

**Cultural Politics of the ‘Subaltern’ Peasants: A Critical
Reading of Mo Yan’s
*The Garlic Ballads***

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Abstract:

This study undertakes to examine the cultural politics of the subaltern peasants in Mo Yan’s *The Garlic Ballads* (1995) in the light of the theoretical speculations of the subaltern study project espoused by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty. Yan endeavors to give a voice to peasants who are underrepresented. *The Garlic Ballads* presents a dimension of peasant reality that is ignored in historiographic annals. They have been labeled ‘primitive’ and ‘anachronistic’ and thus, they have been muted, marginalized and confined to the peripheral zone of difference. In Mo Yan’s narrative, the bleak existence and the physical and psychological wounds do not subdue the peasants’ urge to resist, and their vitality remains enflamed. They forge stratagems and weapons derived from within peasant experience through which they counter the atrocious oppression and

injustices of the officials. The weapons are diverse namely; docility, voluntary compliance, folktales, songs, rumors, and memories. Given their unrelenting insubordination and resistance through the resort to stratagems and maneuvers, they prove worthy of the status to represent China's sturdy backbone. Moreover, they demonstrate evidence of their capability to bear the responsibility to disrupt the burdensome legacy of the silence, inferiority and subalternity imposed upon them by the dominant culture.

Keywords:-

Peasants- ballads- garlic- culture- subaltern- dominant- insurgency- resistance- weapons

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة الثقافة السياسية للفلاحين في ضوء خطاب التابع وذلك من خلال تحليل رواية مو يان "أغنيات الثوم الشعبية" (1995). ولقد نظّر لهذا الخطاب راناجيت جوها وجياتري سيفاك و ديبيش تشاكرابارتي. سعي يان في هذه الرواية إلى إبراز صوت الفلاحين والذين تم تجسيدهم في الخطاب المهيم بصورة مغايرة للواقع؛ لذا فان "أغنيات الثوم الشعبية" تقدم رؤية واقعية تم تجاهلها في سجلات النظريات التاريخية العنصرية والتي صورتهم على أنهم بدائيين وبلا وعي ثقافي أو سياسي وقد أسفر هذا المنظور عن تجاهل وتغييب أصواتهم وإقصائهم وتهميشهم وعلي الرغم من واقع الفلاحين الكئيب، كما يجسده النص السردي، إضافة إلى المعاناة الجسدية والنفسية، تأججت رغبة وعزيمة الفلاحين علي المقاومة وظلت مشتعلة. فقد لجأوا إلى العديد من استراتيجيات وأساليب المقاومة المنبثقة من واقعهم المعاش لمجابهة الظلم والاضطهاد من قبل مسئولو الحزب الحاكم. وتميزت هذه الأدوات والأساليب بالتنوع والابتكار ومن

بينها التظاهر بالخنوع والإذعان للسلطة واللجوء للاغاني الشعبية وترويج الإشاعات والاستعانة بالمدكرات كوسائل للمقاومة وبنهج اسلوب المقاومة المستميتة أثبت الفلاحون أنهم جديرون بأن يكونوا بمثابة العمود الفقري الصلب للقصر في الثقافة المهيمنة.

الكلمات الدالة:

الفلاحين، أغنيات، الثوم، ثقافة، تابع، مهيمن، تمرد، مقاومة، أسلحة

Historiography has been content to deal with the peasant rebel merely as an empirical person or member of a class, but not as an entity whose will and reason constituted the praxis called rebellion. The omission is indeed dyed into most narratives by metaphors assimilating peasant revolts to natural phenomena: they break out like thunderstorms, heave like earthquakes, spread like wildfires, infect like epidemics. (Guha and Spivak⁴⁶)

Eric Hobsbawm, a Eurocentric historiographer, identifies peasants as “pre-political people who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express their aspirations about the world” (2). He contends that peasants do not apprehend the insidious economic forces that give rise to capitalism. He envisions the conventional forms of peasant discontent of the twentieth century as “primitive,” and “archaic” (3) since peasants lack real consciousness, political identity, and an explicit ideology and organization to stimulate insurgent actions. On their

part, Delanty and Isin, argue that “as far as radical politics is concerned” (83), peasants are an “anachronistic” and “extinct” group.

Such depiction portrays peasants as incapable of envisioning a revolution that might alter the subaltern, peripheral and marginalized position assigned to them by the mainstream dominant discourse. Scholars of subaltern studies such as Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, and Dipesh Chakrabarty deploy the term ‘subaltern’ to designate the dominant classes’ projection of “the relationship of two entities to each other vis-à-vis their access to power or capital (of the material and social varieties)” (Novetzke and Patton 379). In their postulations, they endeavor to discredit such projection and thus, as Leela Gandhi declares, “allow people to speak within the jealous pages of elitist historiography and in so doing, to speak for, or to sound the muted voices of, the truly oppressed” (1-2). Any declarations that peasants are capable of rebellion, that their voice is a conscious counter politic targeting the discriminatory power of state, class, gender and race ; and their stance, as Gramsci assumes, is a defense against the subjection exercised by the dominant classes (21) constitute an evidence that historiographers fail to formulate a valid depiction of peasant potentials.

Basing his speculations on Gramsci’s conjectures, Guha defines the term subaltern as the overall aspect of subordination expressed “in terms of class, caste, age, office or in any other way” (Preface 35). For Gyan Prakash, subalternity connotes “centrality of dominant/ dominated relationships in history” (1477). Mulling over the historiography produced by European and American ‘elites’ in the nineteenth and

twentieth century, Guha comments that it is not a true representation of “the historical realities of nonelites” (“Prose” 43) because it is “blinkered,” “narrow,” “partial,” “one-sided” and “un-historical” (*Elementary* 39-40). In the first volume of *Subaltern Studies*, Guha outlines the objectives of the project, “We are indeed opposed to much of the prevailing academic practice in historiography [...] for its failure to acknowledge the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny” (vii). Only through what Guha calls “epistemological inversion” can peasants be the agents of their own history, and the subaltern is enabled to carry out a political struggle to “appropriate[...] and/or destroy [...] the insignia of his enemy’s power” thus undertakes “to abolish the marks of his own subalternity” (*Elementary* 75).

Through indicating the faults of historiography, on grounds of its endeavors to keep the subaltern in the peripheral space of difference, Guha argues that elitist historiographers and politicians deliberately disregard the existence of subaltern classes and groups disregarding the fact that they constitute the mass of the laboring population that counteract the dominant groups and superordinate authorities in the aboriginal society (“Some Aspects” 3). Furthermore, Pandey debates that the main task of subaltern historiography is to accentuate the presence of the underdeveloped figure for history, “to restore the agency of the yokel, recognize that the peasant mass was contemporaneous with the modern, a part of modernity, and establish the peasant as the maker of his/ her own destiny” (2).

Evidently, proponents of the subaltern studies project embark on clearing a zone to effectively incorporate the peasants in modern social politics. In other words, for the peasant to become “the citizen-subject of the nation” (Pandey 19), he must be reinstated as the subject of modern, historical and potentially revolutionary politics. In the same vein, Vinay Bhal, focusing on rectifying the elitist bias of academicians in South Asian Studies, emphasizes the concern of Subaltern Studies to restore “history to the subordinated” (361). In India, for instance, peasants emerge as sovereign cognizant actors/subjects countering the elitist hegemonic ploys. Retaining subjectivity entuses them to play a perceptive political role that is not “contingent on the intervention of charismatic leaders, advanced political organizations or upper classes” (Guha, *Elementary* 4). It is a role that galvanizes them to “writ[e] [their] own history” (Guha, “Small” 12) of nationalism and the nation, and disrupts the legacy of silence about the undercurrents of desperateness. Guha’s words unquestionably endorse as erroneous the potentiality of subverting the power dynamic notions of subaltern/elite as well as the political consciousness of peasants. In a study that investigates the political culture of peasants in Egypt, Kamal El Menoufy underlines the peasant’s political cognizance as a set of inveterate beliefs associated with how the citizen considers the authority to be responsible for the legitimacy of the regime. Political culture determines the citizen’s relationship with the regime: what the citizen expects from the regime to deliver and what duties are incumbent upon the citizens. Besides,

political culture comprises all details specific to individual and group identity. (14 *my translation*)⁽¹⁾

El Menoufy's definition of political consciousness indicates a failure on the part of the historiographers to acknowledge "the agency and actions of subaltern people" (Altern 60). It also confutes their sweeping designation of peasants as incapable of insurgency when they proclaim that only a charismatic leader can change their condition "from subjugation to freedom" ("Some Aspects" 2). Such misconception renders exigent the need to re-formulate subaltern historiography that would go "beyond the failings of the existing historiography" (Altern 60), and as Chakrabarty professes, "to write the subaltern classes into the history of nationalism ... and to combat all elitist biases in the writing of history [as well as] to make the subaltern the sovereign subject of history ... to listen to their voices ... to take their experiences and thought ... seriously" (102). It is the peasants' participation in insurgencies against state-centric regimes that constitutes the pivot of a new historiographical approach. El Menoufy mentions several instances; namely that of the "Russian between 1905 and 1917; the Mexican (1910); the Chinese led by Mao Tse-tung from 1925 to 1949, the Vietnamese burgeoning after World War Second, the Algerian (1949); and the Cuban that triumphed in January 1959" (6). He goes on to indicate that henceforth "a new way of looking at peasants as a revolutionary power has evolved" (6).

In explaining the factors that instigated upheavals, James Scott points out that peasant revolutions were "intended either to mitigate or to deny claims (e.g. rents, taxes, deference) made on [them] by superordinate

classes (e.g. landlords, the state, owners of machinery, moneylenders) or to advance [their] own claims (e.g. to work, land, charity, respect) vis-a-vis these superordinate classes" (*Everyday* 22). In view of this perspective, insurgency is thus not specific to an individual class or group. It encompasses a broad spectrum of powerless and oppressed groups; namely, slaves, impecunious peasants or workers. They all rise, despite the reprisals that would befall them, against their subalternity and work to institute a forceful identity that is able to thwart the superordinate multiple forms that crush them whether religious or economic, and stand up to political and social autocracy and their misappropriation of work, taxes or production.

Additionally, in their insurgencies, peasants implement sundry unconventional forms and tactics that "we would not recognize" (19) as presumed by Dirks, Eley and Ortner. Hence, it is not an easy task to identify them. Scott describes them as the "weapons of the weak." He explicates that the political culture of the lower groups is to be found "neither in the overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance" (*Domination* 136). Suffering under a prolonged process of domination, the subaltern peasants resort to an interstitial zone between the two opposites of overt defiance and complete docility.

The subalterns cast aspersions on the autocratic power from behind as they manipulate an offstage discourse of what cannot be spoken openly over issues such as taxes, cropping policies or arduous new laws. Such a discourse, as Scott explains, includes "rumors, gossip, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater" (*Domination* xii). Other weapons encompass

“foot dragging, deception ...[and] in place of a land invasion, they prefer piecemeal squatting; in place of open mutiny, they prefer desertion; in place of attacks on public or private grain stores; they prefer pilfering” (Scott, *Weapons* xvi). They can also extend to “transcripts” (137) and “contests that are hidden or displaced into popular cultural forms, such as folktales and festivals” (Stallybrass and White 42). In utilizing such oblique stratagems, peasants do not risk downright combat with authorities in order to evade jeopardizing their existence and safety. Along these lines, the peasants’ appropriation of alternative uncommon tactics, in their contest against coercion, assert their dignity and create “political and economic barrier reefs of their own ... [to] make its political presence felt” (Scott, *Everyday* 8).

The above theoretical speculations provide the springboard for the subsequent analysis of Mo Yan’s *The Garlic Ballads* (1995). The Prize Nobel Committee praised the text as not only an innovative social critique of the abusive elite norms, but also “a departure point in old Chinese literature and in oral tradition” (qtd. in Jacobs and Lyall). Yan undertakes to give a voice to peasant narratives that are misinterpreted, not recorded, and under-represented in historiographic annals of the Communist Party. Underscoring the importance of Mo Yan's socio-political engagement, Michel Hockx states that Mo Yan “began looking at Chinese society, particularly in the countryside through new eyes outside the party line” (qtd. in Jacobs and Lyall). He veers away from the party’s elitist vision that topples the subaltern archetypal figure, and in

the process he unravels a cultural consciousness and potentiality to speak out defiantly against an entirely lopsided social system.

For Mo Yan, the main mission is to express censure and aversion directed at “the dark side of society and the ugliness of human nature” (qtd. in Jacobs and Lyall). The writer, like the subaltern peasants he portrays, is cunningly manipulating various weapons against opposition. Throughout the text, he alternates between venting out his indignation, revealing overtly his protest and espousing submission and hiding his indignation. Several allusions to motifs, topos, and keynotes populating his previous production of short stories and fictional texts ⁽²⁾ function in a way to proclaim his views and convey his message but in oblique ways that spare him direct confrontation.

In Chinese literature of the 1980s, peasantry acquires a compelling position of “a quiet empathy” (Siu 19). Together with the Yellow River, Helen Siu professes that peasantry has “always symbolized the life force of Chinese culture and society” (19). Siu explicates further that the main impetus underlying such a perspective is that Chinese writers regard peasants as “much a political and moral metaphor as living, suffering, and functioning human beings” (vii) who have been objects of abuse in traditional societies as well as objects of transformation in the decades of socialism. Furthermore, the representation of their diligence and labors were merely used to add to the privilege of Chinese intellectuals and elitist historians rather than to the peasants themselves. In Mo Yan’s *The Garlic Ballads* (1995), he embarks on a mission to recover their absent voice and make their political contribution acknowledged. In this respect,

Gayatri Spivak suggests that when “the Subaltern speaks,” he/she “is no longer subaltern” (qtd. in Menon 37). The downtrodden peasants lie at the core of *The Garlic Ballads*. It recounts their insurgency and rage against hunger, privation and exploitation by immoral officials. The narrative is based on the 1987 Cangshan Garlic incident in Mo Yan’s native province of Shandong, as admitted by Thomas Chen in “The Censorship of Mo Yan’s *The Garlic Ballads*.” Chen describes the incident of the overproduction of garlic in Cangshan County which was aggravated by the indiscriminate fees and fines levied by the market administration that “obstructed sales”. Thus, “the price of garlic dropped dramatically” (38) when stopping the purchase of garlic from the farmers led them to dump “their rotting garlic in front of the county seat government building” (38). Scott argues that “fiscal and monetary policy” or “the distribution of property in land” (*Everyday* 34) represents a major instigation of peasant riots. In this case, when a riot ensued, people broke into the government offices. Admittedly, the riot signifies the peasants’ political consciousness and calls the readers’ attention to the statist oppressive maneuvers.

In *The Garlic Ballads*, the spectrum of peasantry reality is unequivocally verbalized in the highly symptomatic title of the novel. The setting is rural, Paradise County (1985). The characters are farmers and cadres who are engaged in peasantry affairs. Most of the time, they are scything millets, planting garlic, emaciating lines of corn, irrigating, planting, selling crops. The narrative tells disjointedly intercutting stories of Gao Ma, Gao Yang, Fourth Aunt, Jinju and other characters recounted

by an omniscient narrator. The narrator seeks to report on their derelict conditions embracing “pieces of real lives, historical stories, reminiscences, illusions, and folk tales which jump back and forth for the reader alternating between fact and fantasy” (Du and Zhang 2).

Yan utilizes the ballads and songs of Zhang Kou, the black minstrel protagonist, as prologues of the chapters. Such songs typify one of the main weapons of the subaltern, as presumed by Scott. Yan deploys them to censure the blemished deeds of the elites manifested in the “Garlic Event” and to string the disrupted spatial-temporal sequence of the narrative. They are also used to make “explicit the meaning of the action to come (prolepsis) or the action just completed in the previous section (anglepsis)” (Duke 63-64). Significantly, Kou’s role alludes to that of Tiresias and the Chorus in Greek mythologies and tragedies foreshadowing upcoming events.

Ping Du and Lili Zhang deliberate that the name of Zhang Kou, which signifies knot or button in Chinese, brings a peculiar meaning to the novel. He is sightless but insightful and “clear-hearted, with an abhorrence of sin and a strong sense of justice,[his] song lyrics have a fine sense of humor and an inspiring spirit ... and voice is the conscience of the land” (2). When arrested by authorities, he was physically tortured by putting an electric prod on his lips to suppress his voice; the people’s voice. Nevertheless, he does not succumb to their violence and continues his ballads after his release.

Indubitably, subaltern traits of “blackness” and “blindness” are attributed to Zhang Kou not to incapacitate him but to empower him as a

mouthpiece for the subaltern suffering. This is Yan's way to indicate that no infirmity can ever hinder or silence the subaltern's voice. Furthermore, Kou's ballads denote one means to bring the peasants to speak out to let their songs be heard. This undermines the connotation of Mo Yan's name that stands, in Chinese culture, for "don't speak" (Yan, "Nobel Lecture"), implying in this sense the suppression of speech and censorship of creativity.

Early in the novel, Yan announces his objective through Zhang Kou's song of the oppressed that tells of "the mortal world and Paradise" in which the "nation's Founder, Emperor Liu of the Great Han,/ Commanded citizens of our country to plant garlic for tribute" (1). Kou manipulates the story of the military campaigner and Emperor Liu Wu who led Han China through its greatest expansion to declare it outright that China as an empire has not changed from the communist China. In other words, revolution has changed neither the stances of statist officials towards the oppressed subaltern nor the marginalized position that the subaltern occupy.

Yan scrutinizes the discrepancies of post-revolution on two levels: politically, against the debauched state, and romantically, against familial and household conventions of love and marriage. Richard Bernstein comments, "The unifying theme of Mr. Mo's new book is the small person's battle against capricious authority, both of the corrupt state and of the family tradition." Both levels are interconnected through characters such as Gao Ma, Jinju, her parents and brothers, as well as Deputy Yang. Yan points out the officials' prompts of the peasants'

despondency due to the endless sequence of dilemmas that mainly revolve around ‘Garlic.’

On the political level, *The Garlic Ballads* focuses on the peasants’ common life attacking corrupt aristocratic officials of post-revolutionary China. Preoccupation with the ordinary common Chinese subjects have been originally dealt with in Zhou Zuoren’s “A Literature of Commoners” (1919) which is conducive to creating “literature that addresses common people’s daily lives, thereby accessing their universal feelings of joy and sorrow” (qtd. in Li 32). In answering Jim Leach’s question on whether his writings will become a principle resource for historians, Mo Yan says, “If people still read my books in a few hundred years, they could find out all about the everyday life of people. History books focus on events and the times, but literature focuses more on people’s lives and feelings” (“Real” 12). In fact, Yan is most concerned documenting and substantiating the corruption and brutality of the officials against the peasants. The ruthless functionary adopts all forms of illegal measures to subject the helpless farmers to detention and torture.

Consequently, the narrative presents the dismal life of the peasants and their poetics apropos their callous surroundings, and the officials’ insensitivities towards their groveling and brawling. Peasant daily life is drenched in putrefaction of lice and rats, flies and poisonous maggots, urine, hornets and a sour smell of garlic that hangs in the air. The scene of Gao Ma’s leading Jinju, his sweetheart, into his room is indicative of their grimy life. The narrator depicts the floor of Gao Ma’s room as “carpeted with melon-seed husks, candy wrappers, fruit skins, gobs of

phlegm and standing water” (107). Aunt Fang's allegorical tale about picking lice is another revealing instance in line with the peasants' penury, indigence and destitution before and after the revolution. The conditions are nearly as miserable in 1987 as they were ten years ago. The narrator argues, “Fourth Uncle, her husband, sat against the wall in the sun-baked yard, stripped to the waist, his jacket draped across his knees as he picked lice out of the folds and flipped them into a chipped bowl filled with water” (127). As a little girl Jinju asks “How come you've got so many lice, Daddy?” (127). Her father answers, “The poor get lice, the rich get scabies” (127). Sarcastically, he tells Jinju that they can make medicine out of lice. Then, he recounts a story about “the city louse and the country louse who meet on the road” (128). The tale implies a comparison between the city and country life from the perspective of the two lice. Both escape with their life in search for food. The city louse assumes that things are better in the country, and the country louse assumes the opposite. Yet, the city louse narrates:

‘Things must be better in the city than in the countryside,’ the country louse says. ‘Like hell they are!’ the city louse says. ‘In the city everybody wears silks and satins, layer upon layer of them. They clean them three times a day and change them five. We never catch a glimpse of flesh. If the iron doesn't get us, the water will. I barely escaped with *my* life.’ The two lice cry on each other's shoulders for a while, and when they realize they have nowhere to go, they jump down a well and drown themselves. (128)

The words are so expressive that they drag the reader into the text. We can feel the crawling of the lice in the deterministic world where they live. The lice story reinforces misery on a larger scale in post-revolutionary Chinese cities and villages.

Yan ably alternates between two worlds: the filthy one where the peasants struggle to survive albeit they bleed, cringe, scuffle against grinding bureaucracy, poverty and nature and the one they aspire to attain manifested in their reveries and memories and glimpses of hope about the green, living and breathing countryside. Fourth Aunt speculates such a world in reminiscences of “fields planted with cucumbers, eggplants, and broad beans. The beans were yellowing, the eggplants blooming. A pair of pink-and-white butterflies flew around the purple flowers, moving back and forth between the bean trellises and the eggplant flowers” (129).

However, the officials’ inexorable ordering of peasants to grow garlic in a way that makes their livelihoods heavily reliant upon selling it dissipate the peasants’ hopes about the thriving future of affluence and wealth. Zhang Kou underscores such a proclamation in the opening of the second chapter, “Paradise county garlic is long and crunchy-/ For pork liver or fried mutton forget the onions and ginger,/ Planting leeks and selling garlic will make you rich-/ You’ll have new clothes, new homes, even a new bride ...” (13). The order has several ramifications; namely, the officials fill their pockets with fees, raise taxes and prices of fertilizers and so do bureaucrat-middlemen. Besides, the same officials, whimsically, announce that they will not buy the harvest since garlic has

exceeded their estimates and flooded the warehouse and markets. As a result, farmers find themselves shuttling back and forth daily from farm to warehouse hoping to sell their rotting garlic. Commenting on the event, Zhang Kou sings, and “If you can't sell your garlic, look up the country administrator” (185). He proceeds, that the country administrator is “hiding behind closed doors, shunning duties, and letting subordinates exploit peasants” (185).

Under such circumstances, the stench of garlic inundates the air as portrayed by the narrator early in the novel “dusty air carried the stink of rotting garlic after a prolonged dry spell” (1). He proceeds, “there had been no time to braid the garlic, which lay in heaps, reeking as it baked in the sun” (1) rotting in the fields, saturating the air with foul aromas and costing the farmers’ their livelihoods. Such deluging image is palpable in Fourth Uncle and Fourth Aunt’s conversation. When Fourth Aunt questions: “Are there really that many people selling garlic?” (130), he replies, “Believe me, there are. The streets are jammed with farmers, trucks, oxcarts, horsecarts, tractors, bicycles, even motorbikes. The line runs from the cold-storage warehouse all the way to the railroad tracks. Garlic, nothing but garlic” (130).

In fact, the entanglement of the garlic with the peasants’ destiny and dreams accentuates its substantial implication. The characters of the two significant male farmers, Gao Yan and Gao Ma, are revealing cases in point. Apparently, they seem unrelated to each other; however, the glut of garlic and the official response exemplify the meeting point wherein they concurrently overlap.

During his wife's visit in prison, Gao Yang, a garlic farmer and father of a blind daughter and a new-born son, expresses that garlic is not only a crop, it represents hopes and confidence. He adds, "I placed my hopes on the crop. To me that garlic was everything" (237). Panicky, he goes further and asks his wife, "Can't you hold back for another day or two? At least until I've sold the garlic?" There was a grudging edge to his voice. "If not a day or two late, a day or two earlier would have been fine. Why does it have to be now?" (250). In his destitution, Gao Yang cannot afford buying a coffin to wrap his mother's corpse. He bemoans his condition, "It's raining, and water is seeping into the hole. I can't afford a coffin, so this worn blanket will have to do. Mother, you ... you'll have to make do" (155). He adds, "Father is dead, Mother has joined him, and my roof leaks" and thinks about "hanging himself from the roof beam, but he lacked the resolve" (156). The scene is highly stirring and fires Gao Yang up to ponder, "Our leaders have to deal with all kinds of problems, while we concern ourselves with working, eating, and sleeping period. That's why we live so long-we don't wear our brains out" (72). The sardonic tone is underlined as Yang mocks the elite's proclamation that there is a dire need for charismatic leaders to guide the subaltern peasants, and wonders "why everyone wants to be an official and no one wants to be a peasant" (72).

Gao Ma, a veteran soldier who turned garlic farmer, likewise considers garlic selling a path to perpetual felicity he aspires to achieve in his marriage to Jinju. He states, "I'll marry you as soon as I've sold my garlic, and I promise you'll never again be buffeted by the wind, baked

by the sun, soaked by the rain, or frozen by the snow! You'll stay home to mind the children and work in the kitchen!" (147). He weeps bitterly and tells his neighbour Mrs. Yo "Dear Sister- in-Law, I'm crying because I'm so happy. I'll scrap the ten thousand together somehow. I'll keep planting garlic, and I'll sell it. Jinju will be my bride within two years" (148). However, Jinju seems to be more realistic and practical than Gao Ma. She asks Gao Ma to stop dreaming since he'll never sell his garlic that is rotted away. She further explicates, "You broke the law when you demolished the county offices. The police have a Wanted poster out on you.... I have no choice but to take our son and leave" (147).

Unlike the miserable life of the poor peasants whose dreams are deferred, the officials lead a luxurious life. So puzzled is Gao Yang that he demarcates four categories of the officials; mainly, "landlords, counterrevolutionaries, rich peasants, and criminals" (153). He speculates "how senior officials can eat like kings, dress like princes, and have the medical care of the gods; then, when they reach their seventies or eighties and it's time to die, off they go" (71). The narrator elaborates on the county government lavish environment,

The county government compound was on the northern side of the boulevard, running past the public square. Pines and poplars grew tall and green behind the wall; fresh flowers bloomed everywhere; and a column of water rose in the center of the compound, only to fan out and rain down on the fountain below. The government offices were housed in a handsome three-story building with glass-inlaid arched eaves and yellow

ceramic tiles set in the walls. A bright red flag billowed atop a flagpole. The place was as grand as an imperial palace. (224)

Contrasting the deluxe world of the government officials, the derelict countryside of the mass is nightmarish. The latter is a “world of ignorance, poverty, cruelty, bitterly hard work, suffering, sadness, misery, and broken dreams, the bleakness of which is only infrequently and temporarily relieved by very small doses of simple human kindness, friendship, and love” (Duke 48). Thus they are “still for the most part on the bottom of the social hierarchy, sharing an egalitarianism of backwardness, poverty, and ignorance” (Duke 49). Yet, in the mode of Orwell's ‘animalism,’ some peasants enjoy a sense of equality. Some are rural Communist Party cadres who “support and are supported by the county, provincial, and national Party apparatus. Together these two groups constitute a *tequan jieji* (lit. “a class with special powers”) that has been oppressing the mass of the peasants ever since the Great Leap Forward” (Duke 49). Mulling over the peasants harsh life, the narrator states, “old farmers. ... work all their lives, raise a couple of worthless sons, never eat good food or wear decent clothes, and in their nineties they're still out in the fields every day” (71).

In order for Mo Yan to enhance the thematic depth of the peasants’ corrupt milieu, he resorts to a pertinent modernistic technique in utilizing zoological allusions and animalistic portraits of the subaltern peasant milieu. Duke contends that specific political institutions of superiority and subordination in the countryside reinforce the peasants’ spiritual and material destitution which, in turn, “reduce them to a state lower than that

of the animals” (68). Their victimization by corrupt rural cadres resembles, in Benedict Spinoza’s terms, the vulnerability of little fish in confronting the big fish (179). In a prominent study entitled “Transspecies Urban Theory,” Wolch, West and Gaines argue that animals constitute what has been referred to in animal studies literature as a “shadow population of non- humans spanning the phylogenetic scale” (736). In a similar way, the subaltern farmers, always compared to animals, wild, unclean, and insanitary, live in the shadow and are made to feel outcast and rejected while persistently excluded from the domain of the ‘superordinate’ societies.

Accordingly, throughout the narrative, the elite/superordinate are recurrently depicted as wild beasts and fierce lions, tigers or cats as versus the peasants portrayed as gullible lambs, horses, dogs, chickens, monkeys and rats. Mo Yan adeptly points out such animalistic combat through the overlapping stories, intertwined by the specificities of place, time and circumstances, especially of three peasant characters: Gao Ma, Gao Yang and Fourth Aunt.

With respect to Gao Ma, the narrator explicates that he resembles “a big tall horse caught in a noose” as he runs from the policeman who “tensed like tomcats about to pounce a mouse” (8). His physical physiognomy with the “bared teeth and long, drawn face, look[ing] just like his namesake, *ma*, the horse” (10) accentuates the horse image. The narrator elucidates further that he is “A horse-faced young man” (38) whose “legs seemed lashed together, like a great horse in fetters” (10). Another animal image is delineated in Gao Ma compared to “a weed

puppy” (30). Brutally beaten by the Fang’s brothers due to his love to Jinju Fang, Gao Ma complains to Gao Yang, the local government representative. Yet, Yang treats him as if he is a wounded dog and kicks him from behind saying, “Who said you could leave your dog blood here?” (31). He is so terrified of Gao Yang that he dropped to his knees to sneak home “on all fours, like a dog” (31).

Animalistic depiction extends to Gao Yang whose name literally signifies High Sheep or lamb denoting timidity. In jail, he emerges as “a rat in the clutches of a cat” (102). Furthermore, the dog image haunts him in one nightmare after another. He dreamed of a “dog gnawing leisurely on his ankle, chewing and licking as if it wanted to bleed him dry and consume the marrow in his bones. He tried to kick the dog away, but his leg wouldn't move; he tried to reach out and punch it, but he couldn't lift his arm” (99). Another image assigned to his daughter is that of a monkey. The narrator portrays her as a “chained monkey being whipped and dragged roughly along, leaping silently but widely from side to side” (5). Similarly, he describes one of the prisoned peasants as “an ape man, the kind he'd seen in a schoolbook—narrow, jutting forehead, wide mouth, long, apelike arms. Anyway, this strange creature leaped out of the crowd, raised one of his long arms, opened his mouth wide, and bel-lowed, Hua-lala, hua-lala” (263). The metaphorical usage of beastly images discloses a contradiction arising from the officials’ manipulation of animal labels when referring to the peasants. Generally, in Chinese culture, dogs, sheep, lambs and monkeys represent virtuous and nourishing qualities; however, in the context of the officials’ intentional

humiliation and mortification of the peasants, they resort to comparisons with the animal world. Utilized in a derogatory sense, it robs the peasants of their humanity and capitalizes on their coarseness, and a brutish, unrefined and uncultured nature.

In a similar animalistic tenor, Fourth Aunt, the central female character acts like a dog when Jinju visits her while she is tied to a tree in front of the local government offices. She sticks out her white-spotted tongue to “lick Jinju's forehead, like a bitch bathing her pup or a cow cleaning its calf” (49). Furthermore, she regards her sons in their brawl as degraded and demeaned to the bestial level of “cats and dogs” (54). Nevertheless, the animalistic life connoted to, in this instance, by the allusion to dogs is sometimes better of than that of human life. In prison, she poignantly recounts,

People feed them when they're hungry, and as a last resort, they can survive on human waste. And since they've got furry bodies, they don't have to worry about clothing. But we have to feed and clothe our families, and that keeps us hopping till we're too old to take care of ourselves. Then, if we're lucky, our children will take care of us. If not, we're abused till the day we die. (124)

By implication, Fourth Aunt contrasts the dogs' cozy life with her uncomfortable and shoddy circumstances. Tangibly, her sons have turned her life into a constant torment by their greed and waywardness. Her premonition about their malevolence comes true when they refuse their mother's appeal to carry their dead father into the house and lay him

down on a kanga. Indeed, they are more concerned with selling the beef of their father's dead cow than preparing their father for cremation. The narrator remarks that the boys lay their "father's body facedown on the ground like a dead dog" (209). Fourth Aunt adds that her husband has worked like a dog all his life "and now that he's dead is he to be denied the comfort of a warm kang?" (214).

Paradoxically, Jinju, portrayed as a Golden Chrysanthemum, is as "strong as a baby ox" (14) and "a young heifer" (15) who worked with "the same concentration as the magpies chasing one another overhead" (17) and whose brothers are "heartless wolves" (81). Yet, she also labels herself a dog telling Gao Ma, "If you call, I'll come running as a dog" (81). During her labor pain, she dramatizes this doggy image; "Child-you're biting me open-biting me open-I'm crawling on the ground just like a dog" (103). It is sardonic that the subjugated subaltern themselves sometimes internalize animalistic and debasing images given to them by their oppressors. Such feigning of frailty and docility may, on the one hand, secure them a safe arena within the Darwinian jungle. On the other hand, Mo Yan endeavors, with such internalization, to galvanize the oppressed to purge themselves from the stereotypical images of inferiority.

Nonetheless, it is disturbing to witness the subaltern population impersonating the role of the oppressors towards each other in a manner that brings about a double oppression. It is most conspicuous in their gender based notions. This is prominent in the love story of Jinju and

Gao Ma that is set against the backdrop of the peasants' riot and the post revolution laws that forbid marriages of unrequited love. Jinju suffers the tyranny of both her familial convoluted tradition and communal laws of marriage. To execute a profitable bargain, the Fang family ignores Jinju's fervent love for Gao Ma. According to such a bargain, Jinju is to be engaged to an aging wealthy invalid whom she abhors and in return, Fang Yijun, her crippled 'Elder Brother,' will have a young and pretty wife.

Jinju's rejection of the marriage bargain prompts her family to treat her violently. Her father beats her and remarks, "To hell with the law! ... If she doesn't do what she's told, I beat her. Who's going to stop me?" (58). Her Second Brother, in a stern manner, shrieks in her face, "Don't expect any mercy from us ... you shameless, stinking slut!" (115). Enraged, her Elder Brother addresses her vehemently, "The first rule for a son or daughter ... is to listen to ... parents" (51). At times, trying to appeal to her emotions and show sympathy, he lays his hands on her shoulders saying, "You can't rely on outsiders, but your brothers will always be there for you" (54). Nevertheless, such semblance of kindness is evanescent, since he later reprimands her that she will be foolish if she rejects someone as rich as Mr. Liu.

The matter gets worse with Yang, the government representative of the people who "connives with three rural families to subvert the marriage law" (Duke 57). And, in return, the families perform free services for him the same way peasants did for the landlords in imperial China. Jinju's father discloses the facts about this deal, "If it weren't for

us stinking garlic growers, all you big shots would have to live off the northwest wind. Isn't it our taxes that support, keep you all eating meat, drinking wine, and dreaming up more laws to squeeze the oil out of the common people?" (58). Nonetheless, Yang's reply reveals more about the corruption and privileges of the post-revolution officials, "You support us? Shit! I'm a national cadre; if I lie in the shade and watch the ants crawl up a tree, my wages are still paid, and not a penny less; if your garlic rots into pulp, I still collect my pay" (63). The argument presents evidence of how the conditions in post-revolutionary China are problematic and doubtful: on the one hand, the ruthless victimizers are self-indulgent and immersed in hedonism while their vociferous claims falsely profess honesty and chant nationalist principles. On the other hand, the persecuted and terrorized peasants are enduring the tribulations of coercion and degradation. More to the point, the victimized sometimes impersonate the victimizer's role. Jinju's father undergoes such a transformation especially in relation to his determination to upset his daughter's hopes and dreams.

In fact, familial, political and communal coercion propels the insurgency of farmers in the face of tyranny. This is functional since it marks the birth of the subaltern solidarity and thus confutes historiographers' unfounded perceptions of the subordinate as primitive rebels and "dumb farm animals" (153). Zhang Kou addresses the Townsfolk, "stick out your chests, show what you're made of/ Hand in hand we will advance to the seat of power!" (153). The heavy weight and the tight shutting of the governmental iron gates cannot stop the flood of

the masses. They speak out manipulating the various weapons Scott mentions such as “screaming shouting bawling swearing” and resorting to “Fists and clubs” (196). No one and nothing can stop such frantic masses from the upsurge and bursting into an upheaval. Zhang sings “panicky County Administrator Thong made the walk higher,/ Added a topping of broken glass and rings of barbed wire./ But no wall can stop the masses' shouts, no matter how high,/ And barbed wire cannot hold back the people's fury” (175). Accordingly, the gate shuddered violently as the people up front crashed into it. Then, peasants resort to alternative ploys using some other weapons such as “feet, shoulders, bricks, and tiles” (227) which bring about the surrender of the gates.

As multitudes of peasants poured into the governmental compound, a sense of ecstasy and gratification crept into them with the destruction they caused to the luxurious trappings that have always incited in them feelings of envy and malice. Gao Yang picked up a flowering cactus in red-and-pink vase and flung it at a window. Then he went back, picked up an oval aquarium and flung it against another window. Fourth Aunt likewise grabs everything in sight and screams, “Give me my husband! ... I want my husband back” (228). After that, she lit a pile of torn curtains declaring that she has avenged her husbands' death. Gao Ma shouts out, “Down with corrupt officials! Down with bureaucratism!” (226).

Rather than admitting that the garlic rioters have a legitimate quest for survival and justice to appease them, corrupt officials deemed them “a few of law-breaking criminals who took the opportunity to instigate a

riot" and thus will be "punished by Ministry of Justice" (Du and Zhang 247). It is tremendously ironic that the Ministry of Justice would punish the innocent who are seekers of evenhandedness, and the Deputy Director, who is supposed to eliminate the townsfolk hardships, intimidates the farmers "to turn around and go home; otherwise, he will call the police and let them teach [them] some manners!" (226). Yet, Peasants are not afraid of the armed policemen who "swarmed ... like tigers on a flock of sheep" (228). The officials' testimony proclaims that the rioters participated in counterrevolutionary activities that brought about smashing and looting the county administrator's office and the destruction of the social order on May 28.

Consequently, the three characters Gao Ma, Gao Yang and Fourth Aunt, declared as alleged leaders of the enraged farmers, have been held in custody, tried and sentenced to imprisonment. Yet, they will speak out from behind the high walls and the barbed wire. The voice of Zhang Kou rings loudly, "I won't shut my mouth just because you put me in jail" (221). Adopting diverse stratagems to enable them to cope with undeserved and unjustifiable arrests and tolerate the dejections of imprisonment, the three characters contests the claims of the officials that the peasants "always take the short view, never seeing beyond petty personal gains" (185), and that the government is always wise, and benevolent and if only the peasants heed its advice, they would never drift or go astray.

Gao Yang deploys what Scott labels as "false compliance" and "feigned ignorance" (*Domination* 185-186). These tactics are rooted in

his terror of the Red Guards. He cannot sleep or even doze off. He recalls the scary stories he heard as a boy about the rise of the dead to haunt the living. He believes that he would be dead in a month and shouts, "Old man upstairs, get me out of here. If you do, I'll never complain, never fight, never ask for help, even if someone dumps a load of shit on my head" (231). Under interrogation, his muscles seem loose, his legs were so rubbery that he cannot get up, and "an icy stream of urine ran down his leg" (3). In jail, Gao Yang's submission maxes out in telling the officer, "I've got a wife and kids at home, Officer! Make me eat shit or drink my own piss, but please don't shoot me!" (249). He also attempted to convince the jailer that he is a good citizen, but in vain since he is accused of "torching the state's council Headquarters" (229). Moreover, he signs a confession of what he has not intentionally done. In his acquiescence, Gao Yang proves that he has a deep perception of his dilemma and comprehends the government policy of "Leniency to those who confess, severity to those who refuse to do so" (222).

In jail, Fourth Aunt embraces a similar tactic of subservience since she believes that peasants are destined to terror and mortifications. She consoles herself and her cellmates saying, "Try to see things as they are. The world wasn't made for people like us. We must accept our fate. Some people are born to be ministers and generals, others to be slaves and lackeys, and there's nothing anybody can do about it" (124). She is maltreated by her jailers who have no qualm about her tearful cries. A policewoman kicked her to the floor and threatened her that she will sew her mouth if she does not stop moaning. She calls out to her using

demeaning names such as “crafty old bitch” and “ancient counterrevolutionary!” (40).

It might sound contradictory that the detained peasants are oriented to reckon that they find in prison what they lack outside beyond its walls. Duke notes that for Gao Yang it is his first ride in a fast automobile when he is taken to jail. It was a luxury that he was given a physical examination, an injection and a haircut by high-class women. And, when he grows feverishly ill in jail, he is served a bowl of noodles that is better than anything he usually has to eat (59). Similarly, in prison, Gao Yang sometimes seems, as Duke observes, gratified with the “gains available under the reforms and only hopes to go on enjoying whatever the higher-ups are willing to give him” (66). He firmly espouses a biddable path persuading himself that people are, after all, made of different materials; “The good stuff went for officials, the so-so stuff went for workers, and whatever was left over for us peasants” (207). Additionally, his mother's death convinced him that he “should be content with [his] lot” (187) at the bottom, since “If everyone was on top, who would hold them up at the bottom?” (187)

Fourth Aunt is also prompted to think of jail in the same way: “jail life is in some respects better than their life on the outside” (Duke 59). She argues the cell is not so bad, “We've got a cot and a blanket, and free food” (125). The guard puts emphasis on such a positive perspective of the stay in jail telling her, “Just eat. You don't need money and you don't need ration stamps. Is that why you weren't eating, because you thought you had to pay” (123). Duke remarks, Aunt Fang “finds the jail's black

and fly-covered steamed mantou, made with wheat flour, better than the fried corn flour cakes she has at home” (60). For her, the outside world is a world of cheating, full of money grubbers and dishonest merchants, “Everywhere you turn these days someone is trying to cheat us out of something. Anyone who doesn't cheat back is a fool. If even the government co-op is dishonest, what's to stop us poor peasants?” (56).

Although filth and inhumanity in the cell are indescribable, physical examination and good food render it more appealing than the destitution experienced in the outside world. In this regard, the officials feign a humanitarian attitude and benign façade in an attempt to reform the rebels and force them to yield to the tenets of the Party. They sometimes succeed in instigating the subaltern peasants to see the bright exterior of the system rather than seeing it as it really is.

In contrast to Gao Yang and Fourth Aunt's content and docility, Jinju and Gao Ma display direct defiance as a weapon to counter corrupt authorities as well as family convoluted traditions. In the face of the hardships, Jinju contested the thrashings of her harsh father and thuggish brothers, “You can beat me to death if you want, but even then I'll belong to Gao Ma” (137). She speaks out daringly declaring that she will not listen to them and would not succumb to the bogus marriage pact. Stunned by her open challenge, her father ordered the two brothers to strip Jinju to beat her. Yet, her elder brother begged her, “Please, ask Father's forgiveness” but she answers “No” (137). Reflecting the stance of the of the historiographers of peasant revolt, her father states that she is just an impetuous girl "who doesn't know what she's doing” (57) and

that she will never get her way as long as there's breath in his body. Jinju's father implements what Spivak calls "epistemic violence" (74): the oppressors use violence in the process of producing some knowledge/ 'episteme' about the oppressed subaltern. In other words, the narrative of reality, claimed by the superordinate is regarded as normative whereas that alleged by the marginalized is regarded as ineligible, contemptible and naïve, and it is thus ignored. In this manner, the superordinate legitimize the undermining and subjugation of the subaltern. However, later Jinju's father himself surrenders to her wishes and declares, "I give up" (137) and says, "Tell Gao Ma to bring ten thousand yuan. We'll hand over the girl when he gives us the cash" (137).

With respect to Gao Ma, he defends his right to love Jinju and to rebel against injustices audaciously. On the one hand, during the insurgency, he avers that they are not law breakers endeavoring to destroy the social order as claimed; they managed to incite the fellow townsmen not to fall for the officials scare tactics. He shouts out that they have the right to see the county administrator because he is an elected public servant. He adds, "I couldn't tell you if his face was black or white! How did he get elected?" (226). At that moment, the narrator states, "Gao Ma climb(s) onto the oxcart and shake(s) his fist" (226). On the other hand, reproached by Deputy Yang for not only stealing a man's future wife, but also destroying the marriage prospects for three couples, Gao Ma defends himself, "I did nothing illegal" (115) and asserts, "I'd die for Jinju, my Jinju" (22). Therefore, he lost his garlic and was thrown into prison. Notwithstanding, he did not succumb and did not abide by the order of

the policeman not to curse, yelling at one of the officials calling him “dog whelp” (237).

In fact, Gao Ma’s probe of the garlic riot divulges a profound discernment of the unscrupulousness of the officials who fine him alleging that his scale of garlic is not accurate. He speculates on the drop of the price of garlic from sixty fen a pound to twenty, and finally down to three. At the same time, he analyzes the agreements they signed with other counties to purchase their garlic and how they were canceled and buyers were turned back by the supply and marketing co-op. He speaks up dauntlessly uttering the hatred and abomination of the tyrannical communist, “*Down with bureaucrats! ... Cut off my head or put a bullet in it, even bury me alive if you want. It's all the same to me. I hate you dog-bastard officials! All you know how to do is trample the people!*” (*emphasis mine* 237). Ironically, Zhang Kou’s voicing of the silence of the peasants with the opening of chapter 18 petrifies the Party representatives who always claim the capability to speak for the masses. Moreover, Kou’s song accentuates Gao Ma’s intrepid recalcitrance, “Calling me a counterrevolutionary is a slanderous lie/ I, Zhang Kou, have always been a law-abiding citizen. /The Communist Party, which didn’t fear the Jap devils-/ Is it now afraid to listen to its own people?” (247)

In jail, Gao Ma uncovers more about his political reserve of socialism as a system. He tells his guard that he does not hate socialism since it denotes a concrete social formation embedded in public proprietorship of the means of production and in a system of allocation. Nevertheless, he

hates the corrupt officials who regard socialism as “a mere [abstract] signboard” (241) appropriating it for their privilege and turning it into farce. Old Wang, an aged peasant, adds another observant vision of socialism. He bellyaches the futile point of the revolutionary transformation of imperial China to the communist bureaucracies since the masses still struggle to survive humiliation whereas the elite are mainly concerned with contriving all lies to protect the interests of the feudal class. They also feign for themselves “the role of *genius and superman* to keep the masses under their thumbs” (239).

Ascertaining the power of their knowledge as superior and legitimate in comparison to the subaltern ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’ mental cogitations, the elite endeavor to implant the feelings of despondency in the subaltern. The farmers are made to believe that their knowledge about themselves and the world is invalid and thus necessitates the dire need for the ‘superman’ to speak for them and ‘manage’ their hardships. In her contest with her family, Jinju ably destroys this ‘epistemological inversion’ as she destroys the familial gender based convoluted traditions as her father surrenders to her resolve to marry Gao Ma. Nevertheless, under prolonged pressure, she is beaten and ends up hanging herself.

Before her death, Jinju visualizes a highly effective conversation with her unborn baby. In such interchange, she presents an in-depth analysis that forcefully conveys the humiliating position of the subaltern peasants in post-revolutionary China. She reminisces about her desires to see the world the same way the unborn child would perceive it, and tells him about the hardships of life. Her account reveals that since she was

delivered into the world, she worked like an ox and a horse, was beaten and kicked, was even strung up and whipped by her father. Then, she tells him about the broad expanse of garlic that looks like a nest of poisonous serpents that resembles the bloody parakeets that exemplify meat eaters, blood drinkers, and brain suckers (139). The scene portrayed is so terrifying and strikes fear into boy, who draws into himself. Yet, Jinju proceeds revealing more about the subalternity of the condition of her poor family that, at this point, no longer exists: she tells of a fugitive father, arrested grandmother, greedy uncles and murdered grandfather. Jinju's ruminations resonate with the tremendous desperation that prevailed in rural China.

Despite the portrait of gloomy surroundings awaiting the boy if he had been born, some glimpses of hope erupt through the questions of the wiggling boy: "I want to come out I saw a spinning fireball [the sun]," "I saw flowers in the fields, and smelled their perfume ... and stroke the red colt's head" (139). The association of the "sun," "flowers," and "colt's head" symbolizes hope and survival. However, Jinju's deliberations on the symbols denote death, she perceives the flames of the sun that will burn her flesh and skin, and the flowers that are poisonous, "their perfume is a miasma" and the colt is an "apparition" (139). Such bleak vision dissipates any hope that could have risen; it vanishes with the boy's eyes shut; and Jinju abandoning her rationality and committing suicide which underscores her last political weapon against the communal failure to understand her misery, and her denial of a platform to speak not only as a woman but also as a human being.

Discovering Jinju's corpse, Gao Ma bursts into an uncontrollable anger against all the government officials and refuses to cooperate with the sympathetic procurator who is trying to defend him. He speaks out "I hate all of you corrupt officials! I wish I could flay all of you alive!" (255). In fact, we share in the gruesome scene as Gao Ma sees Jinju's body swung gracefully. The narrator observes that Gao Ma "shouted his own name. Gao Ma, you were fated to take a bloody fall from the moment Jinju became yours. You have coughed up blood, vomited blood, spat blood, pissed blood—you are blood-spattered from head to toe" (175). The repetition of the word 'blood' is highly significant since it does not only evoke the subaltern flimsiness in the face of tyranny and their determination to survive the gory combat against the autocratic government, but it also explicitly divulges that Chinese philosophy pays "significant attention to the human body or physiology" (Lin 142).

Gao Ma then embarks on a dialogue with the corpse the same way Jinju does with the imaginary fetus. The two trance-like conversations are examples of "Hallucinatory Realism." The term, first coined by Clemens Heselhaus to describe the poetry of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, has been used by the Swedish Academy which praised Mo Yan for embodying in his narrative such type of realism, explaining that it "merges folk tales, history and the contemporary" (Nobelprize.org). The surreal condition in which Gao Ma and Jinju are situated has its roots in their inclination to express their despair and incapacity to protect each other and their unborn child and to realize a utopian Paradise County in the place of a dystopian naturalistic one. As a result, they both fall into a

trance liberating their intense inner/psychic feelings towards their physical surroundings merging the psychosomatic and realistic perceptions of the dichotomous worlds of the living and the dead and of the good and the bad.

Chuah Guat Eng. notes that Fourth Aunt, Gao Yang and Gao Ma typify the three basic Chinese philosophical responses to a cruel world; namely, “Confucian orthodoxy, Taoist-Buddhist quietism, and heroic rebellion,” respectively. Fourth Aunt is much closer to the authorial perspective driven by her congenital belief in the inviolability of the family; Gao Yang is propelled by his natural disposition to stay out of trouble, and Gao Ma is instigated by the romantic urge to strike out against coercion. In this regard, the variant attitudes of the characters towards the despotic regime seeking to attain one common goal allude to what Spivak labels as “strategic essentialism” (58). They are explained by Paul Dourish as “the ways in which subordinate or marginalized social groups may temporarily put aside local differences in order to forge a sense of collective identity through which they band together in political movements.” The peasants’ collectivity reaches the zenith in their insurgency.

Obviously, revolutionary peasants crumble under the pressure of terror and depression: Fourth Aunt, Gao Yang and Gao Ma “have been given unspecified punishments in order to prevent the spread of such anarchy [that] their actions represent, [while] the criminally guilty Party officials, having been disciplined by the usual Party methods, are given promotions in other places in rural China” (Duke, 53-54). However, they

stirred up by the balladeers' songs articulating: "Paradise County once produced bold heroic men./ Now we see nothing but flaccid weak-kneed cowards/ With furrowed brows and scowling faces:/ They sigh and fret before their rotting garlic" (141).

Though Zhang Khou dies as "one day, his dead body is found in a side street with his mouth crammed with mud" (Du and Zhang 2), his voice still booms even after death through his devotees continuing singing. Therefore, the Garlic Ballads survive to be sung, "spread(ing) from mouth to mouth" and recount(ing) "People's Daily to read" (247). Accordingly, an inclusive rumination of Zhang Khou's songs points to his "thorough comprehension ... [and] ... accurate grasp of ... the culture of the land" (Du and Zhang 2). His hopeful note of reform with which the novel ends resembles that of the opening "what I'm saying is, a breath of fresh air emerged from the Third Plenum of the Central Committee: Citizens of Paradise County will be poor no longer" (14). With the closure, Zhang Kou asks the townsfolk to work hard and never lose hope "Dig wells, lug water, fight the drought:/ Watering the garlic makes it grow an inch a night/ Each inch is the gold you turn into cash..." (233). Moreover, Gao Ma is persuaded by a hopeful neighbor to fortify himself and summon courage, "This is, after all, a new society, so sooner or later reason will prevail" (33).

Conclusion

In *The Garlic Ballads*, Mo Yan incites the reader to question historiographical approaches to 'subaltern' culture and their attempt to undermine peasant rejection of injustice and ability to rise up and effect

change. Throughout the narrative, the peasants devise stratagems that confront the heinous oppression of the governing officials. Docility, voluntary compliance, and the semblance of accommodating the corruption of officials and police injustice and oppression have been their potent weapons instrumental in minimizing their losses in a raging battle against a ferocious power; it was expedient in gaining grounds without jeopardizing their safety and livelihood. Other weapons that are forged out of the material of their reality such as folktales, songs, rumors and memories have been functional in steeling them to counter the dominant culture. Their fury and riots attest to a political culture that is specific to their reality and circumstances. Despite their bleak reality and the inflicted physical and psychological wounds, the vitality to resist persists and remains enflamed, and proves the peasant to be worthy of a position to represent China's sturdy backbone. Hence, peasants are instigated and urged to cling to their right to speak and to survive and defy the images of inferiority and subalternity imposed upon them by the dominant culture.

Notes:

(¹) Translations of quotations from Arabic texts are mine.

(²) Yan's oblique criticism and indignation are prominent in *Explosions and Other Stories* (1991), *The Republic of Wine* (1992), *Sandalwood Death*

(2001), *Life and Death Are Wearing Me out* (2006), *Frog* (2012) and *Red Sorghum* (2016).

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