Trauma and Ideology: Scar Literature from 1977 to1983

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Scar literature (1977-1983) was widely recognized as the first public literary movement in China after the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the New Era literature (1979-1989). Although it was controversial at its time, its function and role in both history and literature seem to be well settled and therefore it seldom draws the attention of current literary critics. Most critics mark out the two distinctive features of Scar literature: a narrative style of emotional catharsis (the so called *Qingsu shi*) and a bright tail (*Guangming de weiba*), consisting of traumatic narrative and indications at the beginning or the end of the stories that the nightmare or the chaos had already passed. Without closely examining the stories, most critics exclusively attribute the bright tails as deriving from external political control upon writers of the Scar movement. However, from my point of view this interpretation is not persuasive. Scar literature at its time was more than a merely literary movement. In nearly all stories of the Scar movement, the Cultural Revolution first was publicly recognized as the root of physical, psychological and spiritual trauma for Chinese individuals. The significance of this literature lies in that it is the first place to report how Chinese people acted out the repressed traumatic memories and experiences, and how they recognized and mediated this overall experience at the shift of communist ideologies between Mao’s Utopianism and Deng’s socialist modernization. It is also a place that we can observe the relationship between trauma and ideology as two disciplines closely intertwined in but not adequately discussed as to the communist catastrophes in the 20th Century.

In this paper I consider Scar literature in the context of its relationship to the social spectrum of Chinese people’s psychology after Mao. I suggest that its key paradigms – catharsis of negative emotions and political implications indicated by the “bright tails,” demonstrate the interactive processes of Chinese people confronting and denying the traumatic experience. Through analyzing protagonists in short stories and novellas selected from this movement,[[1]](#footnote-1) (which have not been done by previous studies), I argue that when unwillingly confronting traumatic moments, protagonists turn to the new ideology for denial: negating trauma in ideology-based (or what I call ideo-centric) language and action so that trauma, as well as its emotional responses such as guilt, pain, depression, etc., are mediated, assimilated, and recognized. Although I mainly study the experience of the protagonists, through drawing on the historical and political documents I expand it to the experiences of many Chinese individuals’ (including writers and readers) paradoxical interactions with the communist ideologies of both Mao’s communist Utopia (1949-1976) and Deng’s socialist modernization (1979-1989). While this paradox may be viewed superficially as coincidence given the blossoming of Scar literature at the transition between these ideologies, I will demonstrate that this change in the perception and the existence of that trauma itself in fact develops from the shift in ideologies. This approach may be expanded to explain more general shifts in psychology and outlook following this ideological shift after the generally traumatic period of the Cultural Revolution.

**Shattering of assumptive world and trauma**

Although trauma is an unsettled concept, the essential concept of trauma is that a tremendous shock happens so suddenly that it results in indelible impairment to the individual’s social and psychological function. Individuals who experience traumatic shock generally present certain symptoms of confrontation and denial (or recurrence and numbing). Freud perceived that trauma occurs when an individual is shocked by overwhelming stimuli breaking through the “protective shield.” He explained that trauma derives from “an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates” (LapLanche1974: 466). He observed that after the traumatic event or moment (sexual trauma included), the survivor unwittingly returns to that traumatic experience in his/her flashbacks, dreams, and obsessive behaviors. Freud called such a psychological symptom a “compulsion to repeat” (Freud 2003: 23), which for Freud consists in an acting-out, a symptom of trauma. Freud’s observations contribute to the basis of diagnosing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD in contemporary psychological studies.

Based on Freud’s concepts, contemporary scholars elaborate different understandings of trauma. Robert Jay Lifton perceived trauma as a “numbing,” a moment of shutting down experience. In his studies of the atrocities of Hiroshima, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Vietnam Intervention, and the Holocaust, he approached the experience of trauma from studying the survivor’s encounter(s) with death. A moment of experience of shattering results in “numbing,” an emotional response to trauma; and this shattering of the experience is the moment of the individual’s’ reconstructing the new knowledge about the world and self (Lifton 1995: 128-150). Cathy Caruth thinks that the traumatic event happens so quickly that this experience damages the individual’s normal cognitive and perceptive system. Based on van der Kolk’s research on traumatic memory and de Mandian performative theory of language and reference, Caruth asserts that trauma is a recurrence. The traumatic moment is not assimilated to narrative memory, but imprints in traumatic memory, which repetitively returns to the traumatized. The traumatized individual is trapped in the reoccurrence of the traumatic moment (1996: *xxx*). Echoing Feud and Lacan, Slavoj Žižek considers trauma as a deferred action. Based on Lacan’s idea that trauma has the nature of retrospective, Žižek argues that the traumatic events only get their meaning at their recurrence. Shoshana Felman perceives trauma as a sudden failure to see during the shock. She believes that historical truth is shattered at the moment of trauma. Therefore, what witnesses witness leads to a crisis of testimony and witness(2007: 259-314). Judith Lewis Herman defines trauma as a feeling of helplessness and as damage of the individual’s adaptability to life under “an overwhelming force”(1997: 33). Thus, although contemporary scholars approach trauma from different understandings, their concepts of trauma are basically elaborated around the traumatic shock, denial, confrontation/numbing and recurrence, and its impact on recognition of the world.

Consistent with these understandings of a causational relationship among emotions, cognition and trauma, some contemporary clinical psychologists regard shattering an individual’s assumptive world as producing indelible impairment to the individual’s cognitive and emotional system. In this aspect Ronnie Janoff-Bulman provides an insightful exploration in her book, *Shattered Assumptions: towards a New Psychology of Trauma*. According to Janoff-Bulman, human beings live in an assumptive world. In the core of our inner world we hold three positive assumptions about the world and ourselves: benevolence, meaning, and self-worth (1999: 4-6). We believe the world is a meaningful, good and just place and we are moral and good individuals (1999: 10-11). Based on these assumptions we construct the meaning of our experience. As Janoff-Bulman posits, these basic assumptions construct “our most abstract, generalized knowledge structures” (1999: 29).Trauma occurs when the new experience is so overwhelming that our basic assumptions cannot be sustained. Janoff-Bulman argues that the assumptive world is suddenly shattered so that our basic structure of the knowledge about the world is destroyed. Our inner world cannot sustain the integration of the new experience. The assumptions of order, benevolence, meaning, and justice are suddenly lost. The world falls into the chaotic, the meaningless and the unjust. As Janoff-Bulman finds in her clinical studies, shattering an assumptive world smashes an individual’s cognitive system, which gives rise to two sets of emotions: denial and confrontation (or numbing and recurrence). The traumatized individual denies his/her experience by avoiding the related memories but sometimes unwillingly confronts them in flashbacks, recurrences, nightmares, etc. The experience of shattered assumptions either is confronted in its recurrence or denied in its dissociation. These emotional responses are well-diagnosed symptoms of trauma or PTSD.[[2]](#footnote-2) Shattering an individual’s assumptive world thus creates a traumatic shock which gives rise to trauma symptoms.

**Revolutionary trauma and ideology**

These psychological and cultural studies of trauma, particularly Janoff-Bulman’s shattering assumptive world, provide useful theoretical assumptions to approach the trauma of the Cultural Revolution. As for trauma of the Cultural Revolution, which I refer to as revolutionary trauma, personal traumatic experience is closely related to the social, political and particularly ideological aspects. For many Chinese people, the revolution was a unique experience which as to some aspects differed from the atrocities of sudden encounters with death (and/or threat of death) in other natural and human traumatic events, such as earthquake, traffic accidents, conventional warfare, nuclear warfare, child abuse and sexual abuse. The revolutionary trauma not only resulted from physical and psychological wounds due to massive violence, the ordeal of harsh living conditions, fear and risk of torture or death, and the shock of witnessing numerous tortures and deaths. Similar to religion, many Chinese people faithfully had believed in Mao’s Utopia but finally found that rather than going up to a communist heaven, they had fallen into a hell - chaotic, backward, impoverished, chained and filled with great brutality.[[3]](#footnote-3) As a consequence, once the Cultural Revolution ended, revolutionary trauma was caused by a social symptom in which personal trauma of Chinese individuals was related to a failure to believe in the long-prevailing communist ideology while being confronted with a dramatically different new ideology after Mao.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In this case, trauma is rooted in ideology. Revolutionary trauma goes beyond the physical and psychological parameters of trauma in two aspects. One aspect is that revolution trauma involves emotional and moral violence as well as physical affliction. The other, key aspect is that revolution trauma stems from a sudden loss of basic faith of the world during and following the abrupt shift of ideologies. Although some people were traumatized by the dramatic and traumatic events during the revolution, it is an abrupt ideological shift that suddenly shattered people’s assumptions about the world, their communist Utopia, the meaning of their previous behaviours and suffering, and their identities.

In an ideologically dominant society, ideology is a main force from which to construct the basic assumptions about the world. To a great extent, ideology is schemas. Ideology, according to Althusser, is “a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Žižek 1994:123). Similar to assumptions defined as representations of the world, ideology “is not their real condition of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there” (Žižek 1994: 124). According to Althusser, ideology is not an external force, but internalized by human beings through Ideological States Apparatus (ISA). The state’s power institutes a guarantee that the hegemonic ideology is put into the heads of the people in the hegemonic society (Žižek 1994:125). In addition, ideology permeates people’s social practice. As Žižek asserts, ideology is not a false consciousness about reality, but the reality itself. Ideology is an action. In this sense, ideology is internalized as schemas in an ideologically dominant society. It constitutes people’s basic assumptions of the world and themselves. Knowledge about the world and meaning of experience are filtered through the lens of ideology.

When an ideology suddenly shifts, the assumptive world is suddenly shattered. The world based on this ideology has to be reassured. Solidarity, coherence and safety of the assumptions are crushed. When people are suddenly cut off from their connection with the old ideology, previous actions suddenly lose their foundation of perception, calling for a re-searching for meanings. Suffering or violent behaviors which could be interpreted as appropriate according to the old ideological based schemas lose their context of understanding. Since memory and meaning of memory is the base of the identity (Hacking 1998: 7), with such shattering of an assumptive world, the ideo-centric identity is also smashed. Past experiences lose their emotional and cognitive binding. Accompanied with this loss, unpleasant emotions (pain, guilt, regret, emptiness, resentment, and anger) are unbounded.

What is more, an individual is an agent who experiences and responds to shattering assumptions based on his/her particular levels of belief and traumatization. However, because each person’s ideological basis of the assumptive world is based on the same ideology, individual experience and responses are released and shared publicly. This produces certain common social symptoms after the shattering of a collective assumptive world. Responsibility and morality may be considered collectively. A small group of people may become the scapegoat (like the Gang of Four in China), whom most people blame for being responsible for the calamity of the Cultural Revolution.

Revolutionary trauma and its correlation with ideology are pertinent to understanding Scar literature. Scar literature, which emerged immediately after the revolution, reflected the collective psychology of Chinese people after Mao. As mirrored in the traumatic catharsis and bright tail of most scar stories, while Chinese people outpoured their resentment and bitterness toward the revolution, they were soon fervently engaged in building Chinese modernization under the call of the new regime. This psychological experience, to a large extent, determined the key paradigms of most scar stories. In the following part, I will take two stories, *The Scar* (published in 1978) and *Astray Full of Flowers* (published in 1979) as examples to demonstrate the confrontation and denial of the experience of the shattering of the old assumptive world.

**Between confrontation and denial: Stories of Scar literature**

The ideological influence of trauma between confrontation and denial can also be widely detected in many stories of Scar literature. In the story *Over the Other Side of the Brook*, written by Kong Jiesheng (1952-), the protagonist Yan Liang cut off his relationship with his parents twice in order to avoid ideological segregation. Except for the first paragraph of portraying brightness after the revolution, Yan Lian presents a certain symptom of melancholia. Although his later encounter with Mu Lan seems to reinvigorate his passion for the life, overall he is addicted to the loss, indifferent to his surroundings, with resentment to others and a lost ability to love. Yan Lian finally releases such symptoms of melancholia when the new regime rectifies his mother’s case. Kong Jiesheng creates a similar protagonist in another story *Between the Humans* published in 1978. Zhang Xing brutally hurt a teacher which directly resulted in her death. Zhang later exiled himself in Hainan Island. Although he unconsciously attempts to repay his guilt by doing his self-tortured labor work, he resisted recognizing his guilt even when he was criticized by the Qiushi, the son of the victim. As he questioned, “how could he personally undertake the historical responsibility?” Both self-sacrifice and reproaching history can be regarded as denial of his trauma when he has to confront it.

Similar figures can be found in another two stories that were widely welcomed after Mao: *The Second Encounter* written by Jin He (1950-) and *Awake, My Brother* written by Liu Xinwu (1939-). In the former story, Ye Hui loses his interest in living, coldly accepting his death penalty. He simply admitted that he is guilty for killing a young man in a mass fight during the revolution and this was because he was cheated by the Gang of Four. He refuses to recount his former experience totally. He even refused to point out that the interrogator, Zhu Chunxing, was the one who should be responsible for the mass fighting during the revolution. His simple refusal actually reveals his denial of the past, avoiding facing up to the pain, fear, and guilt related to previous memory. In the latter story, Xiao Lie’s trustworthy hero was ruined when he witnessed his father’s death and secretary Lu’s suffering. Withdrawing himself from society, he rejects the anxiety-provoking discussion of his past memories. The so-called socialist reformation provided him with an excuse that he uses to cover his wound so that he could avoid touching his memory that “something beautiful was broken” (Liu 1979: 232).

In these stories, traumatic catharsis is entangled with the denial of such experience by interpreting such memories through the old ideo-centric assumptions and turning to a new one when such ideology couldn’t hold in the shock of the external events. Clearly underlying the recognition of the Cultural Revolution as a period of widespread trauma is an ideological basis for it that overarches, and is shown to be ultimately causative of, individual traumatic episodes. Ideological shift not only shattered the previous ideo-centric world, it also provides another assumptive world through which to deal with the entire process of traumatic representation and plot. Traumatic narrative is not only catharsis, but allows for a hermeneutic approach to the trauma from the perspective of the new ideology. In this ideological recognition, the personal traumatic memory is subordinate to the ideological shock and private traumatic memory functions not simply as testimony of personal traumatic experience. It also alerts to reader to the process of transferring fault to the ideology of Mao’s Utopianism and actions of the Gang of Four, hence subordinating personal experience into this grand narrative. Through this, personal trauma mediated into a collective, historical, ideological level.

What calls more notice, these images of the gloomy, lost, indifferent, mentally deformed and physical signs of the wounded indicated a theme that is repressed in the Scar literature narrative but is circulating there nonetheless as a specter. This sub-voice indicates the tension between ideological denial and spontaneous acting out. Melancholia, according to Žižek, is a kind of fidelity to the lost libidinal object. Ideology provides a shelter for them to resist or accept the new ideology. The personal traumatic memory was repressed by the new ideology. “The bright tail” indicates that the wound is covered, but it is also “this bright tail” that exposes that Dengist ideology actually was used to deny such memories. This made the optimistic part become pure linguistic signifiers floating on the surface of an atmosphere of melancholia. The gloomy permeates the entire narrative although linguistically the optimistic occupies part of the narrative; hence the dark and the bright are ambiguous.

**At the shift of ideologies**

The process of shattering the assumptive world, confronting such a trauma and denying it by turning to the new ideology is backed up by reinforcement of Mao’s ideology and a series of events that caused the dramatic social change at the shift of ideologies from Mao to Deng. Revolution trauma derives from the smashing of the revolutionary illusion of Mao’s ideology. The initial purpose of the revolution is “to avoid the perils of revisionism and complacency” (Clark 2008: 1). However, understanding this revolution we need go beyond the superficial political approach to explore the basic concept of Mao since that is the essence of the Chinese communist revolutions under Mao. The ultimate aim of that communist revolution was to realize freedom, equality and the liberation of the whole world. This beautiful utopia of Chinese communists germinated from Mao’s philosophical and ideological thoughts. Žižek believes that the basis of Mao’s ideology is Mao’s “permanent revolution.” Žižek thinks Mao’s unique idea of contradiction indicates that, for Mao, affirmation and negation exist at the same time. Revolution, therefore, is not a Hegelian “negation of the negation,” but is a persistent conflict between affirmation and negation, and revolution thus is permanent (see Žižek2007*:* 1-28). Ironically, Mao’s personal reason for developing this ideal may have evolved from his own traumatic experiences. In his study of the Cultural Revolution, Robert Lifton argues that “the permanent revolution,” the core of Maoist communism, results from Mao’s close encounters with death. Examining the relationship between Mao’s individual psychology and Mao’s ideology, Lifton asserts that, having survived such encounters with death many times, Mao transferred his fear of death into a fear of failure of the revolution. In this transference, Mao transmuted immortality of life in Chinese philosophy into immortality of revolution. And so the Chinese peoples’ efforts toward an immortality of revolution under the inspiration of Maoist ideology became the driving force of the Cultural Revolution (Lifton 1974: 45-65). If there is truth to this transference theory, then the irony is that the Cultural Revolution, resulting from Mao’s personal trauma, itself begat the deaths and direct traumas during the Cultural Revolution, and the revolution trauma of millions of Chinese after the Cultural Revolution.

These studies, though from different perspective, provide interpretations that communist ideology and personal psychology are entangled and interacted in the origin of the revolution. As is well known, the Chinese communist revolution copied the Marxist-Leninist revolution in Russia. However, though accepting the Soviet model, Mao’s reading of Marxism in some parts deviates from Leninism. Mao’s revolution is not an urban revolution realized in “the weakest links in the world of capitalism,” but a rural revolution in the agrarian-based China. Peasants as well as workers became Mao’s main reliable revolutionary force. In addition, Mao believed that communist leaders should be concerned with the people’s needs. Once the leaders become a privileged class and separated from the people’s needs, they become a ruling class and the fruit of revolution is destroyed. Mao's revolution thus aimed at bridging the gap between the rural and the urban and eliminating elitism. By this he believed Chinese people would enter into quality and freedom and by this the so-called “revolutionary fruit” could be preserved.

Mao’s ideological and philosophical ideas constructed the basic assumptions of the communist world and the revolutionary identity of Chinese people through personal worship of Mao and overwhelming brainwashing from the mid-1950s. With the avocation of “Mao’s one sentence is equal to ten thousand sentences,” Maoist ideology was embodied in Mao’s words and his iconic image. Mao’s words and images entered into people’s private realms, permeating every corner of people’s lives- in Chinese peoples’ clothes, language both public and private, violence, spectacles of public punishment and torture, re-naming people and streets, souvenirs, food and diet, thus nearly in almost every aspect of Chinese lives. As Yu Hua ironically criticizes in his novel *To Live*, Chinese people “slept in Mao’s words every day” (Yu 1993: 36). In this regard the revolution was performative, a drama of acting out Mao’s words.

At this extreme case, which is what’s Lifton observes “Mao was converted from a revolutionary hero into a Warhol ‘superstar’” (Lifton 1999: 72), Chinese people, particularly young people, perceived the world and their identity through Maoist ideology. Fervently seeking the Communist future can be found in the Great Leap Forward and the later Cultural Revolution in which 800 million people participated. Chinese people willingly reformed themselves and situated themselves in the communist world. Finding the value of self in the communist revolutions is a main movement in Mao’s time. As Lifton observes in his interviewing Chinese who were living overseas following the Cultural Revolution, Chinese people experienced a series of changes in their identities (Lifton 1967:2).

This process can be observed in Scar literature. In *The Scar* and *Astray Full of Flowers*, both Xiaohua and Bai Hui perceived the world and themselves according to Mao’s education. This theme can be found in almost all of the scar stories written by former Red Guards. Another example of this extreme belief is reported in the protagonist of *Drunk in the Flowers* written by Li Jian. *Drunk in the Flowers* depicts the protagonist Xiao Li as a victim of putting Mao's *Quotations* into practice. Perhaps because it was very controversial in 1980 when it was published, this story has been ignored by literary criticism and literary history. This story demonstrates the power of Mao’s Little Red Book and the absurdity of the revolution, here to the extent that it controls the mind, actions, body and sexuality of the main character. The basic plot of this story is that Xiao Li gets lost from her team when she travels on a revolutionary tour to visit a revolutionary holy land with other Red Guards. She has to stay in a farmer’s cave for a night near a remote village of Shaanxi. At midnight, she was woken by the farmer. The farmer kneeled down by her bed and told her that he is 35 years old but had never had a chance to touch a woman. At her hesitation, Mao's words jump out of her mind: “If there are no farmers, there is no revolution. If you deny them, you deny revolution, if you attack them, then you attack revolution.” In the farmer's further requirement, Mao's words kept appearing her mind: “The country is our country, the society is our society, if we do not say, who would say, if we do not do, who would do.” “the peasant’s pain is my pain; the peasant’s difficulty is my difficulty; I shall severely fight with the short thinking of selfishness. The urgency of the peasant is my urgency.” And finally in responding to Mao's “only liberate the whole of human beings, then liberate the self” Xiao Li decided to stay here to be his wife.

Li Jian is the first writer in the Post-Mao period to touch sexuality with such description, and these sexual descriptions are mixed with sexual interpretation of Mao's words. In each step when Xiao Li falls into trauma, Mao's *Quotations* appear in her mind, helping her make a decision. Ideological trauma and sexual abuse are intermingled in this story. Politics is also sexuality. Xiao Li's revolutionary dream turns out to cause her to be but another victim of patriarchal, federal and political dominance and injustice. Mao’s Little Red Book permeates her revolutionary zeal, her body, and her sexuality.

The assumptive world based on Mao’s ideology soon turned to trauma mostly due to the violence and ideological segregation involved in the Cultural Revolution. During 1966 to 1967 Red Guards, as a main revolutionary force put on the political stage by Mao (Sui 1983: Xviii), completely turned the movement of “destroying four olds and constructing four news” into a Red Terror. From 1966 to 1968, witness accounts of violence, massacre and physically fighting were frequently reported in the unofficial newspapers established by Red Guards. During this period an individual’s terror of threat to his/her life is closely connected with the threat of ideological segregation. This terror can be detected in many stories of Scar literature. The teacher in *Astray Full of Flowers* is an innocent mother who finally was tortured to death by Red Guards. Extending from this story, and like Yan Liang's mother in *Over the Other Side of the River*, and Xiao Hua's mother in *The Scar*, thousands of real innocent people are reported to have been tortured to death during the Red Terror. Ideological castigation was a punishment considered by some to be even more severe than physical torture. In *Ah* written by Feng Jicai in 1979, the protagonist was traumatized not by a physical violence, but by a lost letter, the content of which may turn him to be classified as anti-revolutionaries. He was under the persistent fear of being found out to be guilty until finally he betrayed his friends and his brother. In *Professor of Law and His wife* written by Shi Tiesheng (1951-2010)Madam Zhisi was traumatized by a possible interpretation of her sympathy toward her colleagues who were tortured publicly. She was frightened by how her tears would be criticized as sympathy toward the anti-revolutionists. This fear tortured her until her death. In these cases ideological segregation is more involved in producing the protagonist’s trauma than with the strictly physical repercussions of a violent act.

The original trauma that was ignored or repressed, or not present given the prevalent ideology during the revolution may be subject to re-evaluation at the shift of ideologies. Mao’s death in 1976 actually ends the Cultural Revolution. A short while later in 1978, Deng established his political power and became Mao’s successor. The Gang of Four was sentenced dramatically and publicly in 1981. Soon after that crimes that had been committed during the Cultural Revolution were publicly punished, and old Communist veterans who were regarded as anti-revolutionists or revisionists or people’s enemies regained their former positions of status.

With these social events, communist ideology was dramatically changed during this period. A national wide discussion about “the criteria of the truth” was launched in1978. People’s thought shifted from “whatever Mao said is true” into what Deng advocated, “the practice is the only criteria of the truth.” This sudden shift from Mao’s common communism to Deng’s pragmatic communism suddenly demonstrated that Mao’s ideology was problematic and profoundly affected Chinese people’s basic assumptions about the world. For most people who repressed their trauma experience it is a spring after ten years of chaos. For some people who hurt others there is fear. For some people who hurt their families, the foundation of the previous physical violence and cutting their relationship with their family members, the foundation for those immoral actions disappeared and was now held in disrepute. Yesterday’s people’s enemies were repositioned as revolutionary heroes. Yesterday’s “revolutionary little heroes” were today’s criminals. What is seemingly correct, heroic, non-harmful, or unpleasant-but-approved is ignored at the time of action, and then later (after the ideological shift) suddenly comes up, calling for new assimilation to the cognitive system. The meaningful actions, the benevolence of the world, particularly the value of self as a communist successor based on Mao’s promise, “the world is ours, and also yours, but in the final analysis, it is yours,” were suddenly crushed and inverted. The revolution illusion turns into a nightmare and the person who used to be “a revolutionary little hero” turns out to be a criminal or an immoral person who killed others, hurt others, betrayed families.

This assumptive world is ideology based and due to this ideological base, it properly is a collective assumptive world rather than individual solitary realm. For this reason, the collective sense of coherence of knowing the former experience, behaviors, suffering received, etc., suddenly disappears. Pieces of memories and experiences remain present in their lives, but the thread which connects them is broken. Negative emotions (which range from intrusion and resistance to anxiety, anger, fear, guilt, self-reproach, etc.,) are not only individual responses to such experience, but also are social symptoms which indicate the problems of both the society and individuals.

Scar literature provided a public space for Chinese people telling and sharing. Personal traumatic memories were shared with people with common experience. Personal trauma transfers, to some extent based on blaming the Gang of Four and its ideology and actions, into connection with history and country. In Chinese people’s repetitively telling their complaints, hatred, resentment, and bitterness, Deng’s modernization provided them with a new perspective with which to interpret their trauma and relevant loss, pain, and guilt. The traumatized inevitably faced questions concerning who they should blame for, who should be responsible for the trauma, and why such suffering happened to him/her. Deng’s ideology provided answers to Chinese people who were struggling for meaning and interpretation of the ten year disaster. Due to the same ideological basis for suffering and the common scapegoat of the Gang of Four, trauma became an ideological category again.

On the other hand, the social symptoms of revolution trauma welcomed or promoted the formation of Deng’s ideology. Given that Mao’s ideology was regarded as the cause of trauma, Chinese people required a new assumptive world to reconcile their cognitive and emotional systems so as to read, to know and to comprehend their recurring past. Deng’s socialist modernization provided a new assumptive world for most Chinese people to redirect their libido, escape anxiety and fear, and at the same time, forgiveness was reached. Deng’s ideology was thus welcomed. This ideological requirement partly explains what Žižek called the paradox of ideology: Chinese people fell into Deng’s modernization immediately when they stepped out of Mao’s Utopia, the so called paradoxical ideological point. From this theoretical point of view, the mechanism of Chinese peoples’ mediating process exhibits a paradoxical interaction with ideological shift. This process thus stands between confronting and denying trauma.

**Conclusion**

This article seeks to approach the Scar literature movement from an ideo-psychological approach and put this movement in the context of the Chinese people’s psychology after the revolution. It explains the paradoxical phenomenon that the Chinese people “identified themselves as wounded overnight” (as what Bei Dao criticized in 2008), but at the same time demonstrates optimism toward the New Era. Traumatic memories, when confronted, also were denied by turning to the new ideology. Due to this psychological process, while Scar literature provides an outlet for Chinese people telling trauma for interpretation, its paradigms were constructed by this process.

What has been denied in the incomplete psychological healing of Cultural Revolution trauma perhaps is the specter that is haunting later Chinese writing. Scar literature existed for a short-lived movement, which soon overlapped with introspective literature, science fiction and reformation fiction. Later it is replaced by the root-seeking and avant-garde movements. In these later literary movements, the Cultural Revolution is a persistent theme, explicitly or implicitly underlying nearly all the narratives. Chinese intellectuals after the mid-1980s appear more concerned with what happened and why such a disaster happened by examining the root of trauma from the deep dimension of culture and tradition. At the same time, the image of scarred heroes who were subjugated to the grand narrative in the Scar literature movement are re-valued and re-written in autobiographies of former Red Guards, intellectuals and veteran cadres. In addition, writers who did experience the Cultural Revolution also represent trauma in the historical memoir. For example, in 1986, ten years after the Cultural Revolution, Yu Hua, a representative of avant-garde movement, wrote a novella *1986*, (which was published in 1987) indicating how the memory was hidden in the daily life and how this memory nonetheless returned, haunting the people who were attempting to forget. In the 1990s, many Chinese writers and intellectuals like Ji Xianlin, Zhang Xianliang, Liang Xiaosheng, published autobiographies to recount their traumatic memories that were neglected in the scar movement. In the 1990s Red Classic, the literature during the Cultural Revolution and Mao’s time, was adopted into television programs by reinterpreting the history from a perspective of humanitarian concern and commercial pop elements. Recently, *Blowing the North Wind* was a popular television program, which presented the Cultural Revolution like drama, in which people established purest friendship and love. This nostalgia is more explicitly indicated in the popularity of a cyber-fiction *Hawthorn Tree* and a film of its adaption by Zhang Yimo, the most famous director in China. This film of so-called purest love in the history during the Cultural Revolution broke the official box record of artistic film in that it is riding the trend of recollection of the Cultural Revolution in the present-day media and society. In such narratives the Cultural Revolution is related to a remote memory of a crude and naive time, hence is transferred into nostalgia. It is painful but beautiful.

Therefore, writing about the Cultural Revolution in the period of Scar literature is not the end, but the beginning. From there, the Cultural Revolution trauma keeps changing its image in its transits, from ideological shock in Scar literature to the madness in the mid-1980s avant-garde movement to the nostalgia in the recent tendency. This process directs us to a dimension that is touched upon but not adequately discussed in both Žižek’s ideology and trauma studies in literature and culture. That is, the relationship between confrontation and denial of trauma through ideology may be a consistent dynamic process, in which trauma is consistently changing its face in its vacillation between its acting-out and denial, between personal libido and social, between conscious and unconscious, between compulsive speaking out traumatic memory and denial of this repetition in the narrative. Thus writing about the Cultural Revolution trauma can be regarded as a valuable process not only for us to understand in this dynamic process, but also to peer into the psychology and perspective as people reconstruct their trauma, to better understand why people retrospectively perceive and communicate about trauma in a certain way. While at the same time, the specter of the Cultural Revolution which is haunting the writing reminds us that this trauma, like the Real, is there, but beyond our full approach.

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1. Given that Scar literature is mainly a movement of short stories (see Hong 2007: 258). I do not include novels in my study. The novels which appeared later should be classified as Introspective literature and Reformation literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to 1994 version of PTSD revised by the American Psychiatric Association’s DSM, symptoms of trauma fall into three categories:

   1. Symptoms of intrusion; such as recurrence thoughts about the trauma, nightmares, flashbacks and exaggerated reactions upon exposure to remainders of the trauma. These are also known as ’experiencing’ symptoms.

   2. Symptoms of constriction and avoidance; such as efforts to avoid thoughts about the trauma, efforts to avoid places or activities that remind one of the trauma and evidence of more general withdrawal from the world.

   3. Other symptoms such as irritability, insomnia, poor concentration and hypervigiliance. These ‘other’ symptoms are sometimes described as ‘hyperarousal symptoms’. In addition, as Bracken points out survival guilt was included as a symptom of PTSD in 1980’s version but withdrawn in 1987. Some studies, for example Lifton’s studies, also include survival guilt as a symptom of trauma. In my study I include survival guilt as a symptom of trauma. For more regarding the above information, see Bracken’s *Trauma: Culture, meaning & Philosophy,* p.47-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. While many victims of revolution trauma directly experienced life threatening, thus compounding the etiology of their overall trauma, it is considered possible that many who lived through the Cultural Revolution were indoctrinated, were obedient and mindful of the dangers and ‘toed the line” to stay out of trouble, yet nonetheless were affected deeply by the shift from Maoist theory under the Cultural Revolution to the new doctrines of the post-Cultural Revolution. However, there is little documentation regarding the latter group, and the writings of the Scar literature provide more grounding for the former group. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It is likely possible that during the Cultural Revolution some individuals experienced trauma based on the difference between the ideology of Mao as espoused and what was being experienced in daily life. However, that is beyond the scope of the present paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)