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Reclaiming Rubbish: *Feiwu* at the Intersections of Gender, Class, and Disability in Xiao Hong's *Market Street* and *Field of Life and Death*

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Abstract

*This article revisits Xiao Hong's Field of Life and Death (*Shengsi chang 生死場*, 1935) and Market Street (*Shangshi jie 商市街*, 1936) against sources from the periodical press to explore how Xiao Hong's works speak back to discourses on "rubbish" (*feiwu 廢物*), a slur that was frequently used to refer to disabled people, to people of lower social status, and to women during the Republican period. In particular, I explore how the category of* feiwu *lays bare processes of marginalisation and dehumanisation, contextualising literary excerpts against New Life Movement slogans, satirical cartoons, and homemaking or hygienist press articles. I show how Xiao Hong's works build through the category of* feiwu *a counter-discourse bearing on the representational entanglements of gender, class and disability, as materialised through animals (in Field of Life and Death) and through objects (in Market Street). In doing so, I contribute to a conceptual history of* feiwu*, and I extend existing scholarship concerned with literary representations of disability in China into the Republican period – a budding subfield that has so far mainly focused on works produced since the foundation of the People's Republic in 1949.*

Keywords: Xiao Hong, Market Street, Field of Life and Death, intersectionality, disability, gender, *feiwu*, waste, New Life Movement

Introducing Rubbish: Historicising Discourses on *Feiwu* in the 1930s

On 10 December 1935, the cartoon magazine *Oriental Puck* (*Duli manhua* 独立漫画) published a satirical vignette which read as follows (Figure 1):

> On making use of rubbish
>
> The husband, having lost his job: Our financial situation is dire. You do know how to make use of rubbish, don't you?
>
> The wife: How would I not? I live with you, am I not already making use of rubbish?

Figure 1: On Making Use of Rubbish *(Xu Zhaoran, 1935)*

Beyond poking fun at marital gendered dynamics, the scene is alluding to the moral rhetoric of the New Life Movement (*Xin shenghuo yundong* 新生活運動). "Making use of rubbish" (*feiwu liyong* 廢物利用) was indeed a New Life Movement slogan aimed at fostering productivity, frugal habits, and the use of local products. The slogan was ubiquitous in the periodical press in the mid-1930s (Nedostup, 2009: 380). On the most basic level, primary sources show that *feiwu* 廢物 (rubbish) in the 1930s was part of the vocabulary of homemaking magazines, instructing readers as to the best ways of making the most out of scraps of fabric (Yun Yun, 1936) or out of broken bits of tea leaves (Shi Zhimin, 1936). On a scientific and hygienic level, *feiwu* was a common term used to describe the body's unwanted toxins (You Yusheng, 1935), or in the context of maintaining clean water and mitigating the development of carriers of disease, as outlined in documents published by the Health Department of the Ministry of the Interior (Neizhengbu weishengshu, 1934). As alluded to in the *Oriental Puck* vignette when the husband's newly found state of unemployment brings about a reversal of gender roles, *feiwu* was also a distinctively gendered slur. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, it had been used as a gendered derogatory term, especially after some reformers took to referring to women as a "wasted resource […] because of their non-contribution to the household economy" (Bailey, 2006: 175). In the early 1920s, *feiwu* became an integral part of May Fourth iconoclast discourse when Chen Duxiu started to use the expression to refer to all things that were "useless yet revered by people" which he thought had to be discarded (Ciaudo, 2015: 45). Beyond its uses referring to gender and employment status, *feiwu* was also a common term in Republican China for the alienation and objectification of people. As Dauncey says, *feiwu* was associated with "*canfei* 残废 ('invalids') […] with all its retained connotations of 'uselessness' and 'rubbish' as reflected in particular by the fei 废 character" (Dauncey, 2017: 51). The term was an intrinsic part of an ableist lexicon and the imagery that surrounded individuals thought to be visually repulsive, a stigma held against disabled people and mutilation victims that went back all the way to the pre-imperial penal mutilations for criminals

which served to make offenses legible on the body (Graziani, 2011).

As those usages highlight, the term *feiwu* and the associated lexical field of "garbage" were part of a dehumanising discourse of interpersonal and institutional violence. In early Republican China more specifically, *feiwu* was part of a discourse on women, economically disenfranchised people, and disabled people, proving reminiscent of the insult that is calling people *dongxi* 東西 (things). Charting the evolution of the representations of disability after 1949, Sarah Dauncey underlines that the term *feiwu* became an iconic catchphrase in 1950s discourses, used to represent the oppression of the "old society" towards disabled people and, by extension, thanking the Party for enabling a new society where disabled people would be "disabled but not useless" at last (Dauncey, 2020: 51-52).

However, as illustrated in the *Oriental Puck* vignette above, the "old society" was certainly not entirely devoid of ironical or critical uses of *feiwu*. In this case, it bears asking how the term was understood, negotiated, and possibly reappropriated in cultural and literary production prior to 1949. Was it used at all to describe the same processes of alienation and marginalisation of different categories of people that quickly become apparent in the examples above? And, if so, how can we use *feiwu* as a steppingstone to chart the ruptures and continuities in the representation of marginalised individuals beyond the 1949 divide? In this article, I argue that one powerful example of such critical engagement can be found in the works of Xiao Hong 蕭紅 (1911-1942), a young woman writer who arrived in Shanghai in November 1934 after fleeing Japanese-held Manchukuo. Xiao Hong quickly became a literary sensation after she joined Lu Xun's circle and started publishing in literary magazines associated with the League of Left-Wing Writers.[1] I contend that the category of *feiwu* allowed Xiao Hong to undertake a critique compounding questions of gender, disability, and social class in her works *Field of Life and Death* (*Shengsi chang* 生死場, 1935) and *Market Street* (*Shangshi jie* 商市街, 1936).

In raising the marginalisation and de-humanisation at play through *feiwu* in Republican China as well as Xiao Hong's critical engagement with the representational entanglements of gender, class and disability, my point is certainly not to claim that Xiao Hong invented intersectionality ahead of time. The notion of intersectionality was first coined by feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in a specific socio-historically situated moment to analyse how race and gender intersected to deepen the marginalisation of African American women in the United States. Overtime, Crenshaw's foundational concept of intersectionality has gradually been taken up by other scholars to encompass the intersections of not only gender and race, but also sexual orientation, disability, age, social class and other identity markers entangled in social power hierarchies. What interests me nevertheless is the exploration of how *feiwu* in Xiao Hong's texts still effectively functioned as a compounding prism that spoke back to representations of marginalised people circulating in Xiao Hong's *own* linguistic and socio-historical context of 1930s China, one that effectively targeted and otherised women, economically disenfranchised people, and disabled people as "rubbish." I am focusing here more specifically on questions of disability, gender, and social class, as those are the primary vectors through which Xiao Hong undertakes a critique of usages of the term *feiwu* in *Market Street* and *Field of Life and Death*. Nevertheless, reflections on Manchuria being the home to a multi-ethnic refugee population and its alternative geographies of stateless subjects (White

[1] Xiao Hong's life has been the subject of a wealth of biographical works that are beyond the scope of this article. For English-language biographical accounts of Xiao Hong's literary career, see Dooling (2003: 431-36) and Kong Haili (2016: 313-16).

Russians, Russian Jews) under the Japanese colonial regime are certainly present in other works by Xiao Hong (eg. *Sophia's Distress Suofeiya de chouku* 索菲亞的愁苦), as astutely described by Clara Iwasaki (2019) who also emphasizes its implications for marginalised women.

In seizing *feiwu* as a compounding prism through which are reflected the entrenched marginalisation of gender, class, and disability in the historical context of the Republican era, this paper not only contributes to historicising the concept of *feiwu*, but also enriches literary scholarship on Xiao Hong in revisiting two of her major works beyond the now-canonical frameworks of nationalism and feminism and to more recent debates on ecocriticism and animal studies. This article further contributes to the budding field situated at the crossroads between Chinese studies and disability studies, most notably in extending the timeframe of ground-breaking scholarship that has mainly focused so far on the Second Sino-Japanese War (Riep, 2008) and the People's Republic of China up to the present day (Dauncey 2017 and 2020; Riep, 2018; Choy 2016). My article thus seeks to expand the discussion into the Republican period. Offering a glimpse of earlier critical discussions of disability in literature as they intersect with gender and class is all the more interesting, I argue, in that Dauncey notes that it was *not* customary for women writers to write about disability. She observes that while "Chinese women write about their sick selves, Chinese men, it seems, have dominated the market in writing about disabled *others*" (Dauncey, 2020: 35). Unsettling those boundaries, Xiao Hong's texts engage, as we shall see, with a wide variety of terms of interest to historians of disability in China, often doing so through the prism of animal (in *Field of Life and Death*) or object-related metaphors (in *Market Street*).

Human Beings and/as Animals in *Field of Life and Death*

Published in December 1935 as part of Lu Xun's *Slave Series* (*Nuli congshu* 奴隸叢書), *Field of Life and Death* (hereafter, *Field*) made Xiao Hong an overnight literary sensation. The novel consists in a series of vignettes chronicling life in the Manchurian countryside alongside the cyclical rhythm of the seasons before and after the inauguration of Japanese rule over the region. *Field* is replete with grim accounts of epidemics, poverty, domestic violence, traumatic childbirths, accidents in the fields and how all of those often leave minds and bodies scarred for life.

While most of the reception from Xiao Hong's contemporaries focused on the theme of national resistance, the role of animals as a key theme of the works was already noted by Hu Feng in his postface and in reviews he published to promote the book (Hu Feng 1935a & 1935b). The title of the book itself was famously chosen by Hu as a testament to the shared predicament of humans and animals, encapsulated in a famous line from *Field*: "In the village, men and beasts were occupied in the business of living and dying."[2] Animals and animal-related metaphors certainly play a prominent role in *Field*, with many characters turning into animals, either individually or as a group. In their classical study of Chinese women's literature, Meng Yue and Dai Jinhua (2004:181) devote a small passage to animal figures in *Field*, which they take as a metaphor for the bestiality of human existence, and as a stand-in for people who have

[2] Xiao Hong & Howard Goldblatt (2002: 47). Unless otherwise noted, all citations are from the original Chinese edition (Xiao Hong, 1935) and noted (SSC: [page number]). Citations in English are quoted from Howard Goldblatt's translation and will be noted (FLD: [page number]). The same holds true for citations from *Market Street*, noted (SSJ: [page number]) for the Chinese original and (MS: [page number]) for the English translation.

little other desires than those of the flesh. The question of bestiality in Xiao Hong's *Field* has also been taken to be a precursor to animal symbolism in 1980s literature: "A work most densely populated with animals […] where the skinny fish, dead snake, gaunt horse, sick dog, ailing cat and a dozen or so of their wretched companions are presented in juxtaposition to the human protagonists agonising in their existential struggle, epitomising the bestiality of human existence." (Zhou Zuyuan, 1994: 70). The animal as representative of bestiality in human beings was a frequent trope of Republican Chinese literature under the growing influence of social Darwinism (Capehart, 2016) and of Lu Xun's and Zheng Zhenduo's translations of Russian naturalists such as Artsybashev from 1920 onwards (Gamsa, 2008: 144, 384-85). Lydia Liu (1994: 157-77) also touched upon animals with regard to what they share of the physical experiences of abuse suffered by women in her well-known examination of *Field* as an indictment of patriarchal rural society beyond the nationalist narrative. The most extensive treatment of the topic can be found in a recent article by Todd Foley (2020), who analyses *Field* through the prism of ecocriticism and animal studies. Drawing on Zhuangzi and Buddhism, Foley examines how animals and their fate in *Field* work as a magnifying glass to expose the failure of traditional philosophical approaches to address the suffering of the villagers.

What all of the above accounts share is a very pessimistic approach to animal metaphors in *Field*, whether they are concerned with bestiality, with gendered violence, or with the failure of philosophy or religion to alleviate suffering. And certainly, most vignettes in *Field* are pretty grim: in keeping with the hygienicist discourse of *feiwu*, villagers as a group are often described as animals to account for their lowly status. The *Busy Mosquitoes* chapter that describes harvesting peasants as busy mosquitoes is immediately followed by a chapter called *Epidemic*, and then another one titled *Do You Want to Be Exterminated?* In *Field*, peasants are brought closer to actual mosquitoes as they become pluralised as *chongzimen* 蟲子們 (insects). In many instances, animals and plants are thus pluralised when they function as metaphors for human beings. One finds many *niumen* 牛們 (cattle), *yezimen* 葉子們 (leaves), *mamen* 馬們 (horses) in Xiao Hong's *Field*, using a pluralising form for common nouns specific of Northeastern dialects (Maury, 1992: 106; 119; Peyraube, 2000: 4).

Beyond the plethora of characterisations of humans as animals, two characters depicted as animals deserve particular attention as they embody an exploration of *feiwu*: Mother Wang (*Wang po* 王婆) and her mare, and Two-and-a-Half Li (*Er li ban* 二里半) and his goat. In the book, the term *feiwu* first appears *stricto sensu* in Mother Wang's long semi-incoherent rambling recounting the death of her daughter, aged three, when the little girl fell from a haystack directly onto the sharp end of a rake lying on the ground:

> "The child was three when I let her fall to her death. If I'd kept her, I'd have been a wreck [我會成了個廢物]. That morning ... let me think ... yes, it was morning. Anyway, I left her on the haystack when I went to feed the cow. Our haystack was behind the house. When I remembered the child, I ran back to get her. But she wasn't there. Then I saw the handle of the pitchfork under the haystack, and I knew that was a bad sign. She'd fallen right on top of it. At first I thought she was still alive, but when I picked her up ... aah!" (SSC: 14; FLD: 10)

Mother Wang starts off saying that having a child was to be her downfall. Embedded within such a lapidary sentence is the harsh reality of lost income and lost time to work in the field,

the added mouth to feed, the meagre compensation for it given she had a daughter, not a son.[3] She then effectively sacrifices her daughter on the altar of keeping up with manual labour, due to the necessity of leaving her child unattended to be able to work, or forgetting her due to tiredness. As reality catches up, she is overcome by remorse and pain. The next scenes describe Mother Wang throwing herself into working in the fields to avoid thinking about her dead daughter, trying desperately to forget and so outperforming every other family in terms of her work output. Mother Wang having escaped her fear of becoming non-productive "garbage," the text soon starts hinting at her gradual estrangement from herself, self-loathing and eventual self-identification with "rubbish" herself when *she* starts to give way to *it* (emphasis mine):

> 趙三門前，麥場上小孩子牽着馬，因為是一條青年的馬，牠跳着蕩着尾巴跟牠的小主人走上場來。小馬歡喜用嘴撞一撞停在場上的「石滾」，牠的前腿在平滑的地上跺打幾下，接著**牠**必然像索求什麼似的叫起不很好聽的聲來。
> **王婆**穿的寬袖的短襖，走上平場。**牠**的頭髮毛亂而且絞捲著，朝晨的紅光照著**牠**，**牠**的頭髮恰像田上成熟的玉米纓穗，紅色並且蔫捲。
> 馬兒把主人呼喚出來，**牠**等待給**牠**裝置「石滾」，「石滾」裝好的時候，小馬搖着尾巴，不斷的搖著尾巴，牠十分馴順和愉快。
> 王婆摸一摸蓆子潮濕一點，蓆子被拉在一邊了；孩子跑過去，幫助**牠**
> (SSC 20-21)A

> In front of Zhao San's house a little boy was leading a horse onto the threshing floor. The young foal trotted after its young master, tail swishing in the air. The young foal loved to nuzzle up against a stone roller on the ground; pawing the smooth ground with its front hooves, then looking for something, **it** gave a slightly discordant whinny.
> **Mother Wang**, dressed in a short jacket with loose sleeves, came out onto the threshing floor. **[Its]** hair was untidy and snarled. The morning sun made it look like tassels on ripening corn, all red and curly.
> The horse's whinny brought out its master. It was waiting for the roller to be put in place. When that was done, it swished its tail. It was a docile, happy animal.
> The straw mat was damp to the touch, so Mother Wang pulled it to the side. The boy came over to help **[it]**. (FLD 13-14)[4]

Xiao Hong's play on neuter pronouns can seem trivial until we remember that neuter pronouns had just been around for ten years when *Field* was written. By the mid-1930s, neuter pronouns were specifically the targets of rebuttals as "unnatural" or "un-Chinese," (Lin Yutang, 1994: 214), as being "too foreign," "too deformed" and "useless" (Zhu Ziqing, 1933). Here, the first *it* starts bringing together the image of Mother Wang and of the dishevelled horse. The

[3] In addition to usages outlined in the introduction to this article, *feiwu* was also used as a very charged term in the specific context of colonial Manchukuo institutions, and associated with Japanese impositions on women who had "nation-oriented roles to fulfil" and should not just "change from garbage into a toy (*you feiwu gaicheng le wanwu*)" (Smith, 2004: 57-58).

[4] Here, I have replaced some instances when Howard Goldblatt translates "her" by [it] and [its] to reflect more accurately pronoun use in the original Chinese text. If the translator's preface to Field does not state which version the translator is translating from, it is likely that he was working from one of the many post-1953 editions of *Field* where pronouns have been "corrected" and where those are indeed feminine pronouns. See for instance Xiao Hong (1953, 16).

following instances of the pronoun confirm that there are two *it*s present: one of them must then be Mother Wang. By the time the little boy arrives to help, the reader no longer knows if he is there to help Mother Wang or to help the horse break free. In the next scene, the horse lashes out at her foal, exhausted by her work on the threshing floor, and the scene ends up with the foal being badly hurt and bleeding. Like the old mare, the foal's mother, Mother Wang blames herself for hurting and losing her daughter.

This first passage is important in that it prefigures and helps better understand the oft-analysed third chapter, *The Old Mare's Trip to the Slaughterhouse* (*Lao ma zou jin tuchang* 老馬走進屠場). Zhang Yinde (2010: 125) has noted the influence of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, translated into Chinese by Guo Moruo as *The Slaughterhouse* (*Tuchang* 屠場), on Xiao Hong and her use of animal imagery, emphasizing how cruelty to the old mare can be understood as a metaphor for the cruelty of Japanese rule. But this chapter, I argue, cannot be understood in isolation from the previous scene. It is precisely because Mother Wang has had a daughter, causing her to become a *feiwu*, and because she has inadvertently let her daughter be killed in the name of attending to her duties, that she becomes *feiwu* to herself, and then through the use of pronouns, literally turns into the mare who hurts her foal in the passage above. Then, the *lao ma* 老馬 (the old mare) of the chapter title effectively turns into the *lao ma* 老媽 (the old lady) as she leads the "frail old animal" (*canlao de dongwu* 殘老的動物) who hurt her foal to her death at a "private slaughterhouse" (*si zaichang* 私宰場), which is also her own private mental hell:

> The old mare [老馬] stepped onto the road leading into town. The illegal slaughterhouse [「私宰場」] was located east of the city gate. There the knife had been unsheathed in readiness for the frail old animal [這個殘老的動物].
>
> Old Mother Wang was not leading the horse. She was following behind, driving it ahead of her with a switch. (SSC51; FLD 26)

Here, the reader does not know anymore who is leading whom towards the slaughterhouse. In the following paragraphs, Mother Wang then tries to reassure herself that putting an end to the frail old animal's life is the most compassionate thing to do. The only alternative is a slow painful death and starvation. The Chinese sentence remains unclear as to whether Mother Wang refers to herself, to the mare, or to both of them. Meanwhile, they continue to move forward:

> The old horse, the old woman, the old leaf [老馬，老人，配着一張老的葉子] – moved down the road into town. (SSC 51-52; FLD 26)

The "old leaf" (*lao de yezi* 老的葉子) turns into another kind of *lao yezi* 老爺子 (old man) as the compassionate Two-and-a-Half Li (*er li ban* 二里半), an old villager with a bad limp, accompanies her for a while on the road, trying to plead mercy for the animal. Soon afterwards, Mother Wang imagines the butcher's knife going through her own spine instead of the mare's. The point is driven home on the next page when:

> They drew near the slaughterhouse. Now the city gate was directly ahead. Mother Wang's heart was in turmoil [王婆的心更翻着不停了].
> Five years ago it had been a young horse [五年前牠是一匹年青的馬], but owing to farm work, it had been reduced to skin and bones. Now it was old.

> Autumn was nearly over and the harvesting done. It had become useless, and for the sake of its hide, its unfeeling master was sending it to the slaughterhouse. (SSC: 54; FLD 27-28)

Here, the *it* is without doubt an anteposition for the young horse, but given that Mother Wang's name immediately precedes it, the reader initially confuses it with an anaphoric reprise of Mother Wang, furthering the identification between the woman's heart and the horse. The autumn being nearly over echoes another passage when "Only the women in the village, like farm horses, grew skinnier in the summer" (只有女人在鄉村夏季更貧瘦，和耕種的馬一般。SSC: 99; FLD 45). The continuum of shifting pronouns from Mother Wang's early ramblings through to Chapter 3 show how the mare's trip to the slaughterhouse is also a metaphorical trip to the slaughterhouse of remorse. As opposed to the horse, Mother Wang fails to die at the slaughterhouse but then becomes an old "talkative phantom" (*neng yan de youling* 能言的幽靈 ; SSC 16; FLD 11). She is repeatedly described as "phantomlike," (*youling yiban de* 幽靈一般的; SSC: 48; FLD: 105) as if all life energy had left her, and pronominal shifts become most explicit when again the "old gray phantom" is compared to a grey bird, where once again she is described as *it*. Like a phantom, she will know no respite and does not even manage to die when she takes poison on purpose to kill herself in Chapter 7, *The Sinful Summer Festival (Zui'e de wu yue jie* 罪惡的五月節). She is almost buried alive, but even that fails.

Todd Foley (2020) also explores the example of Mother Wang: he ties the shared fate of the human and animal in life and death to Buddhist associations with the concept of samsara given the prominence of the terms life/birth (*sheng* 生) and death (*si* 死) in the title of the book, and given other explicit mentions of Buddhist terminology including the four distresses (Foley, 2020: 189-91). The question of Buddhism in *Field* has led to some controversy. Yue Gang (1999, 298-300) generally dismisses Buddhist associations in Xiao Hong's writings, while Lydia Liu emphasizes that the novel locates "the meaning of its suffering in the immediate socio-economic context of this world rather than in a world of karma" (Liu, 1995: 203). For others, the association and translation of the title of the book as *Samsara* are immediate (Vuilleumier, 2015: 49). While I concur with the view that the Buddhist subtext to the story is undeniable, I argue that, although it is the most overt, it might not be the only element that lends itself to a religious interpretation in the text. Reading *Field* through the prism of *feiwu,* the figure of Two-and-a-half Li materialises neither as a ridiculed anti-hero standing in the way of the nationalist struggle (Ho, 2012: 242), nor as a castrated individual, more of a woman than a man (Liu, 1995: 209), but through the lens of his relationship with the goat. This relationship frames the entire novel, articulating his disability and his compassion for all living beings, until the goat ultimately transforms into a Christ-like figure, the only one to see Two-and-a-half Li beyond his physical appearance.

Among the villagers, Two-and-a-half Li is described as the most *feiwu* of all, and as an anti-heroic figure who is constantly mocked by other characters through the entire course of *Field*. First he is mocked as "a cripple," second as father to a disabled boy, and third for refusing to give up his beloved goat for good luck in an oath-taking ceremony for the sake of "saving the nation" and without, at that, seeming particularly distressed about it, the most supreme insult of all. In the eyes of his fellow villagers, he is considered to be even lower than the widows who, "despite being women," had at least the moral strength to join the revolutionary army:

> Even the widows took their oaths with the gun aimed at their hearts. But Two-and-a-Half Li did not return until after the oath taking, when the

> assembly was about to kill the goat [殺羊]. He had managed to find a rooster somewhere. He was the only person who did not take the oath. He didn't seem particularly distressed about the fate of the nation as he led the goat [山羊] home.
>
> Everyone's eyes, especially old Zhao San's, angrily followed his departure.
>
> "You crippled old thing [你個老跛腳的物]. Don't you want to go on living?" (FLD 73)

Located at the end of Chapter 13, this passage constitutes a twist on the theme and title of the chapter, *Do You Want to Be Exterminated?*, which the reader had so far believed to be a reference to the peasants as victims of the Japanese, or to point at the peasants' resolve in joining the revolutionary army, the chapter ends with Zhao San's angry and threatening call: "You crippled old thing. Don't you want to go on living?" It is the banal yet terrible social death sentence imposed upon those who fail to live up to the norm, either physically or patriotically, and shows how quickly physical weakness becomes associated with lack of moral strength or patriotic values.

Interestingly, the 1953 edition of *Field* substitutes "*ni ge lao bojia de wu* 你個老跛腳的物" ("You crippled old thing") with "*ni ge lao bojia de dongxi* 你個老跛腳的東西" (122), moving the original sentence away from the lexical field of *feiwu* by replacing the *wu* with the common insult of calling people *dongxi* 東西 (things). The choice of *wu* over *dongxi* in the original text – while *dongxi* was attested as a political slur as soon as 1915 (Thornton, 2002: 607) – is just one of the subtle shifts that illuminate the discrepancy between the original discourse on *feiwu* and the later readings of Xiao Hong's *Field* by PRC critics as more of a nationalist text. Certainly, the 1953 editors' choice of the dissyllable *dongxi* over the monosyllabic *wu* sounds more natural in spoken speech. However, the new ending to Chapter 13 also diverts from an oral "clunkiness" that was perhaps specifically the point, one that made audible the manifold manifestations of the category of "rubbish."

And yet, while nearly every other character goes on to die a horrible death, Two-and-a-Half Li eventually finds redemption from the goat itself. The animal increasingly takes on human-like characteristics, its dreariness and sadness standing in for those of its owner:

> Two-and-a-Half Li's goat lowered its bearded head [山羊下垂牠的鬍子] and walked gently over to a spot beneath a luxuriant tree. It no longer searched for food. It was tired and so old its coat had turned a dirty color. Its eyes were dim and teary. It looked comical yet pitiful as it walked toward the low ground, its beard swaying from side to side. (SSC: 140; FLD: 62)

In the final chapter, *The Unsound Leg* (*Bu jianquan de tui* 不健全的腿), Two-and-a-half Li eventually becomes convinced that "to free himself from all worries and ties, it seemed to him that he must kill the goat without delay" (FLD 90). And yet, his physical and emotional "weakness," his "unsound" leg where *bu jianquan* 不健全 can be read as "not robust" but also as having "no common sense," prevents him from killing the goat. Of course, the idea of "robustness" (*jianquan* 健全) ties readily into the prevalent eugenics-influenced discourses of the Republican period (Dauncey, 2020: 21). In the eyes of other villagers, the leg is also "unsound" because they see it as unfit for its purpose as a leg, that is, for farm work. The leg is unsound because it does not make sense according to the norms of society to spare the goat

at all costs. And yet, it is Two-and-a-half Li's renunciation of the supposedly "sound" expectations of society that eventually turns the goat into a Christlike figure able to redeem the "cripple":

> The old animal [*lao yang* 老羊] came up and scratched itself against his legs. For a long time, Two-and-a-Half Li stroked its head. He was overcome with shame and prayed to the goat like a Christian. (SSC: 208; FLD: 90)

In the end, only an animal found the compassion necessary to stroke Two-and-a-Half Li's leg and look beyond his disability, whereas human beings could not. Reading the "goat" as a redemptory figure for the "cripple" eventually unveils an astute superposition of metaphors in Xiao Hong's writing that can hardly be rendered in translation. Two-and-a-half Li's *yang* 羊 is not, strictly speaking, a goat. It is certainly described as *shan yang* 山羊 (a goat) in the first chapter, but gradually the text moves towards describing it only as *lao yang* 老羊 (the old sheep/goat), as *yang* 羊 (a sheep/goat/lamb), or sometimes even as *xiao yang* 小羊 (little sheep/lamb). By the time we get to the sacrificial scenes, there is only the question of whether to *sha yang* 殺羊 (to kill the sheep/goat/lamb). The "goat" from the beginning is transfigured into a sacrificial lamb, as is also evident in the first time when the peasants must conduct a sacrifice: a rooster ends up being sacrificed in its place, just as a ram ended up as a substitute for the beloved son in the Bible. By the time we get to the last scene, Two and a half-Li's *yang* 羊 is thus both the sacrificial lamb and the satanic image of the pagan goat who is prayed to, instead of the nation that Two and a half-Li is expected to hold sacred. As a Christ-like figure undoing blindness, the goat is nevertheless the only character of the story to "save" Two and a half-Li. However, in a total reversal of Christian anthropocentrism, here the saviour *is* the animal. Linguistically speaking, this reversal is even more striking in relation to representations of disability if we consider, as Emma Stone has shown how Chinese characters with animal radicals have historically been used to refer to physical or mental disability in a way conveying diminished personhood (Stone, 1999: 141). Here, Two-and-a-half-Li and the goat saving each other in turn and moving away from the cruel expectations of society thus further subverts common tropes of metaphorical and linguistic linking of animals and disabled people circulating in the Republican period. In a similar fashion, the next section will explore how *Market Street* turns its focus to the shared destiny of human beings and *things* as *feiwu*, and how *things* similarly highlight a compounding of inequalities based on class, gender, and disability.

Human Beings and/as Things in Market Street

Published in August 1936, *Market Street* (*Shangshi jie* 商市街) consists of a series of semi-autobiographical vignettes chronicling the life of a couple struggling to make ends meet through the seasons, sickness, and Manchuria's evolving political circumstances during the early 1930s. Though considerably less studied than *Field of Life and Death*, scholarship on *Market Street* has mostly focused on the book as an artistic exploration of hunger (Yue Gang, 1999: 293-4), or alternatively as an autobiographical account of Xiao Hong's life (Zhang Enhua, 2016: 113). The latter tendency is to be attributed to the many striking similarities between the storylines of *Market Street* and the details of Xiao Hong's own cohabitation with fellow author Xiao Jun (蕭軍, 1907-1988), with whom she lived in Harbin until 1934 and with whom she co-authored *Trudging* (*Bashe* 跋涉, 1933). Beyond those aspects, the book is a striking exploration of the way people relate to objects when everything is scarce, and of how "broken things" become stand-ins for reflecting on the value of what society considers to be "broken

people." Echoing the mercantile connotations of the title of the book, many chapters are named after objects (*The Last Piece of Kindling*, *Black Khleb and White Salt*, *Ten Yuan Bill*, *The Book*…), after places or practices of consumption (*The Europa Hotel*, *The Pawnshop*, *Borrowing*, *Buying a Fur Cap*, *Selling Off Our Belongings*…), or after occupations (*The Tutor*, *The Basket Carrier*, *The Female Tutor*…).

In *Market Street,* objects often become imbued with human emotions. For instance, the window glass in the vignette *The Tutor* (*Jiating jiaoshi* 家庭教師), which is marked by a multitude of tear-like streams by the snows:

> The window was high up on the wall, like in a prison cell. I raised my head to look out the window at the swirling snowflakes falling outside the building. Some of them stuck to the windowpane, melting on the glass and forming rivulets of water, turning the window into a mass of meandering, aimless streaks.
>
> Why did snowflakes dance in the air? How meaningless it all seemed. It dawned on me that I was just like those snowflakes, leading a meaningless existence. I was sitting in the chair, empty-handed, doing nothing; my mouth was open but there was nothing to eat. I was exactly like a completely idled machine. (SSJ: 9; MS 8)

Here, the window becomes a reflector of the narrator's image, in a stunning first parallel made between "useless" non-productive bodies and machines. The main protagonist of *Market Street* cannot work as she is physically too weak, all while her partner is out and about seeking employment. She is described as being as frail as a snowflake and she sees her own existence as a meaningless one. The windowpane recurs several vignettes later when:

> The window frosted up as soon as I closed it. Before long, tears were streaming down the pane of glass! At first, only a few streaks, but then tears ran in a torrent down the glass! The face of the window was covered in tears, just like the face of the beggar-woman on the street below. (MS: 26)

The window functions as a stand-in for the tears of the narrator herself, a medium exposed to both the warmth of the inside and the cold of the outside. The thawing ice on the pane acts as an intermediary between the two women, until the reader no longer knows who is crying for whom: the narrator on the inside, the beggar woman on the outside, or the object that separates them. It is but the thickness of glass that differentiates the narrator from the beggar woman, a fragile thing that nevertheless amounts to everything in the dead cold of winter.

The narrator's physical frailty is made worse as she eats as little as possible so that her male partner who is able to work can have as much sustenance as possible. With reduced eating, she must reduce her physical movements to the bare minimum as well:

> During the days, I would sit quietly in the company of our furniture — I had a mouth, but no one to talk to, legs, but nowhere to go, hands, but nothing to do. I was just like a disabled person — I was so lonely! [我雖生着嘴也不能言語，我雖生着腿也不能走動，我雖生着手而也沒有什麼做，和一個廢人一般，有多麼寂寞！] (SSJ: 59; MS: 44)

The narrator then turns to things to assuage her loneliness during her long wintry confinement: things in the apartment are recast in her image. Like a table, she has legs but nowhere to go (a table's legs are also *tui* 腿 in Chinese). Like a jar, she has a mouth but no one to speak with (a jar's mouth is the *kou* 口 of *pingkou* 瓶口, as for a human mouth). She likens her object-like forced stillness, and her loneliness to that of a *feiren* 廢人. This is translated as "disabled person," in Howard Goldblatt's translation but which in Chinese, of course, carries the added connotation of "useless person" or "good-for-nothing," as translated and noted by Dauncey (2012: 322) in her discussion of disability life writing in China from the late 1980s.

Immediately afterwards, the narrator's silence is contrasted against the lively tune of the concertina that takes on a life of its own to sing to the hardships of life:

> Close by, a concertina started to play. Was it singing to life's hardships?[5] It was such a mournful tune!
>
> I opened the little window by standing on the table. That little window was our sole link with the outside world. Through it we maintained contact with the skyline — roofs and chimneys — the falling snow, the dark, floating, moisture-laden clouds — street lamps, policemen, hawkers, beggars... The streets were noisy and bustling.
>
> We could no longer hear the concertina in the next room. (MS 9)

It is the *it*, the concertina-as-object, that comes alive to fill the air with the sound of streets, "noisy and bustling," that the narrator cannot access or make out for herself. The effect is reinforced by the *shijie* 市街 "Market Street" that phonetically evokes a world (*shijie* 世界), a cityscape that is a world in and of itself for the confined people who cannot go out. In the next vignette, when the narrator is finally well enough to be working, she can at last enjoy a spring outing to the park. As she hears again the enchanting tune of the concertina, she turns around the corner trying to follow it. To her disgust, she discovers that the concertina is played by a blind man sitting next to another with a frozen, swollen leg, who is at once begging and eating a rotten pear:

> The song of a concertina came to us from the next street over. But it wasn't the song of spring. How sad the blind man made us as he cocked his head and played his concertina. The blind man couldn't experience spring, for he had no eyes. The man with the swollen leg couldn't walk in the spring, and he might as well have had no legs at all.
>
> There's no reason for the world's unfortunate people even to be alive! They should be exterminated as soon as possible, so that the rest of us need never listen to the horrible song they sing!" (MS 84)

Only at this stage does she find out that the concertina, the *it* that has charmed her all along and helped her bear her solitary confinement and her extreme state of weakness, does not sing by "itself" but is played by a *him*, the blind man. She was happy to listen to the beautiful sounds of the concertina as long as she remained blissfully unaware of the conditions of their

[5] Here, the original English translation reads "Someone began playing a concertina in the next room. Was it a tune dedicated to the misery of life?" thus removing the emphasis on the concertina in the Chinese original.

production, unaware of people – as the reader learns a little later in the text – injured by war. The motif of the man with a broken leg as a nuisance to others is of course reminiscent of Lu Xun's *Kong Yiji* 孔乙己, perhaps the epitome of the motif of the physical disability at that time. Of course, in the case of *Kong Yiji*, it is not war but classical culture and education that lead to his becoming disabled (Vuilleumier, 2015: 66). Here, the reoccurrence of the vocabulary of "extermination" recalls the attitudes of the characters of *Field* towards disabled people and also shows here how people's empathy largely extends to themselves as long as they are directly concerned but is quickly dismissed as soon as their personal circumstances improve.

After she falls ill again, the narrator seems to regain her sense of empathy for what others see as "damaged goods," the only ones to keep her company. In the penultimate vignette, *Selling off our belongings* (*paimai jiaju* 拍賣傢俱), the cooking pot that has eased the burden of the narrator's loneliness and prevented her from dying of hunger is nevertheless damaged goods (*feihuo* 廢貨), from the perspective of the unemotional used goods merchant:

> Look, this stuff is a bunch of junk [廢貨]. Even if I do buy it [它] from you, I'll have trouble selling it. (SSJ 178; MS 129)

Meanwhile, the narrator seems to hesitate as to whether she should simply consider the cooking pot as an object that has served its purpose and let it go, or cling to it as a member of the household that had shared their misfortunes (129). This passage builds on an earlier scene when the narrator found herself discussing "what is human" and "what is not" with a couple of friends. Everyone brought their own definition to the table, some people highlighting that "A person without emotions is not human," others that "A person without courage is not human," and still others that "Cruel people are not human." (殘忍的人不是人; MS 76; SSJ 106). The passage concludes: "Everyone had his own definition of what was human. Some gave as many as two standards for determining what was human." Interestingly, the text leaves a degree of doubt as to whether the sentence refers to participants in the conversation, or if it is a more general statement from the narrator that "people" in general often having "double standards."

If "cruel people are not human," the discourse on *feiwu* in *Market Street* shows how disabled people often come to be on the receiving end of the cruelty of other people. Already in the earlier scene with the concertina player, it was deemed "cruel" (*canren* 殘忍) and thus repulsive to the narrator that the blind man could not experience spring. A little further, disability functions once again as the magnifying glass that brings out cruelty in people:

> After that, we went over to look at a warship sunk during a 1929 battle with the Russians. We could still see its name — it was called "Great Victory." We shared our thoughts regarding the warship, but everything we said was a bunch of nonsense. Someone said it had sunk when the boiler had burst; someone else said that it had sunk when the pilot had been killed. It was riddled with bullet holes, and made people feel the cruelty of it all [使人感到殘忍]. Just like one sees on the street[6] a soldier who has lost a leg on the battlefield. Being maimed, he is called a cripple [他殘廢了，別人稱他是個

[6] Here, the original English translation modifies somewhat the meaning of the original. Goldblatt's translation reads: "It was riddled with bullet holes, a useless cripple. It reminded one of…", thus transferring judgment value by calling the disabled soldier "a useless cripple" while the Chinese original oppositely says that the view of this body prompts people to being cruel. For the sake of the analysis, I have thus replaced parts of Goldblatt's translation, signalled with brackets.

> 廢人]. The battered warship lay there alongside the wharf, turning to rust. (SSJ 168; MS 121)

Here, the masculine third person pronoun helps personify the sunk warship and transform it into a maimed soldier. Once again, the focus is on what other people call it (*feiren* 廢人, human rubbish), and the term "cruel" returns as bystanders become uncomfortable with the emotions that arise from watching the sunk warship. Beyond *Market Street*, disability and disability-related metaphors often take centre stage in Xiao Hong's wartime narratives. Mute people become narrators of the war's story, as in her 1933 *An Old Mute* (*Ya laoren* 哑老人), where a mute old man is unable to prevent his granddaughter dying from violence while he himself is trapped during a fire at a beggar's shelter (Xiao Hong, 1991 [1933]). On a metaphorical level, the role of hearsay in giving fragmented, conflicting accounts of the war, here foregrounded in the use of "someone said", "someone else said", "everything we said was a bunch of nonsense" in the text, becomes physically embodied when characters have their ears cut off, as is the case in *On the Oxcart* (*Niuche shang* 牛車上) when the wife of the soldier finally shows her cut-off earlobes, lamenting her typical fate (Xiao Hong, 1936). A far cry from the heroic figures and able-bodied, superhuman exemplary soldiers who would take literary models by storm a few years later in the early PRC (Riep, 2008), disability comes to represent the absurdity of war, when people are either considered to be "garbage" for not joining in, or "garbage" all the same when society fails to find a way to reintegrate those who did go. In the same vignette, the image of the maimed battleship, forever moored by its wounds, is contrasted with the broken pieces of ice that despite being broken, float happily towards the sea:

> It was a beautiful sight, this river flowing with a purpose but seemingly without purpose; chunks of ice, big and small, crashed against each other as they flowed with the current — "ping, ping" — sounding like ceramic pots banging together, like pieces of glass banging together. As I stood on the riverbank I daydreamed: *Where do these chunks of ice go? To the sea? They'll probably never make it that far, for the sun's rays will surely [eradicate]*[7] *them* [全數把牠們消滅盡] *before they reach their destination.*
>
> Still they [它們] flowed on, tranquilly, as though they were alive and far happier than we humans [幽遊一般也像有生命似的，看起來比人更快活。]. (SSJ 167; MS 120)

While the warship is stuck ashore, condemned to rust and stay a "cripple" in the human realm, the chunks of ice happily float and dissolve into the sea. The pieces of ice floating to the sea are likened to broken ceramic pots and pieces of glass, *things* containing water, like the windowpane, or the little rice pot. Unlike the crying windowpane, and unlike the image of the narrator frail as a snowflake melting onto the glass, they are happy. While a shattered window or a ceramic pot become a collection of mere pieces of ceramics or pieces of glass, the little pieces of ice are content to serve no purpose. Unlike objects or humans, they do not belong to any realm of transactional exchange and do not lose "value" because they are shattered. They are just water returning to the sea and will continue to do so despite having been "eradicated" by the sun.

[7] Here, the original English translation gives "melt them" but 消滅 *xiaomie* is "eradicate" and much harsher than "melt."

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought first to historicise the slur *feiwu*, "rubbish", as it circulated in the periodical press in 1930s China through excerpts of New Life Movement slogans, satirical cartoons, and homemaking or hygienicist press articles. Against this background, I have shown how the category of *feiwu* functions as a prism that brings together Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death* and *Market Street* in a common critique of contemporary discourse on gender, disability, and social class. Through a gendered lens, *feiwu* in *Field* is most clearly articulated through the figure of Mother Wang, for whom having a daughter was a downfall. In *Market Street*, women become "trash" when they do not contribute actively to the household (the narrator, the beggar woman), while men become "garbage" when their disability makes them unable or unwilling to join the armed insurrections against the Japanese, as Two-and-a-half Li. And still, when men do uphold their civic duties and later become unable to reintegrate society after the "heroic" undertaking of war leaves them disabled (the soldier and the warship, the beggar and the concertina), they become "rubbish" all the same. The category of *feiwu* thus becomes revealing of disability as much as it uncovers gender and works as a magnifier for social inequalities: the beggar woman is separated from the narrator by the thickness of the window, and peasants are mosquitoes that "must" be exterminated.

Pointing to gendered violence and rural patriarchy as dominant themes in *Field*, Lydia Liu already noted in 1995 that "It is interesting that, in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, nationalist interpretation of this novel is the rule rather than an exception in Xiao Hong scholarship" (Liu, 1995: 210). Interesting also is how many of all those who have looked at Xiao Hong beyond the nationalist struggle have focused on the novel's dark denunciation of "bestiality," on gendered violence, deaths and hopelessness. While Xiao Hong's works remain grim indeed, an exploration of what *Field of Life and Death* and *Market Street* opposes to this discourse on "human rubbish" (the figure of the goat, the pieces of ice) allows us to see how her novels are not only dark, but in many instances also let light in between the cracks, thereby revealing what all kinds of people can teach us about our shared humanity. Laying bare the processes of marginalisation and dehumanisation at play in public discourse and popular media in 1930s China, Xiao Hong's oeuvre thus provides us with a glimpse into the kind of critical counter-discourse that was already being articulated in the Republican period by those seeking to take to task stereotypical representations of gender, class, and disability circulating at the time. Expanding into earlier decades discussions conducted thus far by historians of disability for the Second Sino-Japanese War and for the People's Republic of China, it also suggests that more attention needs to be paid to earlier critical discussions taking place during the Republican period to understand fully the continuities and ruptures that have shaped discourses and counter-discourses on marginalisation in twentieth-century China.

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