CHAPTER 9

After the Sun: Slow Hope? Rethinking Continuous Crisis Through China's Revolutions

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Introduction

我在朦胧中, 眼前展开一片海边碧绿的沙地来, 上面深蓝的天空中挂着一轮金黄的圆月

我想: 希望本是无所谓有, 无所谓无的 这正如地上的路; 其实地上本没有路, 走的人多了, 也便成了路

As I dozed, a stretch of jade-green seashore spread itself before my eyes, and above a round golden moon hung from a deep blue sky

I thought: hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made. (鲁迅 Lu Xun 故鄉 *My Old Home*)[1]

… we also need stories that provide us with alternatives to narrowly defined pathways: with ideas that seemed unimaginable before they were voiced and with paths that seemed unwalkable before they were walked. We need stories that empower us to become thinkers, actors, and activists capable of imagining alternatives in a world dominated by technical and economic constraints. (Christof Mauch *Slow Hope*)[2]

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J. P. Zúquete (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Left-Wing Extremism, Volume 2*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-36268-2_9

At the beginning of the twentieth century, and faced with the country's weakness—manifested in losses in the opium wars and even against its small neighbor, Japan—writers, poets, and artists alike were reflecting on the best way to save China. One character who—after many decades of danger and destruction—promised to bring back the light was none other than Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976). During his lifetime, he was hailed as "The sun that never sets 永远不落的太阳." And as such, as the bright morning sun, rising in the East, Mao would become the most important *propageme* of China's successful and continuous revolution.

Yet, at the same time, Mao Zedong is the figure whose politics, especially in the final years before his death in 1976, would come to be associated with a leftist extremism officially denigrated. In the words of the *1981 Party Resolution*, passed a few years after his death, his politics had been punctuated by "(ultra-)left errors" and "deviations" (*Party Resolution* 1981:19, 20). The Resolution points to a number of serious setbacks since the founding of the People's Republic of China caused by extremist policies: after the seven years of completing "Socialist Transformation" (ibid.: 15) between 1949 and 1956 and the "building of Socialism in all spheres" (ibid.: 17) between 1956 and 1966, a first set of "left errors" became evident, especially in the fields of economics: the period of the *Great Leap Forward* was, for example, "characterized by excessive targets, the issuing of arbitrary directions, boastfulness and the stirring up of a 'communist wind'" (ibid.: 19). The *Cultural Revolution* is considered the final culmination of such ultra-leftist errors, now evident in the fields of politics, ideology, and culture (ibid.: 19), and Mao is immediately associated with this erroneous left-wing extremism as it is said that the *Cultural Revolution* was "initiated by a leader labouring under a misapprehension and capitalized on by counter-revolutionary cliques," and that it "led to domestic turmoil and brought catastrophe to the Party, the state and the whole people" (ibid.:22).

In spite of the fact that the *1981 Resolution* has been binding for the interpretation of Chinese history ever since, and that it remains so even after the *2021 Resolution*, were these same "left errors" are also evoked—if much less elaborately, as this new resolution is more concerned with the future "new age" of Xi Jinping 習近平 (1953–) rather than the past (II. 11–12)—the sun, not just the symbol of China's successful (continuous) revolution, but even more so of Maoist left-wing extremism, remains an important *propageme* and keeps on getting evoked to this day. I show that throughout the long twentieth century, the sun has been mobilized as sign and symbol by different players as an important element in different strategies (e.g., popular and religious, as well as official and propagandistic) and narratives (e.g., artistic, musical, literary). I will illustrate how the sun as *propageme* has been used to put transformative visions into practice—both in the past and in the present—but how, at the same time, it has changed its meaning repeatedly and drastically. From being a respite from crisis (AFTER crisis), it becomes a sign of crisis itself (IN crisis). It personifies both (utopian, slow) hope and (realist, accelerated) despair, and

sometimes both at the same time and is, therefore, invoked both as a sign of continuous revolution but also of continuous crisis pointing to the effects of leftist extremism that constitute a significant part of the Maoist heritage.

In a 2017 documentary *Chairman Buddha* by Tang Louyi, a film that follows Mao worshippers around China and shows their reverential activities—from temple building to narrating the miracles he works (Tang 2017), we observe how to many of the people shown and interviewed in this film, Mao remains the savior sun that brings light and hope to China. This chapter will illustrate, therefore, how Mao, the bright and shining sun, becomes a trope that is in fact increasingly sedimented in cultural memory, as it is "heritagized" as part of both China's continuous revolution and continuous crisis. Informally sacralized, it ironically becomes part of a religious populism, on the one hand, and an intellectual iconoclasm, on the other. As I consider the legacy of this *propageme*, in reviewing how it has been used by supporters as well as critics of the leftist extremism it came to stand for, I will consider the epistemic violence accompanying the religious extremism behind its propagation during the heydays of Maoism. The verve with which it was disseminated during the heydays of Maoism helps explain some of its beguiling as well as evidently traumatic effects. While focusing on the period after Mao's death, one which did not do away with the sun in spite of its associations with leftist errors and deviations, I will be considering artistic discourses during the long Chinese twentieth century,[3] in an attempt to understand the power of left-wing extremism, or, in other words, the Maoist specter in China. I will thus illustrate why the sun remains a "principal of hope"—in spite of its associations with left-wing extremism—arguing that Chinese intellectuals—in the following of Lu Xun cited in the first epithet above—continually created ever new and utopian dreams, i.e. narratives of what Christof Mauch has called "slow hope" (second epithet).

From Night to Light—The Making of a Trope or: How the Sun Rises

The trope has its beginnings in the late nineteenth century, when many a journal called on the Chinese to wake up (Fig. 9.1 *Shenzhou Ribao* 1908, Ma 1908). The *Shenzhou Ribao* 神洲日報-*China Daily* shows a journalist, under a bright sun (which brings "civilized enlightenment" 文明 *wenming*). He is calling out loudly 大聲疾呼者, to wake up the sleeping Chinese citizen, on his left, while on his right an old-style Chinese official stands by, half stooping in front of the foreigner on the far left of the image who is letting his greedy eyes wander over China. The idea of the need to search for an enlightening sun was part of the discourse propagated at the height of the *New Culture Movement* 新文化運動—also alternatively called the *Chinese Renaissance/Enlightenment* by contemporaries: one of its protagonists, Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1972) who, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, would become a state-writer of Mao's revolution, publishes a dramatic poem *The Rebirth of the*

Goddesses 女神之再生 *Nüshen zhi zaisheng* (Guo 1921) which deals with the struggle between two legendary rulers whose wars have affected the world so terribly that even the sun has withdrawn in disgust. Three goddesses come down to save the world by creating a new sun. They are helped by the poet, who has already set out, in search of the sun, as the stage manager, who appears to address the audience in the play, relates. He ends with words of hope: "that they may all meet again, when the Sun rises again (我们待太阳出现时再会)" (Guo 1921: 16).

Guo's dramatic poem manifests the typical role that the protagonists of the *New Culture Movement* had chosen for themselves: the intellectual, the poet becomes a savior figure, he shows the people the way to the light, enlightens them, all those who are groping blindly, in the dark of night in this long moment of crisis.[4] The entire long twentieth century remains dominated by this rhetoric of waking up from the darkness and rising in the new light.

Fig. 9.1 Shenzhou Ribao 1908 in commemoration of the first anniversary of the *Shenzhou Ribao* 神州日報, 1908 (Holy Country—China—Daily) Ma (1908)

Heritagized, it is part of a quasi-religious populism nurtured both from above and from below. Xi Jinping with his "China dream" 中国梦 *Zhongguo meng* picks up on this trope, as the Chinese Communist Party had become the self-fashioned heir to the *New Culture Movement*. Quite accordingly, the response to the stage manager's last words in Guo's dramatic poem is the revolutionary song "The East is Red" which stems from the Communist base in Yan'an—the cradle of Chinese left-wing extremism in the 1940s. It begins, "The East is red, the sun is rising, China has produced a Mao Zedong, hurrah, he is the savior of the people." Mao and the Communist Party, they are "like the sun," it continues, "wherever it shines, there will be light."

The song made Mao both into a sacralized object and metaphorical idea and as such, sedimented in cultural memory, the sun would become an ever more powerful *propageme* (Mittler 2012).[5] The song advanced to the status of a national anthem in the years of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (1966–1976), and sounded from many a public clock, it opened the loudspeaker news every morning and pompously accompanied the launching of the first Chinese satellite in 1970. All throughout the Maoist years, the song and with it the metaphor of "the sun that never sets 永远不落的太阳" prevailed. As such, Mao put China "after the crisis." And even when he died, he remained, the "sun in everyone's heart, which would never set," forever 心中的太阳永不落.[6] Everyone saw the Chairman live on, an absent presence forever: even after his death, China remained the country where the sun never sets—slow hope?!

This is what is insinuated in the official memorial film (Chinese Central Studio of News Reel Production 1976). The obvious focus is on Mao continuing alive as the Heaven-sent saintly sun. Quite predictably, the film ends (ibid.: 1.50.00), with the sun rising above the sea, washed in the sounds of "The East is Red." All throughout the 1980s and even more intensely since Mao's centenary in 1993, the sun motif has been re-used and thus sacralized (Mittler 2012, chapter 2). Just before the centenary, Jia Lusheng and Su Ya publish *The Sun that never sets* 不落的太阳 (Su and Jia 1992). A collection of anecdotes, this book has Mao—the only sun they want 中国人只要一个太阳 (see ibid. chs. 2 and 3)—speak to his people. The two authors suggest that China's continued fascination with Mao reflects a nostalgic longing for the years under Mao and their views resonate in the *Red Sun Fever* 红太阳热 *Hong Taiyang re* which begins around the same time.[7] The controversy around a 2016 cover version of "The East is Red," in which Xi Jinping is shown as inheriting Mao, speaks to the idea that Mao remains the only sun on Chinese skies. A formula like "the king is dead, long live the king" (Kantorowicz 2016) cannot be applied to post-Maoist China—the cover was almost immediately withdrawn from public view when it appeared in 2016 (Wen 2018).

The Sun That Never Sets—Resisting the Trope or: How the Sun Scorches and Blinds

The sacralized aura of the sun remains, clearly, linked with Mao and Mao alone. In the meantime, however, the meaning of its shining light began to change: it had become clear—during Mao's lifetime already—but then again with the suppression of the Democracy Wall in 1979, the demonstrations on Tiananmen in 1989 and in Hong Kong since 2019—that even in this country where the sun is always shining, oppressive darkness, or, put differently, the negative effects of leftist extremism, prevails.

Already at the height of Mao's Cultural Revolution, some had been revolted by the omnipresence of the sun—the sun which to some of them was no longer the solution, but indeed, the problem itself, putting China in a state not of AFTER crisis, but of IN crisis. Accordingly, iconoclasm of the sacralized object and metaphor can be found even then. Many a memoir reminds us how nerve-racking the constant use of "The East is Red" was (Yang 1997: 1157–1158). Cui Jian 崔健 (1961–), China's first rock star in the1980s, makes frequent use of the sun as an established symbol. In one of his first songs, 艰难行 *A difficult path*, he ends a long list of calls not to give up even in spite of difficulties—slow hope—with the phrase "The radiance of the sun symbolizes our tomorrow!" 太阳的万丈光辉象征着明天. In 出走 *Leaving*, he begins: "The sun is rising, my eyes open again" 太阳爬升来我两眼又睁开. Yet, the refrain asks: "How often a day does the sun shine on my head, but in my heart I am still depressed?" 多少次太阳一日当头, 可多少次心中一样忧愁 (Steen 1996: 79).[8]

Over time, then, the old and well-established optimism, associated with the sun and its powerful radiance, is fragmented, even shattered. With Cui Jian's 这儿的空间 *This space*, published in 1991, which describes a love relationship become stagnant, faith in the sun is turned malignant. The lyrics end: "only the fire in the breast and the sweat on the body, are the real sun and the real spring water" (这胸中的火, 这身上的汗; 才是真的太阳, 真的泉水). This hopeless vocabulary is expanded in a song never officially released but performed several times in the late 1980s—and, significantly, one of the hits of the demonstrators on Tiananmen Square in 1989—entitled *A Piece of Red Cloth*—块红布 (Cui 2010).[9]

> That day you used a piece of red cloth
> To blindfold my eyes and cover up the sky
> You asked me what I had seen
> I said I saw happiness (辛副)
>
> This feeling really made me comfortable (舒服 *shufu*)
> Made me forget I had no place to live

You asked where I wanted to go
I said I want to walk your road (要上你的路)

I couldn't see you, and I couldn't see the road
You grabbed my hands and wouldn't let go
You asked what was I thinking
I said I want to let you be my master (要你做主)

I had a feeling this wasn't a wilderness
Though I couldn't see it was already dry and cracked
I felt that I wanted to drink some water
But you used a kiss to block off my mouth.

In this song, the sun is not visible, it is only implicitly there, with its withering and drying capacities, and the need, therefore, to blindfold the eyes. These elements do not occur, in the original song of praise for Mao. Yet, not unlike there, the sun remains the guide. It shows the road and leads the way, it promises happiness and appears as a savior, as one has no place to live—slow hope. While Cui Jian openly describes the pain, the suffering, the oppression from a drying and withering master, he admits to his own complicity in the process of subjugation: isn't he happy and comfortable (舒服 *shufu*) in the blinding, forceful embrace of his "master," does not he like to feel the warmth of his hands, his kiss? The song may be read, on the surface, as a love song, but it turns out to be a political song as well, speaking about a blind youthful love for Mao. In Cui's case, the scorching sun turns out to be much less a savior bringing happiness than a dangerous master who inflicts wounds, thus putting his people not *out of* but *into* crisis. The ambiguities of the text are captured musically, as well. In order to illustrate the dangerous qualities of his embrace with the sun, Cui uses his voice in a manner constricted to the point that he is producing a kind of quavering rasp (Jones 1992: 140/141; Lee 1995: 97), in a mannerism he had already used in *This space* where the "real sun" 真的太阳, too, is presented in coarse, chopped-off articulation. This performative style contrasted quite crassly with those pop and rock versions of the old revolutionary songs praising the sun which began flooding the Chinese music market just around the same time.

Chinese writer Wang Shuo 王朔 (1958–) had once called the Cultural Revolution "a rock'n roll concert with Mao as top rocker and the rest of the Chinese as his fans" (Huot 2000: 59). A reconfiguration by painter Zhu Wei 朱伟 (1966–) of Mao as Cui Jian, complete with blindfold in red cloth, as no. 16 of his *China Diary* 中国日记十六号 (1995–2002), illustrates precisely this: the blazing sun makes its followers blind, but this includes Mao, himself, with whom everyone has completely identified! The piece is a thoughtful and thought-provoking "product of a distinct time and consciousness" (Jia 1996: 5), i.e., the turn to the twenty-first century when reflections of Mao also

became ways of deliberating current concerns—of a China, again in crisis. Mao and his self-doubts are a projection of those of a younger generation reflecting life under Mao—the blinding sun. It is no coincidence that the 1994 film by Jiang Wen 姜文 (1963–), about his childhood under Mao, is entitled 阳光灿烂的日子*In the Heat of the Sun*. These artists realize that under the scorching sun, they did not see anymore, that they became not unlike the blind followers of the sun which, throughout the 2000s reoccur, again and again, in paintings by Yue Minjun 岳敏君 (1962–).[10]

Similar collective self-reflections appear in a painting series by Wang Xingwei 王兴伟 (1969–), 东方之路 *The Eastern Way*.[11] The young man who keeps recurring in these paintings is a self-portrait of the artist, but, at the same time, a stand-in for Mao. Wang paints a rather accurate parody of 毛主席去安源 *Chairman Mao going to Anyuan*, that famous solemn depiction by Liu Chunhua 刘春华 (1944–).[12] Wang thus cites a paradigmatic vision of Mao without showing Mao himself: the clouds above him and the majestic mountainscape at his feet are exactly the same as in the original.[13] While the young man in Wang's painting is cast in Mao's position, he has turned away from Anyuan. In one image of the series, the young man is seen, at the peak of a mountain ridge, a dead end. The dog accompanying him has already turned back onto the one and only path. The young man, on the other hand, is marching on, walking straight into his death. He is blind, as the title of the piece suggests, and this fact, in combination with Maoist rhetoric where "going forward" 往前进 *wang qian jin* (part of the text of the Chinese national anthem!) is always considered the one and only direction one should take—toward continuous revolution, or, should we say, continuous crisis—makes for a very ambiguous message. What would be the purpose of this young man's going forward into his death? Does this throw a light on some of the other deaths caused by forcefully going forward, blind under Mao and the extremists who followed him?

Are these images a sign of (after/in) crisis? To what extent do they point to leftist extremism? What does it mean that in the parody Wang/Mao has taken the fatal decision to turn away from Anyuan—is this necessary in order to "go global" and move into another type of brighter future in the twenty-first century, to give up the old and (slowly) hope for a new sun—to go back to the message of that dramatic poem by Guo Moruo that I evoked at the beginning?

Most of the prints, paintings, and installations by artist Fang Lijun 方力钧 (1963–) are deliberately unnamed (Moldan 2017; Chou 1998–1999). Quite prominently, his paintings contain the scorching, blinding sun. This sun is the attractive backdrop to many of his typical moving and frantically merry crowd scenes. The repetitive individual type who appears in a crowd appears a grotesque masque, virtually faceless and nameless and apparently thoughtless, too, simply following the crowd while the warm rays of the sun are shining on them, their arms raised in victory, their faces are glowing—not only with exuberance but also with scorching heat.[14] As they gaze toward the

sun in the sky—which is reflected in their illuminated faces—their somewhat forced, unnatural grins evoke a sense of collective anxiety. These paintings can be read as a metaphors for the disorientation of a whole population, they capture a world adrift, a people in crisis, lost in space and time, blinded—by the scorching sun that never sets in China and by their own faith and belief in this sun (Zhu 2010). They reflect the enormous proportions that the sacralization of the sun has taken—as powerful and religious symbol of China's left-wing extremism, especially, if not only during the *Cultural Revolution*—and they criticize not just the sun itself but also those who continue to follow it unquestioningly: those who (still) believe in its transformative power—after crisis. The iconoclasm thus goes both ways, against the sun and its believers.[15] Everyone is, potentially Mao, the sun, and the metaphorical sun not only appears to exert warmth and happiness, but, in the eerie colors that surround it, also unease and fear—of the arbitrariness, the excesses of Maoist policies! Fang explains: "My works do not come from nowhere. The changing social reality has exerted an impact on my worldview and my art" (Zhu 2010 cites from an interview with Fang). He encapsulates the disillusionment of a generation defined by the events leading up to Tiananmen Square which symbolizes the climax of the artistic aspirations that built up during the late 1970s (Democracy Wall) and the early 1980s (the Culture Fever mentioned above) all of which collapsed at once with the killing in 1989—not by the sun itself, but by his successor, Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1996)—himself engineer of the *1981 Resolution* that had declared Mao—for his undemocratic and arbitrary acts—a left-wing extremist, as well as the reform and opening and four modernizations policies, all decidedly not left-wing or extremist—but excluding democracy. 1989 thus created a void that Fang Lijun and others filled with a message full of irony—as left-wing extremism appeared no deviation any longer. Fang's work and that of many of his contemporaries, speaks of despair in times of ongoing (not just epistemic) violence, of continuous crisis, associated with the left-wing extremism associated with the sun of Communism which never sets, and which, on the other hand, and quite ironically but also logically, given the disenchantment with the discourse of "leftist errors," is also the beginning of the new Mao/Sun Cult that accompanies the centenary of Mao's birth and that manifests itself in the building of temples and worshipping activities described in *Chairman Buddha*—something which Fang Lijun attacks openly by defacing his subjects as they are running hysterically, frantically, blindly, toward or with the sun.

Fang's trademark use of gaudy colors successfully creates a tension between the rosy romantic cozy-ness (the "comfortable" 舒服 *shufu* feeling from Cui Jian!) of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism—the Maoist answer to Soviet Socialist Realism—which turns out to be but fake. His idea is to show how behind all the seemingly beautiful things, a terrible world is hidden. The beautiful sun turns out to be—Mao.[16] At the same time, everyone, that is, all the monstrous humans that have stood behind or for him are also contained in that sun, that is Mao and everyone at the same time:

this is visualized in Fang's Ink and Wash painting No. 25 (2004) where we see a man from behind, facing the sun and moving back in shock as the sun turns out to be filled by a whole crowd of gaffing faces.[17] The same idea—the omnipresent contagion of left-wing extremism, so to speak—is expressed by Picun worker poet Xiao Hai 小海 (1987–)[18]:

> Yellow River Yellow River
> before pushing the millstone
> We call that spirit/soul that persists in singing of the depths of bright light that we call sun
> and this sun—is primarily composed of you. (Picerni 2022)

Clearly, everyone—you and I—has been deluded, "singing to the depths of bright light" (thus following leftist extremism all the way to the present—when supposedly it is actually defeated). The open iconoclasm of this imagery is quite astonishing if not shocking. These artworks are testimony to an experience of revolutionary culture that is not a sign of a world AFTER crisis but one still deeply immersed IN crisis. A painting by Fang Lijun, from 2010/2011, with its internal title "我愛北京天安門 I love Beijing, Tiananmen," another important song in praise of Mao, cannot but be read ironically. On the surface, the painting shows joyful crowds with balloons, butterflies, and colorful roses, on Tiananmen, facing the portrait of Mao, their sun, in their midst (Cohen 2012).[19] It appears to illustrate slow hope—a future, a tomorrow (明天 the characters of which can be read to mean as much as the bright 明 Heavens 天, where the character for bright 明 is made up, again by sun 日 and moon 月. This character is part of the "civilized enlightenment" 文明 brought by and hidden in the sun in the 1908 caricature fig. 1 discussed earlier). Yet, for Fang, it appears baseless to be thinking about a beautiful bright future, to him, this hope has basically been turned ad absurdum by a sun that never sets (Cohen 2012: 6.05–7.05). His reading comes close to one proffered by Bei Dao 北岛 (1949–), one of the "obscure poets" of the early Democracy Wall period (1979–1983). In a poem titled *Tomorrow*, *No* 明天, 不 he argues that "He who cherishes hope (i.e. is expecting something good to happen), is a criminal" 谁期待, 谁就是罪人 (Bei 1991: 30). Paradoxically, it is the never-ending brightness of the sun, which is here perceived as the problem, the real crisis. The scorching sun becomes synonymous with the crisis, the disaster, and the darkness that left-wing extremism has brought to China. Working on the ensuing despair as do these artists—thus keeping the wounds open that this sun is burning—can have a healing effect (and thus bring back slow hope): Gu Cheng 顧城 (1956–1993), in a short poem that has become famous, entitled *A Generation* (一代人, 1979), says: "The black night gave me these black eyes./But I use them to look for the light. 黑夜給了我黑色的眼睛 /,我卻用它尋找光明" (Gu 2005: IX). Not for long: Gu Cheng committed suicide in 1993—the centenary of Mao's, the extremist sun's, birth.

The Light of the Night—Unthinking the Trope or: How the Moon (Re-)enters

While more than one Chinese writer has written about the apocalyptic darkness that prevails in the land where the sun never sets, one of the most prolific writers working on this theme is Yan Lianke 阎连科 (1958–), a writer from Henan (the province hardest hit by the 1960 famine—when Yan is still a baby—caused by left-wing extremism, i.e., Maoist policies, in this case, the *Great Leap Forward*). The idea of keeping wounds open by showing evidence of the omnipresence of darkness, which prevails under the gaze of the sun that never sets, is a *basso continuo* in his stories, many of which include the sun in their titles: *Riguang liunian* 日光流年 *The Sunny Years* (1998) is the story of a village doomed by a cancerous disease during the Cultural Revolution: the villagers do everything they can to stop the disease, following the good advice of the Mao, their sun's, *Little Red Book*, but all in vain. *Xiariluo* 夏日落 *Summer Sunset* (2010) is the story of a young soldier, symbolically named Summer Sunset, who commits suicide—after seeing a sunset—the end of the world for him. The novel *The Day the Sun Died* 日熄 *Rixi* (2015) asks in turn what happens when the sun loses its power completely: here we are back to the scene we began with, the dramatic poem by Guo Moruo.

In Yan's writings, the scenario becomes ever more grim, the sun ever more powerless. Himself one of China's most censored writers, Yan had noted, in 2008, that he was convinced that for "those whose writing has brought light to the literary firmament of the twentieth century," (Yan 2008) their "ability to create masterpieces is due to their imagination overcoming the constraints, inhibitions, and wounds suffered during their lives. The energy they produced gave brilliance to works written in obscurity." He continues: "Today, after three decades of reform, opening up and economic growth, the social consciousness has shed … darkness." Yet, it turned out that continuous revolution—the Maoist form that leftist extremism had taken in China—was at the same time continuous crisis: the sun (Mao) and its brightness (leftist extremism) is as much a problem as it offers to be a solution. A few years later, in 2020, Yan speaks of his "despair of reality. Living in this society, anyone with any consciousness must be in a very desperate state…. not being allowed to express the world."[20] Yan here speaks of the anxiety of the intellectual who knows that he must lead the way out of darkness—who must kindle slow hope—a Herculean figure who never gives up, in spite of all the pains, Promethean in that he brings the light, but one who also knows that, paradoxically, this has become much more difficult than before, because he lives, still, in the country where the sun never sets. This is even more so since Xi Jinping—as a new incarnation of leftist extremism—came on the scene, in 2012, to inherit Mao. With his "China dream," the paths to light and hope have been barred, or, put differently, monopolized.

For the generation from the first Chinese Cultural Revolution, the *New Culture Movement*, intellectuals such as Ba Jin 巴金 (1904–2005), it may still

have been easier to believe in Prometheus' fire, and in literature as an effective means of fighting social inequality and calling the masses to struggle as the sun had not yet taken over and become all-encompassing: "我的文章是直接诉于读者的, 我愿意它们广泛地被人阅读, 引起人对光明爱惜, 对黑暗憎恨 I want to address my readers directly, to make them love the light and hate the darkness," writes Ba Jin in the early 1930s (Ba Jin 1932, 1989: 295; Mao 1978: 41). His words resonate with the stage manager, in *The Rebirth of the Goddesses*, who addresses the audience, saying: "Ladies and gentlemen, I am afraid you have had enough of … this dark, black and gloomy world 黑暗世界 *hei'an shijie*" (Guo 1921: 16). Yet, even these early intellectuals already had their doubts: Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936), one of the most pessimistic among them, hesitates at first, in the scene he describes in the preface to his short story collection *Cry to Arms* 呐喊 *Nahan*:

> Imagine an iron house, windowless and indestructible. All the occupants are fast asleep and will soon suffocate. As they die in their sleep, their death will be painless. But if I now cry out to wake up at least some of the sleepers, so that these few people must then suffer the agonies of a death that is nonetheless irrevocable, will I be doing them a favor? (Lu 1973, vol. I: 274)

His friend replies that those who wake up may still manage to destroy the iron house and allow everyone to escape. Lu admits this possibility. He then writes a short story for the magazine *La Jeunesse* 新青年: thus is born the 狂人日記 *The Diary of a Madman*, one of his darkest stories about China, a land of cannibals. The story is told by a madman who experiences his brightest moments—a lunatic—at night: enlightened (like the Buddha) under the shining moon (Mittler 2007).[21] In the early twentieth century, then, the prospect of bringing light appears as still a valid option, even if it is not at all easy (and one must have a certain hubris of blowing one's own trumpet to believe so): one of the first works of Chinese science fiction, the *New Stories of Mr. Braggadocio* 新法螺先生譚 (1905) by Xu Nianci 徐念慈 (1875–1908), resonates with Lu's *Preface* and with the contemporary cartoon seen at the beginning: Mr. Braggadocio flies over China at noon one day. He finds that the majority of Chinese people are still asleep, and that even the very few who are awake choose to stay in bed and smoke opium. Assuming that the sun is not bright enough to wake up his countrymen, Braggadocio tries (in vain, of course, showing his *hubris*!) to illuminate China with his own powers: yet in spite of his efforts to reach beyond crisis, the iron house—China—remains locked, the sleepers do not get up—no hope, not even slow hope, after all (Wang 2020: 137).

Here, as in Yan's *The Day the Sun Died* 日熄 *Rixi*, the question Lu Xun posed reappears: Is it at all possible or even sensible to wake the sleepers? In Yan's work, the night is not really peaceful as during the night, the past (under the bright sun… illustrating continuous revolution—Mao's left-wing extremism—as crisis) begins to haunt the people of Gaotian.[22] The result is

a parade of revenge, of looting and murder that begins at sunset one day in late June, and intensifies as the night progresses—in a manner reminiscent of some of the more frightening paintings by Fang Lijun. There appears to be no hope, the night brings no respite, and the long-awaited sunrise is but "a moment of eclipse" (Wang 2020: 135/136).[23] As a result, Yan concludes (like the madman in Lu's *Diary of a Madman* who realizes that he, too, must have eaten human flesh) in his speech for the 2014 Kafka Prize award: "but I do know that I am somehow fated to perceive darkness" (Yan 2014b). And he explains (in terms that resonate, again, with Lu's madman):

> I developed a keen appreciation of the dark side of our existence. I came to understand that darkness is not the mere absence of light, but that it is life itself. Darkness is the fate of the Chinese people. The China of today is no longer the China of my childhood. It has become rich and powerful, … it looks like a ray of light illuminating the East. But underneath that light is a long shadow. When I look at contemporary China, I see a nation that is prosperous but deformed, developing but mutating. I see corruption, absurdity, disorder and chaos. Every day something happens that is beyond ordinary reason and logic. A system of morality and respect for humanity, developed over many millennia, is unravelling. Life is dark and depressing. Everyone is waiting for something dreadful to happen. This anxious and frightening expectation has produced a collective sense of anxiety… It is a writer's job to find life in this darkness. (Yan 2014b)

In spite of everything, however, and not unlike the journalists and intellectuals of the early twentieth century, Yan remains convinced that he must pick up his brush—even if it turns out to be in vain: "From these shadows I lift my pen to write. … only the pursuit of true art, …can help us find the delicate light, beauty, warmth and love that lies hidden in the darkness" (Yan 2014b). As a result, he has "invented a new form of writing that rests on the belief that the darker it is, the brighter it becomes…" (Yan 2018), another type of slow hope.

Yan concludes: "We hope that light will shine from the tip of our pen as we write in the haze of centralised power…. Each time I don't know how much truth I can tell, but I must not tell flattery or lies; I cannot tell the truth that everyone agrees with, but I must tell the truth that I think I am telling" (Yan 2014a). Yan's truth is to put light into the darkness of contemporary China, hidden from view by the dazzling sun that never sets. This, his philosophy of writing can be summed up by a story from his Kafka Prize acceptance speech. It is the story of an old blind man in his home village who, facing the rising sun every morning, said to himself, "It turns out that the sunlight is actually black—but that's good!" (Wang 2020: 137/138; Rojas 2018). In a caricature from the Cultural Revolution—a time when darkening the sun was a crime—we can see how the painter, who tries to darken his sun a little, ends up having the bucket of black paint poured all over his head.[24] Such ideas form the backdrop to Yan's story, they illustrate its potential danger, as he concludes:

"My writing, in other words, is like the blind man with the torch shining in the dark to help others see their purpose and destination" (Rojas 2018).

The idea of finding more light and enlightenment itself more in the dark night than in sunny days—a clear sign of resilience against the master trope of left-wing extremism—is expressed in an enigmatic 2015 painting by Liu Wei 刘韡 (1972–), a Beijing-based artist who practices a style he calls "post-sense sensibility." For him, art should be free, disconnected from politics. His painting 夜之光 *The Light of the Night*[25] shows, on the one hand, a colorful cityscape illuminated by moon/sun/electric lights and gracefully framed by a generic blooming tree. Liu is highlighting the positive powers (pink coloring!) of night light as reflected in the skyscrapers of glitzy Chinese cities on the one hand and gracefully framed by resilient flowers (such as the plum blossom, symbol of the untiring intellectual), on the other. His painting echoes ideas we have already seen voiced in the early Republic—where sun and moon, too, as well as electric light, stood together to form the brightness of enlightenment. These ideas are also captured in some of the mini-poems 小诗 by Bing Xin 冰心 (1900–1999), in the collection *Fanxing* 繁星 *Stars*, published in 1923: to her, only darkness can provide the space for true reflection:

> n° 105
>
> Oh Light!
> Thanks to your sudden extinction:
> In all this thoughtless writing
> you have saved me the time to really think.

A decade later, in 1933, Lu Xun takes up the subject in *Yesong* 夜颂 *Ode to the Night* where he writes that indeed, he who loves the night is not idle and inactive, to the contrary (Wang 2020: 132):

> The words and actions of men are often different by day and by night, in the sun and before the lamp. The night is a mysterious celestial garment woven by creation, which covers all men, keeping them warm and comfortable, without knowing that they are gradually stripping themselves of their masks …. to wrap themselves naked in this infinite mass of black wool.
>
> Although it is night, there is also bright darkness … He who loves the night must have the ear to hear it and the eye to see it, to be in the darkness itself and to see all darkness. The gentleman moves from the electric light to the darkened room and extends his slouch; the lover moves from moonlight to the shade of trees and abruptly changes his gaze … He who loves the night then receives the light it gives … The bright heavens changed into day, with its hustle and bustle, is the decoration of this darkness… Only the night can still be considered honest. (Lu 2005a: 203)

For both Lu Xun and Bing Xin, it is the night, with its many shades of darkness, where one can find truth. This is the warming light of the night that

Yan's blind man also evokes. In contemporary China, this light of the night has disappeared almost completely under the stifling glare of the sun—and the novels by Yan Lianke show that even the night and one's dreams have become a refuge manipulated by the powers of the sun. They are a clear sign of this epistemological violence and continuous crisis.

As a "lover of the night 爱夜的人," Lu finds himself not "the one who cannot fight, the one who fears the light 不能战斗者, 怕光明者," (Lu 2005a: 203) but instead, as someone gifted with an extraordinary capacity for discernment. For this text, Lu Xun uses a pseudonym, *Youguang* 游光—literally meaning, a "wandering or passing light." This pseudonym has the sinister connotation of an evil spirit in a cemetery (Wang 2020: 132). With this "posthuman" look at the human condition (and here we return, in a loop, to Guo's *Goddesses* and the ominous paintings by Fang Lijun, Yue Mingjun, and Wang Xingwei, on the one hand, as well as *Chairman Buddha*, on the other), the questions of self-reflection, in telling the Truth about the sun, that we have seen develop in the pictorial, musical and poetic readings of the power of the sun, return. The night light/light of darkness (in blindness, for example) that Chinese intellectuals have found comforting and liberating—Yan Lianke, Bing Xin and Lu Xun, Liu Wei and Cui Jian among them—does not always come from moral certainty, but also from unknown terrain—it is but slow hope.

By rethinking the blazing presence of the never-setting sun that we observed in China under Mao's sacralized, and idealized, auratized—but at the same time violent, and poisonous—sunlight (which lasts to the present day, as the example of Picun worker poet Xiao Hai 小海 [1987–]) cited above illustrates: he speaks precisely of those poisonous rays of the sun (Picerni 2022: 292)[26] and thus reconsidering Gu Cheng's poem ("The dark night gave me black eyes / I use them nevertheless in seeking light"), we may now understand why "the dark night" and only "the dark night" can generate a "beam of darkness" for artists after Mao. But we also see the continuities and repercussions with thinking of a time before Mao. Echoing Lu Xun and Bing Xin, but also Guo Moruo, it seems clear in the artworks of Fang Lijun and Wang Xingwei, in the songs by Cui Jian, that the sun or at least its relentless rays have to be ignored if not destroyed. One has to search for total darkness, but this needs to be done precisely in order to be able to see the light again—thus iconoclastically dismantling the sun while exploring the night. Clearly, the Maoist specter, left-wing extremist symbolism, has had a powerful effect on redefining some of the metaphorical uses of light and night in the early twentieth century, while leading back, in the end—with the realization that darkness prevails even under the blazing sun—to some of the tropes of finding light in darkness, developed then.

In 聽說夢 *Hearing about Dreams* (1933), Lu Xun offers the following thoughts:

> Dreaming is synonymous with freedom,
> Talking about a dream does not mean freedom.

> To dream is to have a real dream,
> To speak of a dream is inevitably to lie. (Lu 2005b)

Transposed to the present, Lu Xun who both foregrounds the night and the dream but warns of them at the same time, rings eerily true: dreaming of the light and sun means freedom, but those talking about that dream of light and sun (i.e., Xi Jinping with his "China Dream") destroy that very freedom—tell all but lies. The feeling that, therefore, these kinds of dreams are impossible and ineffective, is probably the reason why prescient Han Song 韓松 (1965–) called his unpublished 2003 novel *My Nation Doesn't Dream* 我的祖國不作夢. Hong Kong dramatist Yan Pat To 甄拔濤 (*1975), in his "Concise History of Future (China) 未来简史," written in 2015, echoes this thought. He has one of his characters, the "Sinister woman," tell her recurring dream to "The Man who witnesses pain," her lover, one who—hearing her out—must become blind (!), as her dream turns out to be the nightmare of contemporary China: sexual harassment, organ trafficking, constant supervision, in public and in private, day and night. While the Sinister woman keeps reminding her lover that what she is telling him is but a dream, "not real," her story is an evident manifestation of the lies behind "*the* Dream" that everyone has to speak of today—Xi's "China Dream."[27]

Criticism abounds. Chinese lawyer, Xu Zhiyong 许志永 (*1973) in a 勸退書 (Letter of Remonstrance recommending Dismissal) published on 4 February 2020, makes the China Dream one of Xi's major mistakes: he writes: "You have a ‚China Dream? Come on: That's plagiarized from the Americans; … you still can't really explain what it means. National revival? According to the standards of what particular dynasty? You have amassed dictatorial powers, and through your policies you have increasingly distorted the market. Now, the nation's economy is trending downwards. You call this a revival/renaissance? You also espoused building a ‚beautiful China.' But that's all just put out there for show; what about the deeply held aspirations people have, to enjoy true equality, justice, freedom, and happiness? … You're no politician. …Yet you remain perversely unaware of your limitations; you actually think you are more formidable than Deng Xiaoping ever was and you have the hubris to presume that you are on par with Mao Zedong." (Xu 2020)

At a time when the specter of the sun is making its comeback, as in the midst of his "China Dream," Xi is trying to take over the position of Mao—there is a lot of criticism by those who do not accept a second sun on their skies. This is why that recent cover of "The East is Red" mentioned earlier, in which Xi Jinping is shown as Mao's heir—and thus appears as a second, a substitute sun—has become so controversial. It is testimony to the fact that, in the words of Lu Xun "to talk about a dream is inevitably to lie." There is a widespread feeling that, indeed, Mao must remain the only sun in China's skies—if any, and that Xi Jinping cannot inhabit the night skies either—not even as the star of happiness, as the last verse of his new version of "The East is Red" suggests.

Xi's competition for stellar status—preferably that of the sun—brings us back to the ancient myth of Hou Yi 后羿, a prodigee archer and Chinese Herculean figure,[28] who allegedly lives in a palace in the sun whereas his wife, the goddess Chang'e 嫦娥, lives on the moon (in a palace constructed for her by Hou Yi, so legend has it—here we have that "bright" 明 pairing of sun 日and moon 月 again!). Hou' s story stands for the ambiguous relationship to the sun and its illuminating powers which thus turns out to be a rather ancient motif: Hou Yi is said to have—after lengthy and fruitless negotiations with the ten suns that had originally peopled the skies above China—shot down, with his bow, nine out of the ten suns. He does so because while the ten suns had habitually appeared in the sky, in an order of one per day, one day they had all come out at the same time, thus scorching the earth completely.[29] In this situation, Hou is asked to help and, after long deliberations—as he originally hopes to bring down all of the suns—he leaves one of them, to ensure prosperity and *happiness* for mankind (the identical line from "The East is Red" clearly resonates). Yi, as the Promethean savior-hero, capable of both destroying and saving the sun and thus, the light for his people, consequently becomes their king, in one version of the story.[30] Stepping in for one of the incapable rulers of the declining Xia dynasty, in this version of the story, he eventually turns into a tyrant himself, however.[31] Having more than one sun, Mao *and* Xi, therefore, is not something that Chinese cultural memory would allow for, but substituting the sun as Xi is hoping—to reign as yet another tyrant, after Mao—also has proven problematic.

While its semantic charge—the ability to bring light, has come under criticism, even as sign of continuous crisis, the sun continues to be linked to Mao—not Xi—and this is especially true at a time when contemporary Chinese artists, writers, and intellectuals are being urged to develop, once again, a (left-wing extremist) narrative that exclusively reflects the bright side of the socialist past and present, the so-called "China story," that everyone must "tell well" (讲好中国故事 *jiang hao Zhongguo gushi*), thus generating positive energy for the future (and this works, for some, e.g., those whom one can see in *Chairman Buddha*, but also the representatives of China's *New Left*).

While emphasizing the presence of darkness under the blazing sun of socialism, the artworks covered here highlight the many horrific elements behind the realization of a socialist utopia.[32] While developing new ways of reclaiming the light in the night, by turning away from the blinding light of the sun, they echo some of the thoughts developed in the early twentieth century: by becoming a wandering light, one is able to illuminate the darkness, for since one cannot destroy the sun, after all (remember Hou Yi!), one has only one way out: to dream a luminous night. This is what one can see in *Chairman Buddha*. Xi Jinping, too, has been trying to make use of this, while Chinese intellectuals have continued to highlight the importance of the dream and the night in resilience—in the spirit of Lu Xun—as the unspoken, and only thus "real" utopian dream—slow hope.

Pat To Yan, in his libretto for the Opera *The Damned and the Saved* by Malin Bång (First Performance 2022) which tells the story of two freedom fighters, Dana and Sara, makes this unspoken dream—symbolized by the enigmatic butterfly that the two women think about while in their cells in solitary confinement and which thus first brings them together—an important motif of hope. The opera begins in an scene of torture that appears endless—the two girls in constant agony. At one point, we see Sara repeatedly reciting her identity number to herself, in a painful delirious loop, making sure that she does not forget herself while being tortured (Y 259123 (9)—I am Sara One). At the same time, we hear Dana in a brief moment of respite: "I see a butterfly, flying over the sky outside the window, I am lucky enough to have a high window in this room, The room of whose existence, nobody knows." The butterfly she evokes stands for dreams—real dreams. It is an immediate link to the so-called "Butterfly Dream" by Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi who relates that he dreamt he was a butterfly and while in the dream he realized that he no longer knew whether he was Zhuangzi dreaming himself a butterfly or the butterfly dreaming itself to be Zhuangzi. In the opera, such butterfly dreams are collected by Dana, and they become the liberating escape valve, as the cancer that eventually destroys the dictatorship machine that rules their country. At the end of the story, under a new regime which, however, has not really turned out so much better (the Hou Yi or Mao Zedong/Deng Xiaoping/Xi Jinping problem—where the liberator turns into the oppressor), and with Dana dead for her heroism, the two fighters meet once more and part, finally, while Dana evokes the image of the butterfly:

> You know what
> I see the butterfly there again.
> *Dana disappears*
> *Sara cries quietly. Bears the unbearable lightness and heaviness.*

Conclusion: "What Lies Ahead?!"—Continuous Crisis in the Heat of the Sun and Resilient Dreams of Slow Hope

As one of the important voices in Environmental Humanities, Christof Mauch, puts it: "Stories of accelerated catastrophe are multiplying. They have their legitimacy." But he also warns us that they do "not lead us out of ecological crises. We are running out of time, but we cannot outrun the very catastrophe that our accelerated lifestyle and actions have caused. We will need to find ways that help us flatten the growth curves that reflect our ever-faster pace of ecological destruction and social acceleration" (Mauch 2019: 18). Against this background, I have set out, in this paper, to investigate the action potential released in moments of crisis and catastrophe—from κατά (katá, "down, against") and στρέφω (stréphō, "I turn"), a term for the abrupt and often

shocking plot twist with which classical Greek tragedies are resolved (Mauch 2019: 5). While catastrophes—and left-wing extremism has been repeatedly called such a catastrophe for China, not least in two *Party Resolutions*—entail danger and destruction, they also provide opportunities for change. A line from *The Damned and the Saved* voiced by Sara runs: "Hope glittered when we were fighting." Taking the case of the perpetual symbol both of catastrophe and of salvation, the rising sun, in China as an example, we can see how feelings and actions are determined, somehow, by the patterns inscribed, not only in our genes, as Christof Mauch argues, but also in cultural memory. He writes: "humanity has … been able to learn from past mistakes. Culture has shown itself to exert a strong influence over us" (Mauch 2019: 18). As the sun shifts back and forth from being a saving emblem of hope to being a scorching symbol of the end of our days (from mythical Hou Yi to the present), the question remains of how and where there still is hope, or put differently, why Chinese intellectuals find resilience to continue to build their dreams.

In thinking about what lies ahead, I would like to end this paper by reconsidering the mottos to this essay, taken from a short story by Lu Xun *My Old Home* 故鄉 written in 1923, and Christof Mauch's essay on *Slow Hope* written almost exactly a century later. Lu Xun speaks of hope as a road, in terms very similar to Christof Mauch. And Mauch echoes these thoughts (without knowing the Lu Xun text) by saying that we: "…need stories that provide us with alternatives to narrowly defined pathways."

In China and other parts of the world, I would add, it is political constraints, often due to (not just left-wing-) extremist policies that play a major role in these scenarios of "darkness." The question is, whether the many contradictory options of thinking the sun and brightness and obscurity in China that I have introduced here are in fact viable roads to follow, signs of slow hope? As we see Chinese worshipping Mao with his sun-like halo, we also see other Chinese attacking the delusive powers of this same human turned sun-god-symbol, while we see them embrace dreams—we see them declare those dreams prescribed by their respective rulers as all but lies. How can this be? Is this not contradictory? If we think of Bulgarian-born writer Maria Popova whom Christof Mauch evokes in saying that "critical thinking without hope is cynicism" and "hope without critical thinking is naïveté," (Popova 2015 in Mauch 2019: 39) we come to the heart of the matter: in China, intellectuals have an age-old model of ideal governance at hand that continues to provide the backdrop to their acts and that builds both on critical thinking and on hope: a good ruler distinguished himself by keeping the "road of speech" yanlu 言路 open. Thus, he was prepared to listen to criticism and remonstration. The *Great Preface* 大序 to the *Book of Songs* 詩經, a collection of ancient poetry—folksongs as well as songs in praise of rulers, dating from about the tenth–seventh centuries BC—argues that "Song/poetry is the product of one's most heartfelt ideas/aims 詩者志之所之也 …." That is why, according to the *Great Preface*, "Those above change/transform those below

with songs, while those below criticise those above with songs" "上以風化下, 下以風刺上." And "….whoever utters such (criticism) is free from guilt; and whoever hears such, will take it as an admonition 主文而譎諫, 言之者無罪, 聞之者足以戒, 故曰風…."

Keeping the road of speech open, therefore, does not only mean changing those below in line with one's own ideas of power. An ideal ruler was (and is) also obliged to those who—within the system, the so-called pure officials *qingguan* 清官; or outside the system, the people—would point out critical alternatives. If a ruler did not do this, then it was "right to rebel" 造反有理 (a famous quote by Mao—who would thus allude to the importance of the open road of speech….but who also sparked, precisely with this quote, some of the worst and most violent leftist extremist horrors of the Cultural Revolution), because in such a case the ruler had probably forfeited his "Mandate from Heaven" *tianming* 天命.

While many a Chinese intellectual has been censored, incarcerated, exiled, and killed for raising critical thoughts (this is why the pure official of old would habitually bring his own coffin to his remonstration and this does not end with the left-wing extremism that Chinese Communist policies entail), their confidence in the existence of these basic tenets continues—or so I would interpret their repeated courageous and ingenious (critical) reference back to the sun and the possibility for renewal, renaissance, and enlightenment. They keep envisaging new (unspoken) dreams and seeing light in the night, in spite of everything—slow hope! The contradictory but significantly critical answers to the sun as symbol in China's long twentieth century suggest to me that there is hope in that Pandora's box that the sun holds in stock for China:

Hong Kong dramatist Yan Pat To, (whose name 甄拔濤 is very meaningful as it describes someone "drawing out" ba/Pat 拔 "big waves" tao/To 濤), in one of his essays tells us that we need to "Keep Walking, as it is the greatest freedom we can experience" (Yan 2019). In his "Concise History of Future (China)," which is, so the author contends, not a piece about China alone, but one that—not unlike all his other plays—can be imagined to take place anywhere in the world (and indeed, Antigone appears as an important protagonist, while Aristotle and Beckett are cited, too), he introduces a figure, called "The Outsider," who carries with him, and to the capital, a mysterious (Pandora's) box! Such (Pandora's) boxes keep re-appearing in his writings, most recently in his libretto for *The Damned and the Saved*. There, the "poetic utopia box" which captures everyone's unspoken/unsung dreams as collected by freedom fighter Dana who first realizes their importance under torture, eventually becomes so powerful that it is able to destroy the dictatorship machine and thus to liberate everyone. As typical Pandora's boxes, then, Pat To Yan's boxes contain all the bad things in the world but also hope, while hope, too, in turn, may turn out to be one of the most dangerous of them all—for those who engage with it. This accords quite well with Christof Mauch's call: "It is about time that we open Pandora's box again. According to Hesiod, after Prometheus had stolen fire from heaven, Zeus took revenge and

presented Pandora to Prometheus's brother Epimetheus. In the presence of Epimetheus, Pandora opened a jar that released curses and evils. Once Pandora had closed the container, however, the one thing that was left inside was elpis (ἐλπίς), the spirit of hope. After the release of ecological curses, it is high time to get back to what is left at the bottom of Pandora's jar" (Mauch 2019: 38).

What I hope to have shown here, is how the Chinese Communist Party, Mao, and the sun as metaphor for his leftist extremism, are situated and performed as an object/idea/metaphor far beyond the ordinary—one that is and has been used as a transformative metaphor both after and in crisis at the same time throughout China's long twentieth century. The continuous repetition and use of this object/idea in China's intellectual discourse as well as in popular practice can be seen as a form of (violent) sacralization, by means of which this object/idea is made to symbolize something much bigger than itself, and potentially calling for action. It is my contention that as such it is one of the most important elements in the realm of revolutionary culture to be experienced throughout the long twentieth century. On the one hand, it was part of the mission of those who attempted to revolutionize culture, while at the same time, it gave intellectuals a voice throughout this period—both in reaffirming and in resisting the trope—and thus it shows how art and culture have transformed throughout the long twentieth century engaging different types of (cultural) revolutions, dreaming the night and thinking it bright, all conducted in the name of enlightenment. The sun as object/idea and metaphor continues to function as a resilient element of slow hope, in spite of in times of continuous crisis that are continually determined by new waves of (perhaps not just leftist) extremism in the future.

Notes

The online resources (images and videos) have been archived in the (Digital Archive of Chinese Studies at CATS, Heidelberg), see the Citation Repository https://www.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/boa/digital_resources/dachs/citation_en.html.

1. The quote is taken from (Lu 1923: 110–111). For the English translation, see (Lu 1980: 101).
2. Mauch (2019: 37).
3. I have analyzed the earlier periods in detail elsewhere, e.g. in Mittler (2019 and 2023).
4. For an elaborate discussion of this Chinese "Renaissance self-fashioning" see (Thomas Maissen & Barbara Mittler 2018).
5. In Mittler (2012), two entire chapters are devoted to the many remediatizations of this song (chapter 2) and the sun motive (chapter 5) in music and the arts.
6. This occurs in a song written on the day of Mao's death, 9.9.1976, Fu Lin 付林 (1946–), entitled "The sun is the reddest, Mao is the dearest 太阳最红毛主席最亲."
7. For musical examples see, e.g., Mittler (2012)/Online Exhibit: https://projects.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/continuousrevolution/main.php?part=1&chapter=2&media=7. For the effects of the Sun Fever, more generally, see Mittler

(2012)/Online Exhibit: https://projects.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/continuousrevolution/main.php?part=3&chapter=5# (esp. ill. 5.77ff).

8. Similarly, positive associations with the sun are to be found in the song "Sun" *Taiyang* 太阳 by the rock group Tang Dynasty *Tangchao*. Their song keeps asking "Sun, where are you?"—but it is asking for the sun, after all (Steen 1996: 169).
9. A translation and interpretation of *This Space* is given in (Steen 1996: 119–121). The negative imagery now associated with the sun is continued in *Duishi* 对视 *Staring at each other* from the same album. Here, it is not the morning sun which rises, but the evening sun which sets (Steen 1996: 121/122) which plays the decisive role. The song *A Piece of Red Cloth* has been released and published several times since the 1990s and can today be bought on CD without problems.
10. See, e.g., a series of images all called Sun, e.g., from 2002 http://www.artnet.com/artists/yue-minjun/the-sun-NkjwJOtASuhIULrHTp0L8Q2 & 2001 http://www.artnet.com/artists/yue-minjun/sun-CqYJhbVawjNqX0axjbRK9g2.
11. Some images from this series can be seen here: Mittler (2012)/Online Exhibit: http://projects.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/continuousrevolution/main.php?part=3&chapter=5&setname=5.27.
12. For this painting, see Mittler (2012)/Online Exhibit: http://projects.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/continuousrevolution/main.php?part=3&chapter=5&setname=5.1.
13. Yue Minjun 岳敏君 (1962–) has an even more radical version of this, where Mao is left out altogether: http://www.artnet.com/artists/yue-minjun/chairman-mao-going-to-an-yuan-maozhuxiquanyuan-i2dMuhDP6O4rwUJ7PkOJXA2.
14. See, e.g., Fang Lijun 2005.11.11, https://wikioo.org/paintings.php?refarticle=AQQ82J&titlepainting=2005.11.11&artistname=Fang%20Lijun; https://en.zhongart.it/artisticontemporaneicinesi/FANGLIJUN?pgid=jwlxjtb8-2005.11.11_8. Fang Lijun 2015春 (Spring) -2016秋 (Automne), Oil on Canvass, 250x360cm https://freewechat.com/a/MjM5NTU3MzQ0NA==/2652663310/1. Fang Lijun 2005.06.23, http://www.culturaitalia.it/opencms/en/contenuti/eventi/Fang_Lijun__life_and_death_intertwined.html?language=en&tematica=Tipologia&selected=3. Fang Lijun (Spring 2011), https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/biennale-chengdu-ausgebuext-aus-der-schule-des-kommunismus-11516456/irrtum-und-dekadenz-sind-auch-11516498.html. Fang Lijun (2013–2015), http://www.artnet.de/k%C3%BCnstler/fang-lijun/2013-2015-KTWX5ZuFoZKnk00_8AXfNw2 or https://freewechat.com/a/MjM5NTM4MzMyMQ==/2650244824/1. Fang Lijun方 力钧 (1963–) 8.2014 春夏Spring-Été, http://www.artnet.de/k%c3%bcnstler/fang-lijun/2014chunxia-bumianyouhua-BOMJ_w-Cpfw7Q0d0hQ0NZA2.
15. See, e.g., Fang Lijun (1997) no. 8, https://wikioo.org/paintings.php?refarticle=AQQ82L&titlepainting=1997++No++8++&artistname=Fang+Lijun. Fang Lijun (Spring 2009), https://www.zhongartinternational.com/work/Primavera2009_c77c225d-666c-4526-8c45-482d0d6978b3; Fang Lijun 2005.6.24 https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/41614/fang-lijun/.

16. Fang Lijun (Spring 2008), http://www.artnet.com/artists/fang-lijun/2008-spring-1kSRlgQabJRHxNVnASo-3w2; Yue Minjun has a similar motif, playing in the big brother grinning at us again with the identification with Mao and everyone's self: Title: Untitled (Smile-ism No.8), 2006, http://www.artnet.com/artists/yue-minjun/untitled-smile-ism-no8-2006-wO3zSybvJYZqEwDW9soEgw2.
17. Fang Lijun Ink and Wash Painting (2004) no. 25, 38.1 x 44.1 cm, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/108390?artist_id=26839&page=1&sov_referrer=artist. This develops from Fang Lijun Ink and Wash Painting (2004) no. 3, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/108387.
18. The poem appears in the collection (Xiao Hai 2017: 214). For a thorough discussion, see (Picerni 2022, 282–285). He juxtaposes the poem with its intertext, by Haizi which uses the moon instead of the sun as the important element of hope—we will come back to it.
19. These details are taken from a conversation by Andrew Cohen with Fang Lijun, see (Cohen 2012: 6.05–7.05). At 6:58 Fang says: "Even crying and laughing had to be done according to the rules."
20. Yan Lianke's quotes are taken from (Xie 2020).
21. For an interpretation that deliberates this motif of the lunatic enlightened visionary suffering cannibalism, see (Mittler 2007).
22. In *My Reality, My-isms/convictions* 我的现实,我的主义, Yan explains, "What you think about during the day gets etched into your bones, so that after you fall asleep at night, you continue to think about what you thought about when you were awake, and you try to execute those thoughts in your dreams" (Yan 2011: 16).
23. The following is very much indebted to David Wang's amazing work. I have benefited enormously from his analysis and all I do here is add examples from other artistic fields to contextualize further his brilliant literary analysis.
24. See Mittler (2012)/Online Exhibit: https://projects.zo.uni-heidelberg.de/continuousrevolution/main.php?part=1&chapter=2&img=48.
25. Liu Wei 夜之光 The Light of the Night 2015, http://www.artnet.de/künstler/liu-wei/yezhiguang-light-of-the-night-Lv8te848ri8ceNophUPDLA2.
26. Compare, for example, the phrase 太阳毒照 (the poisonous rays of the sun) in Xiao Hai's poem entitled "This great Fatherland" 这很好祖国 (see Xiao Hai 2017: 158–162). For a thorough discussion, see (Picerni 2022, here 292).
27. The sinister girl's dream is told in Scene 3, entitled "A Dream of China." It ends with these words: "It's not real. / I don't believe it's real. /It's only a dream" (From the script: Yan 2015/2023). In writing these paragraphs, I have much profited from David Wang's analysis (e.g., Wang 2020: 137).
28. Mao Dun, one of the protagonists in the *New Culture Movement*, makes Hou Yi into such a figure. See (Masako 1995: 241–242).
29. This is roughly the story, related in the *Huainanzi*, see (Masako 1995: 239).
30. This second version can be seen in the *Chuci*, cf. Masako (1995: 240 & 248).
31. For the historical backing of his activities, see (Masako 1995: 247), quoting, for example, from the *Zuozhuan* (Ibid. 248–249).
32. Wang (2020: 139–141) discusses *All the Nights in the World* 世界上所有的夜晚 (2005) by Chi Zijian 子建 (b. 1964), but one could find myriads of other examples for this critical trope, notably in the work of controversial nobel laureate Mo Yan 莫言 (1955–), for example.

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