



Article

Mao Dun's "Spring Silkworms": Living Like Worms

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Abstract: Mao Dun's (茅盾) 1932 short story "Spring Silkworms" (春蚕), the first of a three-part series known as the Village Trilogy, is widely regarded as one of the author's most representative works. Given Mao Dun's leftist politics and commitment to critical realism, the story has generated debate over its depiction of the Chinese peasantry and the extent to which it condemns tradition in support of revolutionary progress. This article contends that the key to the ambiguity of the peasants' depiction lies in the fundamental questioning of what is human, which underlies the story's overall ideological framework. Through a close examination of the story and its 1933 film adaptation, the article aims to show how the silkworms act as a metaphor for the villagers themselves, who are dehumanized through their helplessness and alienated labor. By reading the human villagers as metaphorical worms, the article demonstrates how they are both exposed as a kind of valueless "bare life" and situated in a narrative pause in historical materialist time, which indicates a space for the potential fundamental reconceptualization of the human. Ultimately, the article hopes to push beyond didactic readings of the story's politics to reveal an ontological anxiety at its core.

Keywords: Mao Dun; Spring Silkworms; leftist Chinese literature; leftist cinema; human and animal



Citation: Foley, Todd. 2022. Mao Dun's "Spring Silkworms": Living Like Worms. *Literature* 2: 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature2040019>

Academic Editor: Stephen Roddy

Received: 1 September 2022

Accepted: 4 October 2022

Published: 10 October 2022

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1. Introduction

In Lu Xun's 1918 story "Diary of a Madman" (狂人日记), his first vernacular work and a landmark of China's New Culture Movement, the infamously paranoid protagonist juxtaposes the category of "real humans" (真人) with that of "worms" (虫子). Describing to his brother what he perceives as the cannibalistic society that surrounds them, he presents a theory of social evolution essentially based on the moral prohibition of cannibalism:

Brother, probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their views altered, some of them stopped and tried so hard to do what was right that they changed into men, into real men. But some are still eating people—just like reptiles. Some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys, and finally men; but those who make no effort to do what's right are still reptiles. When those who eat men compare themselves to those who don't, how ashamed they must be. Probably much more ashamed than the reptiles before monkeys. (Lu 2000a, p. 43)¹

Interestingly, the translators of this passage, Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, choose to emphasize the moral rather than scientific elements of this evolutionary ladder, translating 虫子 *chongzi* as "reptile" instead of its more literal meaning of "insect" or "worm"; Julia Lovell, in her more recent translation with Penguin, retains this translation of "reptile" (Lu 2009, p. 28). Keeping in mind, however, Lu Xun's fondness for Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, which he encountered through Yan Fu's 1896 translation/reinterpretation as *Tianyuan Lun* (天演论),² we might note the way that the madman fuses moral action with a Darwinian notion of evolutionary biology, invoking a hierarchy of lifeforms from worm to monkey. Humans can only become real humans—either at the top of this ladder, or outside of it altogether—by practicing a social morality. In this sense, the separation between human and animal paradoxically falls in line with the traditional Confucian notion whereby the category of human is distinguished from animal through its capacity for moral action.

Spring Silkworms

Kären Wigen



Spring Silkworms:

Spring Silkworms Tun Mao,1970 Spring Silkworms, and Other Stories Dun Mao,1979 **The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature** Joseph S. M. Lau,2007 An anthology of Chinese fiction poetry and essays written during the twentieth and twenty first centuries **The Chinese Text** Yingxiong Zhou,1986 The collection opens with Harry Levin's What is Literature if Not COmparative read in the Second Hong Kong Comparative Literature Conference 1982 and used here to highlight the significance of a comparative outlook in literary studies It is followed by five constellations of Chinese Western comparative studies some of which were read in the same conference and others specifically solicited The areas studied include classical Chinese drama Chinese narrative Chinese influence in modern American literature Chinese aesthetics and contemporary Chinese literature P 4 of cover Moriculture Kichisaburō Minamizawa,1997-06-01 The raw silk industry is dependent upon sericulture and sericulture is dependent on moriculture In order to increase cocoon production and also to reduce production costs moriculture techniques must be improved This work describes the means of increasing productivity of mulberry The text has a wide coverage on morphological physiological and ecological features of mulberry Also included are details of classification improvement of varieties leaf quality and complete information on cultivation technique Tables and figures are included to explain these aspects **Spring Silkworms and Other Stories** □,1956 Spring Silkworms and Other Stories Maodun,Dun Mao Tun,1979 **General History of Chinese Film I** Ding Yaping,2021-10-25 The early years of the history of Chinese film have lately been the subject of resurgent interest and a growing body of scholarship has come to recognise and identify an extraordinarily diverse and complex period This volume explores the development of Chinese film from 1896 to 1949 The volume covers the screening of foreign films in Shanghai Hong Kong and other coastal cities in China the technological and industrial development of Chinese national cinema key filmmakers and actors of early Chinese cinema changing modes of representation and narration as well as the social and cultural contexts within which early Chinese films were produced and circulated The relationship between the War of Resistance against Japan and the Chinese civil war and Chinese film is also explored The book will be essential reading for scholars and students in film studies Chinese studies cultural studies and media studies helping readers develop a comprehensive understanding of Chinese film *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-century China* Dewei Wang,1992 Although deconstruction has become a popular catchword as an intellectual movement it has never entirely caught on within the university For some in the academy deconstruction and Jacques Derrida in particular are responsible for the demise of accountability in the study of literature Countering these facile dismissals of Derrida and deconstruction Herman Rapaport explores the incoherence that has plagued critical theory since the 1960s and the resulting legitimacy crisis in the humanities Against the backdrop of a rich informed discussion of Derrida's writings and how they have been misconstrued by critics and admirers alike *The Theory Mess* investigates the vicissitudes of Anglo American criticism over the past thirty

years and proposes some possibilities for reform Silkworm Rearing Pang-chuan Wu, Da-chuang Chen, 1988-01-01

Principles of Sericulture Hisao Aruga, 1994-06-01 Great progress has been made in the past decade in the field of sericulture research Sericulture technique covering various aspects has also advanced greatly Like agriculture sericulture as an industry requires greater development in research and technology aimed at increased production This text covers the complete range of subjects with current data relating to mulberry and silkworm Particular emphasis has been laid on the basic aspects of stable crop of silkworm and various preventive measures against adverse factors Topics covered include the sericulture industry and its future mulberry cultivation silkworm and its strains silkworm eggs morphology physiology ecology and genetics of the silkworm diseases of silkworms rearing of silkworms cocoon silkworm and egg production and utility of byproducts Translations on Communist China's Food and Agriculture United States. Joint Publications Research

Service, 1965-05 **Micro-Credit in Modern Japan** Hikaru Tanaka, 2024-11-05 Japanese society believes they enjoy socio economic equality While industrialization tends to make gap between rich and poor most of Japanese are proud of themselves as being middle class in the first Asian industrialized country In fact post WW2 Japanese economic miracle made Japan rich and equalized High personal saving ratio supported the economic development in those days as if it s a proof of Rostow s take off model Japanese saving rate had jumped high level around the beginning of 20th century which was the time of their industrialization taking place This book shows the savings was not only rich s accumulation of wealth but ordinary citizen s daily spares The spare money helped whole nation s economic development especially supported relatively small farmers and self employed workers The personal small savings became huge funds for the basis of modern Japanese micro credit and emergency bailout loan Postal Savings Bank and nationwide cooperatives played the role in managing This financial network was independent from ordinary financial system composed of private banks and securities market and complement its function The personal small savings funds in Japanese economy saved its society from various type of calamity and supported economic equalization as alternative financial system which acted as Not for Profit enterprises *Liang Shaoji's Silkworm*

Art Feixuan Xu, 2025-05-23 This book focuses on the work of Chinese contemporary artist Liang Shaoji and emphasises the contribution of multispecies ethnography to art criticism Over three decades Liang has worked with domestic silkworms to craft art that embodies the Daoism inspired ecological motif of ziran Are silkworms co authors or alienated fabricators in such creative practice Based on a multi sited ethnographic study conducted in China the book delves into Liang s artistic techniques involving close collaboration with silkworm farmers and biologists In doing so it makes a significant contribution to discussions of non human agency and labour The author unveils the intricate power dynamics between silkworms and their caretakers revealing multi sensory knowledge anthropomorphic kinship and moral dilemmas inherent in working with these insects This volume will be of particular interest to scholars working in the anthropology of art human animal studies and environmental humanities The Breeding and Culture of the Silkworm, Bombyx Mori, Linn Rui Feng, 1922

Building a New China in Cinema Laikwan Pang, 2002-05-01 Building a New China in Cinema introduces English readers for the first time to one of the most exciting left wing cinema traditions in the world This unique book explores the history ideology and aesthetics of China s left wing cinema movement a quixotic film culture that was as political as commercial as militant as sensationalist Originating in the 1930s it marked the first systematic intellectual involvement in Chinese cinema In this era of turmoil and idealism the movement s films were characterized by fantasies of heroism intertwined with the inescapable spell of impotency thus exposing the contradictions of the filmmakers underlying ideology as their political and artistic agendas alternately fought against or catered to the taste and viewing habits of a popular audience Political cinema became a commercially successful industry resulting in a film culture that has never been replicated Drawing on detailed archival research Pang demonstrates that this cinema movement was a product of the era s social economic and political discourses The author offers a close analysis of many rarely seen films richly illustrated with over eighty stills collected from the Beijing Film Archive With its original conceptual approach and rich use of primary sources this book will be of interest not only to scholars and fans of Chinese cinema but to those who study the relationship between cinema and modernity *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas, 1919-1949* Joseph S. M. Lau, Chih-tsing Hsia, Leo Ou-fan Lee, 1981 This volume brings together some of the best and most historically significant works of short fiction written in China in this century 44 stories by twenty different authors including such important figures in the development of Chinese modernism as Lu Hs n Mao Tun Ting Ling and Shen Ts ung wen The companion volume to the highly acclaimed Traditional Chinese Stories which covered the period from the former Han dynasty to the beginning of Chinese modernism this new volume presents modernist short fiction from the thirty year period leading up to the Communist revolution of 1949 after which Chinese literature entered a new phase of development *The Sericultural Industry in Japan* Dai Nippon Sanshikai, 1910 **The Making of a Japanese Periphery, 1750-1920** Kären Wigen, 2023-09-01 Contending that Japan s industrial and imperial revolutions were also geographical revolutions Kären Wigen s interdisciplinary study analyzes the changing spatial order of the countryside in early modern Japan Her focus the Ina Valley served as a gateway to the mountainous interior of central Japan Using methods drawn from historical geography and economic development Wigen maps the valley s changes from a region of small settlements linked in an autonomous economic zone to its transformation into a peripheral part of the global silk trade dependent on the state Yet the processes that brought these changes industrial growth and political centralization were crucial to Japan s rise to imperial power Wigen s elucidation of this makes her book compelling reading for a broad audience Contending that Japan s industrial and imperial revolutions were also geographical revolutions Kären Wigen s interdisciplinary study analyzes the changing spatial order of the countryside in early modern Japan Her focus the Ina Valley served as a gate *Translations from Ta Kung Pao, Peking* , 1961

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