From the Absurdist to the Realist:

A Reading of Lao She's Teahouse from a Comparative Perspective

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In the study of traditional and modern Chinese literature, we have often been warned that it is biased and unfair to apply a Western critical approach indiscriminately to Chinese literary texts. Rather than criticize a Chinese work only in terms of Western critical models, standards, and values, we should complement our criticism by employing also the yardsticks against which the Chinese critics measure their own literature. This argument is perhaps especially relevant to the studies of post-1949 literature in China Mainland, for since then most creative writing and literary criticism were done to meet the standards and requirements of the Marxist literary tenets and above all Mao Zedong's (1893–1976) literary views expressed in his famous Yen'an talks on literature and art in 1942. It is, therefore, unfair to judge a Chinese poem written in accordance with the Maoist principles of “revolutionary literature” only from the standards of a Western poetics. On the other hand, just because literary criticisms during these forty years in China were by and large controlled by the State for political purposes (Lu 1966; Mackerras 163–79), following too strictly the Chinese official critical opinions in criticizing a Chinese work may lead a critic astray. After all, a work may still have great values even though it falls short of the Maoist literary standards. Therefore, it is not altogether presumptuous to hypothesize that applying a Western critical approach in criticizing a post-1949 Chinese literary work is not necessarily unfair to that work, but may possibly complement the Chinese Marxist critics' one-sided viewpoint and would ultimately lead us to a more solid ground for valid and fair criticism of post-1949 Chinese literature. The aim of this paper is to test the validity of this hypothesis.

I have chosen Lao She's (1899–1966) Teahouse to be my touchstone for this test. The fact that this play has been severely condemned and later praised as a masterpiece while all along very much welcomed by the audience at home and abroad makes it one of the best choices to test my hypothesis. I have a further reason to justify applying a Western critical approach to Teahouse: Lao She himself was influenced by the Western literary tradition which actually kindled his creative impulse (Lao She 1935: 521).
It is no doubt that Chinese critics have contradictory views on *Teahouse*. Since its first publication in 1957, it has been criticized quite harshly by many Chinese critics. The fact is that although Lao She confessed that he found his new literary life in Mao's Yen'an talks on literature and art (Lao She 1952: 68), if we employ the critical standards as revealed in the Yen'an talks as yardsticks, *Teahouse* is by no means a satisfactory work. First of all, even though the play was written after New China was established, it does not reflect the conditions of this new era, nor does it express any positive and optimistic views on the present or future. If we follow Chou Yang's (1908–1994) opinion that writers who write in the socialist age but not about it “must surely be against the idea of writing socialism” (107), we may classify *Teahouse* as “anti-revolutionary”. No wonder it was banned from 1963 to 1979. Amazingly, however, when it was put on the stage again in 1979 by the Beijing People's Art Theatre, this performance, the third of the play by the drama troupe, proved to be an unprecedented success. The play was later chosen to be representing the achievement of the post-1949 Chinese spoken play to tour the world, and was found well received also by the audience overseas.\(^1\)

The dramatic change of fortune of *Teahouse* itself is an interesting topic to study. But a more interesting thing to notice is that while the critics after 1979 highly evaluated the play, they could not give any new ideas to account for the meaning of the play and its rather unusual dramatic structure, not to mention successfully defending the play against its early negative criticisms. In fact, many articles and essays praising *Teahouse* after 1979 are memoirs of the history of its stage production written by the directors and actors rather than serious critical essays. Given that the play falls short of the Maoist literary standards and traditional dramatic standards, we need an explanation to account for its popularity among its audience. It is regretful to say that the Chinese critics so far cannot produce a good explanation to convince us that *Teahouse* is a great play. The second aim of this paper is to provide such an explanation.

Ideologically, the play lacks a clear “red-line” (political orientation) to make it acceptable for the Marxist critics. In addition to the “anti-revolutionary” elements recounted above, it does not reflect the great people's revolution undergoing during the fifty years dramatized. Nor does it portray any positive revolutionary figures. Instead, since the development of the three acts conveys a strong sense of gradual regression, it gives the audience an impression that the golden age (Qing Dynasty in act one) has gone forever and the present is not up to the past (Ran 1980: 468, 471–2). That *Teahouse* exhibits a strong sense of

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\(^1\) *Teahouse* was first performed abroad by the Beijing People's Art Theatre in 1980, visiting West Germany, France, and Switzerland. It has also been staged in Japan later. In 1986, it went for a world tour that covered Hong Kong, Canada, England, Singapore and the U.S.A. For the receptions of its Western Europe tour in 1980, see Krauter 1981, 1983.
“the present is not up to the past” is a quite common interpretation of the play, and also the idea on which the design of the stage setting was based (“Yan Cha-guan” 225). Again, according to Chou Yang (98), “the present is not up to the past” is one of the slogans that the bourgeois rightists used to launch their frenzied attack on socialism. It follows quite logically that Teahouse is reactionary by this critic's standards.

Aside from its ideological problems, critics have found fault with its unusual structure. Even a critic who considered the play a product of art pointed out in one of his articles written in 1980 that the play had no clear plot, no central conflict, no dramatic suspense (Ran 1980: 477). He had said nothing new but perhaps rehearsed what Li Jianwu maintained in 1958 that each act in Teahouse was like a picture in a traditional Chinese scroll: they were so independent of each other that they did not constitute an organic unity (384–5).

Seeing that he had created a dramatic form too alien to the Chinese literary conventions for it to be appreciated by Chinese critics, Lao She wrote two essays in 1958 to defend Teahouse, in which he elucidated its central message and why he had adopted such an unusual dramatic structure. According to him, the ultimate purpose of writing Teahouse was to paint a true picture of the nightmarish social condition in the past fifty years (1898–1948)\(^2\) so that the audience could appreciate by contrast the achievements gained after New China was established (1958A: 157).\(^3\) Another aim is to symbolically bury the three significant periods in those fifty years presented (1958: 159). Since his focus was on the entire fifty years, he could not follow a conventional dramatic structure but had to create a new one. He served this purpose by using the development of characters to support the development of the plot (1958: 159).

Lao She's self explanations were used by many later critics as their major premises in interpreting the play. Some critics argue that although writing only about the history of the pre-socialist age, the play is by no means reactionary but actually didactically oriented, for it provides a lesson to the people born after 1949 about the dark age that China underwent before 1949 and the tremendous improvement that the communist government has brought to China since then. Thus, even though Teahouse does not directly deal with the People's Republic of China era, it affirms this era in an indirect way (Guo; Hu; Pang; Ran 1980, 1983; Wang Yunman; Zhi Ge). Based upon similar arguments, Wang Jingshous even contends that Teahouse contains the romantic elements of ideal-

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2 Many collections of Lao She's essays and bibliographies of Lao She's studies, e.g. Ke Ling and Li Ying, have mistakenly dated this article back to 1955. This is really an unforgivable mistake, for Teahouse was not published until 1957.

3 In the text of Teahouse, act one is clearly stated to be set in 1898, but acts two and three are not specified. Since Lao She claimed that it was about the fifty years before the birth of the People's Republic of China, presumably act three was meant to be set in 1948. Vohra, however, states without reason that act three is laid in 1945 (157).
ism (557), which is in fact to say that the play is an example of true "revolutionary literature" in which we can find the elements of revolutionary realism and that of revolutionary romanticism well blended together.

It is unfair to ask the author to explain his work to you. When Alen Schneider, the director of the first American production of Waiting for Godot (hereafter abbreviated as Godot), asked Beckett who Godot was and what he represented, Beckett was reported to answer, "If I knew, I would have said so in the play" (quoted in Esslin 1962: 32). Asking Lao She to explain Teahouse is far more unfair, for he could say anything but confess that the play was reactionary if he wanted to avoid political censorship, to say the least. The fact that the Chinese critics could not produce any convincing evidence to prove that Teahouse is a great piece of "revolutionary literature" suggests that Teahouse is perhaps by nature not "revolutionary". When Lao She was asked why he did not develop Kang Dali's involvement in the revolution as the major plot of Teahouse to strengthen its "revolutionariness," he answered that he could not do so because "such treatment would have made it difficult to achieve his aim of symbolically burying the three historical periods presented in the play" (1958: 159). It suggests that Lao She's ultimate purpose was not to produce a "revolutionary" play. Moreover, in his recollection of his experience in directing Teahouse, the famous director, Xia Chun, recounted how hard it had been for him to add a "red-line" to Teahouse when it was staged in 1963. After the downfall of the "Gang of Four", he confessed that he was wrong before in trying to add a "red-line" to the play in which it actually had none (218-9). It is, therefore, not altogether presumptuous to argue that the play has very little, if any at all, to do with the people's revolution and should not be considered as an example of "revolutionary literature" in the Maoist sense. As compared with the ideology revealed in his other plays clearly "revolutionary" in nature, such as Dragon Beard Ditch which earned him the honorious title of "people's writer" ("Beijing shiftu"), Teahouse is obviously wanting in terms of "revolutionary literature". In Dragon Beard Ditch, Lao She described in the first act the ugly phase of Beijing before the success of the people's revolution, whereas in act three he highlighted the improvement achieved in Beijing after the communist government took over the ruling. In addition to the direct eulogy of the communist government in the third act, the audience could easily appreciate by contrast Lao She's affirmative attitude toward New China. On the contrary, since the audience are not shown the social phases of New China in Teahouse, they must exercise their imagination in order to get the positive message claimed to be embedded in the play. From this perspective, it is indeed strange to find the Beijing People's Art Theatre to have chosen Teahouse but not Dragon Beard Ditch to represent Lao She's dramatic accomplishment to tour the world.

It is perhaps clear now that if we criticize Teahouse purely from the Marxist critical viewpoints, we cannot fully explain why it is a great play. The fact that
Teahouse was so well received both in China and overseas urges us to look for a better explanation from another perspective. In this paper, I shall criticize Teahouse from a Western critical standpoint. To show that at its core Teahouse depicts the modern human predicament, I attempt to read the play as an authentic modern work (as the term is used in the context of Modernism). Instead of simply subjecting Teahouse to a set of abstract rules of modern dramatic poetics, I shall compare it with Samuel Beckett's Godot and show that although Teahouse is a realist play and Godot an absurdist one, their central pathos are common. They demonstrate a realist and an absurdist approach to dramatize one's despair of modern life. In other words, the two playwrights mean to dramatize the absurd modern condition in which men are left behind by a dead old world and waiting desperately for the perpetually delayed coming of a new one.

Moreover, I shall place Teahouse in the same category of his earlier works such as Cat Country, Camel Xiangzi and Crescent Moon. It seems to me that Lao She was consciously or subconsciously entertaining in Teahouse an old theme-pessimism concerning the chance of a better life – recurrent in his earlier works. Among Lao She's post-1949 literary works, Teahouse is perhaps the only exceptional one in which this old recurrent theme can be found.

If we focus only on the main “plot” of the play, it actually describes what happens while the three major characters Wang Lifa, Fourth Elder Chang, and Qin Zhongyi struggle for survival in the transition between the old and new China so that they can catch up with the new world. At a symbolical level, therefore, Teahouse is the story of these characters' experience in waiting for a better world to come. From this angle, Teahouse and Godot are comparable, for the latter is also the story of the two main characters' experience in waiting for the coming of a better world symbolized by Godot. While Estragon and Vladimir wait passively, the three Chinese characters try very hard to improve their own living and society, and therefore actively involved in the building of the brave new world to come. If Estragon and Vladimir are clochards, these three Chinese characters are clochards to be, somehow equivalent to Estragon and Vladimir when they were still presentable in the Eiffel Towel, who become clochards at the end of the play (details to follow).

In his definition of modernism, Irving Howe describes modern men as “a whole generation caught ... between two ages, two modes of life, with the consequence that it losses all power to understand itself and has no standards, no security, no simple acquiescence” (15). This picture is incomplete, however, leaving out the central image of modern men waiting forlorly and helplessly for a better new world to come. As Mathew Arnold (1822–1888) saw it, modern men were confronting a situation as the speaker in his “Stanzas from Grande Chartreuse” was facing:
Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn. (ll. 85–9)

This image of waiting is dramatized in *Godot* which has become a monument of modern drama. If the past world gone with the death of God, in Beckett's dramatization, the next is to be born with the coming of Godot. We are waiting for Godot, but he perpetually postpones his coming.

Although neither Arnold, nor Beckett, nor Howe had consciously extended his vision to the East, their descriptions of modern men's predicament are applicable to the situation of modern China. In 1898, a political movement, known as One Hundred Day Reform, aiming at modernizing China was launched. Although the movement was soon subdued by the conservative forces at the imperial court, the movement marked a culmination of the Chinese intellectuals' disillusionment of the Chinese orthodox traditions and their outburst into action to search a new bearing and a new meaning of life. Like Nietzsche (1844–1900), they found their "God" dead. Their duty was to find a new "God" for China. When Lao She was 23 (1922), he gave a speech in which he expressed his awareness of this duty that "Jesus carried only one cross. We [Chinese], however, should prepare to sacrifice ourselves to carry two crosses: one to destroy the old world, the other to create a new one" (Shu 256). From this speech, we may discern that Lao She was aware that his generation was actually left in the transition of a dying old world and a new one to come.

For the next few decades after 1898, China underwent a course of metamorphosis until in October 1949 it once again settled down with the establishment of the People's Republic of China. During these fifty years of transition from 1898 to 1949, China was afflicted by all kinds of social chaos, civil wars, and foreign commercial and military invasions, while its people waiting forlornly and helplessly for a better new world to come. Lao She's *Teahouse* puts on the stage this fifty-year history of modern China. In depicting Chinese people's struggle for survival while waiting for their "Godot", Lao She provided a panoramic overview of the history of modern China through the vicissitudes of Yutai Teahouse and the people attached to it. His tone was pessimistic, insinuating that the hope for a better world would very likely turn out to be a despair.

As common to all modernists, Beckett and Lao She worked with unfamiliar forms (Howe 13). They intentionally violated the rules of traditional dramaticity. In using new dramatic forms, the two playwrights aimed to produce extraordinary effects: to allow their dramas to transcend the limits of time and space. In other words, what is dramatized is not confined merely to one time and one space but represents a recurrent human situation. For *Teahouse*, these effects are especially essential. Although the story took place in the fifty years
from 1898 to 1948, what the audience witness is a general picture of the story of the Chinese race's waiting for a eutopian world to come.

*Godot* consists of two nearly identical acts. Strictly, no plot, no beginning, no end, no climax, no denouement, no plot and no suspense can be identified in the acts. A fable remaining on the level of abstraction (Anders 141), it is not a play by all traditional standards (Kern 41; Fletcher 59). Its central theme is also elusive and allows different approaches and many levels of interpretation: it is about "nothing to be done" (Kenner 25), "nothing happens, twice" (Fletcher 56), "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (Anouilh 1), or simply "we're waiting for Godot" (Robbe-Grillet 111). What exactly takes place on the stage is now too well-known to deserve a detailed summary.

*Teahouse* has three acts during which over sixty characters are acting on the stage, but, as in *Godot*, it has no plot, no action and not a central theme to connect those three acts and incidents happening together (Ran 477). Each act reflects one significant period in the history of modern China: act one is set in 1898 in the Qing Dynasty, just after the One Hundred Day Reform was subdued; act two takes place about 10 years later in the Warlord period, and the third act is set sometime around 1948.

Howe sees a dilemma in modernism that "modernism despairs of human history, abandons the idea of a linear historical development, falls back upon notions of a universal condition humaine or a rhythm of eternal recurrence, yet within its own realm is committed to ceaseless change, turmoil and recreation" (17). This modern spirit is reflected in both *Godot* and *Teahouse*. If there is anything that can be called a "plot" in either play, this "plot" is cyclical: the linear chronological progress in the plays takes place within a system of cyclical time. In other words, all movements occur within a closed system, of which the situation can be compared with the lunar cycle of changing from full moon to new moon. This concept of cyclical time endows change itself with both dynamic and static properties: on one hand, change is ceaseless; and on the other hand, since the phenomenon of change itself is constant, it leads to an exposition of the stability of the world. From this perspective, even though the rise and fall of curtain signify the "beginning" and the "end" of an act, but they are actually not distinguished.

In *Teahouse*, the above concept of cyclic time can be seen in the playwright's choice of the time and space for the story to take place. In terms of space, each act takes place in the same location, Yutai Teahouse. In terms of time, the first act opens in a morning in autumn and so is the final act, implying that a full circle has gone through and the end of this cycle coincides with its beginning. This idea can further be seen in the actual historical time represented. The first act is set at the time when the Chinese feudal system began to wither whereas the country itself was on its way to democratization and modernization, which means the end of an old cycle and the beginning of a new one. The third act is
set in 1948, a year prior to the success of the Communist revolution, thus another critical moment of historical transition. Within this cycle of fifty years, the Chinese society changed and so did Yutai Teahouse, but life in general remained as difficult and miserable as before.

The concept that change and revolution do not necessarily ameliorate society is no new theme of Lao She. Nor is that “unusual” (cyclical) structure anything really new. In his earlier works, such as *Cat Country*, *Crescent Moon* and *Camel Xiangzi*, just to mention a few, we can see a similar concept of change and a similar cyclical structure in action. In *Cat Country*, Lao She expressed his suspicion of the effectiveness of revolution in bringing about social amelioration. Emperor system was adopted for thousands of years in *Cat Country* until a political party upholding Everybody Shareskyism (a political theory somehow resembling Communism) led a revolution and overthrew the existing government to rule the country. However, the leader of the party finally ascended the throne and brought back the monarchy (Ho). In *Crescent Moon* the appearance of the crescent moon is a recurring motif to indicate that a cycle has gone through and the protagonist turns a “new leaf” in her life, and as the three main characters in *Teahouse*, the protagonist suffers a gradual degradation in her life. In the process, she actually repeats her mother's deplorable fate of being driven into prostitution, which she has been struggling in all her life to avoid. It also anticipates the theme that sons inherit their father's business in *Teahouse*. Both cases are simply variations of the same theme of “history repeats itself”. In *Camel Xiangzi*, the significant turning points of the cycles are marked by Xiangzi's possessing his own rickshaw. But each time the seeming success is only a mirage. He soon loses the car and in the meantime his life gradually deteriorates until at the end he becomes “a ghost of an individualist pushed to the wall”.

The three phases of Yutai Teahouse in the three acts should also be seen in the same way as the different phases of Xiangzi and the protagonist in *Crescent Moon* in their life cycles. As the two characters have ups and downs in their life cycles, Yutai Teahouses changes in those fifty years. The fact that the second act of *Teahouse* takes place in spring connotes that within a cycle time progresses. Therefore, the relation among the three acts are comparable to the cycle of the seasons, autumn-spring-autumn. The shift from autumn to spring in act two of *Teahouse* also reminds us of the tree on the stage of *Godot*. In the first act, this tree is leafless whereas a few leaves are found on it in the second act. Although it is clearly written in the play that the second act takes place the next day, these leaves in some way confuse the audience about exactly when this act happens. Since it takes time for the leaves to grow, there may be a period of time before act two actually starts. The impression the audience gets as a result is that these two acts represent, perhaps arbitrarily, any two segments of time in the same time cycle.
While the two acts in *Godot* are nearly identical, the three acts in *Teahouse* are seemingly independent of each other. They are, however, connected by inherent repetition, recurrent leitmotifs, and balancing of various elements as in *Godot*. The following table shows some significant recurrent leitmotifs in the three acts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act 1</th>
<th>Act 2</th>
<th>Act 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Morbid sexual relation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>an eunuch wants to get marry</td>
<td>two soldiers want to share one wife</td>
<td>Yutai Teahouse to become a harlots' house</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Emperor system</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Qing Dynasty</td>
<td>Yuan Shikai made himself emperor</td>
<td>Fourth Elder Pang wants to become emperor</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. The theme of death at the end of each act</strong></td>
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<td>fainting of Kang Shunzi (a symbolic death, for she is going to marry an eunuch)(^4)</td>
<td>death of Pockface Liu</td>
<td>death of Wang Lifa</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Political control (no freedom of speech)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Don't discuss state affairs” posted</td>
<td>“Don't discuss state affairs” posted</td>
<td>“Don't discuss state affairs” posted</td>
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<td><strong>5. Pessimistic view of the future of China</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth Elder Chang:</td>
<td>Cui Jiufeng:</td>
<td>the collapse of Yutai Teahouse (symbol of China)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Qing Empire is going to finish</td>
<td>China is finished – dead</td>
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</table>

*Godot* has also a structure which is “based on repetition, the return of leitmotifs, and on exact balancing of variable elements” (Fletcher 65). The action is obvious cyclical, the events in Act II more or less duplicating those in Act I. As Ihab Hassan aptly points out, “the inaction of the play is cyclical, and its events are endless repetitious, its two acts are symmetric, both equal images of an absence. Two acts, as Samuel Beckett knew, are enough to represent a sequence stretching to infinity” (176).

Likewise, not only the repetitions and recurrent leitmotifs in the three acts of *Teahouse* suggest that they form a sequence stretching to infinity, the use of sons to continue and develop their fathers' business carries the action to infinity. Positive figures like Wang Lifa and Qin Zhongyi inherit their fortunes and busi-

\(^4\) This is the ending of act one in the 1957, i.e. the first, edition of *Teahouse*. In the later editions, an episode was added: one of the two customers playing chess cries out, “Checkmate, you're finished” (Lao She, *Teahouse* 22).
ness from their fathers, and so are the negative characters like Little Pockface Liu and Little Soothsayer Tang. The Taoist number one classic, Daode jing, says, “one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures” (Tao-te ching 63). Since “the myriad creatures” (wanwu) actually means “all things”, three can be seen as a symbol of the mother of “all things” and hence a symbol of infinity. The effect of using two acts and two main characters in Godot is, therefore, comparable to that of using three acts and three main characters in Teahouse. The purpose is to bring out a sense of timelessness on the stage so that the audience can see that the two stories are not confined to a particular time but forever relevant. From this perspective, the fifty years contained in the three acts of Teahouse are enough to represent a sequence stretching to infinity.

If the plots and actions of the two plays are so designed to betray the concept of linear time, their settings are such contrived to transcend the spatial limitation of the stage. The setting of Godot is very much simple. There is nothing on the stage except a tree and a low mould, and the scene is to be perceived as a country road. In actuality, when performing Godot, there is absolutely no need for the place to resemble a theatre. That the scene can be anywhere implies that it represents everywhere. In other words, the scene becomes a universal symbol. What happens here is universally true.

While the absurdist dramaturgy permits Beckett to put a symbol of the entire world on the stage, the rules of realist drama, especially the requirements of concrete setting, restrict Lao She to displaying only a symbol of China on the stage. A teahouse itself is a powerful symbol of the Chinese community and its mentality, as in the case of the public bath for the Japanese. As Lao She put it, a teahouse “could be reckoned as a kind of [Chinese] cultural centre” (Teahouse 6) and “a microcosm of society as a whole” (Teahouse 82). The vicissitudes of Yutai Teahouse, therefore, symbolize the vicissitudes of China itself. Moreover, by putting the central concern on the characters rather than the events, by portraying mainly the common folks instead of historical figures, and by deliberately avoiding political issues which happened in this particular period of time, Lao She successfully reduced the topical (Chinese) favors of the play and simultaneously gave it a strong universal significance. The impression the audience obtains in effect is that Teahouse dramatizes not only the transition of China from a “feudal” era to a socialist epoch but also the common painful journey to modernization shared by all developing countries in the twentieth century.

In Godot, there are three pairs of dramatis personae, even though only five characters appear in reality. They are Estragon and Vladimir, Pozzo and Lucky, Godot and his messenger. None of these characters should be treated as an individual but only as a representation of some abstract ideas. Never appearing on the stage, Godot stands for man’s amorphous hope for a better world. We have very limited data about Godot. All we know about him is that he does nothing.
(Godot 91), that he has a beard which is perhaps white in color (Godot 92), and that he beats the boy who minds the sheep but spares the boy who minds the goats (Godot 51). All these imply that modern men do not know exactly what the new world that they are expecting will be like. The promise of Godot is simply an excuse and an adaptation of modern men to the meaninglessness of life (Metman 125). Godot's amorphism is also suggested by the ambiguous identity of his messenger, the boy, who is three in one. In the French original version, it is indicated that the boy in the second act is the same boy in the first; but in the English translation by the author, it is no longer specified as such. As a result, the boy in the second act may also be the shepherd, the brother of the boy in the first act, or simply another boy who has no relation with that boy at all. But no matter who the boy is, the message that he carries is definite: "Godot will not come today, but will surely come tomorrow", suggesting the elusiveness of that eutopian hope for a better world.

Estragon and Vladimir are representatives of all mankind (Kern 43). In view of the fact that Gege and Didi in Chinese mean elder and younger brothers (Harvey 143, note 14), they also represent friendship (Kern 45) and hence universal brotherhood. They are portrayed as "clochards" (Metman 132; Anders 142; Strauss 255), which is defined as people who have known better time and are now excluded from the scheme of the world with which they have nothing to do any longer. In other words, they are precisely the portrayals of the modern generation defined by Howe and Arnold, men exiled from the dead old world and waiting for the birth of a new one to which they belong.

While Estragon and Vladimir are universal figures, Pozzo and Lucky are of a more particular kind. They are the "gruesome product[s] of the modern age" (Metman 122). While Estragon and Vladimir, the universal, live in a cyclic time, i.e., free from the control of time, Pozzo and Lucky are subject to the control of linear time calculated by clock. In act one, Pozzo constantly consults his watch, implying that he is the being of the present world in which clock time plays an important role. But in act two, Pozzo becomes blind and as a result, for him, past, present, future collapse into an eternal present (Harvey 138). Pozzo and Lucky lose their "particular" identities and become also universal figures. That is why the blind Pozzo becomes "all humanity" in act two (Godot 83). Thus, as Harvey contends, "there is really only one character, man," on the stage, and the four personae are only divided selves of man (143). From this perspective, we may further argue that the characters on the stage are only the surrealist projection of the inner self of Beckett and objectification of his thoughts and feelings of modern human conditions. The dialogues in the play are always inconclusive and repetitious perhaps because they are the objectification of Beckett's stream of consciousness.

Not a single character in Teahouse has been treated in depth. They all remain till the end only on the level of a flat character. No wonder, they are but the ob-
jectification of certain abstractions like the personae in *Godot*. The three major characters, Wang Lifa, Fourth Elder Chang, and Qin Zhongyi, are exponents of three major philosophies of life that people living in a period of historical transition commonly hold. Wang Lifa's philosophy is "keeping up with time" (*Teahouse* 74). He does not attempt to improve society, but just follows the pace of social changes. He is one of those self-centered folks whose major interest in life is to secure a descent life for his children. Fourth Elder Chang is an individualist and an upright person who has "never relaxed his struggle against injustice and wanted to earn his own way and live an honest life" (*Teahouse* 74), reminiscent of the traditional Chinese values of *xia* or "knight-errant". While Wang adopts himself to the changes in society, Chang wants to uphold his own principles no matter how society may change. Chang represents those who are honest to society and in turn try to make sure that society is honest to him and to itself. Qin Zhongyi is portrayed as "a follower of the Reformists" (*Teahouse* 1), who advocates and practices for his whole life "saving the country by industrializing it" (*Teahouse* 72). He can be, therefore, compared with a modern utopian dreamer who worships science, technology and eternal progress. Each character struggles for survival in his own way in that transitional fifty years, but each is frustrated and reduced to a penniless old man in the end, who has not even money to buy himself burial clothes and a coffin. If Estragon and Vladimir are clochards, they are also reduced to clochards in the final act: they find themselves having nothing to do with society any longer.

It is, moreover, important to note that all their professed philosophies and purposes of life are not dramatically acted out or shown in the action but are spelt out in the dialogues exchanged among the three characters themselves in act three. From the standards of traditional drama, telling but not showing is of course a failure. I tend to see this "failure" as Lao She's deliberate attempt to abstract the characters so that they can be easily seen as symbols rather than purely individuals.

Moreover, the fates of Wang, Chang and Qin reflect perhaps Lao She's own life. That Wang reforms his teahouse several times to suit the ever changing taste of the customers reminds us of the fact that Lao She changed his favorite subject matter and style in creative writing for some political and social reasons especially during the period of the Sino-Japanese War and after 1949. Even Lao She's son thought that Wang Lifa's ending "share[d] an amazing lot of similarities with my father's own" (Shu 278). Chang is a Manchu as Lao She himself. In Lao She's other works, one cannot find another Manchu character who plays such a significant role as Chang in *Teahouse*. Vohra was perhaps right in saying that Chang was the spokesman of the author as a Manchu loyalist to China (161–3). Furthermore, we see the image of the young Qin Zhongyi who advocates saving China by industrializing it in young Lao She in twenty-three who advocated to destroy the old China and build a new one. Finally, Qin's factory is
demolished by the government, whereas Lao She's works were banned before he died in 1966. It seems that Lao She had foreseen his own destiny when he wrote the play in 1957 and spelt it out there. In fact, the deplorable fates of Wang, Chang, and Qin are shared by many Chinese intellectuals and laymen alike, in the modern times. It follows that there is only one Chinese character on the stage of *Teahouse*. Moreover, all those characters could be seen as the dramatic projection of Lao She's inner feelings of his country and people. In this sense, the characterization of *Teahouse* is comparable to that of *Godot* recounted above. In other words, Lao She adopted some techniques of symbolism in his realist drama, and the result is that its characterization appears wanting under the criteria of realist dramaturgy.

If Wang Lifa represents the common multitude who live their lives by seeing how the social wind blows, and Fourth Elder Chang, those people who have their own way regardless of what social condition they are confronting, neither is better than Vladimir and Estragon who wait passively for Godot in terms of their contributions to the building of a better new world. Qin Zhongyi, who aims at saving the country by industrializing it, however, is an actual utopist of reconstruction. His philosophy represents a false eutopian hope and false ideal once deluding men as an authentic substitution for "God". To understand Qin Zhongyi and what he stands for will be facilitated by comparing him with Pozzo.

Appearing twice on the stage, both Qin and Pozzo are prosperous at first and then being reduced to poverty and misfortune. In act one of *Godot*, Pozzo looks like a rich and powerful man very certain of himself. Esslin contended that Pozzo was an incarnation of a "worldly man in all his facile and shortsighted optimism and illusory feeling of power and permanence" (1962: 35–6). The fact that Vladimir and Estragon have once mistaken him as Godot suggests that Pozzo and the values he represented symbolized a false eutopian hope. When we first meet Qin Zhongyi, he is more or less the same kind of person as Pozzo, who naively and optimistically believes that his capitals and industry will turn out to be a eutopian elixir to cure the sick China. In their first appearance, moreover, both Pozzo and Qin have behaved as inconsiderate masters. Pozzo is on his way to sell Lucky "at the fair". Since in the French version, the fair is specified as "marche de Saint-Sauveur" or "the Market of the Holy Savior", it is suggested that Pozzo is trying to sell Lucky to redeem himself (Esslin 1962: 41). In other words, Pozzo attempts to fulfill his wish of redemption by depriving Lucky's chance of salvation. In a similar manner, Qin intends to take back the land where Yutai stands to realise his scheme of industrializing China without caring that this plan will deprive Wang Lifa's means of living. Moreover, Pozzo treats Lucky as an animal, whereas Qin, who derides Chang when the latter gives noodles to a poor peasant mother and her daughter, never really shows his sympathy to the poor. In both cases, if the capitalist master succeeds, the success is built upon the misery and sufferings of those under them, imply-
ing that they and the capitalist values they represented are not real messiahs of our modern world.

When they appear in the second time, Pozzo has become blind and helpless, whereas Qin is a poverty-stricken old man. Once we hear him say, "Do I look like a man that can be made to suffer" (Godot 34), Pozzo now expresses his despair of life: "They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, that it's night once more" (Godot 89). Qin, who has considered himself a national hero, now calls himself "a real bloody fool" (Teahouse 73). The common fate of Pozzo and Qin expresses the two playwrights' doubts of the twentieth-century eutopian faith in science, technology, and progressive time. The two phases of these characters symbolize respectively modern men's illusion and disillusionment of science and technology as the solution to human problems coming out as a result of the death of God.

After a brief account of the dramatic structure and characterization of Teahouse, we come to its central theme. I basically agree with Lao She and his critics that one of the major concerns of the play is to symbolically bury the fifty-year history of modern China presented. I also agree that although the story has not covered the socialist epoch, the play has something to do with this epoch. As I see it, however, instead of praising obliquely the socialist age as many Chinese critics have argued, the logic of the play leads us to believe that the play does not forbode an eutopian socialist era. On the contrary, it makes us feel that the future would be as disappointing as the three periods dramatized. In each act, as in each historical period represented, we observe superficial changes in society, but despite all such changes, the essence of life remains the same. In other words, all those changes are only an illusion, the reality remains always the same. The repetition of this illusion up to three times suggests only that this idea of change is not incidental but universally true. The idea will be easier to decipher by first looking at the correspondent situation in Godot.

In Godot, the concept of "change versus stability" is dramatized in the central action of the play-waiting. As Esslin asserts, "waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is itself an illusion. The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating, purposeless and therefore null and void. The more things change, the more they are the same" (Esslin 1962: 38f.). From this angle, we can see that the changes in Pozzo and Lucky in act two are not actual changes. Pozzo in act one is a particular incarnation of mankind, "a gruesome product of the modern age". But when stripped of all his modern accoutrements, he is just a human being as Lucky, Estragon, and Vladimir. Thus, when he becomes blind, implying that linear time (symbolizing his modern accoutrements) is no longer significant to him, he becomes "all humanity". In this sense, the prosperous Pozzo and the blind Pozzo, just like the tree with and without leaves or the new and full moon, represent only two different phases of the same entity within a time cycle.
Nothing has become better or worse in essence. It follows that the slight variations in the two acts are not to show "a sort of regression beyond nothing [...] that little we are given to begin with, and which we thought so meager at the time soon decays under our very eyes" (Robbe-Grillet 111), but to show that "life will continue without change, that expectations of change are generally disappointed" (Hoffman 133). There is no possibility for a better world to come no matter what superficial changes occur. What is depressing consists in that Estragon and Vladimir are unaware or pretending to be unaware of this fact and keep waiting for Godot. As Anders maintains, "Beckett does not show nihilistic men, but the inability of men to be nihilistic" even in a situation of utter hopelessness (144). The inability of men to be nihilistic can be interpreted positively and tragically to mean that "life must have meaning even in a manifestly meaningless situation" (Anders 144). But in the world of Godot, in which there is no chance of tragedy, the impression we obtain is that of despair. One reviewer of Godot points out that "Godot is a masterpiece that will cause despair for men in general, and for playwright in particular" (Anouilh 1). This reviewer has not specified his meaning of despair. As my analysis shows, this despair is two-fold. First, it is an anti-utopian feeling, a despair of the possibility of the coming of an eutopia. Secondly, it is a despair of men's ever coming to the realization that eutopia is impossible.

As in the case of Godot, changes in Teahouse are necessarily cyclical. Some Chinese critics have pointed out that the developments of the three acts in Teahouse convey a sense that "the present is not up to the past". It is certainly true that in the developments of the three acts, the three main characters and Yutai Teahouse itself suffer from a gradual deterioration and regression. But these apparent changes should be seen only as the ebbs and flows within a cycle. No matter what superficial changes occur, the essence of life remains the same. History will turn round and round without any real breakthrough, while life is an irretrievable journey from birth to death. In the play, the evil forces symbolized by the negative characters stand for the eternal recurrent social and life conditions. Even when the old generation dies, it will soon be replaced by a new one. On the other hand, the three main characters represent that irretrievable life journey. If we examine carefully the table of significant recurrent leitmotifs above, this idea of the dual properties of change will become more obvious. All these recurrent leitmotifs suggest that society will continue without real changes, the differences are only superficial variations, their essence being the same. Item 2, "empire system", suggests that no matter if it is in the Qing Dynasty, the Warlord period, or the period of the Nationalist Government, some people still want to become emperor. Item 3, "death at the end of each act" suggests that life is irretrievable, man or woman, good or bad, all have to die at the end. Reinforcing item 2, the last item demonstrates that in either period, the government does not allow criticisms, positive or negative alike, reflecting the
mentality of absolute monarchy in action. Since the life of the general multitude has not been improved during these fifty years, the logic of the play leads us to project that regardless of what type of government is coming into power, it will rule the country in the same way. In this sense, the central pathos of the play is not the idea, “the present is not up to the past”, but “life will continue without change, that expectations of change are generally disappointed”.

In the third act, Lao She announced the death of the old traditions through the dialogues exchanged among Zou Fuyuan, Wei Fuxi and Chef Ming. They point out that the once cherished traditions such as story telling and Beijing opera, are rotting away (56–57). Now, even Wang Lifa whose life philosophy of “keeping up with time” has brought him success for half of his life finds himself losing his bearing of life and has become a real “clochard”. The climax of this act is a “mock” funeral ceremony in which the three main characters pay last respect to themselves and to the old world (75).

This “mock” funeral ceremony of course functions, as Lao She claimed, to bury symbolically the three historical periods dramatized. But how should we appreciate its meaning? I tend to relate this ceremony with the sacrifice ceremonies to honor the inauguration of the Taibo Temple in The Scholars. To understand their interrelation, we must first of all look at the meanings of rituals or li in Chinese tradition. The concept of li denotes a cardinal virtue in Chinese ethics and expresses the Confucian ideal of civilization (Lin 256f.). It has a derivative meaning of “propriety” (Tu 190) and hence decorum. H.C. Chang contends that “[ritual] also asserts the dignity of man, as is evidenced by its recognition of the worth of feelings and even his desires. These, ritual sets out to cultivate and beautify, not merely to regulate, and this cultivation and beautification of crude nature is, in its beginning, the process of civilization. They bring about moral order in the world (distinctions in human relationships); they also bring about moral order within (reverence), …” (Chang 1955: 218). But li has become a synonym of corruption and decadence in the intellectuals’ mind in the twentieth century, which suggests that this Confucian ideal has been corrupted. Instead of serving positive social functions, the teaching of li has become “a philosophy of cannibalism”, eroding the Chinese culture and civilization.

In The Scholars, the inaugural sacrifice at the Taibo Temple can be seen as Wu Jingzi’s (1701–1754) laments on the death of an “old world”. In the Confucian canonical beliefs, ancient rituals and music have a marvelous power of civilizing people. As Chi Hengshan asserts in the novel,

in mid-spring and mid-autumn we can [make] sacrifice [to the Taibo Temple] with the ancient ceremonies and music. In this way people will practise ceremony and music, and that should help to produce genuine scholars who will be able to serve the government well. (Wu 370)

Chi Hengshan and his friends therefore hope that the ancient rituals and music can restore to health the corrupted and decadent world of their time. To their
disappointment, although the sacrifice is performed carefully to accord with the ancient ways, it brought no positive effect to society. The ancient rituals and music have lost their civilizing power. In other words, the old world has gone and restoration to the good old days is not possible. But Wu Jingzi was not altogether in despair because he still saw a way out. The four outstanding figures described in the epilogue perhaps represent the author's recommendations to the "clochards" of his generation to live. These four outstanding figures are Ji Xiannian, the calligrapher, Wang Tai, a seller of spills, Gai Guan, owner of a teahouse, and Jing Yuan, who keeps a tailor shop. They are satisfied with a simple life and do not crave for money or fame. In their leisure time, they amuse themselves with playing lyre, playing chess, practising calligraphy and painting, according to their own talents. It seems that Wu considered a kind of semi-hermit life while keeping the old traditions going on privately as a way out for the "clochards" of his generation.

In contrast, in the society of *Teahouse*, the only ritual still practised seemed to be a kind of funeral ceremony which is done out of vanity.\(^5\) Again, in this society, even common folk as the four outstanding figures in *The Scholars* do not have a good time. When Censor Shi's grandson asks Ji Xiannian to do some calligraphy work for him, Ji answers rudely: "Who do you think you are to order me to write for you? I don't want your money, I'm not impressed by your position, and I don't expect any favours from you. How dare you order me to write" (595), and what Mr. Shi can do is this: "[He,] quite speechless, hang his head and went back inside" (Wu 596). In the world of *The Scholars*, a common folk can still persevere his own dignity provided that he does not curry favour from the riches and those in power.

But in the world of *Teahouse*, Chang is put into prison just because he has said that "Qing Dynasty is going to be over" (20). Chang does it more or less as a hawker as Wang Tai after he leaves the prison, but instead of leading a free and happy life, he finds himself not able to afford buying himself a coffin. Like Gai Guan, Wang keeps a teahouse, but he is never as free and proud as his predecessor, because he is always taken advantage of by the policemen, soldiers and secret agents of the government. His ending is also deplorable: while his teahouse is going to be converted into a harlots' house, Wang hangs himself. Wu's optimistic hope in the common folk as the hope in the future perishes in Lao She's time. The world of *Teahouse* is one which does not allow common folks to lead a free and honorable life.

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\(^5\) According to the note to this ceremony in the original text, a number (either 32, 48 or 64) of bearers were employed to carry the coffins at funerals of the wealthy. While the funeral parade was in procession, the leading bearer would demand tips from the bereaved family and call out an exaggerated amount of money they had been given. The great number of bearers and the amount of tips called out are obviously only for showing off.
Wu's four outstanding figures are of course idealized figures. It is not a matter of deterioration that Lao She was aiming to show in relating *Teahouse* with *The Scholars*. I rather believe that Lao She used *The Scholars* as T.S. Eliot used the allusions in *The Wasteland* as a target of parody to bring about strong ironical effects. In this sense, the ironies in *Teahouse* also become one reason to justify calling it a piece of modern literature. Moreover, *Teahouse* and *The Scholars* actually share many other similarities, even though the former is a play whereas the latter a novel. Regardless of their genres, they do not have an integral plot (Lu Hsun 274 for *The Scholars*) and as a result reading them one got an impression of watching a Chinese scroll (Chang 1974: 20f. for *The Scholars*). In respect of subject matter, both works try to capture the panoramic view of their authors' societies from a critical and satirical perspective. Here we may find a reason to explain why the structure of *Teahouse* deviates from traditional dramatic structure. This is because Lao She was influenced by traditional Chinese narrative structure and perhaps consciously or subconsciously using *The Scholars* as his model in writing this play, and therefore adopted the method of using characters to bring out the plot which is common in classical Chinese novels such as *The Scholars* and *Water Margin*. The result is as many critics have already pointed out that the plot leaves much to be desired if we measure it against realist dramaturgy.

A reader may argue that at the very end of *Teahouse*, a message of an optimistic hope for a better future brought by the Communist party is suggested in the epilogue spoken by the ballad-monger, Oddball Yang: "It's a dark night, but the sun will rise / … / From the West Hills flows a bright new hope / A hope to wash away our grief. / And fill our hearts with new belief. / In a land where you nor I / Nor our children shall know slavery /" (*Teahouse* 81). It is important first of all to note that the speeches of Oddball Yang were written under the request of the first director of the play (Chiao 200). In fact, when *Teahouse* was first published in 1957, the character Oddball Yang and his speeches were not there. Even in the edition published in 1980, the speeches of Oddball Yang are treated as appendix to the main text. Therefore the epilogue should be considered exterior to Lao She's original intention.

Although the story of *Teahouse* ends in 1948, Ranbir Vohra contends that the slogan *motan guoshi* ("Don't discuss state affairs!") appeared as posters on the walls of Yutai Teahouse in all the three acts is perhaps "Lao She's greatest indictment of the communist government for [its] not differentiating between criticism voiced by the intellectuals who loved China and that which came from China's enemies" (161). What Vohra referred to is the Anti-rightists Movement during which the Communist government persecuted those who criticized the government policies in 1956. For those who were classified as rightists in this movement, seeing the slogan "Don't discuss state affairs!" of course evokes a kind of very special feeling in their hearts. If Vohra's argument is valid, then
instead of painting the social darkness in the pre-socialist age to contrast the improvement gained in the socialist age, *Teahouse* actually uses the past to criticize the present. That is to say, the slogan is not only a satire on the Anti-rightist Movement but also a silent protest of Lao She against the movement. He did not agree with the movement but lest he would be classified as a rightist himself if he voiced his opinions openly, he set up an example in *Teahouse* of avoiding discussing the state affairs after 1949 and therefore ended the play exactly before that critical year.

Moreover, *Teahouse* forbodes the disaster brought to the Chinese society by the “Gang of Four” during the Cultural Revolution. Lao She's wife Hu Xieqing wrote on the occasion of the third performance of *Teahouse* in 1979 that this particular performance was more popular than before, for *Teahouse* reminded the audience of the social calamities created by Lin Bao and the “Gang of Four”. She wrote:

> While Second Elder Qin laments that “the factory was demolished”, intellectuals in the audience would associate it with their own experience of having their laboratories, classrooms, and nursery of young plants where they have worked hard being demolished by the “Gang of Four”. While Proprietor Wang and Granny Kang bid each other best regards and then take leave of their granddaughter, son and daughter-in-law, the audience would be reminded of the scenes when they themselves made their farewell to their relative on the ways being sent to the Cadet Training Schools, “Cowsheds” and isolation cabins. While Fourth Elder Chang and Second Elder Sung are arrested because of mentioning some taboo words, people would think of those deliberately misinterpretations in the tyrannical literary inquisition and all those unjust verdicts, wrong verdicts and false cases [...] (Hu 192)

Hu's observations suggest that the social darkness depicted in *Teahouse* has not gone after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. In other words, new China has not evolved from the historical cycles that governed the three periods dramatized. History only repeats itself once again. In this way, we can argue that *Teahouse* is a great play because it successfully dramatizes the common fate of modern Chinese and exposes the roots of the social problems confronting modern China. It also acts out what embeds at the recess of the modern Chinese collective unconsciousness: what they felt but dared not spell out. That answers to the question why *Teahouse* is so popular and much cherished by the Chinese audience even though it falls short of the requirements of true “revolutionary literature” and traditional drama. In a comparison with *Godot*, we realize that the common fate of modern Chinese is shared by people in the Western world, which makes it understandable also why *Teahouse* is well received by the foreign audience in its tour in Western Europe. In this sense, *Teahouse* transcends its Chinese topic to assume universal significance.
In a letter to George Jean Nathan, Eugen O'Neil says that the dramatist of today has to reveal the root of sickness of our time, which he describes as "the death of the old god and the incapacity of science and materialism to give a new god to the still living religious instinct" (Metman 117). Beckett and Lao She fulfilled this duty in *Godot* and *Teahouse* respectively. By comparing *Teahouse* with *Godot*, we find that *Teahouse* is perhaps a rare item in Lao She's post-1949 literary productions that retain his earlier critical sensitivity and his "burden of moral contemplation" defined by C.T. Hsia (533). Hsia distinguishes the pre-1949 modern Chinese writer with the modern Western writer by that the latter would "automatically identify the sick state of his country with the state of man in the modern world, [whereas] the Chinese writer sees the conditions of China as peculiarly Chinese and not applicable elsewhere". To become member in the main stream of modern literature, the Chinese writer needs "the courage or insight to equate the Chinese scene with the condition of modern man". In doing so, however, he has to give up "the hope for the betterment of life, [and] for the restoration of human dignity" (Hsia 536). It is indubitable that *Teahouse* deals with China in a realistic format, but Lao She's use of symbols, his attempt to avoid political issues, and his emphasis on the characters rather than the plot make the fifty-year history of modern China in *Teahouse* become a universal symbol. While in *Cat Country*, for example, he still had some hope with foreign countries that they might set good examples for emulation, in *Teahouse* the foreigners are put in the background and any references to them suggest only that the foreigners are as morally corruptive, covetous, and repacious as the Chinese themselves.6 Lao She's employment of cyclical action to destroy our usual sense of linear time and concept of change, moreover, makes us also realize that he had given up the eutopian hope for the betterment of life. We may conclude therefore that Lao She at last placed himself in the mainstream of modern literature. In this sense, in addition to the modern elements rehearsed above, *Teahouse* also fulfills the criteria of modern literature in Hsia's sense.

When being asked about Bertolt Brecht's place in the Polish theatre, the Polish critic Ian Kott answered that "We do him when we want Fantasy. When we want Realism, we do 'Waiting for Godot'" (Bentley 1967: 110). Although written in an absurdist dramaturgy, *Godot* actually reflects realistically the condition of modern society. As Bentley contends, *Godot* has a "historic destiny ... to represent the 'waiting' of the prisoners of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, as also the prisoners behind the walls and barbed wire of Walter Ulbricht, as also the prisoners behind [the] wire of totalitarian society generally, as also the prisoners

6 There is no foreigner appearing on the stage of *Teahouse*, but there are remarks on them. For example, in act one, Fourth Elder Chang mentions that "the English and French destroyed Yuan Ming Yuan" (8); and in act two, through Soothsayer Tang, we learn about the fact that the Japanese were importing heroin to China (28). These remarks are obviously not compliments.
behind the spiritual walls and barbed wire of societies nearer home’’ (110). *Tea-
house* being the realist counterpart of the absurdist *Godot* has also a historic
destiny to represent the painful struggles for modernization, or better Western-
ization, of countries in the Third World, to represent the gradual dying of their
old traditions and the incapacity of the Western civilization to give them a new
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