Arnhilt Johanna Hoefle, "The Liberating Masculinity of Goethe's *Werther* and Its Repression in Modern China." In *Gendered Encounters between Germany and Asia: Transnational Perspectives since 1800*. Palgrave Series in Asian German Studies 2, ed. Joanne Miyang Cho and Douglas T. McGetchin, 151-169. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

This extract is taken from the author's original manuscript and has not been edited. The definitive, published, version of record is available here: https://www.palgrave.com/de/book/9783319404387 and http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-40439-4_8

The Liberating Masculinity of Goethe's *Werther* and its Repression in Modern China

Arnhilt Johanna Hoefle, University of Vienna

When Guo Moruo first translated Goethe's novel *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) in 1922, it triggered a large-scale "Werther fever" in China, similar to the craze that its first publication had engendered in Europe 150 years earlier.[1] *Werther* became one of the most popular works of foreign literature in China of all time. Until 1949 six different publishing houses published the translation in more than fifty print runs, not including the numerous pirated editions.[2] As "the bible of modern Chinese youth," *Werther* soon became an icon of the New Culture Movement, an intellectual movement of the 1910s and 1920s that turned against the traditional feudal ways of Chinese society.[3] At the same time the young lovesick German man left notable traces in modern Chinese literature, which is the focus of this chapter. It will follow the trajectories of Chinese Wertherism from the first fervent short stories of the 1920s to the harsh parodies of the 1930s, arguing that this process of collision, appropriation, and repression is not only inextricably bound up with the contingencies of a society at historical

crossroads. It also tells the story of a literary figure in cultural transfer and the image of masculinity it conveyed; a masculinity that for its radically liberating and transgressive impetus needed to be contained. Quite surprisingly, gender, and in particular masculinities, is a perspective that has been completely overlooked so far in studies on this crucial moment of German-Chinese literary relations, despite the fact that gender issues were among the prime concerns of the New Culture Movement, and that the figure of Werther is certainly an intriguing case for the study of masculinities.

The Transgressive Masculinity of Werther

Within German studies, Young Werther's representation of masculinity has just recently received more academic attention. Although applying a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, scholars univocally conclude that the figure of Werther diverges significantly from the propagated norm and ideal image of masculinity of eighteenth-century Germany. According to Inger Sigrun Brodey, Werther embodies the melancholic type of the "man of feelings" who hovers "on the edge of illness, madness, impotence, inactivity, silence, and death" and stands in stark contrast to the "man of the world," represented by Lotte's rational, prudent, and industrious husband Albert.[4] A recent study by Nina Rexhepi draws on Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and identifies Werther as an example of the subordinate form of "marginalized masculinity."[5] According to these studies, Werther's deviant masculinity signifies a crisis of masculinity; it renounces and challenges traditional masculine roles and opens up potent alternative counter-discourses.[6] The explosive socio-critical power attributed to *Werther* in China a century and a half later, I argue, must be understood exactly in the light of the work's transgressive representation of masculinity, which is even more complex in this transcultural case of reception.

In contrast to scholarship on gender in Asian contexts which tends to impose Western paradigms on the Asian case, I follow Kam Louie's pioneering work on Chinese masculinities.[7] Louie proposes to apply a largely "indigenous" framework that draws on the ancient Chinese concepts of *wen* (cultural attainment) and *wu* (martial valor). While the ideal man would be expected to embody a balance of *wen* and *wu*, the two qualities have not been perceived as equally important in different periods of China's history. Due to the primacy of *wen* advocated by Confucianism, an elitist intellectual or scholar-type of man has been long considered the masculine ideal, while the Communist Party increasingly promoted a more physical non-elitist *wu* masculinity, epitomized by the revolutionary peasant-worker-soldier heroes.

At first sight, Goethe's Werther is an extraordinarily adept man in the realm of literature and culture whose education and literacy is displayed prominently in the novel by numerous references to contemporary as well as classical works of literature, such as Homer, Klopstock, Ossian, and Lessing. He also works, at least temporarily, for an official delegation. Werther therefore seems to successfully fulfill the expectations of *wen* masculinity. However, already at the very beginning of the novel in his letter to Wilhelm of May 13, 1771, one month before he meets Lotte for the first time, he sets the tone of the novel and reveals excessive emotionality as his main character trait. Undermining the image of the diligent scholarly civil servant, he rejects Wilhelm's offer to send him his books that could guide him to reason. Shifting between sorrow and excessive joy, sweet melancholy and disastrous passion, he knowingly subordinates his fate to his turbulent, changeable, and unsteady heart, which, he writes, like an "ailing child" will be granted any wish.[8]

Despite their differences, there is one main aspect that both the *wen* and *wu* ideal of Chinese masculinity share: successful manhood is in both cases inevitably connected to self-control, in particular with respect to (heterosexual) love and desire.[9] The prime objectives of men

should solely be their military successes and scholarly achievements, officially recognized by the civil service examinations (*wenju*) and the military service examinations (*wuju*). Women are welcome only in so far as they help achieve these goals.[10] Emotions and sexual desires are perceived not only as distractions but also as men's most severe threats. Werther therefore lacks one of the most important conditions for successful manhood, also in its Chinese understanding.

The virtue of male self-control, the ability to suppress feelings and, in particular, to resist women and their feminine charms, has significantly shaped Chinese literature and culture. It has created a pervasive narrative pattern that shows men who abandon their female lovers to return to their military or scholarly duties or to a financially or socially better match, after having been provided with sufficient material, bodily or psychological support.[11] Furthermore, Chinese literary history has shown that emotionality has become a literary motif reserved for female characters only. This becomes particularly evident in the motif of self-sacrifice and, eventually, suicide for love, its most extreme manifestation. For centuries, Chinese love stories have regularly featured female suicide, beginning with the popular tales of "talented scholars and beautiful women" (*caizi jiaren*), the major genre of romantic fiction since the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE) that flourished during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing periods (1644-1911). The late Qing and Republican eras saw large numbers of the so-called "mandarin ducks and butterfly fiction" (*yuanyang hudiepai xiaoshuo*), extremely popular love stories, which usually ended in the death of the heroine, often suicide. Of course, there are also examples of male sacrifice and martyrdom in Chinese literature; however, male figures predominantly die for the country, while women die for love. Butterfly stories, for example, often foreground a male character's heroic act and death on the battlefield, whereas stories with a female protagonist emphasize her devotion to the father, husband, or son, reflecting a woman's "three obediences" (*san cong*) in traditional Confucianism. Consequently, only women die a "stereotypically romantic death."[12]

Romantic death also proved to play an important role in the reception of foreign literature in modern China. The best-known foreign icons are undoubtedly tragic female figures, such as Joan Haste, the eponymous heroine of Henry Rider Haggard's Victorian melodrama of 1895, as well as Marguerite, the Lady of the Camellias in the novel by Alexandre Dumas, fils (1848). As the symbol of tragic love and suffering, the latter, in particular, became immensely popular so that many imitations of the original plot and sentiment, what Hu Ying calls the "transplanted camellias," were created.[13] After Lin Shu first translated *La Dame aux Camélias* into Chinese in 1899, only Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* had a comparably profound impact on Chinese society and literature. The only crucial but generally ignored difference is that *Werther* confronts its readers with a tragic male figure, whose unrestrained emotionality and, moreover, his romantic suicide significantly challenges traditional Chinese concepts of masculinity. Werther also stands in stark contrast to other male figures of Western literature that have received wider attention in China in the early twentieth century. Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe became the prototype of the "white hero" when the novel appeared in Chinese translation in 1905.[14] Crusoe embodied vitality, bravery, dynamism, self-assertion, independence, fearlessness, the defiance of death, rationality, and practicality, features that Werther is decidedly missing.

Werther and Modern Chinese Literature

Goethe's *Werther* made such an impression on the Chinese literature of the time that the phenomenon was even given its own name: Wertherism (*Weite zhuyi*).[15] Ignited and fueled by the iconoclastic spirit of the New Culture Movement, young Chinese intellectuals declared *Werther* to be a passionate protest against the traditional feudal system and its moral values and, in particular, the traditional practice of arranged marriage, which was a major theme of the movement. Werther's misery was primarily attributed to the arranged marriage between Lotte

and Albert.[16] In the preface to his translation, Guo Moruo calls for literature to be "a kind of revolutionary manifesto against established morality and established society."[17] Furthermore, it is no coincidence that he lists "emotionalism" as the first of his "five areas of resonance" with Goethe's work: "A world without love is a magic lantern without light. Werther's feelings are the light from this magic lantern, able instantly to project a variety of pictures against a white screen or give birth to a universe of feeling from the midst of death and destruction."[18]

The enthusiastic response to Goethe's novel must be placed within a discourse of sentiment that obsessed the field of literature and popular culture in the first decades of the twentieth century. Guo's translation entered China at a time when the traditional Confucian idea of sentiment (*qing*) was undergoing epochal transformations. The importation of the physicalist Freudian theory of sexuality and the expressivist European Romanticist ideal of free love provided potent alternatives to the rigid, hierarchical, and asexual Confucian ethico-cosmological logics of sentiment.[19] Goethe's *Werther* had thus given Chinese youth a powerful weapon in their struggle to overthrow the "Confucian structure of feeling" and its focus on the state and the family. The prime concern of the movement was to instate the individual as the new organizing principle of society, which also reshaped Chinese literature on a formal level. The literary market in the 1920s was "congested" with subjective formats written in the vernacular language, especially autobiographies, personal biographies, diaries, and letters.[20] Together with an array of foreign works, *Werther* was purposefully selected for its focus on individualism and first-person narration. It played a particularly important role in the rise of epistolary fiction, which despite its long history in Chinese literature became a major genre only in the early twentieth century.[21]

A first wave of Werther fever engendered a number of short stories written in the 1920s that show strong affinities to Goethe's novel in technique but also in theme and character portrayal.[22] The protagonists of these narratives are sensitive romantic dreamers who wander the

world restlessly in quest of love and self-realization. They eventually become victims of the incompatibility between their individual desire for love and socio-moral expectations, often resulting in premature death, suicide, self-abandonment, or exile. The most famous examples are Yu Dafu's "Sinking" ("Chenlun," 1921), Guo Moruo's "Ye Luoti's Grave" ("Ye Luoti zhi mu," 1924), "Donna Carmela" ("Ka'ermeiluo guniang," 1926), and "Fallen Leaves" ("Luo ye," 1926) as well as Lu Yin's "The Sorrows of a Certain Youth" ("Huoren de bei'ai," 1922), among many others. The parallels of these narratives to Goethe's *Werther* are blatant. For instance, Ye Luoti, Guo Moruo's eponymous hero, is deeply in love with the wife of his cousin. Instead of Ossian he reads passages of Dumas' *The Lady of the Camellias* as well as Haggard's *Joan Haste* to her. Instead of Lotte's ribbon he keeps and worships the girl's thimble. After he learns about her death in childbirth he swallows her thimble and dies a mysterious death. A married man's growing and uncontrollable passion for a Japanese girl selling karumera candies, his mental anguish, self-condemnation, and final self-abandonment is the content of "Donna Karmela." The main protagonist of "Sinking," a young Chinese man studying in Japan who like Werther seeks solace in nature and reading, commits suicide succumbing to his melancholy, loneliness, alienation, and frustration with the insistence of his desires.[23]

Within the framework of traditional Chinese concepts of masculinity, these sensitive young male figures significantly deviate from established literary patterns. Their character is excessively and uncontrollably sentimental, and their death or demise is not motivated by a public cause. *Werther* therefore became not only a manifesto of liberation of the emotions of the individual, an un-gendered abstract idea, but of the emotions of men, quite specifically. The craze for *Werther* hence opened a door to tremendously transgressive terrain. Long persisting borders of gender expectations were blurred, and images of masculinities were allowed to cross into

spaces, realms, and dimensions of action, expression, and feelings that were previously inaccessible.

How daring and threatening this non-conforming depiction of masculinity was, is attested by the fact that in contrast to works like these, several of the other literary manifestations of Wertherism actually feature a female protagonist, a "female Werther." For instance, the sensitive young girl Yaxia of Lu Yin's "The Sorrows of a Certain Youth" of 1922, published only a few months after the first Chinese translation of *Werther*, drowns herself in the picturesque West Lake in Hangzhou. In addition to the explicit allusion in the title, several narrative features unmistakably refer to Goethe's novel, such as the one-sided letter structure, the figure of a fictional editor compiling and commenting the letters, and the date of Yaxia's final letter on Christmas Day. Even Guo Moruo, who had produced bold images of Wertherian masculinity earlier, avoided a male protagonist in later works. For example, in his epistolary novella "Fallen Leaves" a fictional editor introduces the 41 letters by the young Japanese nurse Kikuko that document the young woman's torment of being caught in a love triangle that she can only end by self-imposed exile.

These narratives thus revert to traditional gender roles, and they deny the Chinese Werther his masculinity. Hidden in his avid praises of Werther's sentimentalism, Guo Moruo indeed already pointed to the explosive transgressive potential of Goethe's figure in his preface of 1922 by including the motto verses of the 1775 edition of *Werther*: "Be a dignified man and do not follow in my footsteps."[24] They are an explicit warning against the seduction of Werther's catastrophic end, and at the same time they offer a definition of successful manhood that decidedly rejects romantic suicide.

Although the extraordinary popularity of *Werther* in China has attracted the attention of many scholars for decades, this essential feature of the preface as well as the gender switch of the

main protagonist in Chinese literary works has gone completely unnoticed. Studies usually resort to general remarks on the un-gendered sentimental "young people" that *Werther* and its Chinese adaptations featured in their fight against the traditional practices of arranged marriage, or they even emphasize the female characters' plight and their prominence within the New Culture Movement.[25] Indeed, the "women's question" (*funü wenti*) and female liberation had gained center stage in intellectual discourses in modern China. Countless stories and essays attack the authoritarian family system and the subjugation of women. The popularity of the most important other foreign import of the era, Henrik Ibsen's *Nora* (1879), also epitomizes this trend.[26] It is striking, however, that this heightened awareness of gender roles was restricted exclusively to women. Without doubt, the political upheaval in early twentieth-century China had cataclysmic effects on the social position as well as the conceptualization and self-understanding of men and manhood. For example, the termination of the examination system in 1905 had cut off a whole social segment of men not only from their traditional livelihood but also from their established role in society, not to speak of the fatal repercussions of this on the inherited Confucian logics of *wen* masculinity and its ideal image of the scholar-official. The literary scene provided an attractive milieu for this group of male intelligentsia who continued their moral commitment to the country; interestingly, by incessantly commenting on the role of women in society.

The interest of intellectuals in women's issues is in fact part of a discursive strategy of social criticism that has a long history in China. The correlation of the status of women in society with the degree of civilization has been employed in intellectual and political discourses for such diverse purposes ranging from the late Qing reformist movements and colonialist missionaries to the May Fourth as well as nationalist and communist political agendas.[27] Moreover, feminist scholarship since the 1980s has argued that the obsession with the "new woman" (*xin nüxing*) was in fact largely constructed out of male fantasies.[28] Projecting death and suffering on female

figures has been identified as a longstanding literary strategy of reflecting male anxieties that could otherwise not be voiced. After having trespassed upon the forbidden territory of creating tragic male Werther figures, I therefore argue that these Chinese writers, male and female, reverted to a traditional literary motif of female Werthers in order to voice their discontent with society but, in particular, their anxieties about male identities arising from the radical changes that the Chinese society and its gender conceptions were undergoing at the time.

The Decline of the Werther Fever

Apart from these tactics of avoidance, in a second phase, the violation of gender boundaries was met with more explicit disapproval. In particular from the early 1930s onwards, Chinese critics excoriated *Werther* in their articles for being a dangerous "bacillus in the veins of China's youth," that promoted a cowardly, egoistic, and even harmful role model.[29] After the first phase of passionate Werther enthusiasm had gradually faded away, many literary works penalized Werther's transgressive masculinity with criticism, sarcasm, and parody. The most famous examples of this literary development are Mao Dun's *Midnight* (*Ziye*) and Ba Jin's *Family* (*Jia*), two of the most influential novels of modern Chinese literature.

Goethe's *Werther* features most prominently in *Midnight* of 1933, Mao Dun's opus magnum on the commercial world of Shanghai and its inhabitants, represented by the nationalist capitalist Wu Sunfu and his family. There are several references to Wertherism in the novel. The most famous scene involves Wu Sunfu's wife and Colonel Lei, who were star-crossed student lovers. Convinced that he will not come back alive from the battlefield, Lei returns the "tattered old copy of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* in Chinese" with a faded white rose between its pages, gifts she had given him back then.[30] They are both very moved, shed tears, and start kissing passionately but have to part abruptly when someone approaches the room. The old copy of

Werther reappears several times in the narrative. This scene has naturally attracted the attention of scholars, in particular the analogy of the dramatic farewell scene between Lotte and Werther at the end of Goethe's novel.[31] The prominence of *Werther* in this novel has, first of all, been seen as a proof of the popularity of this work among Chinese readers. Most importantly, however, *Midnight* has been read as a caricature of the spreading Wertherism in the 1920s and one particular ramification of it, an emerging "fashion" among young lovers to give each other a translation of *Werther* as a sign of their affection.[32] The naturalistic symbols of the faded flower and the old and well-worn copy emphasize that Wertherism was clearly out of date.

Another scene later in the novel also parodies the Chinese Werther fever by staging the Wertherian motif of male suicide for love. After another unsuccessful attempt to approach Mrs. Wu's younger sister Lin Peishan, Fan Bowen, a poet and the younger cousin of Wu Sunfu, contemplates drowning himself. His main consideration, however, pertains to the reactions this would cause: "suddenly dying in front of all the members of the fair sex who were gracing the park on this lovely May evening … what a shock that would be for them! Would it not bring every female in the park, all the shy, soulful, sentimental young girls, to weep tears of sympathy over his handsome dead body – or, at least, make their dear hearts beat faster?"[33] He even chooses the best place at the pond for the spectacle, but "to his disappointment, there were hardly any suitable girls on the benches to witness the tragedy."[34] Fan calls upon Qu Yuan (340-278 BCE), a poet and minister during the Warring States period, and compares himself to his tragic fate. However, Qu had drowned himself for political reasons, hence following the dominant pattern of male suicide, whereas Fan is suffering from hurt feelings and melancholy. This scene is therefore clearly ridiculing male suicide for love, which is further emphasized by the reaction of his cousin and friend who had watched him at the pond just to laugh at his extravagant sensibility. His manhood also becomes the target of criticism later in the novel during the rallies

commemorating the May Thirtieth Massacre, when he is directly contrasted to "real men" who sacrifice themselves "for the cause." While scorching Fan's passivity, who is cowardly watching the demonstrations from the window of a restaurant, his female cousin exclaims: "Oh, what a man – what a hero!"[35] In the course of the novel Fan Bowen struggles with what is explicitly mentioned as his "stigma of 'romantic poet'" and, in particular, with the open resentment of Wu Sunfu against this "romantic and decadent" youth courting his wife's sister.[36]

Compared to Ba Jin's *Family* and its exclusively scholarly setting, which will be discussed below, Mao Dun's *Midnight* features competing models of masculinity. Colonel Lei embodies the warrior masculinity of *wu*, whereas Fan Bowen represents the elitist *wen* masculinity. Both concepts of manhood are severely compromised in the novel by their sentimentalism. They are juxtaposed to the businessman Wu Sunfu, who is initially portrayed as the radical counter-image of the Werther figure. In contrast to the German man, who had become famous for giving free rein to his feelings, self-discipline and self-control are stylized as Wu Sunfu's highest virtues and the key to his success, which has enabled him "to win the trust and respect of other people."[37] Wu is a successful entrepreneur, a "man of the world," who aspires to help freeing China from its dependence on foreign capital. He is perceived by his business partners as "a man of action and initiative" and applauded for being "no milksop."[38] Rather than declaring Wu's character as a third alternative modern mode of masculinity, I argue that this figure in fact seems to anticipate the major transformation of the *wen* icon that Kam Louie has identified.[39] According to Louie the *wen* ideal started to encompass commercial expertise in addition to its moral and political obligation from the 1980s onwards. Images of businessmen like Wu Sunfu, who take on the responsibility for the future of their country, already signify this expansion of the *wen* ideal in modern Chinese literature. This development is again closely

connected to the changing career paths of the Chinese elites, after the abolition of the examination system had catapulted them out of their traditional institutional framework.[40]

However, in the course of Mao Dun's novel, the parodies of *Werther* turn out to be a cipher for hypocritical family relations, unhappy marriage without love, and, eventually, failing masculinities. Paradoxically, Colonel Lei, Fan Bowen, and even Wu Sunfu fail precisely due to their inability to accept or express their emotions, a feature that has been traditionally praised as the highest masculine virtue and the defining distinction between masculinity and femininity. Fan Bowen loses Lin Peishan to a competitor. After returning to Shanghai from the battlefield, Colonel Lei ends up leading a loose life in the company of "society girls" working for corrupt speculators. Wu Sunfu is not able to notice the dramatic changes that had come over his wife after her meeting with Lei. The usually cheerful woman spends her days in solitude reading in the very copy of *Werther* suffering from severe depression: "Once or twice" he had had "a vague feeling that all was not well with her, but he had dismissed it and immediately forgotten it."[41] Alienated from each other, they stay together but there is hardly any interaction between them anymore. Wu's self-discipline is also gradually undermined in the novel. He keeps hiding and suppressing his feelings and his fears until they burst out in a pattern of violent, destructive, and eventually self-destructive behavior. He rapes the family's maid who in his eyes is "an object, an object to be violated, an object whose violation would best afford him satisfaction."[42] Despite noble intentions of saving his country, he is corrupted. At the end of the novel, after big losses at the stock exchange, he tries to shoot himself, another reference to Werther's suicide. However, Wu collapses before he is able to pull the trigger. His only escape is to give up his business and move to the countryside.

The second major novel of the 1930s that needs to be revisited from the perspective of masculinities and Wertherism is Ba Jin's novel *Family* (first serialized in 1931 and 1932, released

in a single volume in 1933).[43] The novel tells the story of the two teenage brothers Gao Juemin and Gao Juehui who live in Chengdu with their upper middle-class family. It centers on the issue of free marriage standing for the larger inter-generational conflict between the old system, represented by their father, the Venerable Master Gao, a "crusty Confucian moralist," and the brothers' progressive aspirations.[44] All of the main male characters are well educated and move in an intellectual environment; the novel's frame of reference is therefore *wen*, the scholar type of masculinity. Several characters, elements, and scenes of the novel allude to Goethe's *Werther* and they clearly take a critical stance. The melancholic Wertherian type of man is, first of all, embodied most conspicuously by their eldest brother Gao Juexin as well as a relative of the family, Jianyun. Both characters are in love with women they cannot have.

Jianyun is the unsuccessful rival of the middle brother Juemin for the hand of their cousin Qin. He is portrayed as an extremely weak character who is scolded by the brothers for his "easily wounded sensibilities."[45] After his final dramatic emotional outburst, he completely disappears from the narrative. There are persisting references to his illness, death, and suicide. After pouring out his heart about his "forlorn love" to his very rival Juemin, Jianyun admits that death is constantly crossing his mind, and he repeatedly begs him to come to visit his lonely grave after his death.[46]

The oldest brother Juexin is in love with his cousin Mei but resigned to his parents' will and married a woman that had been chosen for him. In addition to Juexin's uncontrolled emotionality, his passivity becomes the main target of criticism. Just as Werther did not run away with Lotte and did not fight the system that denied them happiness, Juexin similarly does not rise up against the old system and the pressures exerted by his family and society. He is repeatedly called a spineless "weakling," and his melancholia and non-resistance is penalized in different ways in the novel.[47] After the death of her abusive husband, Mei lives a lonely life and finally

succumbs to tuberculosis while Juexin keeps following his "philosophy of bows" and "principle of non-resistance," which ultimately leads to the death of his wife and thoughts of suicide.[48] Although Juexin does not kill himself in the novel, Ba Jin based his character on his own eldest brother who had committed suicide just prior to the novel's serialization; he subsequently dedicated the novel to him. In his preface he sets suicide as a major theme of the novel and takes an unmistakably critical position towards it. He claims that his brother had submitted to their father's will without "a single word of protest" and had died "being made a victim of totally unnecessary sacrifices."[49] He concludes: "But I am not going to die. I want to live on. I want to write."[50] As the opposite of melancholic passivity, the prime male virtue in the novel is therefore defined as courage. The second brother Juemin is directly contrasted to the oldest brother Juexin, as he actively opposes the marriage that his father arranged for him. Taking the risk of being expelled from the family, Juemin runs away from home and successfully asserts his right to marry his cousin Qin, returning home "like a conquering hero."[51]

The relationship between the third brother Juehui and the family's teenage bond-maid Mingfeng sheds more light on how the Wertherian motif of suicide for love is rejected as a form of protest and escape in the novel – at least for men. To avoid becoming the concubine of the abusive Venerable Master Feng, Mingfeng drowns herself in a lake. Her decision is admired by the whole family and she is highly praised as a "fine girl" of such "strong character."[52] Mingfeng's suicide is understood as a sign of strength, whereas the despair and suicidal tendencies of male characters in the novel are considered an intolerable weakness. *Family* therefore ultimately signals the end of the short-lived window of opportunities which had allowed expressions of Wertherism as a powerful and subversive alternative form of masculinity. Men are expected again to be the strong characters who control their emotions and who serve society. Mingfeng and Juehui had been secretly in love with each other. After briefly cherishing hopes

that Juehui could save her, Mingfeng soon realizes that she "could not let him sacrifice himself for her sake" because "his existence was much more important than hers"; he "had his future, his career" and "must become a great man."[53] After her suicide, Juehui similarly concludes that apart from his "petty-bourgeois pride" that would have never permitted him to marry a bond-maid, he wanted to "devote himself entirely to serving society."[54] At the end of the novel, Juehui leaves his family and moves to Shanghai to support the New Culture Movement. The novel therefore evokes the traditional pattern of *wen* scholars who abandon their love interest because they perceive them as a threat to their professional and social responsibilities.

How traditional gender models are reconfirmed in this novel is also demonstrated by the portrayal of the Gao brothers' highly educated female cousin Qin. Qin actively participates in the New Culture Movement, for example, by contributing to Juehui's progressive journal, and hence represents a "modern" woman. However, her character is compromised from the perspective of gender in the moment when Juehui receives the manuscript of her article. He notices "the beautiful grace of her feminine calligraphy" and "her pioneering spirit and manly courage."[55] Her femininity, determined by beauty and grace, is therefore instantly contrasted and to a certain extent undermined by her "manly" courage. The contradiction and maybe even irony is further attested by the content of her article, an emancipatory manifesto about women and their right to wear their hair short, which had met with opposition predominantly due to a fear of masculinization. Only Qin's decision not to cut her hair out of filial respect for her mother rehabilitates her as a woman.[56]

Depicting young people rising up against oppressive familial and social structures has established Ba Jin as a leading voice of a new generation and his book was wildly popular among the Chinese youth. However, the novel paints an ambivalent picture. It simultaneously endorses modern concepts while it perpetuates conservative patterns. It thus documents a system caught up

in a painful process of re-orientation and transition and reflects the anxieties unleashed by the shifting gender ideologies. By re-introducing oppressive traditional structures it not only admonishes but also attempts to rectify the liberation that the sentimental figure of Werther had represented a decade earlier. This development signals a dramatic change in modern China in the 1930s connected with an increasing politicization of all realms of society. While the romantic discourse of free love had spearheaded the revolt against Confucian patriarchy and its social constraints on the individual, love now took on a political stance, converting the hegemonic mode of feeling from romantic love and sexual desire to patriotic fervor with a social cause.[57] The Wertherian hero was declared outmoded and obsolete. He was soon challenged by another passionate German man, Goethe's Faust. In contrast to the passive, sentimental, submissive, gentle, melancholic, and frail Wertherian type, this rebellious man embodied the "Promethean" prototypical model of the romantic personality; he was read as an energetically passionate hero who triumphs over suffering and strives to shape the world.[58] As a dynamic and perseverant hero with a questing and fighting spirit, Faust evoked the image of the adventurous Robinson Crusoe and he, not Werther, fit into the changing image of Chinese manhood at the time. In the decades to follow, the traditional Confucian *wen* primacy was increasingly replaced by the *wu* principle that nourished the promotion of fearless, frugal, and selfless patriotic men who turned their energy exclusively to social construction and revolution.[59]

In conclusion, after its first translation in 1922, Goethe's novel has repeatedly played a role in Chinese literature even beyond the initial Werther fever. In the verve of the New Culture Movement, Chinese writers glamorized and adopted Werther in their fiery attack on the traditional system. The German man who went so far as to kill himself for love became their icon of free love. Moreover, they used him as a liberating counter-image of masculinity, criticizing

both traditional concepts of Chinese masculinity, *wen* and *wu*. Literary works referring to Goethe's novel after the Werther fever have usually been read as mere parodies of the Chinese youth's excessive enthusiasm for the lovesick German a decade earlier. However, even after the Werther mania had cooled down, as this re-reading of some of the most influential novels of the 1930s has shown, the numerous explicit appearances as well as indirect references to Goethe's novel reveal themselves as more than just mockery. Situating these literary developments within contemporary as well as historical discourses of gender and sentiment in China, the parody of *Werther* turns out to be a powerful tool employed to criticize the still prevailing oppressive traditional structures of society, family, relationships, and, in particular, gender and masculinities. Taking Werther's transgressive masculinity as a starting point, this close reading demonstrates that the reception of *Werther* gives unique insights into the young Republic's struggle for modernity, with all the hopes, pleasures, fears, and dangers it entailed. Goethe's *Werther* became part of diverse and contradictory discourse that aimed to reflect on the past as well as to fight for a different future. In the course of the 1930s, with the raging Civil War between the Nationalists and the Communists and the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), the production and reception of literature became increasingly restricted. Although translations of Goethe's novel continued to be published even after 1949, it was only received on a larger scale again after 1978, when a new Werther fever emerged.[60] *Werther* once more became part of a flood of subjective narratives of love and desire that turned against the previous regime and its oppression of private emotions, a phenomenon that promises exciting avenues for future research on masculinities and transnational encounters between Germany and Asia.

Notes:

[1] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Shaonian Weite zhi fannao*, trans. Guo Moruo (Shanghai: Taidong tushuju, 1922). It was the first full translation; portions of the novel had been first translated in 1902 by Ma Junwu but received little attention. Translations from foreign languages are mine if not otherwise stated. Research on this project has been funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): J3546-G23.

[2] Barbara Ascher, "Aspekte der Werther-Rezeption in China (Die ersten Jahrzehnte des 20. Jahrhunderts)," in *Goethe und China – China und Goethe. Bericht des Heidelberger Symposions*, ed. Günther Debon and Adrian Hsia (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 140.

[3] Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 188.

[4] Inger Sigrun Brodey, "Masculinity, Sensibility, and the 'Man of Feeling': The Gendered Ethics of Goethe's *Werther*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 35/2 (1999): 116.

[5] Nina Rexhepi, "Werther als Bild des in die Krise geratenen Mannes: Das Motiv krisenbehafteter Männlichkeit bei Goethe und Friedrich Dürrenmatt," in *Gegenbilder – literarisch/filmisch/fotografisch*, ed. Corina Erk and Christoph Naumann (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013), 111-28.

[6] Marion Recknagel's interdisciplinary contribution to this debate is particularly worth pointing out as she offers stimulating insights by comparing conceptions of masculinity in Goethe's novel with Jules Massenet's opera adaptation: Marion Recknagel, "Ein Mann von Gefühl – ein Mann von Leidenschaft: Männlichkeitskonzeptionen in Goethes *Leiden des jungen Werther* und Massenets *Werther*," in *Der musikalisch modellierte Mann. Interkulturelle und interdisziplinäre Männlichkeitsstudien zur Oper und Literatur des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Barbara Hindinger and Ester Saletta (Vienna: Praesens, 2012), 220-41.

[7] Kam Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[8] Johann Wolfgang Goethe, "Die Leiden des jungen Werthers," in *Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens* (Münchner Ausgabe), vol. 2/2, ed. Hannelore Schlaffer, Hans J. Becker, and Gerhard H. Müller (Munich: Hanser, 1987), 353.

[9] Homoerotic desire, on the other hand, has featured dramatically in depictions of the ideal man in arts and literature over the entire period of Chinese history, in particular with regard to *wu* warriors, see Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 24.

[10] Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 47.

[11] See further Yu-ning Li, *Images of Women in Chinese Literature* (Indianapolis: University of Indianapolis Press, 1994). Interestingly there are similar patterns of male heroes who have to prove themselves by withstanding a seductive temptress or leaving their lovers behind in order to fulfill their social, military, courtly, or religious duties in Western, Arabic, and other literary traditions in different parts of the world.

[12] Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 91.

[13] Hu Ying, *Tales of Translation. Composing the New Woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 9.

[14] Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, 55.

[15] Ascher, "Aspekte der Werther-Rezeption in China," 151. Wertherism was in fact one of several "-isms" adopted by intellectuals during the New Culture Movement, including for example "Ibsenism" (*Yibusheng zhuyi*), see Chengzhou He, *Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama* (Oslo: Oslo Academic Press, 2004).

[16] See for example Terry Siu-han Yip, "The Romantic Quest: The Reception of Goethe in Modern Chinese Literature," *Interlitteraria* 11 (2006): 53; Wuneng Yang, *Goethe in China (1889-1999)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 38-41; Ascher, "Aspekte der Werther-Rezeption in China," 146.

[17] Guo Moruo, "Shaonian Weite zhi fannao xuyin," *Chuangzao jikan* 1/1 (1922): 1-9. English translation: Guo Moruo, "Preface to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*," trans. Kirk A. Denton, in *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893-1945*, ed. Kirk A. Denton (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 204-12.

[18] The other areas of resonance are pantheism, exaltation of nature, reverence for the primitive life, and respect for children. Guo, "Preface to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*," 206-8.

[19] See Parts One and Two on the "Confucian Structure of Feeling" and the "Enlightenment Structure of Feeling" in Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 25-217.

[20] See in particular Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice. Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity. China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 45-102.

[21] Some scholars, such as Terry Sui-han Yip and Wuneng Yang, regard Guo Moruo's translation of *Werther* as the starting point for epistolary fiction in China, but, as Bonnie S. McDougall emphasizes, letters as a stylistic device have appeared in Chinese fiction and drama since the Tang dynasty (618-907). The enthusiasm for *Werther* and the first large-scale boom of epistolary fiction were undoubtedly closely interrelated as symptoms of a larger turn to subjective literary forms. See Yang, *Goethe in China*; Terry Siu-han Yip, "The Reception of Werther and the Rise of the Epistolary Novel in China," *Tamkang Review* XXII/1-4 (1991/1992): 287-304; Bonnie S. McDougall, "Revealing to Conceal: Love-Letters and Privacy in Republican China," in *Concealing to Reveal: An International Scholarly Conference on "The Private and Sentiment" in Chinese History and Culture*, vol. 2, ed. Ping-chen Hsiung (Taipei: Center for Chinese Studies, 2003), 279-346.

[22] Following Guo Moruo's translation in 1922 the novel was translated at least ten more times and it triggered a large-scale critical discourse among intellectuals and writers. Cao Xuesong, for instance, openly called himself "a youth of Werther mania," and Guo Moruo declared this period's creative phase to be his "Goethesque" phase. Apart from similar thematic and formal features in their works, in particular the one-sided epistolary form, there are also more explicit references to *Werther* in narratives, titles, or names of characters. The "Werther fever" also permeated other genres; for example, Cao Xuesong adapted the novel into a four-act play in 1927. Several studies have elaborated on this literary phenomenon in detail, such as Ascher, "Aspekte der Werther-Rezeption in China"; Yip, "The Reception of Werther"; Yip, "The Romantic Quest"; Terry Siu-han Yip, "Desire and Repression: *Werther* and Modern Chinese Writers," in *Chinese Literature and European Context. Proceedings of the 2nd International Sinological Symposium, Smolenice Castle, June 22-25, 1993*, ed. Marian Galik (Bratislava: Institute of Asian and African Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1994), 119-24; Yang, *Goethe in China*; Wuneng Yang, "Goethe und die chinesische Gegenwartsliteratur," in *Goethe und China – China und Goethe. Bericht des Heidelberger Symposions*, ed. Günther Debon and Adrian Hsia (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 127-37; Wolfgang Kubin, "Yu Dafu (1896-1945): *Werther* und das Ende der Innerlichkeit," in *Goethe und China – China und Goethe. Bericht des Heidelberger Symposions*, ed. Günther Debon and Adrian Hsia (Bern: Peter Lang, 1985), 155-81; Chenxi Tang, "Reading Europe, Writing China. European Literary Tradition and Chinese Authorship in Yu Dafu's *Sinking*," *Arcadia* 40/1 (2005): 153-76.

[23] The implications of these Japanese characters and settings on the construction of Chinese or even transcultural modes of masculinities is an intriguing question not covered here.

[24] Guo, "Preface to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*," 212. Goethe had added two prefatory poems to the second edition after witnessing the extreme reactions to his novel. They were omitted in later editions.

[25] Ascher, "Aspekte der Werther-Rezeption in China"; Kubin, "Yu Dafu (1896-1945)"; Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*; Yang, *Goethe in China*; Yip, "The Romantic Quest"; Yip, "Desire and Repression."

[26] See He, *Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama*.

[27] See Gail Hershatter, "State of the Field. Women in China's Long Twentieth Century," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 63/4 (2004): 991-1065; Hu, *Tales of Translation*; Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*.

[28] Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature. The Making of Modern Chinese Identity, 1895-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 144; Bonnie S. McDougall, "Disappearing Women and Disappearing Men in May Fourth Narrative: A Post-Feminist Survey of Short Stories by Mao Dun, Bing Xin, Ling Shuhua and Shen Congwen," *Asian Studies Review* 22/ 4 (1998): 428.

[29] The most ferocious critics of *Werther* included Xiong Yufang, Gao Dao, and Guo Moruo himself, who after his initial enthusiasm drastically changed his attitude towards Goethe from the mid-1920s onwards. Only in the 1940s he turned to Goethe again displaying more moderate critique and appreciation, see Yang, *Goethe in China*, 120-23. On *Werther*'s critical reception see Ascher, "Aspekte der Werther-Rezeption in China," 148-51.

[30] Mao Dun, *Ziye* (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1933). English translation: Mao Dun (Mao Tun), *Midnight*, trans. unknown (Hong Kong: C&W Publishing Co., 1976), 85.

[31] See for example Zhang Yi's analysis of the scene; however an important difference that Zhang did not mention is that Colonel Lei is leaving to die a traditionally male public death on the battlefield, whereas Werther will die a private suicide for love. Zhang Yi, *Rezeptionsgeschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur in China von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2007), 102-10.

[32] Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, 285-86; Ascher, "Aspekte der Werther-Rezeption in China," 151; Yang, *Goethe in China*, 91.

[33] Mao, *Midnight*, 145.

[34] Ibid., 145.

[35] Ibid., 234.

[36] Ibid., 137-39.

[37] Ibid., 135.

[38] Ibid., 117.

[39] Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 43.

[40] This connection is also reflected in Mao Dun's novel in the figure of the former official candidate and now businessman Feng Yunjing, see Mao, *Midnight*, 190.

[41] Mao, *Midnight*, 329.

[42] Ibid., 402.

[43] Ba Jin, *Jia* (Shanghai: Kaiming shudian, 1933). English translation: Ba Jin (Pa Chin), *Family*, trans. Sidney Shapiro (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1989).

[44] Ba, *Family*, 65.

[45] Ibid., 219.

[46] Ibid., 222-26.

[47] Ibid., 109, 187, 229, 261.

[48] Ibid., 43.

[49] Ibid., 4.

[50] Ibid., 6.

[51] Ibid., 290.

[52] Ibid., 220-21.

[53] Ibid., 217.

[54] Ibid., 218.

[55] Ibid., 193.

[56] Ibid., 197-98.

[57] See in particular Part Three on "The Revolutionary Structure of Feeling" in Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 221-97.

[58] Yip, "The Romantic Quest," 65-67. Faust, however, never gained the same degree of popularity as Werther. Other Promethean models included Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe* (1904-1912), see Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, 279-93.

[59] Louie, *Theorising Chinese Masculinity*, 161.

[60] Yang, *Goethe in China*, 52-78.