepted the more radical thought of Anarchism. See *Ba Jin's Autobiography*, 78-79.

### From the Tingzjian to the streets: the tension between thought and action

Whereas many tabloid writers were satisfied with exhibitionist writing, revolutionary or leftist writers lamented their inability to represent social reality in a realistic fashion. In addition, for them, writing alone was not sufficient; they were anxious to get involved in real struggles. To solve the dilemma, many of them chose to come out of their Tingzjian and take to the streets.

Limited real world experience does not necessarily result in inferior writing. But some leftist artists and theorists urged writers to leave the pavilion rooms in order to have a broader life world and to represent the real life of the common people. Gu Fengcheng 顾凤城 (1908-1940), a member of the League of Left-wing Writers and an editor working for the Taidong Publishing House, Guanhua Publishing House 光华书局 and Lehua Book Company 乐华图书公司 successively, criticized Tingzjian writing. In an essay, he lists all the domestic chaos and foreign aggressions, and asserts that no literature at present can reflect the tumult in China. He claims that since literature should reflect social life; writers sitting in the pavilion rooms will never create masterpieces. He exhorts young writers to experience life personally and grasp immediate subject matter to represent this “great epoch.”<sup>126</sup> A year later, a writer under the pen name of Mulang 木郎 published a short story in *Shen Bao* conveying a similar message in a sarcastic way. In the story, a Tingzjian writer daydreams of writing a novel to “express the outcry from the oppressed laboring people, the faithful exposure of the social reality, and the revelation before a great revolution.”<sup>127</sup> His friend interrupts his fantasy by mockingly ask him how, as an urbanized playboy, he knows the real life of the laboring people? In wartime Shanghai, a writer named Ping Tang 平堂 expressed a similar urge in his short story “The Tingzjian Writer” 亭子

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<sup>126</sup> See Gu Fengcheng’s “The Literature We Ask for” 我们所要求的文学, *Shen Bao*, 1932.12.23, No. 21452, 18.

<sup>127</sup> See Mulang’s “Our Writers” 我们的作家, *Shen Bao*, 1933.12.11, No. 21791, 19.

间作家 (1940).<sup>128</sup> The narrator visits his friend, a writer living in a pavilion room. His friend looks pale and suffers from writer's block. The narrator tells him that he has difficulty as a writer because he lacks life experience and just relies on his memories and imagination in this small room. The narrator encourages his friend to get out and participate in more activities, including his book club. All the examples imply the same motivation to leave for the outside world.

Other stories suggested, however, that merely walking downstairs to search for writing materials on the street could not resolve a writing crisis or help a writer capture social reality. In another short story published in *Shen Bao* in 1934, a Tingzijian writer is in urgent need of money to pay rent but runs out of inspiration. He sneaks out to the street "to look for materials" but ends up whiling away the rest of the day and still fails to write anything the next day. As I discuss later, this was to become yet another archetype of the Tingzijian writer: the loiterer 马浪荡.<sup>129</sup>

Neither can aimless street wanderings heal the mental problems. In *Destruction*, Du Daxin wanders the streets three times: the first is when Li Leng meets him at the accident site; the

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<sup>128</sup> See Ping Tang 平堂's "The Tingzijian Writer" 亭子间作家, *Study 学习*, Vol.2, No.4 (1940.11): 17.

<sup>129</sup> Originally, the term 马浪荡(aka. 马郎荡) came from a late Qing Tanhuang Opera 摊簧戏 in Suzhou, titled "Ma Langdang Gives Up Jobs for Ten Times" 马浪荡十弃行. The main character Ma Langdang constantly changes his job and tells the audience what the job is like. See Zhang Wei 张伟, Yan Jieqiong 严洁琼's *Urban Charms: New Year Paintings of Shanghai Small Grill Ground 都市风情：上海小校场年画* (Taipei: Xinrui wen chuang 新锐文创, 2014), 129. In 1914, *Shen Bao* published an article "On Ma Langdang" 马浪荡说 (1914.1.6, No.14698, 13) referring the term to those who dabble in different walks of life but never master any one. Ma Langdang became an iconic character. Some writers used it as pseudonym. Some pictorials serialized comic strips about Ma Langdang (e.g. *My Pictorial 我的画报*, 1933; *Merry Voice 快活林*, 1946). A comedy film titled "Ma Langdang" was released in 1926. Sooner the term became the metonymy of the loiterers who wander the street without a formal job. See Wu Lianseng 吴连生's *Dictionary of Wu Dialect 吴方言词典* (Beijing: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe 汉语大词典出版社, 1995), 48.

second is after he dreams of his beloved cousin. This time, he sees a poor child steals a carrot and is beaten by the owner. The third time is after the decapitation of his comrade. On the decapitation site, the narrator regards the executioner and soldiers as “roles in a play.” Du watches the process as if he is watching a “scene” in a play, which accentuates the absurd cruelty of the social reality. In fact, Du is numb with pain. For some time, he does not even realize that he is in a square with so many people. Then the conversation between two middle-aged audience members brings Du Daxin back to reality, and he connects what is happening in the present scene to a real historic event in the late Qing, the dismemberment execution of a revolutionary Xu Xilin 徐锡麟.<sup>130</sup> The two men cruelly assert that all the revolutionaries should be sentenced to death. The conversation horrifies Du and leaves him trembling.

Du Daxin’s meanderings follow a similar pattern. Every time he spots a dramatic incident, from the decapitation to an argument on the street, he is merely a lonely onlooker. These spectacles leave him with psychological trauma resulting in agoraphobic hallucinations. When he revisits the spot of the car accident, he has the illusion of seeing thousands of identical corpses arise. He feels oppressed and horrified. He hears a voice saying, “poverty is killing us—and it’s all because of you!”<sup>131</sup> The “you” versus “us” reflects his sense of anxiety and guilty of not being a member of their class or doing anything for them. Du in fact never manages to close the gap. In the sequel, his friend Li Leng does not close the gap either until he is prosecuted. Not knowing how to deal with darkness, Du Daxin suffers from claustrophobia and agoraphobia that are cured only by his death.

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<sup>130</sup> Xu Xilin (1873-1907) was a Chinese revolutionary during the late Qing period. In 1904 he attended the China Restoration Society 光复会. On July 6, 1907, he was arrested before a scheduled uprising in Anhui province. Xu admitted that he had murdered En Ming 恩铭, the provincial governor of Anhui Province. He was executed the next day. His heart and liver were cut out by En Ming's bodyguards.

<sup>131</sup> See *Complete Works of Ba Jin*, Vol.4, 43-45.

For Ba Jin and his protagonists, their mental crisis and writing difficulty derived first from guilt that they were not one of “them,” the proletariat, but belonged to the exploiter class, the petty bourgeoisie. During the late 1920s and the early 1930s, Ba Jin expressed the same sense of guilt with his protagonists. In the first author’s preface to *New Life*, he says that he has been living in a “mansion” 楼台, while those who built the mansion are now in suffering. “I’m in the mansion while they are in the abyss.”<sup>132</sup> At that time, “mansion”, just as Tingzajian, was a metaphor of his social position.

For these writers, aimless street wandering cannot solve the problems resulted from the tension between thought and action; only social practice can. In *New Life*, Li Leng and his colleagues receive a letter from a friend, who has left for City A. In the letter he explains why he left his friends. He confesses that he has suffered from the oscillating, lonely, and empty life for so long. In order not to squander all his youth, he needs work, “real work.” What he wants is a destructive power that he cannot find among them. Therefore, he left to pursue his desire. At the end of the letter, he addresses to Li Leng didactically, “our life like this should end, especially yours. Why do you waste your energy on empty words 空话? Don’t you think it’s a pity? Why don’t you work with your sister?”<sup>133</sup>

Ba Jin expressed similar inner conflicts on several occasions. In the preface to the seventh edition of *Destruction* written in 1936, he describes a scene where he is sitting in front of the window alone, writing on a silent night, asking himself, “What’s the meaning of writing these articles? Why can’t I do something more useful?”<sup>134</sup> He transformed his feeling of emptiness and loneliness into a steady faith when he wrote *New Life* for a second time. The bombing from Japan’s Army evoked his ambitious belief that no violent strength could stifle his creative impulse. Yet he realized that he was armed with no more than a pen and he knew no “correct

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 7.

revolutionary thought.” “Given that I shut myself in the room, writing, without participating any real struggle, how can I attack my enemy?”<sup>135</sup> Thus again he found himself unfortunate as he wasted his life doing nothing but writing. In 1936, Ba Jin published an anthology of essays titled *A Life's Confession* 生之忏悔. A repetitive theme among the selected works is his regret he became a writer. The more novels he writes, the greater his regret. He confesses that he cannot think of aesthetics. When he is writing, he feels as if he was manipulated by some irresistible force and he becomes a tool. Fully aware that such writing cannot last long, he is glad that one day he could give up his “life of arts” so that he can be reborn in some other aspects.<sup>136</sup> His eagerness to do something “useful” comes from anarchism. Kropotkin, for example, called for action of revolt by arguing that “so profound a revolution producing itself in people’s minds cannot be confined to the domain of ideas without expanding to the sphere of action.” He also pointed out that the acts of revolt of the last quarter of a century should not be attributed only to anarchism; it proceeded from all parties.<sup>137</sup>

The predicament of impotence in social action was symptomatic among young intellectuals of the time, and their choices incubated a divide in modern Chinese literature the following year. What concerns us here is only one part of the picture, namely, the choice of social engagement. This type of story often has a promising ending that the protagonists eventually take revolutionary actions almost as a method of self-redemption.

In *New Life*, Li Leng eventually decides to leave his room to do something useful, like his younger sister Li Jingshu, who works in a factory and becomes a leader in labor movements. Jingshu left her comfortable and commodious home to live with her comrade in a narrow and shabby pavilion room in the vicinity of the factory. For the girls, moving to a pavilion room is a

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<sup>135</sup> See *Ba Jin's Autobiography*, 131.

<sup>136</sup> See Ba Jin's “An Author's Self-dissection” 作者的自剖, *Les Contemporains* 现代, Vol.1, No.6 (1932.10): 863-867.

<sup>137</sup> See Peter Kropotkin's *Anarchism: Its Philosophy and Idea* (London: J. Turner, 1897), 29.

gesture of their resolution to join in the revolutionary cause. Yet Li Leng regards their behaviors as “looking for hardships deliberately.” His rhetorical question, “do you believe that just by doing so you can save the people and save yourselves?” makes the girls’ efforts look theatrical and vain. Li Leng suffers a lot, as he cannot have the same faith as his sister. After a period of hesitation his sister is arrested, and he finally decides to go to City A. However, before his arrival, the authorities arrest him as well and sentence him to death. Before his execution, Li Leng dreams of his dead mother who tells him to dedicate himself to the well-being of all the human beings. She asks him to give up his personal feelings, including the sorrow, love, and hate, to integrate himself into humanity. And in so doing he can find his happiness from other human beings’ happiness.<sup>138</sup> Hence Li eventually gains his inner peace and transcends the individual death. He does so by ceding his individuality and subjectivity to the collective happiness.

“To do something useful” becomes a motif that frequently appears in the works of Ba Jin, Ding Ling and other writers.<sup>139</sup> The protagonists leave their room not aimlessly but with a clear direction. Taking a practical part in the revolutionary enterprise, such as working in a factory or leading a movement, is a remedy for the mental crisis and has a redemptive meaning for the protagonists in the leftist writing. In Jiang Guangci 蒋光慈’s novella *The Moon Coming out from the Clouds* (1930)<sup>140</sup>, the female protagonist Manying 曼英 loses hope after the failure of a

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<sup>138</sup> See *Complete Works of Ba Jin*, Vol.4, 319.

<sup>139</sup> See for example, Ding Ling, “Spring in Shanghai, 1930 (I)” 1930年春上海之一, *The Short Story Magazine* 小说月报, Vol. 21, No. 9 (1930.9), 1287-1316; Jiang Guangci *The Moon Coming out from the Clouds* 冲出云围的月亮 (Beijing: Beixin Bookstore, 1930).

<sup>140</sup> Jiang Guangci 蒋光慈(1901-1931) was a revolutionary writer famous for his novels *The Roaring Earth* 咆哮了的土地, *A Young Vagrant* 少年漂泊者 and *The Moon Coming out From the Clouds*. The latter sold well at that time; it was republished within a month. Jiang Guangci joined in the CCP in 1922. He established the Sun Society in 1928 with other two leftist writers. In 1930 he was excluded from the CCP. He died of pneumopathy in 1931 in Shanghai.

southward campaign. She therefore takes revenge on society by toying with bourgeois men and becoming the mistress of officials, so that she can sexually conquer and manipulate them. She keeps her pavilion room tidy and elegant, which symbolizes her pure inner world. Nevertheless, she is suspicious of her own identity. She doubts whether she is morally decadent because of her sexual transaction with men. For the same reason, she refuses the love of Li Shangzhi 李尚志, her previous comrade at the military school. Not until she works in a textile mill and organizes the labor movement does she reunite with her lover. At that time, she finds herself “clean” enough to match him. She takes such social practice as a method to spiritually “purify” and “restore” her. At the end of the story, the image of a moon coming out from the clouds symbolizes that she eventually finds a way out to struggle for a better society and regains her confidence in revolution.

Inspiring endings offered an imaginary way out for some writers in depression, especially when the revolution was at its nadir. Realistic representations of the revolutionary cause challenged such naiveté. In Mao Dun’s “revolution-plus-love” style novella *Disillusions* (1927), for example, the female student Zhang Jing 章静 is at her early twenties and lives in a small room in a Shanghai alleyway house. She leaves her hometown to study in Shanghai, as her previous schoolmates have given up the student movements and devoted themselves to the romance instead. In despair, she can only comfort herself by concentrating on studying. At the beginning of the story, she is sentimental and oversensitive. Isolating herself in the room and lost in fancies and random thoughts, she often feels depressed for no reason. After finding out that her lover is in fact a spy, she falls sick and is hospitalized. She meets an assistant doctor who is passionate about politics and updates her on the news of the North Expedition, discussing current affairs with her every day. His influence changes Jing from a pessimist to a patriot. Her new friends encourage her to join in the expedition at Wuhan 武汉, which renews her hope and enthusiasm. She joins the National Revolutionary Army. Yet the story does not end here. After working for the women’s movement and the labor union, she discovers the revolutionary cause is



not what she expected. Therefore, she eventually works as a nurse to look after the wounded soldiers in a hospital, where she finds her beloved. Yet when she pins hope on love, her lover leaves her for the expedition.<sup>141</sup> Her life path shifts again and again between disillusion, regained hope, and disillusion.

The story is still of the pattern that leaving the room for the revolutionary cause, yet it contains traces of suspicion and ambiguity. Mao Dun was not of Ba Jin and Ding Ling's generation. He had been a literary scholar and critic during the May Fourth era and witnessed all the ups and downs of in the National Revolution. In 1927, he was wanted by the KMT government after the First United Front broke. When he went back to Shanghai, he found the situation tense. Some of his friends went abroad to avoid being arrested. He could only hide in a pavilion room, writing and looking after his sick wife. During this time, he was disillusioned and admitted that the low spirit of the story had something to do with his own depression. Regarding himself as a coward hiding in the room, he chose to write down the disappointing reality of the revolution rather than some inspiring words to pretend to be "revolutionary" and win fame. Under these circumstances, he turned to writing. He confessed that in that lonely and depressive time, he was still willing to "use the embers of his vitality to shimmer in this bewildering and dim life from an alternative aspect". 以我生命力的余烬从别方面在这迷乱灰色的人生内发一星微光<sup>142</sup> Therefore, he started writing fiction and named himself Mao Dun 茅盾, homophone of "contradiction" 矛盾 in Chinese. The pen name implies his inner contradiction at that time. Unlike those younger writers, he granted writing more significance. When the direct conflict or social involvement was impossible, creative writing became an alternative way for him to search for the way of changing the society.

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<sup>141</sup> See Mao Dun's "Disillusion" 幻灭, *The Short Story Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 9 (1929.9): 4-29, and Vol. 18, No.10 (1929.10), 30-48.

<sup>142</sup> See Mao Dun's "From Guling to Tokyo" 从牯岭到东京, *The Short Story Magazine*, Vol. 19, No. 10 (1928.10): 6-14.

By contrast, many younger intellectuals were neither satisfied with the imaginary solution nor finding a way out strategically through writing. Chen Yi, who imagined himself being buried at the Western Hills, claims at the end of the essay that he will get out of the place to “go back to the folk, to the masses” 回到民间，回到群众里。 Later he answered the call of the CCP, left Beijing for Sichuan to help mobilize a military rebellion. Like him, some Tingzijian lodger-writers left their rooms. To move on from the previous failures, some revolutionary writers show an optimistic tendency in their works in the early 1930s. The protagonists find a way out by leaving their Tingzijian for “real work” in movements. By transforming the revolutionary thoughts to the social practice, they break the confinement and relieve their anxiety *of* writing and *in* the writing. The fever of integration with the masses replaces the mental crisis. Concomitantly, the writers voluntarily give up their private realm and individuality to get involved in the collective. To a certain degree, the desertion of Tingzijian and the tendency of going to the streets anticipates the flow of writers either to Yan’an, the center of the Chinese Communist revolution from 1936 to 1948,<sup>143</sup> or to the Great Rear Area after 1937.<sup>144</sup>

The common scenario of “from the Tingzijian to the streets” gives the writers a way out, and gets through the demarcation between the personal living space of the elites and the public space of the masses. This makes Tingzijian—in real life and in literature—different from other repressive spaces. The following discussion shows that Tingzijian created meaning as a liminal space relative to the streets and engendered some narrative devices.

#### “The upstairs perspective”: the Liminal Space of Tingzijian

The physical features of Tingzijian, such as the location between the floors and the poor soundproofing, provide the intellectuals with a liminal space that I call an “upstairs perspective.”

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<sup>143</sup> E.g. Ding Ling, Zhou Yang, Zhou Libo, etc.

<sup>144</sup> E.g. Chen Baichen, Tian Han, Ai Wu, etc.

The relation between the pavilion rooms and the streets embodies the subtle relationships between the elites and the masses.

Some pavilion rooms keep a distance from busy streets and thus prevent the residents from the bustle, but what happened in the alleys and among the neighbors can be clearly heard. As mentioned earlier, the acoustic environment is often represented in two ways, namely the “background sound” that is not consciously discerned and the “foreground sound” that is consciously heard. Ba Jin uses both of them to convey meanings and narrative effects. The background sound that is faint and obscure creates the sense of distance. In the beginning of the third chapter of *Destruction*, Du Daxin lies on the bed in the evening, and the street noise seems so far away from him that he barely hears it. The atmosphere keeps Du Daxin in seclusion: the pavilion room in the alleyway is like a shield, providing Du with a relatively reclusive space. The background sound brings him both physical and psychological distance from the masses. In such isolation, Du is able to indulge into his own feelings and emotions. He recollects the bloody scene of car accident at daytime and feels as if being suffocated, until the photo of his mother gives him consolation and he regains inner peace.

The distance is problematic when the story is narrated from the “upstairs perspective,” as the space of the second floor is penetrable regardless of the distance. When Du Daxin comes back from Li’s home, he finds himself in love with Li Jingshu. He worries about the love affair, as he had made up his mind to sacrifice himself to revenge. He leans against the window and sinks into thinking, until the call of a man selling children in the street distracts him. Just like an audience looks down from the theatre box to watch what is being presented on the stage, Du watches the scene in the alleyway lighted by the moonlight. He sees the man carrying on a pole two large baskets in which are several boys and girls. As the trafficker walks away, his voice echoes in the air piteously, unbearable to Du Daxin. He cannot but cover his ears in pain.<sup>145</sup> This

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<sup>145</sup> See *Complete Works of Ba Jin*, Vol.4, 77.

time the voice of the vendor call is no longer at the background but a foreground sound that interrupts his romantic reverie and awakes him from his self-absorbed thoughts. Notwithstanding he is “one story” higher than the vendor, or the underclass, their miserable life always invades his own life and accumulates the rise to the climax where Du eventually takes revenge. Though he covers his ears, he cannot really turn a deaf ear to the vendor call. Similarly, the seemingly reclusive pavilion room never manages to totally isolate him from the outside world.

The place he stands at symbolizes a liminal space where personal life is juxtaposed with social issues. It also presents an ambiguous distance between him and the abject poor, between what he wants to do and what he can do (for example, to cover his ears). He hates the feeling of being an on-looker, just like an on-looker of the car accident. Through Du Daxin, Ba Jin expresses his sense of powerlessness. As he confessed, “I wanted to use my pen as the weapon to accuse the unjust society. However, in many of my novels, I play but a helpless role of an on-looker, with a deep sigh.”<sup>146</sup> Lu Xun regarded such perspective of representing the underclass as “a cold eye from upstairs” 楼上的冷眼. In a letter replying to questions from Sha Ting 沙汀 and Ai Wu 艾芜, two greenhorn leftist writers eager to know how to represent the social reality, Lu Xun pointed out that even though some bourgeois writers can impartially represent the underclass and criticize the bourgeoisie, the so-called impartiality is but “a cold eye from upstairs” and their so-called “sympathy” is useless. Nevertheless, their writing still has its significance, for they know the bourgeoisie best and their criticism of that class can be more accurate and harsh.<sup>147</sup> The distance could only be overcome when the lodger-writers descended to the “streets.”

Tingzijian as a liminal and penetrable space also helps to generate a narrative frame. The *mélange* of residence in a cramped space deprives the residents of privacy, as the poor

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<sup>146</sup> See *Ba Jin's Autobiography*, 134.

<sup>147</sup> See *Complete Works of Lu Xun*, Vol. 4, 375.

soundproofing makes eavesdropping possible and common and so is spying. Lodger-writers tell stories about what they overheard from neighbors or spied out of the window. That the story is often within a letter or another story becomes a narrative pattern. For instance, in a short story of Ba Jin, a Tingzajian lodger writes a letter to his lover. In the letter he tells her what happened downstairs: a young lady named Ling lives with her family in a room owned by a Japanese landlord for whom her father works. Ling falls in love with a primary school teacher but they cannot get together, as Ling's father takes the whole family away with him to Japan. The narrator knows the whole tragic story by spying on their secret meeting and eavesdropping on their conversation.<sup>148</sup> Lu Xun also had the experience of being a voyeur. He complains about A Jin, the maid of his neighbor, who embroils the whole alleyway in her love affair. Disturbed by their secret meetings and arguments, Lu Xun cannot but witness the whole process.<sup>149</sup> Foreground sound here triggers the narrative.

A *mélange* of residents is a convenient premise for social dramas, and eavesdropping or spying triggered narration is by no means unique to Tingzajian literature. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), for example, a wounded photographer witnesses a murder by observing his neighbors across the courtyard through a telephoto camera lens pointed out the window. What makes Tingzajian special is its liminal position represented in the literature. It produces a space between the private and isolated living space and the public space. The liminal space has twofold significance. As discussed previously, first, it embodies relationships between the elite lodgers and the masses. The "upstairs perspective" to a certain degree foreshadows the castigation of "Tingzajian literati" in Mao era as those who did not really understand the working people. Second, Tingzajian is often juxtaposed with the streets, and lodger-writers shift between the two spaces. Both from Tingzajian to the streets and the reverse trajectory are found in Tingzajian literature, but the former is the more common scenario in revolutionary narratives.

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<sup>148</sup> See Ba Jin's "Below the Window" 窗下, *Writer* 作家, 2:1 (1936): 7-24.

<sup>149</sup> See Lu Xun's "A Jin" 阿金, *Petrel* 海燕, No.2 (1936): 17-18.

In addition, streets, factories, as well as other relational urban spaces in Shanghai give the confined intellectuals concrete directions and opportunities after they get out of the rooms. This makes the getting-out scenario in Tingzajian literature different from that in Chen Yi's writing. In the latter, the narrator gets out his room, only to quixotically yell at the wind, alone. By contrast, the intellectuals in the Tingzajian could take to the street with comrades, could lead factory workers to go on strike. With a large number of factory workers and various revolutionary organizations ranging from the communist party, the League of the Left-wing Writers, to the organizations of anarchists, with the protection from foreign settlements which the KMT government could not totally control over, Shanghai was an ideal hotbed for the radical activities.

This subgenre demonstrates how young intellectuals suffered from the writing and mental crises in the rooms and how they responded to them. Tingzajian made them aware of their situation and their discontent with their class identity. Some thus transformed themselves into revolutionaries in order to break out of confinement. Nevertheless, not all Tingzajian lodger-writers bought into leftist polemics, or believed the people who uttered them.

### 3.3 STAGE: MOCKING THE TINGZIJIAN LITERATI

Leftist elites portrayed the Tingzajian lodger-writers or themselves as victims of the unjust society to create a revolutionary narrative that appeals for taking actual parts in social revolt. This narrative was challenged by writers at the margins of the revolutionary enterprise. They claimed that these narratives were bogus and mocked writers' insincerity. Their writings, though not as voluminous, constitute a critical perspective on the Tingzajian narratives discussed above—the self-exhibition of trivial daily living in a shelter, and the revolutionary writers' expressions of anxiety, depression, and suffocating in a tomb. This third category of writers do not sympathize with their characters. On the contrary, they mock the protagonists from a distanced, omniscient perspective. Their characters are antiheroes and the Tingzajian a stage on

which farces are performed. The two most typical disenchanting depictions of Tingzidian literati are Xiao Hong's *Ma Bole* 马伯乐 and Yu Dafu's *Two Poets* 二诗人.

In 1927, Yu Dafu published in *The Short Story Magazine* the first two chapters of the story, "Two Poets" 二诗人 and "In the Sound of Di-du" 滴笃声中<sup>150</sup> and the remaining chapter titled "Go to the Street" 到街头 in *Bei Xin* 北新. Known since the early 1920s as a romantic writer, Yu Dafu is famous for his sentimental and lyrical expression, for depicting sexual repression and his disappointment with China, most sensationally in his story, "Sinking" 沉沦. Yu first went to Shanghai in 1923 and wrote a short story titled "A Night Deeply Drunk on the Spring Breeze," in which a young writer shares a pavilion room with a female factory worker. In 1927, he returned to Shanghai. In April, he moved from the office of the Creation Society in Zhabei district to the French Concession. In October, he wrote *Two Poets*, which reflects a different author's persona from his other works.

He Ma 何马 and Ma Delie 马德烈 are returned students without any occupation. To rent rooms in an alleyway house, they pretend to be master and servant. As they have heard that the landlady admires poets, He Ma, the "master" who has published a brochure of doggerel poetry claims to be a great poet and inveigles her to give them free shelter and financial support. The name "He Ma" is the transliteration of "Homer", the ancient Greek poet, and also sounds like hippo; "Ma Delie" resembles the Chinese name of the French poet "Baudelaire": 波德莱尔 bo de lai er. On his business card, He Ma calls himself "an eschatological poet" 末世诗人. He lists on the card his fake publications including "*New Life*," "*Inferno*," and "*Iliad*." Whenever he runs out of "inspiration" at home, he asks Ma Delie, the "servant" who translates nursery rhymes in the pavilion room for primary school students, to persuade the landlady to give them money,

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<sup>150</sup> The sound of "Di-du" is made by the traditional musical instruments of Shaoxing opera at the opening scene. The two characters in Yu Dafu's story go to the theatre to watch Shaoxing opera in this chapter.

which they spent at entertainment centers such as The Great World 大世界 Amusement Hall.<sup>151</sup> The so-called poet is in fact a loiterer. Yu Dafu does not focus much on the protagonists' domestic activities; street scenes take up more of the story.<sup>152</sup> Yu describes their behaviors in a hyperbolic and comic fashion. For example, He Ma is awkwardly clumsy especially when he crosses the road. It takes him thirty minutes to dodge cars on the street.

Yu reserves his heaviest sarcasm for talk about “revolution” and “love affairs.” After enjoying a traditional opera, He Ma sits on a rickshaw, cozily eating a snack of fried smelly bean curd. At that moment the inspiration surges and he starts to write a poem titled “Back at Nightfall” 日暮归来. The blunt poem becomes even more silly with the last line: “Oh! Oh! Ah! I want to eat another piece of smelly tofu!” 噢噢呵！我还要吃一块臭豆腐！ Nevertheless, He Ma is quite satisfied with it. As the poem directly records what he has done, he regards the work as belonging to the “art for life’s sake” school and himself as “a great revolutionary poet.” He thereupon changes business card from “eschatological poet” to “great revolutionary poet.” He Me simply equates the immediate recording of life events as “art for life’s sake” and jumps to the conclusion that he must therefore be a “revolutionary writer.”<sup>153</sup>

Skilled swindler that he is, He Ma is yet deceived by a garishly dressed lady on the street. Lured by the beautiful lady, he invites her to dine at a luxury restaurant, in hopes of a romance. During the dinner he boasts that he is a revolutionary poet, that he has published several

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<sup>151</sup> Built in 1917, the Great World is a famous amusement arcade and entertainment complex at Shanghai.

<sup>152</sup> Interestingly, if we look into Yu Dafu’s diary during that time, we can find that he spent more time dining out, visiting friends, or sleeping over at a brothel, than staying at home. From this perspective, he was like a flaneur as well. See *Diary of Yu Dafu* 郁达夫日记 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺出版社, 1986). Though we should not take his diary seriously as facts, it is still curious that he presented himself in this way.

<sup>153</sup> The citations of the story are all from *Anthology of Yu Dafu* 郁达夫文集 (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe 花城出版社, 1982), Vol.1.



anthologies and is going to be a college chancellor at a foreign country. However, after having some expensive dishes, the lady makes an excuse and sneaks away. He Ma is caught to pay for the meal. Beaten by the waiters, the “revolutionary poet” ends up with ice-cream, soda and tomato sauce on his face.

These two sarcastic attempts harshly mock the formulaic narrative of “revolution plus love” initiated by leftist writers like Jiang Guangci.<sup>154</sup> The formula that depicts the romantic emotions as derivatives both from personal love and revolution ranked one of the most important practices of “revolutionary literature.” Yet Liu Jianmei points out that this formula has more variations than the single genre pursued by the leftists. “Shanghai School” writers such as Shi Zhecun, Liu Na’ou and Ye Lingfeng transplanted the formula and altered the inherent revolutionary meanings “through their combination of politics with the commercial, of avant-garde sensibilities with popular ones.”<sup>155</sup> The two poets in Yu Dafu’s story have neither revolutionary spirit nor experimental literary techniques. They do not even cater to the popular interests – if they have any public readers at all. It seems that they make use of the bogus identity only to curry favor with the landlady and get more pocket money. Just as the “revolution plus love” formula had already lost its original meaning, being Tingzijian literati was also a fashionable yet empty gesture.

Yu Dafu criticizes harshly the abuse of “revolution.” The “poets” use it as a signboard to promote themselves and to benefit from it, even without knowing what it means. In 1928, Yu Dafu wrote an article “Revolutionary Advertisement” to reveal and criticize this phenomenon. Someone published an advertisement of a “revolutionary café,” claiming that the revolutionaries such as Lu Xun and Yu Dafu were its regular customers. Yet Yu Dafu had never even heard of

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<sup>154</sup> See T.A. Hsia’s *The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1968).

<sup>155</sup> See Liu Jianmei’s “Shanghai Variations on ‘Revolution Plus Love’, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Vol. 14, No.1 (2002 Spring), 51-92.

it. He sarcastically begins the article with a deliberate abuse: “Today is the revolutionary August 8<sup>th</sup>, a revolutionary day. At revolutionary nine o’clock in the revolutionary morning, the revolutionary moment, I saw a revolutionary advertisement on the revolutionary *Shen Bao*.” 今天的革命八月八日的革命日子的革命早晨革命九点钟的革命时候，我在革命申报上，看见了一个革命广告。<sup>156</sup> Then he explains that “revolution” is so popular these days, one need only add it to another word to make that word popular. To distinguish himself from those who promote and consume “revolution,” Yu Dafu refuses to go into the café and denies being a revolutionary.

Using the clichés of revolutionary literature without understanding their actual meanings was symptomatic among some Tingzijian writers. In Lunliu 沦流’s short story “Our Writer” 我们的作家, the lodger-writer forces himself to write something to exchange for money to pay for the rent. After a day loitering on the street, he gains no inspiration. So he thinks of the popular topics such as “modernization” 现代化, “fiction about the war” 写战争的小说, “popularization of literature” 文章大众化, and “proletarian literature” 普罗文学. It is easy to speculate that the protagonist frequently sees these terms in periodicals and magazines. Yet he has no idea how the poor peasants celebrate the New Year, neither does he know what the war is because he flees to his hometown from the war. He ends up penniless and has to flee away from the pavilion room.<sup>157</sup> From two poets to this writer, revolutionary ideas are merely printed signifiers devoid of actual meanings. If the stories discussed in the previous subgenre depict the Tingzijian writers as struggling for the sublime revolutionary causes in a heroic/tragic manner, then this subgenre exposes the underlying problems and disenchanting the heroic “Tingzijian writers.”

A decade after *Two Poets*, Xiao Hong wrote the novel *Ma Bole* in the similar sarcastic tone. Born in northern China in 1911, Xiao Hong encountered the ideas of the May Fourth Movement

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<sup>156</sup> See *Anthology of Yu Dafu*, Vol.6, 64.

<sup>157</sup> See *Shen Bao*, 1934.03.18, No. 21879, 19.

and literature at a school in Harbin. At the age of 19 she ran away from home to avoid an arranged marriage and started her wandering life. In 1934, she moved to Qingdao with her lover Xiao Jun, a left-wing writer later known as a representative author of the Northeast Authors Group. In that year, Xiao Hong wrote *The Field of Life and Death* 生死场, which brought her fame. In October, the couple moved to Shanghai. In November, they found a pavilion room on Route Tenant de la Tour in the French Concession and made contact with Lu Xun. During her stay in Shanghai, she wrote an array of essays and short stories collected in *Market Street* 南市街. In 1938, she broke up with Xiao Jun in Xi'an, then part of the Greater Rear Area, and married Duanmu Hongliang, another author of the Northeast Authors Group. The newlyweds left for Hong Kong in 1940, where she wrote her acclaimed novel *Tales of Hulan River* 呼兰河传. Xiao Hong began writing *Ma Bole* in 1939 in Chongqing. The first volume of the novel was published in book form in 1941 and the unfinished second volume with nine chapters was serialized in Hong Kong newspaper *Contemporary Criticism* in the same year. Unfortunately, the unfinished novel was interrupted either by the chaos in the war or by her early death in 1942.

*Ma Bole* presents a carnivalesque story of escape. The protagonist Ma Bole is from a well-off family in the countryside with western pretensions. Tired of them, he flees to Shanghai. Unable to get into university or audit classes, he opens a bookstore and attempts to be a wartime writer. However, the bookstore collapses and, having frittered away all the money given by his father, he has no choice but to go back home. The second time he escapes to Shanghai, war is imminent. This time he lives in a confined room below the staircase, without a single window. He leads a wretched and filthy life almost willingly as he is always prepared to flee for the war. Later when he spends all his money again, he moves to live with his friend in a pavilion room, waiting for his wife and kids to come with money. Ironically, though he is the first to make preparations to escape, when war actually breaks out he lags behind the mass of other refugees due to an argument with his wife, whom he eventually persuades to escape to Wuhan.

Xiao Hong describes Ma Bole's room under the staircase as an enclosed vacuum. She represents the space with all the senses: the stink of onions, the faint light, as well as the faded and undistinguishable noise on the street, all make the place unbearable. However, Ma Bole is willing to live there not only because of the affordable rent. Living in such a place to him is a gesture of fleeing from the calamity of the war.

His domestic life, especially the disgusting culinary scene, is farcical. His only domestic activity is cooking, mostly his favorite dish, egg fried rice. But he never washes his kitchenware and dishware. The unsanitary habit again is justified by his situation of fleeing. In addition, every time he enters the room, he would carelessly kick down the bottles and cans containing soy sauce and seasonings. The scene appears repetitively, as if the writer is trying hard to make Ma's life appear ridiculous. It also indicates that Ma Bole lives a repetitive and empty life consisting of dirt and egg fried rice, in the name of the anticipatory wartime. Unlike the characters in *Two Poets* who are inclined to traipse the streets and search for entertainment, Ma Bole goes out mainly for gathering war information or supplies. He would rather retreat to his cramped room, as if compared to the outside world full of dangers and uncertainty, only the small room makes him feel safe.

Later he lives with his friend Little Chen 小陈, a poorer yet generous young man, in a pavilion room, which is even filthier. Everything is covered with dirt. They do not share the responsibility of managing the room. On rainy nights, they would rather let the room get wet than close the window. Instead of portraying the suffering protagonists as sages or even martyrs of some sublime cause, the writer animalizes Ma and his roommate into worms "cuddling on the wet floor."<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> See *Complete Works of Xiao Hong* 萧红全集 (Harbin: Harbin chubanshe 哈尔滨出版社, 1991), 485.

The sarcastic tone makes this novel outstanding among Xiao Hong's works. Different from what we read in Ba Jin and some other writers' works, the antihero does not struggle in the room, eager to run away from the oppressive space, or think of how to change the society and save the people. Instead, he willingly leads the miserable life, concerned only with himself. By making the domestic scenes farcical and ridiculing the protagonists, Xiao Hong mocks the life path of such young educated sojourners at that time and criticizes their hypocrisy, ignorance, and selfishness.

However, I maintain that what Xiao Hong does in *Ma Bole* is beyond "criticism of national character" 国民性批判, which distinguishes this story from Lu Xun's *The True Story of Ah Q* 阿Q正传 (1921). In the story, except his reversed logic of escapism, Ma Bole's life path is very much familiar to us—fleeing from the family, attending or auditing at a modern school, establishing a bookstore, living in a pavilion room, wandering on the street, and criticizing the Chinese. The young generation growing up in the May Fourth era, in fact, had the similar experience, and some then became famous culture entrepreneurs. Some evacuated to inland places during the wartime and became patriotic writers. Many discourses once popular since the New Cultural movement fall prey to Xiao Hong's irony, including emancipation from the traditional family and social revolution.

Xiao Hong also parodies war jargon, which indicates her disagreement with wartime patriotic writing. On the boat, the illiterate captain frequently uses the term "traitor" 汉奸 in any context, only to empty the word of meaning. Scholars have argued that such a jibe is an anti-writing of the aesthetic disciplines required by the "wartime patriotic literature" 抗战文艺,<sup>159</sup> as it focuses on the caricaturable men's quotidian life rather than the heroes' blood and fire in the

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<sup>159</sup> See Chen Jieyi 陈洁仪's "On the deconstruction of 'wartime patriotic literature' by Xiao Hong's *Ma Bole*" 论萧红《马伯乐》对“抗战文艺”的消解方式, *Modern Chinese Literature Studies* 中国现代文学研究丛刊, No.2 (1990): 80-90.

battle field. From the ridiculous escapism to the parody of wartime catchwords, as Christopher Rea has pointed out, the author and the character “threaten the serious mission of resistance” and “deconstruct the wartime discourse of unity of purpose and inevitable victory.”<sup>160</sup>

By parodying the mainstream ideology in a dramatized and anti-sublime fashion, Xiao Hong refuses any cliché or set pattern. She instead sticks to her own independent writing. Another evidence of her independence is her speech at a discussion in Hankow in 1938. At that time, the Chinese Writers’ Anti-Aggression Association advocated writers to actively participate in army life. At the discussion presided over by Hu Feng, other participants voiced the cliché that in the city they were separating themselves from the people and “life”, so they were unable to write. They called for the front line life. While Xiao Hong’s speech was against that opinion. She insisted that there are writing materials all around, as long as the writer has sufficient observation and understanding. “Taking refuge during an air-raid alert is a part of wartime living condition.”<sup>161</sup> Otherwise the major events would also lose their significance for a writer.<sup>162</sup> Her dissent not only rebuts other participants’ opinions on wartime literature, but also speaks to the leftist polemic discussed in the previous section.

The similarities of these works not only lie in the protagonists’ ridiculous behaviors, but also in the parody of revolutionary and patriotic clichés that dominated modern Chinese literature, from “art for life’s sake” to wartime patriotic literature. The authors distanced themselves from those slogan beneficiaries and marginalized themselves from the mainstream literary imperatives. Moreover, the two stories are also relatively marginal among all the authors’

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<sup>160</sup> See Christopher Rea’s *A History of Laughter: Comic Culture in Early Twentieth-Century China*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2008, 256.

<sup>161</sup> See “Forum Summary: Development and Attitude in the Literature and Arts Movement Since the Beginning of the War of Resistance” 抗战以来的文艺活动态度和展望——座谈会纪要, *July* 七月, No.7 (1938.1), 193-198.

<sup>162</sup> See Howard Goldblatt’s *Xiao Hong* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), 80.

famous works. The authors revealed that patriotism and revolution had become clichés and reminded us that there were voices rejecting them. Tingzijian literati are targeted in this trend, not only because Tingzijian was a typical space for revolution, but also because being a Tingzijian writer could be a gesture as empty as the revolutionary and patriotic clichés. The Tingzijian in this subgenre serves as a stage of farce, and also suggests a space where we can hear the complexity of revolutionary discourse, including critical voices.

The three subgenres show that the diversity of Tingzijian literature cannot be oversimplified as simply leftist writing. Even within revolutionaries' writings, we find dissenting voices—such as the slight difference in faith between Ba Jin's protagonists and other young communists, or the critical satire of Yu Dafu and Xiao Hong.

Based on present evidence, I find no strong common sense of identity shared by all the Tingzijianers except for their marginal social and economic status. Still, we can find in their writings that some identified as common residents in opposition to the venal politicians and rich entrepreneurs; some emphasized their petty bourgeois background, guiltily, in opposition to the underclass. It is also possible that the two identities overlapped.

## Chapter Four: Epilogue: The Cultural Afterlives of Tingzijian Since 1949

The Tingzijian is a palimpsest that continues to accrue new layers of meaning. Its connotations, as we have seen, are physical, figurative, and symbolic. In Chinese literature of the 1920s and 1930s, it became an iconic space in which residents' quotidian life unfolded; a symbol of intellectuals' sense of confinement and oppression; and a stage for misbehavior. More than just a setting, the Tingzijian is a trope that engendered multiple motifs—suffering, enjoyment, voyeurism, eavesdropping, confinement, taking to the streets, death. Tingzijian literature was not, as typically thought, the exclusive domain of leftists, but drew writers of different generations and literary schools, an epitome of the heterogeneity of the literature of the 1920s and 1930s.

Tingzijian literature of the 1920s and 30s, in all its variety, adds another dimension to our understanding of Shanghai literature and modernity. Scholars have long been familiar with the Shanghai-style (or Hai-pai 海派) literature represented by Han Bangqing 韩邦庆 (1856-1894)'s *The Sing-Song Girls of Shanghai* 海上花列传, and New Sensationalism writers such as Liu Na'ou 刘呐鸥 (1905-1940) and Mu Shiyong 穆时英 (1912-1940). Yet Tingzijian literature does not represent Shanghai as *Les Fleurs du mal*, a combination of prosperity and decadence. Rarely do we see the lodger-writers admire or indulge in vanity. Instead, as marginal sojourners, they lived in an undesirable residence and showed interest in common people's lives, whether sociological or critical.

The three subgenres outlined above overlap in time, but the majority of each type emerged sequentially. The leftist writings mostly appeared in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Japanese occupation was a deep blow to the Shanghai elites, and some left. More representations of the common residents' daily life emerged in the late 1930s, continuing the story of the Tingzijian. After the fall of Shanghai in December 1941, some writers of popular literature still stayed in the occupied Shanghai and wrote stories about Tingzijian. Most famous is Zhou Tianlai 周天籁's



*Miss Tingzajian* 亭子间嫂嫂, a novel about a prostitute living in Tingzajian, focusing on the lives of common people, which was published in instalments in *Orient Daily* 东方日报. Starting in July 1939, the novel was serialized continuously for a year, and its popularity saved the periodical from bankruptcy.<sup>163</sup> It also inspired a writer under the pseudonym of Aisisheng 爱司生 to create another serialized novel about a Tingzajian prostitute, *Lady Tingzajian* 亭子间小姐 (1940). *Lady Tingzajian* appeared in Shanghai's bimonthly *The Grand View Garden* 大观园 (est. 1939),<sup>164</sup> which featured pulp stories, celebrity gossip, miraculous tales from overseas, household tips, and other pieces of interest to common Shanghai residents. *Lady Tingzajian* was marketed to readers as being “sexy” 香艳, “romantic” 浪漫, “passionate” 热情, and “new” 新型. These pulp works continued a tradition that can be traced all the way back to the courtesan novels 狹邪小说 of the late Qing. In their close relation to the mass common reader, they share common features with the exhibitionistic “Shelter” writings discussed above, as all intend to attract and amuse the readers by taking them inside the Tingzajian.

After Mao's programmatic wartime speeches and the establishment of the party-state in 1949, writing about and for the masses became the single criterion for judging art and literature. Other literary traditions were harshly repressed. “Tingzajian writers” came to stand for a negative model of a writer lacking real life experience and connections with workers, peasants, and soldiers. Party cultural workers depicted them as backward and cited Mao's comments on

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<sup>163</sup> See Hu Shengyu 胡绳玉's “The Writer of Shanghai Dialect: Zhou Tianlai” 上海话作家周天籟, *Century* 世纪, No.2 (2010): 59-61. The novel *Miss Tingzajian* was published in three volumes by Youyi Publishing House 友益书局 in 1942. See Chen Sihe 陈思和's “About *Miss Tingzajian*” 关于《亭子间嫂嫂》, *Bookstore* 书屋, No.1 (1998): 35-37. For other example of Tingzajian pulp novels, see Aisisheng 爱司生's *Lady Tingzajian* 亭子间小姐, serialized in *Grand View Garden* 大观园, Vol.2, No.1-4 (1940).

<sup>164</sup> See Aisisheng 爱司生's “Lady Tingzajian” 亭子间小姐, *Grand View Garden* 大观园, Vol.2, No.1-4 (1940).

Tingzajian writers to criticize dissenters. Given that Mao insisted that harsh critique should only be applied to the enemy, not to revolutionary people or parties,<sup>165</sup> it is likely that his accusation that Tingzajian writers were “out of touch” was his excuse to delegitimize their critique by *ad hominem* attack.

Shao Quanlin was one victim of this shift. He joined the CCP during his study at Fudan University in Shanghai in the 1920s. Originally a writer, he became a literary bureaucrat, and leader of the anti-rightist campaign of 1957. In the early 1960s, he opposed the Great Leap Forward’s (1958-1960) unrealistic portrayal of peasants as revolutionary heroes. He came up with the theories of “deepening realism” 现实主义深化 and “writing about middle characters” 写中间人物 in 1962 at the Forum on Short Stories with Rural Themes 农村题材短篇小说创作座谈会. He emphasized that writers should not only write about heroes and villains, but also about the common people in between; writers should portray the struggles and tribulations of the individual wavering between the old and the new societies. His theory so irritated radical intellectuals in the CCP that they launched a campaign targeting Shao and like-minded intellectuals, such as Zhou Libo and Zhao Shuli 赵树理 (1906-1970). Many CCP critics accused Shao of devaluing heroes and opposing the party’s literary direction,<sup>166</sup> and his theories were included in the Eight Wrong Theories 黑八论 criticized in the *Summary of the Forum on Arts*

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<sup>165</sup> In 1941, Ding Ling published an essay in the CCP official periodical *Jiefang Daily* 解放日报, advocating that even at Yan’an, they still need essays of Lu Xun’s style to supervise and criticize the problems within the party. See “We Need Essays 我们需要杂文”, *Jiefang Daily*, 1941.10.23. In 1942, Mao pointed out in his speech at Yan’an Forum that Lu Xun style should only be applied to the enemy, not the revolutionary people and parties. See *Mao’s Road to Power*, Vol.8, 127.

<sup>166</sup> See Merle Goldman’s *China’s Intellectuals: Advise and Dissent* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 47-50, 101-113. For the attacks on him, see organized articles on the journals such as *Academia Monthly* 学术月刊 (1965.3.2, 1965.5.1), *Shandong Literature* 山东文学 (1965.5.1), *Journals of Wuhan University* 武汉大学学报 (1965.1.31), *Journals of Xiamen University* 厦门大学学报 (1964.8.28), *Journals of Jiangnan* 江汉学报 (1964.8.28), and so on.

*and Literature in the Troops* 部队文艺工作座谈会纪要 (1966). CCP cultural worker Lei Shenghong 雷声宏 argued in 1964 that Shao's proposal contravened the party line that literature should serve the masses. He traces the mistake back to the time when the KMT governed Shanghai. At that time, oppressive political forces prevented bourgeois intellectuals and writers from interacting with the poor. Later, when some writers left their pavilion rooms to Yan'an, they crossed two spaces and times physically, but not, as Mao pointed out, ideologically. They had not remolded their thoughts or paid adequate attention to the masses even after the establishment of the PRC. This, Lei argues, is the sociohistorical root of Shao's mistake.<sup>167</sup> Mao's commentary was frequently invoked in such criticisms.<sup>168</sup> In this context, Tingzajian becomes the metonymy of the bourgeois or reactionary ideology, a place from which all mistakes originated.

Even in the post-Mao era, the spirit of Yan'an Arts and Literature still dominated, and "Tingzajian writing" was still a powerful symbol. Many artists and scholars had internalized the negation of writing in a small room without many connections with the real life, and they continued to use this Maoist theory to criticize and self-criticize. For instance, in 1977, writer Cao Ming 草明 (1913-2002) wrote in an eulogy to Mao's speech at the Yan'an Forum that she came from Shanghai pavilion rooms to Yan'an, with great passion for revolution but also with many confused thoughts, and that she did not really understand whom literature and arts should

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<sup>167</sup> See Lei Shenghong 雷声宏's "This is Singing a Contrary Tune of the Direction that Literature and Arts are for the Workers, Peasantry and Soldiers: On Comrade Shao Quanlin's Literary Proposal of 'Writing the Middle Characters'" 这是与文艺的工农兵方向唱反调——评邵荃麟同志“写中间人物”的文学主张, *People's Daily* 人民日报, 1964.12.27, 5.

<sup>168</sup> For more example, see Xiao Yin 萧殷's "Writing 'Real Characters and Real Incidents' and Artistic Embellishment" 写“真人真事”与艺术加工, *People's Daily*, 1950.4.23,5; see, also, Mu Xin 穆欣's "'Literature of National Defense' is Wang Ming's Slogan of Right Opportunist Line" "国防文学"是王明右倾机会主义路线的口号, *People's Daily*, 1966.7.6, 3.

serve until Mao's speech.<sup>169</sup> In fact, her narrative skips all her activities in Guangzhou and Chongqing, as if she had travelled directly from Shanghai to Yan'an. The rhetoric reflects that Shanghai pavilion room and Yan'an had become metonymies of two ideological polarities: respectively, the departure point and the terminal point of a correct intellectual trajectory. The same rhetoric also appears in the cartoonist Hua Junwu 华君武's article "From Tingzijian to the Base" 从亭子间到根据地. More than six decades after he left Shanghai, he criticizes his works created in Shanghai pavilion rooms and claims that Yan'an was the place where he transformed himself into a revolutionary artist.<sup>170</sup>

Today, the local government has demolished most *shikumen* houses and many of those that remain are dilapidated.<sup>171</sup> The government has also restored and preserved some of the houses, generally according to four patterns: touristic commercial developments such as New Heaven and Earth 新天地; preserving local residences while bringing in creative industries, as with Tianzifang 田子坊; development of commercial residences such as Jianye Alleyway 建业里; and the protection of the original architecture, as in Bugao Alleyway 步高里. It is said that about 70% of *shikumen* have been demolished for the city's development,<sup>172</sup> and the demolition projects have brought up two different voices. Common residents who have had enough of the poor living conditions welcome the demolition. With the removal compensation they can relocate to new apartments. Others regret the disappearance of the old alleyway houses. Especially for some lodger-artists, they commemorate them by collecting photos, documents,

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<sup>169</sup> See Cao Ming 草明's "The Guiding Light" 指路明灯, *People's Daily*, 1977.05.22, 3.

<sup>170</sup> See Hua Junwu's "From Tingzijian to the [Communist] Base" 从亭子间到根据地, *People's Daily*, 2002.5.23, 12.

<sup>171</sup> For the problems of demolition and restoration of Shanghai alleyway houses, see Jie Li's *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life* and Gregory Bracken's *The Shanghai Alleyway House: A Vanishing Urban Vernacular*.

<sup>172</sup> Scholars organized forums to discuss the protection of them, in hope to explore more patterns. See the news report about the forum: [http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_1579296](http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1579296)

and materials.<sup>173</sup> Intellectuals and artists have called for the preservation of historical sites, some of which have been demolished for the commercial development. Minhou Alleyway 民厚里 is a typical example. During the Republican period it was on Hardoon Road,<sup>174</sup> and it accommodated literati including Yan Fu, Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu, Tian Han, Dai Wangshu, Shi Zhecun, and Ye Lingfeng, and welcomed visitors such as Ding Ling, Wang Jingzhi, and many leftist students. In the 1990s, the alleyway was demolished and it is now the site of the Jing'an Kerry Center, a new city landmark.

As *shikumen* houses have disappeared, representations of them have become newly popular. Wang Anyi's *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* 长恨歌 (1995) and Jin Yucheng's *Luxuriant Blossoms* 繁花 (2013) represent a nostalgic trend that has lasted for decades. What writers continue to preserve in their stories are the residents' quotidian life and love affairs, which contain traces of the pulp literature tradition. The other trend of Tingzijian writing, namely the leftist writing, by contrast, has faded away.

The *mélange* of residents remains a convenient premise for social dramas. For example, the Shanghai comedy 滑稽戏 *The House of Seventy-two Tenants* 七十二家房客 (1958) is set in a complex of Shanghai alleyway houses in the mid-1940s. The Shanghai comedian Yang Huasheng 杨华生, Xiao Xixi 笑嘻嘻, among others, wrote the play during the third Rectification Movement (1957-1959). The play vividly shows residents' everyday life in the pigeonhole-like cohabitation and has been adapted into many versions. In 1963, Pearl River Film Studio 珠江电影制片厂 adapted the story into a comic film in Cantonese. A decade later, Chor Yuen again transplanted it to a 1970s Hong Kong slum in a film of the same title produced by the Shaw Brothers. The film was so popular and that it not only ranked the top of the box office in that

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<sup>173</sup> See, for an example, an *shikumen* lodger-artist Le Jiancheng's photo collection on *shikumen* architectural and the residents' life: [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/articlelist\\_2011737750\\_10\\_1.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/articlelist_2011737750_10_1.html)

<sup>174</sup> After the establishment of the PRC, the road was renamed as Tongren Road 铜仁路. Now the road no longer exists.

year, but also impacted the later films such as Steven Chow's martial arts comedy *Kung Fu Hustle* 功夫 (2004).

*Kung Fu Hustle* is set in a highly stylized Republican Shanghai. The opening sequence shows an urban montage of colorful neon lights, wide streets, and beautifully decorated interiors. Then we move to the slum-like *mise-en-scène* of Pigsty Alley 猪笼城寨, a shantytown-like multi-story residence where many underclass people cohabit. The establishing sequence shows residents' life in the morning, including conflict among neighbors, coolies' labor, the landlord's flirting with female residents, and his argument with his wife. Gary Xu has pointed out that *The House of 72 Tenants* influenced Steven Chow in many aspects. One is the site of urban dwelling: the cohabitation in cramped space, the everyday trifles, the laughter amid hardships, and the unexpected arising out of banalities and routines.<sup>175</sup> We see that all these motifs in a 21st century Hong Kong movie can actually be traced back to Tingzujian representations. More interestingly, the residents in the movie who are seemingly so mundane turn out to be Kung Fu masters, who are forced to come out of hiding and fight again. This reminds us of the intellectuals dwelling in the alleyway houses, who were obscure among the common residents until the day they came out of their rooms and took to the street.

Few young people live in pavilion rooms now, but a similar mode of living is reincarnated in contemporary residences such as group rental flats 群租房. A flat can be divided into a dozen small rooms and sublet to the migrant workers and new college graduates. These small residences are nicknamed Snail Houses 蜗居, meaning "humble abode." The phenomenon is common nationwide, especially in big cities. In 2009, the television series *Dwelling Narrowness* 蜗居 evoked heated discussion for its portrayal of present social reality in mainland China, such as urban housing shortages, the wealth gap, and political corruption. It is also commonly seen

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<sup>175</sup> See Gary G. Xu's *Sinascape: Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 92-93.

that the young protagonists of the stories dwell in a cramped rental room. Given the new sociohistorical context, do they face the similar predicaments as their predecessors? Do they have the impulse to leave their room for the streets, or instead to retreat from the public space to their small residence?

The Chinese character *zhai* “宅” (residence) means “placing” or “reposing” 寄托 (as a verb), and, as a noun, refers to the places where things rest.<sup>176</sup> It is often combined with people’s spirit, such as “心宅” (literal meaning: the place where one’s spirit resides) which refers to one’s mental status. As its etymology indicates, “residence” can be a metaphor of the Chinese people’s psychological or spiritual being. Like the pavilion room, the stories told of these new cramped living spaces might yet offer insights into what it means not just to dwell but to be.

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<sup>176</sup> Duan Yucai 段玉裁 explains in his *Annotation of Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters* 说文解字注: “託者、寄也。人部亦曰侷、寄也。引伸之凡物所安皆曰宅。” (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1992), 338. A similar use of 宅 as meaning not just a place to dwell but to be appears in the title of Ge Zhaoguang’s 葛兆光 book 宅兹中国: 重建有关“中国”的历史论述, translated by Jesse Field and Qin Fang as *Here in ‘China’ I Dwell: Reconstructing Historical Discourses of China for Our Time* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

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