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in Modern China

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**Prasenjit Duara**

Local Worlds: The Poetics and Politics of the  
Native Place in Modern China

**T**he modern preoccupation with the hometown or native place (*guxiang*, *xiangtu* in Chinese) is a significant component of the modern representation of the local or the regional (*xiangtu*, *difang*). During the first half of the twentieth century the local—embodied particularly in the native place—was pervasively, though not only, represented as a site of authentic values of a larger formation, such as the nation or civilization. This representation of the local as authentic was frequently dramatized by the threat of ascendant capitalist, modern, and urban values. At the same time nationalism requires a realm of authenticity that it seeks to protect from the corrosive and homogenizing forces of capitalism. The problem of authenticity—which of course goes beyond the local—pervades the global discourse of the modern and represents the *central area of tension in the epochal nexus between nationalism and global capitalism* roughly during the first eighty years of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup>

As the local becomes globally a focus of cultural authenticity, its discourse appears in a variety of media. In twentieth-century China we see its production in such disciplines as anthro-

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pology, folklore studies, geography, local histories, and native place literature; in such visual representations as the woodblock print, landscape art, the postcard or calendar; and partially in political practices such as the rural reconstruction movements and Maoist populism. We may think of the local produced by these disciplines and practices as a type of knowledge—a genre—that temporalizes this space as belonging to another time (different from that of the reader or viewer).<sup>2</sup> Often this time corresponds to the cycles of nature, and the authenticity of the local emerges from this naturalization of space or from some other form of primordialism. In this genre the local becomes an authentic and (heretofore) enduring object to be investigated, restored, and/or reformed. It is therefore subject to a politics whose complex contestations are disclosed through analysis of the historical reception of these texts and practices. In the first half of this essay I examine the interdisciplinary production of the local and the tensions within. In the latter half I examine a native place novel from Manchukuo (1932–45) in Northeast China and the political history of its reception until the present.

In our understanding of the local or regional in modern China, the local is typically seen to have been politically and culturally incorporated into the national. We first saw this in Joseph Levenson's notion of the museumification of the local within the spectacle of the nation or, more recently, in historical arguments that view the local as incorporated into a system of variations regulated by nationalist ideology (see Bryna Goodman, for example). Although national incorporation of the local is undeniable, I prefer to see it as one factor or phase in a wider *process* of the formation of the local. Consider three aspects of this process.<sup>3</sup>

First, what was the historical role of the local in the empire, and what kind of relationship can we expect between the historical and the contemporary (1900–49)? Astonishingly little is written about late imperial perceptions of the locality. Recently, however, Kishimoto Mio has provided an insightful introduction to the problem. Examining the notion of *fengsu* (local custom) during the Ming-Qing transition (sixteenth to seventeenth centuries), she notes that statesmen such as Gu Yanwu and Wang Fuzhi who had different views on the problem of local autonomy (the *fengjian-junxian* debate) shared a notion of a locality as having distinctive characteristics and customs. But the distinctiveness of the locality did not yield a conception of irreducible value embedded in the modern notion of culture or Kultur or, as we shall see, in homeland writings. Rather, whether by means of state

leadership for Wang or of the local Confucian elite for Gu, the *su* (customs) of the locality would have to be transformed (*jiaohua*) and revitalized by the example of moral leadership (*feng*) of upright men. Good *fengsu* was represented by people who led simple and honest lives, though neither ignorance nor poverty was acceptable in the name of simplicity. For both Gu and Wang, *fengsu* had declined terribly in their times (seventeenth century) when urbanization, social division, and commodification had eroded the simple but stable life of village society. In Gu's view the decline of *fengsu*, which was comparable to the moral decline during the barbarian invasions of the Wei-Jin period, represented the decline not simply of a dynasty but of a civilizational order (*wang tianxia*).<sup>4</sup> To this orthodox Confucian view, which saw the locality less as a source of value than as the index of this value and object of cultivation, we might need to counterpose the vernacular and local traditions that celebrated the popular upholders of justice against corrupt government and elites. Although the morality here (*zhongyi*) also derived from Confucianism, it was thoroughly interwoven with popular and subaltern cultural traditions. I am not competent to judge the extent to which this countertradition located an irreducible value in the locality, but the twentieth-century historical and literary celebration of the locality derived, as we shall see, great inspiration from it.

Second, while the Republican era (1912–49) was dominated by the growing ideological hegemony of nationalism, it was characterized by the reality of weak political control. The nation-state was forced not only to grant substantial *de facto* autonomy politically and economically but also to tolerate alternative discursive and ideological defenses of the local against the nation, such as the rural education movement of Liang Shuming and others, or the federalist movement.

Finally, in terms of process, it was not only the national that sought to appropriate the local. The local must be viewed within a field of multiple forces (imperialism, transnational cultural ideologies, social networks, capital, and local resistance itself) contending to appropriate its meaning and resources both during the Republic and later. Viewed as such, the local is released from a naturalistic fixity within the nation and can be treated as process. The local is not a fixed reality distinct from the different forces that seek to stabilize its meaning at any time, nor is its meaning unchanging over time. For the purposes of this essay, the most significant dimension in the modern representation of the local is the struggle over its appropriation

by wider forces such as nationalism(s) and imperialism(s) and the effort to locate its meaning beyond their reach.



In both Chinese and Japanese the signifiers *native place studies or literature* (*kyōdo kenkyū* [J]; *xiangtu yanjiu*, *xiangtu wenxue* [C]), *folklore studies* (*minzokugaku* [J], *minsuxue* [C]), and *ethnology* (*minzokugaku*, *jinruigaku* [J]; *minzuxue* [C]) circulating in East Asia during the first half of the twentieth century were often interchangeable and, at the very least, imbricated with one another. The spaces their practitioners sought to study—the native place, the village, the local—all belonged to a temporality different from that of the modern city. Sometimes the object of ethnology proper (*minzokugaku* and *minzuxue*) was sought to be distinguished as the study of the primitives of other or peripheral spaces in contrast to the timeless spaces of the heartland (the object of folklore or native place studies). In practice, however, this distinction was hard to sustain in either country as ethnographers such as Fei Xiaotong and others worked in both spaces and the distinction itself became politicized in prewar and wartime Japan. Indeed, it is through the efforts of intellectuals and politicians both to draw new boundaries between these terms and to exploit the ambiguities in them that we see how they came to be deployed in the task of national and imperial formation.

The modern Chinese discourse of the local drew from a number of global sources to engage and reinterpret historical conceptions and sentiments of the local. Among these sources were the works of nineteenth-century Russian writers such as Anton Chekhov and Ivan Turgenev (see their impact on Shen Congwen);<sup>5</sup> the anthropological writings of James Frazer, Andrew Lang, and others; and the Germanic literature of the homeland. But the Japanese influence was very significant. This influence, as well as that of Western sources through Japanese translations, was especially profound on the two great writers of the Chinese Republic, the brothers Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren. The brothers had, in very different ways, an enormous impact on the genre—both literary and nonliterary—of the local.

The status of Yanagita Kunio in Japanese folklore and native place studies is much larger than life, and the movement he spawned was extremely influential in China as well. Yanagita had begun the study of the native place in order to salvage a people and a locality's way of life from the pulverizing onslaught of commodification, modernity, and state building. It has been sug-

gested that the study of the native place gradually changed to folklore studies among Yanagita and his cohorts around the 1930s, and *native place* became a metonym for Japan as a whole.<sup>6</sup> Thus the irreducibility of the local (in the face of state building) metamorphosed into the irreducibility of the national. Some believe that in this way Yanagita distinguished and rescued Japanese folklore from the dominant, imperialistic folklore studies pursued in the West by scholars such as Frazer and Lang that emphasized evolutionism and the comparative method. For Yanagita the object of investigating the folklore of a society was not to probe the survival of barbarisms (and thus participate in an evolutionary scheme for cultures); it was a means to understand the history of a people's cultural ethos in order to solve their present problems.<sup>7</sup> He thus employed native ethnology to critique the notion of civilizational progress embedded in history. The emphasis on spiritual, subjective cultural traditions—the search for a nation's “collective doubt lurking beneath their hearts”—thus led him to focus on the special characteristics of each country's folklore as a manifestation of its interior and authentic life.<sup>8</sup>

During the early 1920s, when Zhou Zuoren was involved in the folklore studies journal *Geyao* [Folksong], he was perhaps more impressed by the evolutionism of British anthropologist James Frazer than by Yanagita Kunio, whose work became much more important for him later (even though he was well aware of it and had acquired all of Yanagita's work and every volume of *Kyōdo Kenkyū* since its appearance in 1914). He believed that much of contemporary folklore was a barbaric remainder from ancient times and drew on Frazer's notion of primitive magic to criticize both the Confucian tradition and especially Daoism as a survival from primitive thought.<sup>9</sup> Yanagita's work began to dominate his ideas from the second half of the 1920s, particularly after he witnessed the violence of national revolution (1925–27). As he turned more and more to Yanagita's writings, Zhou came to see in folklore the spirit of a people that existed outside the orthodox historical records and state forms. During this later phase he explored such themes as the popular cult of the mother goddess, Wushenglaomu, and the Daoist doctrine of forgiveness and understanding, *liangjie*, which he understood as an aspect of *renqing*, the popular and historical Chinese conception of human sentiment underpinning the social order. Zhou began to perceive folklore from a sympathetic perspective akin to cultural anthropology and to understand it as a history of a people's spiritual life.<sup>10</sup> Just as Yanagita critiqued state Shinto and regarded village shrines as the true basis of national cul-

ture, so did Zhou model the idea of popular Daoism and shamanism as the cultural foundation of the nation and an alternative to Confucianism, which was the culture of the elite and bureaucracy.<sup>11</sup>

As early as 1923 Zhou wrote “Locality and Literature,” in which he urged contemporary writers not to yield to the abstract and homogenizing tendency in literature but to retain the plurality and creative energy inherent in local traditions and history. Citing Friedrich Nietzsche, he urged the new generation of writers, especially in his native Zhejiang, to be “loyal to the land,” because the locality (*fengtu*) had the power to nourish the character of the “sons of the land.” “Only when the breath of the soil and the flavor of the earth penetrates their veins and finds expression in their writing, can we have authentic thought and literature.” We also see in Zhou a particularly clear expression of the articulation of locality with tradition or history. Zhou rejected the accusation that his was a conservative view of “national essence.” He believed that there were two parts to national essence. One part was a living essence that flowed in the veins—our inherited flavor (*quwei*)—which we are powerless to determine but that naturally reveals itself in all our words and actions and has no need to be conserved. The other, dead part included those morals and customs of the past inappropriate and unnecessary to the present. He hoped that a new national literature could have the capaciousness to give play to the special, historical character of the region.<sup>12</sup>

However, just as in Yanagita’s case, it is also possible to interpret Zhou’s concern with the local as effectively preserving existing power relationships. According to Harry Harootunian, Yanagita’s native ethnology became a means “to preserve older forms of relationships and practice before their elimination (amidst rural ruin) as a necessary condition for seeking a solution to the question of division, fragmentation and conflict.”<sup>13</sup> Japanese native ethnology sought to combat conflict by offering an image of naturalized folk custom tied to a timeless place beyond mere history. Zhou Zuoren’s New Village movement of the 1920s, inspired by the Japanese utopian-socialist new village movement, had sought to build a community based on indigenous notions of self-help and personal ethical cultivation. Through this movement Zhou sought to avoid the struggles and bloodshed associated with revolutionary, particularly communist, movements. According to Ozaki Fumiaki the New Village movement advocated by Zhou initially had much appeal for the youth in the 1920s; but the practical difficulties of implementing its goals together with the growing attractiveness of Bolshe-

vism and eugenics made such a movement appear impractical and retrograde, and it lost favor among the young.<sup>14</sup> Thus in both Yanagita and Zhou we see a duality: to find in the local a source of authentic value and protect it (Zhou's "living essence") from the deprivations of capitalist modernity and state-building; at the same time, however, this very project of identity—the search for an alternative, indigenous order—was susceptible to appropriation by the national and imperialist ideologies.

To be sure, the trend to understand the local as a site of enduring value was not confined to conservative, folkloric, literary, or historical practices; it was secured just as much by the modern scientific disciplines. Indeed, by the 1930s anthropology, sociology, and geography in China were equally involved and intertwined in knowledge production purporting to explain scientifically the reproduction of enduring values in the village or locality (*xiangtu*). The global emergence during the interwar era of a scientific, geographical determinism was tied to German ideas of *Lebensraum* and geopolitics. While both expressions had been associated since the end of the nineteenth century with Friedrich Ratzel and Swedish journalist Rudolf Kjellen, it was the defeat of Germany in World War I that stimulated a popular explosion of geopolitical thought. The critical notion of *Raum* in German denoting space or area but resonating with "thick layers of nearly mystical connotations" combined topography, climate, and other physical elements with a specific people, or *Volk*, to create a mystical unity that produced the state. The idea of *Lebensraum* came to be associated with the necessity of an eternal struggle for a space sufficient for an autarchic existence of the German state both in central Europe and overseas.<sup>15</sup>

Geopolitical ideas rapidly became part of the Japanese geographical scene—both academic and military-bureaucratic—between the 1920s and 1940s. After the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, some leaders spoke of Asia as a kind of Japanese *Lebensraum*. During the Pacific War, geographical determinism was freely employed to describe occupied territories and in the formulation of strategies and policies. At the same time geographical determinism was employed to produce a timeless rural authenticity in the "battle against the urbanism in modern capitalist civilization."<sup>16</sup> Although he criticized the relationship between geopolitics and the totalitarian state, philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro produced in *Climate and Culture: A Philosophical Study* perhaps the most influential geographical determinist argument of the time.<sup>17</sup> According to Susan Daruvala, Watsuji's under-



standing of *fudō* or *fengtu* (a historical Chinese expression referring to the character of a place shaped by both natural and social conditions) influenced Zhou Zuoren's idea of *mingyun* (destiny) through which he viewed the relationship between heredity and environment dialectically. Zhou found in Watsuji an important foundation for his own ideas about place and self-understanding.<sup>18</sup>

This kind of geographical constitution of the local was also beginning to appear in geographical knowledge in the China of the 1930s and 1940s. Jin Qisan elaborated on geologist Ferdinand von Richtofen's division of China into two distinct geological formations in the north and the south. Jin marshaled geographical as well as racial and linguistic factors to argue for enduring cultural differences between the two regions and explain history by means of geography.<sup>19</sup> In turn this north-south division became the basis of scholarly and popular understandings of culture such as Lin Yutang's *My Country and My People*.<sup>20</sup> But more strictly geographical education also contributed to the understanding of the local as productive of abiding values. An introductory text titled "The Research Methods of Community Geography" [*Xiangtu Dili Yanjiufu*] was published by professional geographer Ge Suicheng in 1939. Ge acknowledged his indebtedness to U.S., German, and Japanese geographers, particularly Sasaki Seiji. Indeed, the Japanese title of Sasaki's work is virtually identical to Ge's Chinese. It is no small irony that Ge wrote this work biding time in his home village to which he had fled to escape the Japanese occupation of Shanghai. Ge uses *xiangtu* to translate the expressions *region*, *home geography*, and *Heimat*. His goal was to transform the old geography of the locality, which described various items such as climate, soil, and settlement discretely, in isolation from one another, into an analysis of the dynamic engagement between the environment and human culture in a place. The significance of "community geography" is its comprehensive understanding of the "cultural traits" (English original) produced by a village society living under particular environmental conditions. Although Ge was more concerned with identifying how the environment shapes the positive and negative features of a community, the weighty role in his study of the environmental determination of rural space contributed to the constitution of this space as an enduring object.<sup>21</sup> We shall see how novelist Liang Shanding employs scientific geography and geological conceptions of time to naturalize the local community.

Noted sociologist and anthropologist Fei Xiaotong also wrote a number of

popular essays in the 1940s about the locality and native place that reflected how the discourse of the local spoke through him, despite his own empirical findings to the contrary. The first essay in *Xiangtu Zhongguo* [The true qualities of rural society] is titled “Xiangtu bense” [The true color of rural society]. The notion of *bense* is also very important in Zhou Zuoren, and according to Daruvala it refers to the natural color one finds, for instance, upon wiping off makeup.<sup>22</sup> The expression distinctly partakes of authenticity. The essay has been translated by Gary Hamilton and Wang Zheng, but I shall not follow their translation because I believe they tend to ignore the poetics that is critical to it. For instance, Hamilton and Wang translate *bense* as *special characteristics*. Fei points to the deep-rooted relationship that the Chinese peasant—whom he often refers to as *laogen* or “old roots”—has to the soil, revealed, for example, in the universal worship of the earth god in China and the reluctance to move out of the isolated group or village. Everywhere Fei uses the metaphor of a tree or plant that continues to grow in one place, likening even forced migration (the only kind) because of disaster or famine to the “seeds blown from the old tree.”<sup>23</sup>

The second half of Fei’s essay is designed to show how rootedness and isolation—which he also sees as the richness of *difangxing* or localness<sup>24</sup>—produce those enduring habits and values that, while they can be understood in terms of the sociological distinctions between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* and between Durkheimian mechanical and organic solidarity, are perhaps best understood in Confucian terms. According to Fei, “In our own language, it is the difference between the society of rites and custom (*lisu shehui*) and the society of law (*falü shehui*).” Familiarity develops through a closeness refined through enduring patterns of everyday interactions. According to Fei this process is expressed in the word for *practice* (*xi*) in the first sentence of the Analects of Confucius. In a society steeped in familiarity, we are able to gain a level of freedom where desire arises from the heart and flows with the norms—without violating them. This is very different from the society where freedom is guaranteed by law. Norms are not laws; they are rites and customs that arise from practice, and since they arise from practice, they arise from the heart. In other words, here society and individual develop an intimate understanding (*tonglejie*).<sup>25</sup>

Fei frequently invokes Confucius to clarify the instances he cited of traditional practices, habits, values, and mentalities among the rural folk. In this way it is clear that while the social sciences may, in part, be applied to

understand them, the peasants represent the “old roots” of a distinctively Chinese tradition that can best be understood through an age-old conceptual language. This is possible precisely because of an enduring relation between these people and their space. He concludes the essay with a lament for the loss and abuse of these authentic values by modern developments that is consonant with his well-known call to reverse the erosion of rural communities.

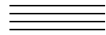
The curious part of it all is that in most of his work, Fei did not find it necessary to either maintain or reject Confucianism as the repository of authentic value, as it may have been for Liang Shuming. Nor, as he himself indicated in the essay and elsewhere, did he necessarily find these rural values to be virtues that should be preserved. Yet he depicted the peasant, and especially the peasant’s relationship to the soil, in a distinctly timeless way. Fei certainly overstated the isolation and rootedness of the peasants, as the later research of G. W. Skinner and others has shown. Even more significantly, Fei’s biographer, David Arkush, has pointed out that Fei’s own research did not reveal Chinese villages as radically isolated communities.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps the force of the discursive need to find authentic Chinese civilizational values in the people compelled Fei to overemphasize the abiding, almost timeless relationship between the old roots and their environment.

Fei Xiaotong’s writings reveal that whether or not the objective conditions for the production of the local as a site of enduring values actually exist, such a notion is ultimately determined discursively and, most specifically, through writing. Literary writing of the native place, then, is not only a significant means of its production, but together with its criticism and debates, it reveals the discursive fault lines of the local as a site of authenticity most sharply. Contemporary writing on the history of native place literature in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) identifies three trends during the republic: the “conservative romanticist” writings of Shen Congwen and the *jingpai* school<sup>27</sup> associated principally with Zhou Zuoren, the radical tradition pioneered by Lu Xun, and the nationalist tradition associated with the resistance to the Japanese occupation of China.

I will take up the “national resistance” strain — perhaps the one most productive of the local as authentic — in the analysis of Liang Shanding’s *Green Valley* below. I have touched on the ideas of the leader of the allegedly conservative and romantic school, Zhou Zuoren, and a great deal of commentary exists on these writers, especially Zhou and Shen Congwen. This school has,

as with Yanagita, been criticized for depoliticizing the locality or countryside and, at worst, enabling a collaboration with occupying forces. But there is also a more sympathetic judgment, which emphasizes their resistance to the pulverizing effects of modern state- and nation-making and their effort to discover, recover, or re-create the local as a different way of constructing the self and its relation to the nation or civilization.<sup>28</sup>

I cannot disagree strongly with either of these readings of native place literature. Both Zhou and Yanagita may have wanted to preserve the value of the local; but Yanagita also spoke of the local place as a metonym for Japan, and Zhou never lost sight of the locality's belonging in the nation. At the same time Zhou also collaborated with the Japanese imperialists, and the evidence of Yanagita's involvement is growing. Their *political* views of the locality were not consistent over their lifetimes, nor was there much consistency within the groups they allegedly represented.<sup>29</sup> My concern here is less with their politics, or even with the politics of the genre per se, as with the wider political struggle over the local as authentic object. I have tried to see how the *writing* of these individuals contributed to the discourse of the authenticity of the local, to the sentimental investment of the village as the bedrock of abiding values. Different forces—national, regional, and transnational—working for different conceptions of political community as much as for different interests sought to seize the object of this writing to make their claims to authenticity.



It can be argued that Lu Xun has written more deeply and interestingly about native place writing than any other writer in China. PRC writers often cite Lu's introduction to a 1935 collection of essays as proof of his view, in opposition to the nostalgic view, of the native place as a site for reforming superstition and backwardness. This is undoubtedly true. But despite his prescient critique of native place *writing*, Lu also could not be disassociated from the sentimental investment of the native place. I want to trace Lu's argument and the historical route to his conclusion to suggest that his is a most complex and productive view of the native place.

Lu's 1935 introduction discusses a group of writers from the early 1920s, such as Jian Xian'ai, Pei Wenzhong, Xu Qinwen, and Wang Luyan, whose stories he identifies as "native place writings" (*xiangtu wenxue*). In this essay Lu identifies two types of writing about the native place, and he is extremely

critical of one style that is immersed in nostalgia, loss, and indeed, death. Lu suggests that the sojourning of these writers in Beijing away from their native places often causes them to dwell on darkly nostalgic memories. Some writers seek to retreat into childhood memories or into the mother's bosom, and others abhor the city—especially Beijing—and indulge in a useless nihilism. Driven out of his village by circumstances, Xu Qinwen can only recall his father's garden and mourn the things that do not exist anymore. Xu consoles himself with the comfort of remembering things that are gone, rather than recall things that clearly exist but that he cannot approach. Lu is sharply critical of writing that is obsessed with memories and incapable of action. These writers have a certain cold detachment (*lengjing*) that produces a worrying laughter and seeks not characters with opinions and life, but death.<sup>30</sup>

While Lu Xun's impatience toward this nostalgic brand of native place writing is sharpened during this last, radical phase of his life, it is not inconsistent with his earlier reflections on loss and death in the native place stories—such as “My Old Home” [“Guxiang”], “In the Wine Shop” [“Zai Jiulou Shang”], “The New Year's Sacrifice” [“Zhufu”], and “Village Opera” [“Shexi”]—that he wrote between 1921 and 1924.<sup>31</sup> I will not engage in a detailed treatment of these stories, but while one can read a message similar to that of his 1935 essay in the conclusions to some of them, these stories are by no means univocal. Taken together the stories examine memory as the medium of apprehending the native place and explore its preoccupation with loss and death. Lu Xun is well aware of the deception and tricks played by memory, particularly when “morning flowers [are] collected at twilight.” This is clear at the start of some of these stories: the narrator, upon returning to the childhood scene, finds it to be different from the way he remembered it, only to realize that it is he who has changed. “Village Opera” is actually structured around the tricks of memory. The adult narrator thinks that he remembers liking the open-air village opera he went to see as a child. As it turns out, what he really enjoyed was not the opera but the adventure of his outing with his country cousins. For Lu Xun writing is the means to both play and reveal the tricks of memory.

In “In the Wine Shop” and “New Year's Sacrifice,” written one week apart in 1924, Lu probes the nexus of memory, death, and ritual mourning. In “New Year's Sacrifice,” the story of Xianglin's widow, a miserable wretch driven to death by misfortune and systemic victimization of unprotected

women, is narrated by a modern, urban outsider. In part because of her victimhood, Xianglin's widow is cruelly rejected by the village as an outcast, and Lu treats her death metaphorically as a communal sacrifice during the New Year celebrations. The ritual thus cleanses the community's memory of the reminder of its inhumanity as well as erasing the narrator's nagging existential uncertainty. Although "Sacrifice" is an enormously complex story in many ways, its view of (ritual) sacrifice as erasure of bad memory is relatively straightforward, and Lu appears to want it to serve an edifying purpose.

Mourning ritual in "In the Wine Shop" appears in a more dialogical mode. The narrator, who decides to stay overnight in a sad, rural town of his youth, runs into an old friend, Wei-fu, who is also visiting the town. Over drinks at the wine shop Wei-fu tells him the story of his life since they last met, and it is one of disappointments and failures. He reveals that the purpose of his visit is to satisfy his mother's wish to rebury the corpse of his brother, who died at age three. Upon unearthing the old grave, Wei-fu encountered an utterly empty, rotting coffin but decided to go ahead with the reburial ritual, "to deceive my mother and put her mind to rest."<sup>32</sup> The experience of loss is heightened by Wei-fu's second encounter with death in the same visit, that of a suffering young girl to whom he had brought some artificial flowers that she had longed for. At the heart of this story is the question of what we do when we come face to face with (the absolute loss of) death. Ritual presents us with a deceiving, but an only, source of solace. We cannot but feel deeply empathetic with this man in his encounter with death and loss and sympathize with his gestures. Yet as the story comes to a close, Lu Xun shows Wei-fu as a man sunk in his past and his failures, with no hope for/in the future. When the two part company the narrator is refreshed by the snow beating on his face as he walks away from the town, which is becoming enveloped in the snow. The simplicity of the conclusion belies the complexity of understanding he has deposited, that is, as Jacques Derrida has said, posited and provisionally abandoned.

For Lu in 1935 the local is not the place to encounter the past, particularly not in the mode of nostalgic dwelling or mourning its loss. He has been there, and he knows writing's memory tricks and the deceiving rituals that cause us to linger there. So how does Lu want us to see the local? Not as the lost past to be restored or preserved, but as the past to be reformed and transformed. The local is where today's peasant and gentry mired in feudalism must become tomorrow's modern citizens. In the 1935 introduction Lu

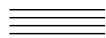
writes admiringly of two native place authors, Jian Xian'ai and Tai Jingnong. Jian gives us a full view of the cruel customs of a village in Guizhou, but he is able to show how the greatness of motherly love issues from within this cruelty. Lu is also full of praise for Tai, who is able to transfer "(the subject of) death and *life* in the village, the breath of the soil (*nitude qixi*) onto paper. There are no better, no more industrious writers than this one."<sup>33</sup> These writers are good precisely because they do not wallow in nostalgia, because they work hard to interest and engage us with the misery of rural life.

But we might ask, Why write about the local? Why is the native place important at all? I am convinced that Lu Xun experimented sufficiently with memory and mourning for the native place to know that the power exercised by the native place was generated less by the place itself than by the desire among writers and readers to (re-)connect with it. Whether because of the tricks of memory or the reader's alienation, Lu Xun recognized that the power of this attachment was generated and mobilizable by the technology of *writing* about the native place. No matter how distant, good writing about a particular time-space can cathect universally. Of Jian Xian'ai's story about motherly love, Lu says that it shows us that "although Guizhou is a faraway land, the human condition is everywhere the same."<sup>34</sup> Evocative writing about a native place can produce empathy in the reader by generating a desire to (re-)connect with the space-time, to recognize oneself in the place. For Lu the native place story becomes a means of imagining a community of common purpose as well as sentiment.

Lu's project of the local is thus twofold: (1) to depict the sorrow and the misery so that reform can be implemented and the nation strengthened. But in order to motivate his compatriots to engage in this task, the writing of the local has to (2) cathect the imagined community of the nation via the locality. It is through the particularity of the locality—in the sympathy and nostalgia for it—that an empathetic identification is built in the reader. If this emotional power is to be mobilized for the sake of nation building, Lu Xun tells us that we have to resist mourning, that overpowering urge to be absorbed by our loss. Mourning, however, is not the only problem Lu Xun's project encounters. For this to work, the writer must also be able to identify or redeem some primordial worth from a locality that is otherwise covered in misery—perhaps something like the mother's love amidst pervasive cruelty in a Guizhou village. Yet a couple of pages down, Lu is critical of the writing of Wang Luyan, who seeks to become human by returning

his heart to his mother and shutting out the rest of the world. The danger with seeking out the source of attachment, the primordial worth, is that this worth can become an end in itself and subvert the program of action on behalf of other forces such as the nation. Note how Lu's own stories exemplify this difficulty. At the end of the hometown stories, the protagonist is often relieved or refreshed as he walks away from the place of the past, but the power of these stories lies less in the endings than in the images of the past that haunt us. The writer who follows Lu Xun's project has to walk a very fine line to transform this attachment into improvement because improvement will involve transformation of the object of attachment.

Thus while there are real differences between the nostalgic or romantic mode of native place writing and Lu Xun's demand for grim realism, it is also important to recognize that both use writing to generate a desire for attachment and identification. Indeed, given the status of the discourse of the local in the modern world, it cannot but be so. To recall, in our analysis the local is the site of tension between global capitalism (which transforms or "erodes" it) and nationalism (for which it needs to be preserved as the timeless source of national authenticity, the source that can grant nation-states the right to claim legitimacy and sovereignty). Lu Xun's project of native place writing reconstitutes this tension within nationalism in which the local must embody some abiding worth but needs urgent renovation to serve as the basis of the modern nation. It seeks a new and difficult balance between the need to transform the local without eroding it, or in other words, to be able to recognize the self in the local without preserving it.



Liang Shanding wrote his only novel, *Green Valley* [*Lüsede Gu*], in the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo (1932–45) in 1942. It is a classic native place novel that dramatizes the tension I have probed in my discussion of Lu Xun and others. While the novel succeeded admirably in producing the local as an abiding source of value, the great unasked question that haunted its afterlife came to be, Of what did it represent the truth? The question was unasked because the successive readings of the novel by regimes and intellectuals, including the author himself, presupposed an answer, albeit each had a different one. Thus they reveal how various political forces seek to appropriate the meaning and resources of the native place—indeed, with such volatility that these forces could well have endangered the idea of the



local as a source of authenticity. If the analysis of the novel reveals the local as produced, the contentious history of its reception reveals the local as process.

The principal plot of the novel revolves around the youthful heir to the Lin family estate, Lin Xiaobiao, and his movements between the village in the valley of Langgou, the city of Nanmanzhan (a station of the South Manchurian Railway), and the primeval forests of the mountains and valleys of Manchuria, which I shall abbreviate as primeval forests (*yuanshi lin*).<sup>35</sup> The entire novel takes place in these three spaces, which are viewed topographically at both the beginnings and endings of their particular descriptions as well as throughout. The topographical view is achieved sometimes by the narrator's location on the mountaintop and sometimes from an aerial view. In the underlying structure of the novel, each of these three spaces acts on the others to produce profound moral and political consequences that are woven together into a complex narrative of corruption and redemption. Relationships of class, community, and gender shaped by these spaces serve as motivating ideals or forces driving the characters to actions that transform the spaces and the relations between them. In other words, each of these spaces generates or sustains a temporality, a mode of production, a style of life, and a morality, and during the time covered by the novel (roughly 1914 until 1931) the equilibrium between the three spaces is threatened by an impending collapse.

Lin Xiaobiao has had to leave the estate in Langgou valley for the city when his father, a modern military officer in the army of the warlord of Manchuria, Zhang Zuolin, was killed in one of the battles of the Fengzhi wars of the mid-1920s. Xiaobiao's mother is forced by her own father to remarry a comprador, or agent, of a Japanese company in the city, Qian Rulong, and eleven-year-old Xiaobiao has to move with them. Xiaobiao reveals an early and stubborn hatred for this decision to leave Langgou and for his mother's remarriage, especially to his greedy and power-hungry stepfather. Despite an early revelation of the strength of his character, in the city Xiaobiao becomes an idealistic but dreamy intellectual with a tendency to lapse into an effete dandyism and cowardliness especially in regard to women. Thus on a visit back to Langgou, he falls in love and has a relationship with a poor tenant girl, Xiaolian. He likens her to the purest orchid in the heart of the forest, contrasting her with the cheaply made-up city girls, but at the time of her greatest need he abandons her.

When Xiaobiao returns after graduating from high school, he considers staying on as lord of the estate, which in the meantime had been managed by his aunt Lin Shuzhen and the foreman of the estate, Huofeng, who is also her not-so-secret lover. He feels a certain paternalism toward the peasants and regards the valley as his true mother against the one who remarried and left for the artificial and corrupt city. But despite the beauty of the land and authenticity of the people, he is also stifled by its feudal insularity. The time is the late 1920s, and a property issue is fomenting unease in the valley. Xiaobiao's stepfather, Qian, wishes to sell some of Langgou's barren, stony lands by the river to his Continental Company so that a railroad can be built in the area. From the perspective of the landlords of the region, such a development would catapult the value of the land, and each lord lobbies for the railroad to be built through his land. Lin Shuzhen is keen on the sale so they can pay for Xiaobiao's higher education, but the tenants and Huofeng are opposed because it would deprive them of their livelihood. Xiaobiao, who views the land less as his patrimony than as his true mother, is confused.

At this point Xiaobiao decides to marry Yasuko, a modern, idealistic sinophile and the daughter of his stepfather's boss, the Japanese manager of the Continental Company. The boss has lived in Manchuria for thirty years and is a devoted sinophile himself. Xiaobiao resolves to return to his beloved Langgou with Yasuko once he has completed his higher studies in Japan. The couple plan a farewell trip to Langgou before leaving for Japan, but unbeknownst to them, Qian and his coinvestor also visit Langgou at the same time to clinch the sale of the land. Before the young couple arrives, Qian and his coinvestor witness a great show of communal solidarity in Langgou. Upon a threatened bandit attack on the estate and the valley, Huofeng persuades Shuzhen to permit the tenants with their families from the ridge bottom to seek refuge in the estate compound while their men defend the estate. Meanwhile the hunter-bandit gang, led by Big Bear Paw, kidnaps Xiaobiao and Yasuko and demands a huge ransom. Yasuko is released, but there is no news of Xiaobiao for several months. While Xiaobiao's biological mother and Shuzhen seek to raise money for his ransom, Qian decides to secure his ransom by selling the barren land. Railway construction begins in the valley. Meanwhile Big Bear Paw has helped Xiaobiao to escape from his captors, and together they spend several weeks seeking an uncharted way through the primeval forests. The ordeal through the forest, during which Xiaobiao develops an immense respect and fondness for Big Bear Paw, be-

comes the ultimate test of Xiaobiao's endurance and his true learning of the secret power of the forest and the secret societies that live in it. When they finally find their way back to Nanmanzhan, the Qian house is locked up, most of the key players are ruined or imprisoned, and the city has been devastated by economic and moral collapse. Xiaobiao decides to return to Langgou, give up all his remaining property to the tenants, and embrace the valley, his true mother.

From the moment of its publication, most readings of the novel have located its ultimate significance outside the locality. This is even true of Liang Shanding's own reading in a postscript to the 1987 republication of the novel, written after he suffered twenty-two years of incarceration (from 1957 to 1979) in great part because the novel had been translated into Japanese. Indeed, the salient features of Shanding's life present the strongest evidence of the novel's historical reception. Shanding was born in 1914 (the same year as the fictional Xiaobiao). With his more famous and older colleagues Xiao Jun and Xiao Hong, he joined the anti-Japanese literary movement in Harbin in 1931 after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria. By 1934 most of the important members of this resistance movement had fled south of the pass, but Shanding continued his writings until 1943. He wrote *Green Valley* in 1942, and in the following year it was translated into Japanese. However, the Manchukuo government censored passages in the novel that implied criticism of the government and its extraction of rural resources conducted under the cover of Manchukuo political pieties. He was also harassed politically by the police after its publication and ultimately fled Manchuria for the interior in 1943. In the People's Republic Shanding was charged in the antirightist campaign of 1957 as a traitor (*hanjian*) because of the Japanese translation and recognition of his work, and as a rightist he was subject to labor reform for twenty-two years.<sup>36</sup> He was rehabilitated in 1979, and *Green Valley* was included in the Series of Reprints of Contemporary Chinese Literature compiled by the Institute of Contemporary Literature of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

In the 1987 postscript to the novel, Shanding depicts it as an anti-Japanese, nationalist work written during the darkest period of Japanese rule. He points to the censorship and harassment by Manchukuo authorities. The communist authorities in the PRC had also critiqued the novel along class lines. According to Huang Wanhua, the peasants are depicted in the novel as feudal because they sided with the landlord against the anti-Japanese bandits

of the *yiyongjun*, or the resistance army.<sup>37</sup> Thus in the postscript, Shanding seeks to persuade the reader that the novel does attend to the oppression of the peasants, but because the work was constrained by its time and circumstances, the peasants could not be shown to stand up for their rights particularly because there was no Communist party there. In other words, Shanding provides alibis for the absence of both nationalism and class consciousness in the novel.

Despite the author's enduring involvement in the anti-Japanese literary movement, for whatever reasons, in my reading of the novel, nationalism is not a major concern. On the other hand, the conflict between capital and community is central to it. To be sure, the critique of capitalism implies a criticism of Japanese capital. The *zaiibatsu* (prewar Japanese financial houses) are occasionally named; the chief villain, Qian Rulong, is a comprador (*maiban*) of a Japanese company; and the Continental Company is very probably the Japanese South Manchurian Railway Company. It is capital that is attacked as a destructive mode of being, however, and no particular form of national or imperialist capital is singled out. Indeed, virtually all the unsavory rich people are Chinese, and the two Japanese figures (Yoshiko and her father) are extremely sympathetic sinophiles. Most importantly, the drama of class conflict does not unfold through the plot of the communist narrative; rather, it emerges from a much deeper anchoring of relations of production and class in sharply conflicting modes of time-space and their moral ethos, between urban capitalism whose temporality destroys a sense of belonging and a place whose naturally rooted culture governs the experience of time.

Within this discursive terrain of the novel, class conflict is expressed through the activities of the bandit heroes of the primeval forest (*lulin hao-han*), as Shanding himself attests in the postscript. For these bandit heroes, however, the fight against social injustice is associated not necessarily with class position but with personal rectitude, resolve, and loyalty, dramatized in the final episode of the novel, during which a bond of loyalty is forged between Big Bear Paw and the heir to the land, Xiaobiao, during their escape through the forest. These values are associated with the moral ethos not of a mode of production but of a mode of being in relation to nature.

A nationalist reading of the novel is favored by contemporary literary critics in the PRC, especially from the Northeast, or erstwhile Manchukuo. It is presumed that this group worked for the rehabilitation of Shanding's

reputation, and there is an interesting complexity in its being a regional group that makes a nationalist case for this writer of native place literature. These scholars tend to divide Chinese native place writing into three categories: the writings of provincial intellectuals in Beijing inspired by Lu Xun who expose the contradictions and misery of rural life; the works of writers such as Shen Congwen and Zhou Zuoren, who romanticize village life; and the creations of writers of the native place tradition of the Northeast, who represent a deliberate and programmatic opposition to Japanese imperialism. *Green Valley* is believed to represent this nationalist tradition of native place writing, which resembles that of colonies and occupied nations all over the world, especially of Taiwan and Eastern Europe under foreign control.<sup>38</sup> Naturally this nationalism could not be expressed directly but was covert and disguised. A proper reading of this writing calls for a decoding of the text.

According to these authors, opposition to colonial rule is expressed in realist techniques and unadorned writing through which the author exposes the grim realities of life under colonial rule. It is undoubtedly true that after 1941 the regime stepped up repression, including that of cultural producers. We have also noted the evidence showing that Liang Shanding was strongly opposed to Japanese rule. After 1934 he was among the few literary figures remaining in Manchuria who kept up the spirit of the Harbin resistance literature in the newsletter *Manzhou Wenxue*. When, in 1937, an anti-traditional group of Chinese writers joined Japanese writers (born or settled) in Manchuria to advocate a new literature, a split occurred among Chinese writers. Those who joined the Japanese writers formed the Literary Records group (*yiwenzhipai*) and were bitterly criticized by Shanding. He satirized them for currying favor with the Japanese and claimed that they cherished the writers of another country but not the rural folk of their own land or even the Japanese villagers newly settled in Manchuria. He urged writers to write about the land that would survive the Japanese occupation.<sup>39</sup>

Sun Zhongtian of Northeast Normal University has argued that the real spirit and parent of native place literature is nationalism and patriotism. The commitment to the locality cannot but entail patriotism because the concern of this form with traditional literature and the very embeddedness of language in a common culture produce an inseparability of the two—“One cannot cut the veins of the culture of the fatherland.”<sup>40</sup> A similar connection is assumed by another authority from the Northeast, Lü Qinwen.

In Lü's view the native place literature of the Northeast written by Xiao Jun and Shanding was deeply influenced by the Russian writings of Nikolay Gogol and Maksim Gorky communicated through the émigré community in Harbin. In Russian, he observes, the word for *native place* (*xiangtu*) and *fatherland* (*zuguo*) is the same, and thus he suggests that the nation is embedded in the very signifier of the locality.<sup>41</sup> Such a view tends to naturalize the relationship between locality and nation, which is by no means given.

While I acknowledge that Shanding was politically a nationalist, it is hard to prove that the novel is overtly or covertly nationalist. One might say that exposing the grim realities of rural life could yield a critique of whatever power structure existed, not only of colonial power (indeed such a critique became a dominant trend in mainland literature after the 1920s). As far as whether the critique of power in the novel is anticolonial or nationalist, I do not believe Shanding reveals a particular point of view. Whether or not this is because he had no political means of expression, from a literary and philosophical perspective these larger political identifications appear to him to be not merely irrelevant but destructive. More particularly, even if the novel is nationalist, Shanding's use of certain popular cultural traditions defies modern nationalist conceptions advocated by May Fourth activists and the Chinese Communist Party. This gap between his and modern nationalist visions returns us to the predicament of native place writing that we encountered with Lu Xun.

Sun has suggested that the power of the novel derives from an aesthetic that creates a mythic power of the valley and people. The evocation of the "ancestral memory" is crucial for the nationalist argument that contemporary PRC critics need to make, not only in response to the party's critique of 1957 but also to the reception of the novel in Manchukuo, where as we shall see, its significance was extended beyond the nation to a civilizational mission. Yet this evocation cannot be allowed to go too far. In invoking and idealizing the ancestral memory, Sun notes that Shanding sometimes slips into a "feudal" mode of writing. Thus shamanism and magic may be part and parcel of the mythic power of the valley, but when Shuzhen is praised for preserving her chastity, a nativist cathexis has gone too far.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, a fuller version of this nativism—emphasizing ancestral, popular cultural elements—yields many associations with Eastern civilizational ideals emphasized by the Manchukuo regime that the PRC scholars have to deemphasize. The predicament of native place writing, which has to be both evocative

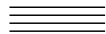
and reformist, for nationalism becomes especially acute and untenable for contemporary PRC writers.

PRC scholars focus their critical ire on the Literary Records group. Led by Gu Ding, this group is identified as clearly collaborationist, and contemporary scholars point to its attack on Shanding and native place literature in particular as parochial, regionalist, and lacking in cosmopolitanism.<sup>43</sup> We will recall Shanding's criticism of this group for their lack of interest in rural society. The personal careers of these writers offer evidence that many of them had engaged in opportunistic collaborationism. At the same time the leading Japanese authority on literature in Manchukuo, Okada Hideki, reveals that their writings were often stridently reformist and their critique of rural society had more in common with the May Fourth tradition than with writings that sought to find an authenticity within the locality.<sup>44</sup> We are thus faced with a complex irony: while this group was personally collaborationist but intellectually autonomous from the dominant paradigms of Japanese and Manchukuo writing of the native place, Shanding, who once had a clear political position, was intellectually and discursively much more part of the world of this writing. The predicament of native place writing would generate tortuous consequences.<sup>45</sup>

Native place literature, of which Shanding's *Green Valley* was the best example, was appropriated soon enough by the authorities in Manchukuo. An official announcement of 1941 stated, "In order to establish the spirit of nation-building (*jianguo*), we have to embody the great spirit of the 'world [as] one family.' We use the transplanted Japanese literature as the warp and the literature of the several original peoples as the weft, thus achieving a cosmopolitan cultural transformation and creating a pure and independent literature."<sup>46</sup> As the PRC scholars correctly note, this was an effort by the state to assimilate the significance of native soil literature within a trajectory that extended from the locality to a pan-Asianist cosmopolitanism exemplified by the new state of Manzhouguo, completely bypassing the question of identity with the Chinese nation.<sup>47</sup> From 1943 the regime aggressively promoted the native soil literature of Manchukuo, publicizing it in newspapers and incorporating the study of "independent" Manchuria's native traditions, simplicity, vigor, and natural beauty in school textbooks. It even sponsored a literary conference on the subject in 1944. Lü Qinwen observes that especially after 1943, writers such as Liang Shanding were forced to rewrite their views on the subject.<sup>48</sup> In 1943, just before he fled Manchukuo, Shanding

published a poem celebrating pan-Asianism that he was probably compelled to write since he had been under close surveillance since 1942.<sup>49</sup> It is little wonder that he fled when he did. Shanding shared a discourse of local authenticity with his political enemy. When the breach between his politics and his discourse was discovered by the state, the latter would surely get him to bridge the gap on its terms.

One might argue that no matter how much political contention surrounded the novel, cultural production in *Green Valley* always implied and invisibly reproduced the region as an ethnic community. The very notion that the Manchurian landscape was occupied by Han settlers and their culture would ultimately override the claims of nonnational forces. This kind of argument is implied by contemporary Northeastern critics concerned with rehabilitating the novel (and its author) as embodying *national* authenticity. For them the ancestral aesthetic was what established the novel as Chinese in response to a more radical reading of it as reactionary and antinational. It is also true that there is a stunning silence in *Green Valley* regarding the relatively large number of minority peoples in Manchuria and their loud promotion by Manchukuo authorities, thereby suggesting that the area was an ethnically homogenous Han space. Yet in its celebration of spatially distinctive features, it was a clearly regionalist novel and was appropriated by Japanese authorities as being about an area distinct from the Chinese mainland. And in its celebration of folk countertraditions the “ancestral aesthetic” could come to serve nonnational, civilizational traditions. The nation-state would thus have to work hard to brand the imagination of the local as neither regional nor civilizational, but national.



By and large, most analysts of *Green Valley* have sought to identify the overt or allegedly covert political references in the novel (such as those objected to by the Manchukuo censors) as the anchors of their interpretations. Also important, especially for the Maoists, is its translation into Japanese—its textual form. Thus the represented events or the text-as-event have been the object of these readings. At this surface level the meaning of the novel is necessarily open to different contemporary and historical appropriations because Shanding offers no coherent or programmatic politics. Rather, the significance of the novel derives from how it produces the local as an object of identification and hence as an object of political desire by the powerful.



Thus I would like to focus my analysis on the representational structures of the novel: the point of view and spatiotemporal schemes that produce the meanings of the text. Needless to say, the referential and representational levels cannot be absolutely distinct, but they do yield different approaches to its reading.

The three spaces identified in the novel constitute the principal representational structures. Each is also characterized by its own temporal rhythm; hence they are three chronotopes. The primeval forest is governed by a natural, cyclical time outside linear history. It is a time of life, decay, and renewal—a return to childhood, to the mysterious and eternal source of life, and to the fount of justice and loyalty. The fertilizing decay of the forest emits a vaporous, mysterious fog that shrouds the secret pact between bandit heroes (*lulin haohan*). They are its human agents who live outside social time but are necessary to justice in the community, to the forces renewing life against those corrupting and destroying it. This time-space also has a distinct gender profile: it is the realm of strong, loyal, and resolute men whose physique microcosmically reproduces the attributes of the primeval forest. Xiaobiao's test of endurance through the forest teaches him more about living than any university can. Women are excluded from this realm. Big Bear Paw's wife, who is the liaison, is always coming out of it when dramatic things are about to happen. But the land itself is repeatedly figured as the mother: the eternal producer of life in whose bosom a child feels a limitless warmth.

If the novel seeks to represent a truth, it is primarily neither of the modern Chinese nation nor of an Eastern civilization. Rather, it reveals the truth of nature, and to the extent that human life in the valley or locality accords with the timeless cycles of nature, it is an authentic life. We may thus deduce that the novel also finds truth in the often suppressed philosophical tradition of Daoism and the folk heroes of the "rivers and marshes" that celebrate this accordance. The importance of this historical tradition in the novel, incidentally, also alerts us to the subtle intertwining of the global and the historical in these representational structures. In the influences of Japanese, Russian, and German as well as the May Fourth writings of the native place we can discern the impulses and forms generated from the global system of nation-states. On the other hand, the indigenous historical and literary narratives substantiate these structures and give the novel its moral force.

Langgou valley, the second chronotope, carries within it a class fracture

visualized spatially as the division between the Lin family compound at the top of the ridge (*kanshang*) and the shantytown shacks of the Lin estate's tenants and hired hands at the bottom of the ridge (*kanxia*). This spatial visualization of social stratification is repeatedly invoked particularly during explorations of the feelings of liminal figures such as the foreman, Huofeng, who as servant and lover is torn between these two spaces. For Shanding the poor folk at the bottom of the ridge lead a life built around the natural, agricultural rhythms, and this mode of life has a close relationship with that of the primeval forest; they depend on the power and virtue of the forest for justice and renewal. The community of the ridge bottom is, however, also tied to the city by the cash nexus on which it too depends, for the sale of its harvest and the purchase of its necessities.

The gentry residents of the Lin family compound, who own all of the land in the valley, have, over the preceding 150 years or so since they settled the land, had a dual orientation. As paternalistic landlords they have looked toward their estate and home in the valley, and as elites who have served in the bureaucracy and the military from the Qing through the early Republic they have looked toward the centers of national power. *Guowei*, the name of Xiaobiao's father, means *defense of the nation*, whereas *Guorong*, the name of his villainous brother, means *national glory*. When the narrator tells us the history of the locality through the lives of this elite—about their roles in the Republican revolution of 1911, the Yuan Shikai presidency, and the various warlord wars—the locality is brought into the linear time of the nation. But the residents of the ridge bottom neither understand nor care about these momentous matters; they can only remember the panicked evacuations during the Russo-Japanese War and are dejected by news of the continuing fall of the local currency under the warlords. When Xiaobiao suddenly decides to leave the valley for a second time to pursue his studies at the university, he addresses the disappointed young hired hands and tenants, who have developed a fondness and gratitude toward him, with a halting and confused speech. The speech is full of such “foreign,” temporal phrases as “historically speaking” and “in the present stage,” and as Xiaobiao utters them, he sees the tenderness of the laborers toward him suddenly evaporate. He wonders if they suspect and hate these words; he hastens to conclude by saying that “the land is our life; no matter who it is, to leave the land is to commit suicide.”<sup>50</sup>

This last passage not only attests to the two kinds of time that *increasingly*

separate the two classes within the valley. It also contains the central tension that governs relations between the two parts, between community and class. It is perhaps here, in the highly complex and contradictory feelings and consciousness of each class for the other, and the even more elaborate attitudes of those classes and the gender fragments in between, that Liang Shanding delivers his most penetrating *social* insights, in marked contrast, as we shall see, to his depiction of urban society. These relations are explored in the direct encounters between the classes: in the romance of Xiaobiao and the tenant girl Xiaolian; in his callous treatment of her and the unresolved, violent swings in her attitude toward him and his family; and in the uncompromising self-sacrifice of the aunt for the honor and wealth of the patriarchal lineage even as she develops a shame-filled relationship with her servant.

Shanding seems to be saying that the best of the landed classes take their paternalism to heart, and even when they scheme and deceive, they may be forced to act in the interests of their community. As for the poor, they can love and need their lord, even though they may know exactly what schemes he may be up to. Once the railroad line has been established and part of the land has been sold through chicanery to the railroad company, the tenants are outraged and feel greatly betrayed. The Mongol Huang expresses outrage at the betrayal by the landlords:

We depend on them, we depend on the land; how can we live without the land? . . . We have nourished the land as we have our children; we have even transformed barren lands into ripe fields, and now we have been cast aside. . . . Huofeng felt a bottomless sympathy for these sincere (*chengshi*) peasants, but he also felt that sincerity was nothing but a symbol of a kind of servility (*xunfu*). Having served and obeyed for several generations, they had suffered on account of this sincerity and also been deluded for several generations by the promise of the “future world” that they could never cast off. Their fatalism and sincerity appeared to be destined for each other. Suddenly Huofeng realized that he too was such a person, and it made him feel extremely uneasy.<sup>51</sup>

This is clearly no pastoral idyll, nor is it simply a false consciousness because for Shanding, as for Huofeng, the sincerity of the peasants has value despite its susceptibility to abuse. It is the quality that Fei Xiaotong called *bense* and that he tied so insistently to their rootedness to land and place.

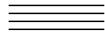
Shanding gives us several instances of its susceptibility to abuse. When the comprador Qian Rulong devises a cunning plan to mortgage the land in order to borrow the hostage money for Xiaobiao's release (thereby freeing the land for railroad purposes), he plays up the virtues of the peasants of Langgou to the Japanese manager—precisely those qualities of simplicity, honesty, patience, communal solidarity, and landlord paternalism.<sup>52</sup> And yet this sincerity—the *bense*—for Shanding is perhaps the only resource with which to build and rebuild the community, as revealed by the episodes in which the peasants resist the bandits and stand steadfastly for the community. It is in the quality of their sincerity—the tension between its virtue and susceptibility to abuse—that the contradiction in native place writing that we observed in Lu Xun is concentrated. The true color has to be both preserved and superseded.

The third chronotope is that of the city, Nanmanzhan. Shanding's social and psychological depiction of characters that belong to the city is perhaps the weakest part of the novel. They are, for the most part, stereotypes of cigar-puffing, scheming businessmen and their obsequious hangers-on; of languorous ladies playing cards and smoking opium late into the night; and of backstreet brothels. But the spatial description of the city is quite striking. Chapter 5, in which the city is first described, opens with a description from a bird's-eye view of the network of roads, electrical and telegraph lines, and points of concentration of business activity and speculation. Between the nodes of concentration those spaces that are not connected are like silted-up spaces, noisy but without purposeful conversation. Thereafter the spatial description itself tends to become despatialized as the author follows the course of electrical and telegraph lines that travel all the way to the borderless northern wildernesses and to the harbor. From the harbor, information can be communicated and disseminated to the dealers and speculators in a single minute.

This insight into the loss of place as a site of reference generated by the accelerating pace of capitalist change (or what is now called time-space compression) is dramatized by his observation of the city's preoccupation with speculative capital, the market in agricultural futures. Manchuria had become a most important grain supplier for the Japanese market, and the futures market includes not only brokers and speculators but landlords and property dealers who drive up property prices with the hint of increased access by the extension of the railroad to such lands. In this market where

speculators and futures traders “buy and sell no thing” (*maikung maikung*), people live in neither the past nor the present, but in the future. For such people the time of the present and the past, which for the author is the time of community and authenticity, is irrelevant.

The ultimate drama in *Green Valley* is played out at the level of its representational structures by moralized representatives of the chronotopes. Authenticity inheres among the people of the valley whose life hews closely to the rhythms of nature in the time-space of the primeval forest. It is an authenticity that emerges from the acceptance of the cyclical time of natural regeneration and is recognizable by a simplicity and capacity for suffering. This time of the locality is directly opposed to the linear time of capitalism and urban modernity (and the nation?), and the novel tracks the corrosive and destructive power of the latter on both the valley and the forest. But this force is also self-destructive as the market collapses and Nanmanzhan is left a ghost town. In the last scene our protagonists celebrate the victory of the valley’s rebirth and the natural principle of regeneration.



We are accustomed to thinking of regions as evolving naturalistically within the political, economic, and cultural formations of states. While there are certainly historical forces that tie regions and localities to higher centers and larger formations for extended periods, there is nothing deterministic about these relationships, nor is it predetermined as to which of these formations the region may be tied: transnational ethnicities, nation(s), empire(s), or civilization(s). During much of the twentieth century the local was produced by metropolitan cultural discourses and practices as an object from the past whose timelessness had to be conserved or reformed. Indeed, the contradictory imperatives on sovereign states (nations and empires) to transform in accordance with the temporality of global modernity and simultaneously produce an authentic, timeless national essence drove these states and cultural producers to fashion the locality as object of both development and identity. Thus even when Lu Xun or Fei Xiaotong sought to employ native place writing for reformist goals, he could not avoid a nativist cathexis, a poetics of identity. We can see the inextricability of these contradictory impulses even more clearly in the Maoist representation of the organic, connected, and harmonious peasant community ultimately unified against the isolated landlord family, well into the PRC era. Both the premise and the

promise of class struggle and revolutionary transformation are to be found in the image of the primordial peasant community—which was significantly dependent on the discourse of the local—as the source of authentic value.

What Shanding's *Green Valley* shows us, I believe, are the stakes involved in the successful, or more precisely, resonant, production of the locality as a locus of authenticity. The competing claims on the locality—as the metonym for the region of Manchuria—by the various political forces derived from the logic of controlling a place by controlling its representation. In the identity-based *polities* of the modern era, control of territory is critically dependent on the subjective production of its space as an object of identification. The local as we have seen it was just such a representational space, and I have tried to suggest that a historical analysis of it dearly needs to understand this representationality. The historical reception of the text, its political life, is the only ground on which we can grasp the intertwining of history and imagination—the reality effects of stories, the fiction at the heart of historical process.

#### Notes

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- 1 Prasenjit Duara, "The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender, and National History in Modern China," *History and Theory* 37.3 (1998): 287–308.
- 2 Thus for the purposes of this essay I shall specify the local in this way: The local is a space that is continuously being reshaped and interpenetrated by political forces through what Henri Lefebvre identifies as spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces. See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford, 1992).
- 3 Joseph Levenson, "The Province, the Nation, and the World: The Problem of Chinese Identity," in *Approaches to Modern Chinese History*, ed. Albert Feuerwerker et al. (Berkeley, CA, 1967), 268–88; Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities* (Berkeley, CA, 1995).
- 4 Kishimoto Mio, "'Fengsu' to Jidaikan—Minmatsu Shinsho no keiseironsha kara mita Soo, Gen, Minsho" [Chinese history in "Fengsu" perspective: The Song-Yuan-Ming transition and statecraft discourse in the sixteenth century] (paper presented at the Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History Conference, Lake Arrowhead, CA, June 5–11 1997), 1–8.

- 5 David Der-wei Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen* (New York, 1992), 281.
- 6 H. D. Harootunian, "Disciplinizing Native Knowledge and Producing Place: Yanagita Kunio, Origuchi Shinobu, Takata Yasuma," in *Culture and Identity: Japanese Intellectuals during the Interwar Years*, ed. J. Thomas Rimer (Princeton, NJ, 1988), 104.
- 7 Zhao Jinghua, "Shū Sakunin (Zhou Zuoren) to Yanagita Kunio: Koyū shinyō o chūshin to suru minzokugaku" [Zhou Zuoren and Yanagita Kunio: Folklore centered on traditional beliefs], *Nihon Chūgoku gakkaihō* 47 (1995): 196–97.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 197. The effort to distinguish folklore or native ethnology (astutely so called by Harry Harootunian) from ethnography (of the Other) is a troubled distinction which maps that between Japan and its colonies. For a long time the native ethnology movement was said to be able to avoid any responsibility for Japan's colonial exploits because of its steadfast lack of interest in the comparative project and, hence, in the colonies. Recent research suggests that despite the official stance of this movement and Yanagita himself, there were plenty of links between native ethnology and colonial, and even officially sponsored, ethnography. Despite the taboo on comparative folklore associated with native ethnology, by the time of the Pacific War, a far-flung network of researchers linked the peripheries of the empire to Yanagita's research center in Tokyo. Moreover, the research in these areas was not really for the self-understanding of the indigenous culture as Yanagita had stressed for Japan itself. Rather, these cultures came to be judged by how close they were to Japanese culture. See Kawamura Minato, "*Daitōa minzokugaku*" no *kyojitsu* [The truths and falsehoods of "Great East Asian folklore"] (Tokyo, 1996), 10–11, 74–85.

At the same time, Japanese folklorists and ethnographers in different parts of the empire inspired by Yanagita coined the expression *Daitōa minzokugaku*, or Greater East Asian Folklore Studies (Asian Folklore, for short), which became a part of the larger ideology of pan-Asianism and its official counterpart, the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere. Pan-Asian Folklore employed the historical framework of the imperial Chinese *huayi* order underlying the imperial tribute system (see Kawamura Minato, "*Daitōa minzokugaku*" no *kyojitsu*, 12–13). Its chief methodology was to establish Chinese civilizational cultures—Chinese, Japanese, and Korean—at the core and locate other cultures beyond it in concentric circles. Needless to say, the center of the core was no longer China, but Japan. The idea was to intensify the study of the folklore of the core so as to radiate the ethos of the center to the peripheries. To be sure, Asian Folklore continued to distinguish itself from the Western methodology of comparative folklore studies. In theory, each of the cultures of Greater East Asia was to reflect its own distinctiveness even as each revealed its connections with Greater East Asia. But a hierarchy was also built in to the idea of distinctiveness because each nationality's individual folklore was tied to its stage of evolution and hence dependent on the leadership of Japan. The characteristic Japanese formulation of combining uniqueness with evolutionary hierarchy was thus extended to folklore studies in order to secure Japan's special superiority.

- 9 Zhao Jinghua, "Shū Sakunin (Zhou Zuoren) to Yanagita Kunio," 198.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 200–4.
- 11 The civilizational critique embedded in the Chinese folklore movement was an identi-

- fiable strand right from the beginning. Thus Chang Hui wrote, “The more civilization progresses, the more degenerate folksong becomes” (*Geyao* 3 [1922]: 3).
- 12 Zhou Zuoren, “Difang yu wenyi” [Locality and literature], in *Zhou Zuoren zaoqi sanwen-xuan* (Shanghai, 1923; reprint, 1984), 308–11.
- 13 Harootunian, “Disciplinizing Native Knowledge and Producing Place,” 101.
- 14 Ozaki Fumiaki, “Shū Sakunin (Zhou Zuoren) no shinson teisho to sono hamon” [Zhou Zuoren’s advocacy of the New Village movement and its ripples], *Meiji Daigaku Kyōyō Ronji* 207 (1988): 119–36; 237 (1991): 67–85.
- 15 David T. Murphey, “Space, Race, and Geopolitical Necessity: Geopolitical Rhetoric in German Colonial Revanchism, 1919–1933,” in *Geography and Empire*, ed. Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (Oxford, 1994), 177.
- 16 Keiichi Takeuchi, “The Japanese Imperial Tradition, Western Imperialism, and Modern Japanese Geography,” in Godlewska and Smith, *Geography and Empire*, 195.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 200.
- 18 Susan Daruvala, “Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967) and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1993), 85.
- 19 Jin Qisan, “Woguo nanbei zhi dili guandian” [Geographical perspectives on the north and south of our nation], *Fangzhi Yuekan* 8 (1935): 55–56.
- 20 Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People* (New York, 1939).
- 21 Ge Suicheng, *Xiangtu Dili Yanjiufa* (Shanghai, 1939), 3–4, 8–10.
- 22 Daruvala, “Zhou Zuoren,” 230.
- 23 Fei Xiaotong, “Xiangtu bense,” in *Xiangtu Zhongguo* (Shanghai, 1947), 3. See also the translation “Characteristics of Rural Society” in *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society—A Translation of Fei Xiaotong’s “Xiangtu Zhongguo,”* introduction and epilogue by Gary G. Hamilton and Wang Zheng (Berkeley, CA, 1992), 37–44.
- 24 Hamilton and Wang’s translation of *difangxing* as *parochialism* imparts a negative feeling; see *From the Soil*, 41. It is interesting that English has no positive term for local orientation.
- 25 Fei Xiaotong, “Xiangtu bense,” 5, 6–7.
- 26 David R. Arkush, *Fei Xiaotong and Sociology in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 145–46.
- 27 This is the Beijing school of writers (as opposed to the *haipai* or Shanghai school).
- 28 In addition, drawing attention to the *textual* dimension—whether in Shen or in Yanagita—some scholars have noted that the nostalgic writing of the native place hinges on the simultaneous “(re)discovery and erasure of the treasured image of the homeland” (Wang, *Fictional Realism*, 250). Marilyn Ivy, in her study of native ethnology and other vanishing discourses in Japan, notes that modernist nostalgia has to preserve the sense of absence that motivates its desires and understands it as the logic of the fetish. The feared absence (or loss) is denied by its replacement with a substitute presence, but this replacement inevitably announces the absence it means to cover up, thus provoking anxiety. See Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity Phantasm Japan* (Chicago, 1995), 10–11. David Wang also finds value in Shen Congwen’s native place fiction that by means of displacement “makes possible the (re)definition of something either irretrievable or unspeakable” and thus enriches what is impoverished in memory; see Wang, *Fictional Realism*, 252, 276.



- 29 Alan S. Christy, “Representing the Rural: Place As Method in the Formation of Japanese Native Ethnology, 1910–1945” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1997). See also Daruvala, “Zhou Zuoren,” and Wang, *Fictional Realism*.
- 30 Lu Xun, introduction to *Xiaoshuo erji* [Second collection of fiction], ed. Lu Xun (Shanghai, 1935), 9–10.
- 31 Lu Xun, “Zhufu,” in *Panghuang Lu Xun Quanjì* [Hesitation: Lu Xun complete works] (1924; reprint, Taipei, 1989), 4:7–30; “Zai Jiulou Shang,” in *Panghuang*, 4:31–45; “Shexi,” in *Nahan Lu Xun Quanjì* [Call to arms: Lu Xun complete works] (1922; reprint, Taipei, 1989), 2:185–98; “Guxiang,” in *Nahan*, 2:80–94.
- 32 Lu Xun, “Zai Jiulou Shang,” 38.
- 33 Lu Xun, introduction, 16.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 8.
- 35 Liang Shanding, *Lüsedé Gu* (Shenyang, 1942, 1987), 206.
- 36 Okada Hideki, “Manshū no kyōdo bungei—*Shan Ding ‘Lüsedé gu’ o jiku toshite*” [Native place literature in Manchukuo—with reference to Shan Ding’s *Green Valley*], in *Nogusa* 44 (1989): 29.
- 37 Huang Wenhua, “Liang Shanding he tade ‘Lüsedé Gu’” [Liang Shanding and his *Green Valley*], in *Dongbei wenxue yanjiu shiliao* (Harbin, 1986), 5:11.
- 38 Pang Zengyu, “Dongbei lunxianqi xiangtu wenxue yu Zhongguo xiandai wenxue shishang xiangtu wenxue zhi bijiao” [Comparison of occupied Northeast native place literature and native place literature in modern Chinese literary history], in *Dongbei lunxian shidai wenxue*, ed. Feng Weijun et al. (Shenyang, 1992), 63–74; Lü Qinwen, “Dongbei lunxianqude wailai wenxue yu xiangtu wenxue” [Foreign and native place literature in the literature of occupied northeast China], in *Zhongri zhanzheng yu wenxue* (Changchun, 1992), 127–61; Sun Zhongtian, “Lüsedé gu yu xiangtu wenxue” [The *Green Valley* and native place literature], in Feng Weijun et al., *Dongbei lunxian shidai wenxue*, 224–35.
- 39 Okada Hideki, “Manshū no kyōdo bungei,” 11; Lü Qinwen, “Dongbei lunxianqude wailai wenxue,” 137–45.
- 40 Sun Zhongtian, “Lüsedé gu yu xiangtu wenxue,” 225.
- 41 Lü Qinwen, “Dongbei lunxianqude wailai wenxue,” 129–30, 144.
- 42 Sun Zhongtian, “Lüsedé gu yu xiangtu wenxue,” 233, 234.
- 43 Lü Qinwen, “Dongbei lunxianqude wailai wenxue,” 144–45.
- 44 Okada Hideki, “Geibunshi ha no bungaku kiseki: Manshū ni okeru Chūgokujin sakka” [Tracks of the Literary Records group: Chinese writers in Manchuria], *Nogusa* 39 (1987): 87–101.
- 45 Okada, who is often sympathetic to the PRC scholars and Shanding, however, insists that Japanese writers in Manchuria, such as Otani, whom the PRC scholars wrongly cite to suggest a Japanese appropriation of Shanding’s writing, actually sought to cultivate a vision of Manchuria independent of Japan and shared Shanding’s desire for a regional literature of the Northeast reflecting its special qualities among both Chinese and Japanese writers; see Okada Hideki, “Geibunshi ha no bungaku kiseki: Manshū ni okeru Chūgokujin sakka,” *Nogusa* 38 (1986): 2–3. See also Okada Hideki, “Wei Manzhouguo wenyi zhengcede zhankai: cong ‘wenhuahui’ dao ‘yiwen lianmeng’” [The development of lit-

erary policy in the puppet state of Manchukuo: From “cultural association” to “literary federation”), in Feng Weijun et al., *Dongbei lunxian shidai wenxue*, 159–61. Okada is perhaps right in pointing to the nationalistic exaggerations of the PRC scholars, particularly in relation to the Japanese writers. But he fails to see that quite apart from what Shandong and the Japanese writers may have desired, their effort to produce an authenticity in the region was easily appropriable by metropolitan interests. Consider the middle-school textbook in the Japanese language, *Manshū kyōdo dokuhon* [Textbook of the Manchurian native place], ed. Oniki Isamu (Dalian, 1935). The preface to this textbook suggests that it is an ideal example of teaching Japanese middle-school children about the entirety of the great Japanese empire. It is also a means of cultivating a love for the region by describing the beauty of the land and its “natural peoples” (*shizen ningens*). Two strains of identity construction run through the essays. One emphasizes the identity of Japan and Manchuria, or rather that their differences are comprehensible within a common framework of understanding. Thus an essay on the four seasons of Manchuria compares the sounds, sights, and feelings of each season with those in Japan, framing both metropole and colony in the same familiar categories of knowledge. A second contrapuntal theme emphasizes the unspoiled, utopian, and essentially natural character of Manchuria. Thus a traveler strikes up a conversation with a young Japanese boy at Fengtian station. When asked if he would ever go back to live in Japan, the boy replies that he could not bear the dirty and crowded cities, the narrow streets and homes of Japan. He also claims to get along well with Chinese boys at school. This triggers a wellspring of emotions (and tears) in the interlocutor, whose mind roams over the vast and unspoiled wildernesses that Japan once was and the good fortune of those who could continue to live so naturally in Manchuria. As the train speeds by the Lamaist tower soaring into the clouds, he envisions the young boy as a mountain goat roaming the vastness of nature. The images are of the vastness and bounty of nature (designed perhaps to attract rural settlers), and the means employed recoup the authenticity of a natural place.

- 46 Quoted in Sun Zhongtian, “Lüsedé gu yu xiangtu wenxue,” 225. This was similar and consistent with the pan-Asian folklore movement described in n. 8.
- 47 Ibid.; Pang Zengyu, “Dongbei lunxianqi xiangtu wenxue,” 65.
- 48 Lü Qinwen, “Dongbei lunxianqude wailai wenxue,” 152–54.
- 49 Okada Hideki, “Manshū no kyōdo bungei,” 30–31.
- 50 Liang Shandong, *Lüsedé Gu*, 75.
- 51 Ibid., 187.
- 52 Ibid., 166.



A venerable Manchoukuo lady out shopping. She is of pure Manchu stock, as is shown by her characteristic Manchu coiffure and her long pipe.

Vénérable citoyenne du Mandchoukouo s'en allant faire ses courses. Elle est de pure race manchoue, comme l'attestent sa coiffure et sa longue pipe.

A Manchukuo lady (1930s). From *Manchoukuo: A Pictorial Record* (Tokyo, 1934), 94.



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- the land of Contrasts -

**Where -**  
Ancient palaces and temples and progressive modern cities,  
Russian cathedrals and Lama temples,  
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The civilizations of the East and West —

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old land, now experiencing successful changes and develop-  
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Advertisement of the South Manchurian Railway Company. *Manchuria Daily News* (August 15, 1937): 558.



"Station-boys in Manchukuo," postcard, 1930s. Courtesy Olga Bakich.



Crowds at Kirin Station. From *Manchoukuo: A Pictorial Record*, 103.