

## The “Growing-up Novel” and its Growth in China

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### Abstract

*The “growing-up novel” is a new field of research in contemporary literary criticism and children’s literature. Focusing on the issue of “growing-up,” this paper investigates the anthropological origin of the term and suggests that the lack of puberty ritual is the main reason for the disorder and chaos in the growing-up process in modern society. I argue that the “growing-up novel” is the substitute for such a ritual. Through a survey of the development of this genre in China, I also reveal that the absence of “subjectivity” is still a major problem that most writers are facing.*

**Keywords:** Growing-up; Growing-up novel; Puberty ritual; Subjectivity; Chinese Literature

### 1. Introduction

People are born onto this earth through chance and upon entering this world the destiny of the individual is closely tied to his “growing-up.” So-called “coming of age” or “growing-up” means “to grow and mature,” to “develop towards the stage of maturity.” As people are the highest existing life forms, their development is undoubtedly the most complicated, richest, and most unpredictable. Everyone’s “searching all around” coming of age journey can even be described as a “long journey to a far off destination,” and the process of seeking its solution is sure to be a mountainous trek. This is an attribute of gradual physical and psychological maturity and has an effect on the daily shaping of personality and character, thereby fixing society’s coordinate of “self” and bringing about a harmonious symbiosis with society. Body development is the physical aspect of growing-up. According to physiology’s standard definition, people generally start developing around ten years of age (girls’ physical development occurring slightly earlier than boys’), and enter “puberty.”

At around twenty years of age physical development reaches maturity, signifying that physically “becoming a man” comes with the ability to reproduce, while mental development implies the significance of psychology and sociology. Psychological development indicates a maturity which includes the ability to think rationally and acknowledge society’s mainstream values and aesthetic standards. According to the terms of sociology, a person enters the ranks of adulthood at eighteen years of age, upon which he gains the rights of an adult as well as the corresponding duties and responsibilities, such as legal rights and economic independence. Furthermore, many unwritten customs also open the way to the door of adult privileges. Eighteen also signifies the evolution from the “natural self” to “self awareness” and the elevation from the “natural state” towards the “societal state.” That is to say, the importance of an individual’s growth points directly to his development of reason. The individual can comfortably find his place in the social system, thus completing his “socialization<sup>1</sup>,” and allowing him to overcome what sociologist Parson called the “identity crisis.”<sup>2</sup> From this perspective, “growing up” often determines the individual’s collective, social, and even mental development.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. sociologist of structural functionalism T. Parson divided “socialization” into two stages, namely “childhood socialization” and “adult socialization.” The former is the primary socialization--childhood character development, the period in which children prepare for their future roles in society. The latter is one’s personal understanding of his role in the social system.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. sociologist of structural functionalism T. Parson believes that phenomenon of character development towards the inability to know oneself, one’s responsibilities, and one’s role in society is an “identity crisis.”

Just like Bakhtin said in his work *The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism*, a person's coming of age "is no longer man's own private affair. He emerges along with the world and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself."<sup>3</sup> Whether it is physiology or psychology, the "growing-up" and "sexual development" is undoubtedly what sociology refers to as the nucleus--the main event on the road to development, a significant milestone? Generally speaking, when one enters "adolescence," his physical changes, especially the second sexual development, are as distinct as a caterpillar changing into a butterfly. Seemingly overnight a boy grows a beard, an Adam's apple, and armpit and pubic hair. "Wet dreams" follow close behind. A girl's breasts slowly begin protruding and her "first period" suddenly arrives.

These great "physical sexual" changes induce the awakening of a "sexual mentality." Compared with one's "physical sexual" development, the development of one's "sexual consciousness" is more complicated, profound, and circuitous. The unknown, unspeakable fear of the inevitable arrival of these tremendous physical/psychological changes is tantamount to a seismic shock to the individual's sensitive, timid and fragile soul. In short, chaos and clarity, despair and longing, intensity and paranoia, optimism and demoralization, conceit and self-esteem, sprouting of sexual desires, and expansion and expression all are problems we must face growing up, and can roughly be grouped according to the following types: 1. Recognition and frustration of the "self" 2. Yearning for and aversion to "the other" (adult world); 3. Unrestrained ego and external restrictions; 4. Oppression and release of sexual tension. It goes without saying that "growing up" is a major assignment in life that cannot be escaped or avoided. For everyone, the coming of age journey is both a record of an individual's existence, a method for unlocking the mysteries of life itself, and also is the interpretation of a complicated, winding life.

## **2. Growing-up Novel: A Return to "Puberty Ritual," and a Concern for "Growing up"**

If physical growth is controlled by a mysterious heredity gene which possesses an innate ability to prearrange and determine, then the parameters of physical development frequently change according to the changes of environment and a number of factors both tangible and intangible, and thus contain various possibilities. It is only because of the denaturation of and inability to accurately gauge personality and character development that causes a "person's" development to have the deep "human cultural" significance that all other forms of life lack. A person's journey from "youth" to "adulthood" signifies the establishment of "subjectivity"<sup>4</sup>, as well as his rising from the margins of society to the mainstream cultural center.<sup>5</sup> This is a critical turning point in the search for the meaning of life and the realization of its worth. In addition, the length and designated time/space of an individual's development are mutually supportive, thereby implying a "pairing." In other words, "Individuals develop in history" (Bakhtin). "Growing-up" is both "individual" and "historical."

According to the individual, history is simply "personal history"; according to history, development is not simply the "private affairs of an individual." So this personal development contains a kind of cultural metaphor. Cultural metaphors for growth are also represented by the submerged processes of various kinds of "collective consciousnesses." If you take a developing individual from the status of an "individual" (single person) and change his status to the "collective" (people), development clearly implies that people follow the evolutionary track of "uncultured—barbarous—cultured." Growing-up also makes clear the widespread approval of the common psychological mechanism of a people or a country and the transmutation of the ethical system. Development is like biological transmission through genetic code and is an indicator of the accumulated wisdom of the collective (public) consciousness that has been established by popular use. Needless to say, "Any narrative about growing-up, whether it is a success or failure, whether it is smooth going or filled with twists and turns, or whether it is about a fellow citizen or a foreigner, all have broad appeal, fulfilling all of our individual yearnings and impulses to be self-acting, self-improving, and free.

<sup>3</sup> From the original translation of Bakhtin, M. M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism," trans. Vern W. McGee, 2004, University of Texas Press, USA, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Marx pointed out that people are always the main subject, the main subject always people. But according to real individuals, people and the main subject are not completely in sync and every person is not truly the main subject. Only when a person has a subjective consciousness, and when the subjective ability has an effect on the object, does he then become the main actor, and have subjectivity. Subjectivity is human nature's prerequisite for moving to a higher level of regulations.

<sup>5</sup> Juergen Habermas believes, "Only in the context of the group identity can self-identity form." Taken from the Chinese translated from German by GuoGuanyi. *Reconstruction of Historical Materialism*, Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, Beijing, 2000, 96.

Growing-up, becoming one of life's commonly existing cultural phenomena, and the importance of individual life experience, inevitably became the targets for literature, especially for the expression and exploration of the novel genre.<sup>6</sup> In many literary styles, "growing-up" and "love" are treated similarly, and the works not only are often more and more modern, but also are classic and timeless. Many literary styles happen to coincide in their passion for the subject of "growing-up." Yet with regard to superiority, depth, and achievement, "novels" undoubtedly have an aptitude for "growing-up" narratives. Therefore, from the family of novels was born a narrative style called the "growing-up novel." What is a "growing-up novel"? As a word it originated from the German *Bildungsroman*, *Entwicklungsroman*, *Erziehungsroman* and *Künstlerroman*, meaning "shape," "self-cultivation," "development" and "growth." As a literary concept, the "growing-up novel" originated from late eighteenth, early nineteenth century Germany. At that time, "the meaning of 'nation' and 'main subject' was for Germany strange and foreign. If Germany wanted to construct a modern nation, it must 'create' or 'develop' this kind of 'meaning.' The 'growing-up novel' unintentionally became the symbolic object that undertook this mission. To some degree, this type of novel is a symbol of the "growing-up" of the nation state."<sup>7</sup>

M. H. Abrams defined "growing-up" novels as those whose theme is the development of the protagonist's thought and character, and narrates his various experiences starting from a young age. The protagonist generally goes through some kind of mental crisis, after which he grows up and understands his place and role in the world.<sup>8</sup> Moritz's *Anton Lai Sui* and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years* are seen as the source of the "growing-up" novel. In his work *What is an Initiation Story* Mordecai Marcus points out that an initiation story reveals all sorts of changes that the young hero experiences after undergoing a painful event, thereby breaking him off from the innocence of childhood and moving him towards the real, complicated world.<sup>9</sup> While Bahkt in believes that a novel: Provides an image of man in the process of becoming. As opposed to a static unity, here one finds a dynamic unity in the hero's image. The hero himself, his character, becomes a variable in the formula of this type of novel. Changes in the hero himself acquire plot significance, and thus the entire plot of the novel is reinterpreted and reconstructed. Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way the significance of all aspects of his destiny and life. The type of novel can be designated in the most general sense as the novel of human emergence.<sup>10</sup>

Although the definitions vary, the key words are more or less similarly formulated--ignorant youth, a road full of trials and hardships, and growing into an adult. Furthermore, "growing-up" novels clearly carry the function of "education," even to the point where they have been called "educational novels." Having read related works and theses, in this article I define the "growing-up" novel as a type of novel focusing on expressing the youth and tenderness of the young herowhogoes through all kinds of setbacks and hardships in order to gain realization and ultimately goes through the process of growing-up. Its aesthetic features are roughly as follows: 1. The narrative's protagonist is usually an adolescent "young man "between the ages of thirteen and twenty; 2. The events in the narrative contain a certain element of "personal experience;" 3. The narrative structure roughly follows the pattern of "innocent→frustrated→lost→insight→adulthood"; 4T he narrative's protagonist finally grows up, and independence is gained. From a deep-level investigation into the cultural origin it is clear that the various functions fulfilled by the "growing-up novel" and the ultimate value of its message happen to coincide with the "puberty ritual" prevailing in primitive tribal groups. As everyone knows, in life people must experience birth, growing-up, marriage, and death, among a number of similar important "stages." These "stages of life" determine the path of development, as well as identify legal status and corresponding obligations in people's respective groups.

<sup>6</sup>Rui Yuping, *A Study of American Coming of Age Novels*, Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, Beijing, 20004, 4.

<sup>7</sup>Fan Guobin, *The Production of the Subject: A Study of Fifty Years of Coming of Age Novels*, Zhongguo Xiju Chubanshe, Beijing, 2003, 2.

<sup>8</sup>Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Beijing University Press, Beijing, 1990, 218; Zhang Deming, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Rites of Passage*, Journal of Zhejiang University, 1999, 4. This article points out that origin the coming of age type novel should be traced back to the rites of passage ceremonies of primitive peoples.

<sup>9</sup> Mordecai Marcus, "What Is an Initiation Story?" William Coyle(ed.), *The Young Man in American Literature: The Initiation Theme*, The Odyssey Press, New York, 1969, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Taken from original translation of Bakhtin, M. M. *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays* text "The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism," Vern W. McGee (trans.), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (ed.), University of Texas Press, USA, 2004, 21.

According to anthropological research, during the age of barbarianism and savagery, whenever a person underwent any one of these “stages of life,” they must accept the corresponding series of sacred rites or baptism, or undergo all kinds of severe “rites of passage” tests (including “adult ceremonies” and “puberty rituals”).<sup>11</sup> A number of ceremonies, such as “puberty rituals” are undoubtedly at a position of great importance, and include “rites of manhood” and the “ceremony to enter society.” They often include undergoing certain “ceremonies” such as conducting a series of almost ruthless trials of survival for those young people who are about to enter society and fulfill their life duties.

The participants will temporarily leave the group and will be taken by the group elders or the mystics of the tribe to a secret far off location and will be given all kinds of extreme physical challenges (experience for oneself)--most being experimental and symbolic and to a certain extent reflect that society’s beliefs regarding their outlook on life and worldview. At the same time, the participants can learn their tribe’s traditional customs, ceremonies, ethics, values and knowledge that have been passed down by the elders. Furthermore, the ceremonies do not mandate that this knowledge be bestowed on the participant. He must use his own wisdom to search it out. When he has gained the knowledge, he still must put it into practice. For example, since ancient times boys living in the gulf of Guinea in Africa had the tradition of undergoing the “forest ceremony.” In order to raise real men, once a boy reaches the age of twelve, he is taken by the tribe elders to a secret isolated place deep in the forest, and baptized with traditional education; becoming familiar with the tribal history, learning to cut trees, build a house, hunt and the skills for living alone. In South Africa some primitive tribes in the jungle still retain their “puberty ritual” ceremony called “thorn cloud.” These ceremonies are undoubtedly the individual separating himself from his natural state, becoming a “complete” benchmark of society.

However, with the evolution of human civilization, especially with the increasing modernization of material and spiritual culture, in revering individuality and abundantly making known the cultural context of modern humanity, the end or extinction of all kinds of “rites of passage” which carry deep moral life lessons is implied. Although modern society uses a highly rational system of education to replace the original “puberty ritual,” and its scientific and progressive nature is clearly evident, its drawbacks are also obvious. Modern education “does not provide adequate opportunity for the shadowy form. The animal instinct that children express is often punished by their parents, but the punishment merely suppresses rather than removes the shadow---there is nothing that can push the shadow back into the unconscious areas of personality, where the primitive, unbroken state is maintained. In this way, once it breaks through the barriers of suppression it will use dangerous methods to express itself.”<sup>12</sup> There is no doubt that modern man’s attitude towards “growing-up” is far less serious than that of ancient people, even than that of primitive people, who were more sacred and pious. Although various kinds of so-called modern “rites of passage” still exist in society today, such as adult ceremonies, admissions ceremonies, graduations, births, examinations, weddings, reunions and more, the symbolic nature of these ceremonies tends to be increasingly important, so much so that they seem more important than they actually are.

In other words, the majority of people today blindly and randomly complete their “puberty rituals” in a social setting that contains no meaningful “rites of passage” whatsoever. Its advantage lies in the fact that the pressure on the individual to fulfill all kinds of traditions, agreements, set patterns, injustices, and restrictions decreases, and it is easier for his nature and personality to freely develop. His creativity and imagination also obtain a greater space in which to develop (of course, the modern classroom and family education often play the role of the one that conflicts with the “naturalness” and freedom”). However, just like the theory mentioned above, individual development, after all, is not just the affair of the individual himself. It determines the individual’s human nature and personality, as well as connecting to the developmental direction of social structure, cultural consciousness, and cultural character. The lack of certain rites of passage leads to a lack of the value of refinement, allowing the individual to naturally develop, inevitably causing the individual to feel a loss at what to do, even becoming lost in the predicament of a mental crisis. This will undoubtedly cause people to miss the good times of “growing-up,” or even inhibit their growth. In a nutshell, modern society lacks the atmosphere of “puberty ritual,” leaving the individual with no choice but to swallow the embarrassment of “growing-up” guideless.

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<sup>11</sup> *Les rites de passage*, also called the transformation or development ceremony, is a broadly used concept originated by A. Van Gennep, who was born in Germany and is a scholar of ethnic groups descended from Holland. Rites of passage include birth, puberty, and marriage ceremonies. See *Glossary of Cultural Anthropology*, Shanxi Renmin Chubanshe, Xian, 1992. (translated from Japanese to Chinese by Qiao Jitang)

<sup>12</sup> Zhang Deming, 4.

Although, as far as the individual is concerned “puberty rituals” are necessary, an uncontested fact is that modern society cannot return to its primitive state, cannot start over and pick up the various kinds of rites of passage that it once had. Since “growing up” cannot be avoided, and the “puberty ritual” is absent from modern society, modern society has undertaken and implemented “adult” education, which often cannot effectively oversee development. So, in the end, what path can development take? Needless to say, growing-up is a gradual process which has unlimited extendibility and is inseparable from the method of growth, whether it be subtle guidance or rigid indoctrination. Clearly, subtle guidance is the optimal choice for promoting growth. When growing-up loses the solemnity and sacredness of “puberty rituals,” it also departs from the mental, entertainment interest, and the relaxed mood and environment of growing-up, thus becoming a heavy burden, even a kind of disaster, for the individual. Yet in modern society which lacks “puberty rituals,” literature without doubt has limitless possibilities for fostering a favorable environment for growing-up. The true mission of literature is discovering things in the world that cause people to ponder, and from which can receive a baptism of knowledge and thereupon receive the elements of exaltation, thus tempering one’s nature and promoting aesthetic awareness and cognitive abilities.

It can be said that literature with its gentle, honest quality, and its weakly set straightforward nature, is like a dose of comfort for the anxious developing individual, silently leading him towards his natural, free, and voluntary growth. A comprehensive view of literary history shows that outstanding works often use a subtle method to convey some kind of hidden teaching capability regarding the true, good, and beautiful, and the fake, bad, and the ugly, as well as all kinds of rich life experiences and values. In particular, in a modern civilized society that lacks adult ceremonies, reading “growing-up novels” that have “growing-up” as their subject is doubtlessly a convenient and effective channel through which adolescents can gain growing-up experience. Particularly during adolescence the individual has a thirst for knowledge and an intense curiosity. As he is eager to enter the literary palace, naturally he earnestly seeks life experiences that he has never had, unconsciously stamping precious growing-up experience deep in his soul, which he naturally puts into practice in his own life. From this perspective, the “growing-up novel” and the “puberty ritual” all have “growing-up” as the backdrop on the stage of life. The actors are all young adults who face a series of “trials,” in the end passing the test and becoming adults.

Serving as effective instruction, the “growing-up” novel undoubtedly plays a role of unusual significance. We can see it as a kind of “rites of passage” in modern, civilized society; are turn to the “puberty ritual.” In other words, it is modern society’s version of the “puberty ritual” and is an important benchmark for nearing adulthood. It can even approximate one’s life and world values, the direction one’s life will take, one’s normal conduct and the integrity with which one does things. Physiological and psychological studies show adolescence is a critical period during which time a person’s character and personality is gradually defined. If the individual is unable to gain beneficial and effective growing-up experience and growth is postponed or obstructed, once the individual has crossed the threshold of physically becoming an adult, the difficulty of attempting to correct his already established personality and character is self-evident. After all, there are few adults who gain “growing-up experience” through reading a work of literature and thereby turn over a new leaf. On the contrary, the majority of adolescents can benefit from the experience imparted by “growing-up novels.” The golden age for reading is during the period of adolescence, when due to rapid physical and psychological development the individual makes quantitative leaps in acceptance and has the greatest thirst for knowledge and entertainment. Therefore, the quality of the “growing-up novel,” directly relates to how well the adolescent matures.

### **3. China's “Growing-up novel” Growing-Up**

As an ethnicity that does not emphasize “individual growth,” Han people’s history of growing-up is tantamount to a history of “self-imposed exile.” Many sociologists believe that the people of the Han culture matured early. Because the early Confucian and Taoist thought formed the fundamental theoretical system, Han people lost many of the inherent qualities of childhood. The “big group” mentality suppressed individuality and highlighted common social values, taking “save the justice of heaven and destroy the desires of humanity” as the central axis for the collective consciousness, imprisoning freedom and outspokenness, and strangling imagination and creativity. A loss of “spiritual adventures” especially caused the Han people to unavoidably present the attitude of “mature beyond one’s years” or “frail before one’s time,” more or less denying access to courage, vitality and passion.

The “filial relations,” the “three principles and five virtues,” the “subdue self and observe proprieties” and other ethical systems must be “sharp” and “sophisticated” forms of writings, learning and etiquette. As soon as children learn to be sensible, adults cannot wait to instruct them in learning all kinds of rules and etiquette. One volume of *Twenty-four Filial Pieties* shackles what would have been a carefree childhood for many children. This culturally metaphorical topic of “growing-up” is really just an abstract code, or just the common cultural imagination’s rejection of a “private life.” Therefore, Chinese literature departed from the “growing-up theme” for a fairly long time. This was undoubtedly a genuine reflection of the situation that many children in ancient China faced, as they lived in a farming culture and faced a malignant environment for growth. That several thousand years ago they had no real sense of the word “childhood” is an indisputable fact. Adults with no “childhood” experience naturally would not think to return “childhood” to their own children.

It was impossible for them to see their children as children, and just like their parents and grandparents before them, saw children as “not people” or “small adults.”<sup>13</sup> Whether it was with regard to physical or mental abilities, adults required children to step through the door to adulthood in one step, or to become an adult overnight. Thirteen years of age was the benchmark age for reaching adulthood, impressing upon them the duty of thinking like an adult, telling stories like an adult, and even taking on the important role of “regulating the family and ruling the state.” As a result their development was heartlessly abbreviated, even to the point of being cruelly banished. Since *The Book of Poetry* many classic juvenile images appeared in works of Chinese literature. However, for the most part these images were just duplicates of adults. Regardless of whether it is survival knowledge or military achievement, all are roughly the same for adults. Examples include the youth Zhou who “eliminated dragons and killed tigers” in *The New Account of Tales of the World* and the young general in Wang Wei’s poem who rode a donkey for thousands of miles for nothing. It can be seen that the meaning of “growing-up” itself remains disassociated with the theme of growing up. However, the perception of embarrassing situations changed following the release of *Dream of the Red Chamber*. I venture to think that the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is a growing-up novel containing the typical pattern of “growing-up.” For the young boys and girls of aristocratic families in ancient China, this work wrote the musical score for tunes of youthful elegies, the so-called “A thousand red cries,” and “ten thousand tragedies.” From this perspective, the *Dream of the Red Chamber* is the pioneer of Chinese novels concerned with the “growing-up theme.” Unfortunately, subsequent Chinese novelists did not carry on the standard set by Cao Xueqin.

It was not until modern times, under the spreading of the tide of Enlightenment, that Chinese people’s “consciousness of growing-up” gradually awakened. Liang Qichao’s brilliance and literary talent came through in his work *Ode to Young China*, which holds meanings of epoch proportions, raising high the national banner of “growing-up.” Yet, the important historical task of returning to childhood, or returning growing-up to its true colors was accomplished by the pioneers of the May Fourth Movement. Chinese intellectual circles discovered “people” and thus discovered people outside of the category of adults---children, teenagers, and youth (collectively known as “minors”). From this, the “growing-up” of an individual once again appeared in Chinese literature. Yet, just as it began being called “growing-up”, it was once again suspended because of the conflagration of the Cultural Revolution and several civil wars.

Just like the adults, children shouldered the responsibilities of history, using their fragile bodies to defend the nation, sacrificing their wonderful, fairytale-like childhood to safeguard the red regime, the country and the people. Even to the time of contemporary China, during the special historical and cultural context from the 1950’s to the 1970’s---from the founding of the nation, when the party advocated such things as “protect the red regime,” “be the successors of socialism,” and “devote your life to Communism” to the historically unprecedented catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution, all fall under the theme of “abandoning private affairs” and “dedication to the public.” From this the great public cultural imagination was created---make decisions according to the new China; fight to liberate our compatriots suffering hardship around the whole; sacrifice youth and blood so that Communism can have a brighter tomorrow; childhood and “growing-up” remained separated from children. Although this period gave rise to typical growing-up novels like *The Song of Youth (Qingchunzhige)*, generally speaking “growing-up” was no longer the “private affair” of the individual. “Growing-up” hand in hand with the young Republic was really the task of the youths.

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<sup>13</sup> Lu Xun said, “In the past European’s misunderstanding of children was to assume that they were preparing for adulthood. Chinese’ misunderstanding of children was to assume that they were little adults.” (See *Lu Xun’s Collected Works* “What is Required to be a Father Today,” Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, Beijing, 2005.

Since modern times, following Chinese society's rapid revolutionary changes, the system of values went from uniform to diverse, and "childhood" and "growing-up" also began to revert back to their intended meanings. Generation after generation of children who had been neglected and suffered injury had already become husbands (wives) and fathers (mothers), or had already missed the golden age of growing up. For them, growing up was at once a kind of incurable disease, and a new and difficult problem. With no "growing-up" during one's adolescent years, naturally one cannot gain growing-up experience, yet has no choice but to face the next generation's growth. Fortunately, in the new era following 1976, in order to give the next generation a harmonious atmosphere that is "concerned" about growing-up, the previous generation finally could say everything that they wanted to say about growing-up that had been suppressed during their youth.

They were able to lay bare the pain, suffering, and confusion that previously could not be revealed, and could reflect on the relationship between the culture of that time and the growth of the generation and the individual, thereby able to face with an open mind the development of the present generation. Therefore, since the modern age, some novels have revived the "growing-up theme," apparently having an in-depth "dialogue" with "growing-up." The leaders entering this dialogue are without doubt "right wing authors" (examples include Zhang Xian's *The Corner Which Love Forgot* (*Bei Ai qing Yi wang de Jiaolou*) and Zhang Xianliang's *Youth* (*Qingchun Qi*)) and "educated young authors" (represented by novels such as Liang Xiaosheng's *The Confessions of a Red Guard* (*Yi Ge Hongweibing de Zibai*), Lao Gui's *Blood Red Sunset* (*Xuese Huanghun*), and Wang Xiaobo's *The Golden Age* (*Huangjin Shidai*)). The formative years of the former group are distantly past, while those of the later recently passed by, but both experienced to some extent the premature loss of growing up. In addition, "authors from the 60's" and "authors of children's literature" write about "growing-up" from different perspectives.

Although the writers born in China in the 1960's also encountered the violent reform of the "Revolutionary era," their memories of growing up are completely different from those of the "the right-wing authors" and the "young, educated authors." The reason is this: The "1960's authors" were mostly on the fringes of the "Storm of the Red Era." At best some of them were "Red Guards" and ignorantly followed the Red era's "storming revolution." Due to their youth, it is difficult to imagine that their "daring" speech and actions could be an accomplice to the era of terror. The degree to which their bodies and minds were twisted and suffered was relatively light. In their eyes, the so-called "revolution" was merely just a bigger version of "playing house." Yet the gravity and loftiness of the revolution was almost lost by their "childish games." Moreover, as most of them never experienced the bitter hardships of forced agricultural labor, not only was there no way for the "memories of the era" to be imprinted on the walls of their minds, but what they had were fragmented and gradually scattered farther apart over the passing of years. As they welcomed life's time of peak development (namely, "adolescent years"), they also ushered in a brand new era (namely, the new age). The new era's cleansing spring winds "brought order out of chaos" and quickly reinstated qualities that were normal, good, upstanding, and beautiful. All those that had been twisted, all the taboos contrary to human nature were liberated. Such a flourishing new era began to acknowledge the growth of the protagonist's "individuality," and returned individuality to the developing individual. Therefore, since their memories of growing up were no longer blank, were no longer covered by the memories of the age, when they picked up their pens to write about their recently passed "adolescence," they naturally were unwilling to excessively mention that abstract and empty era which alienated individual memory.

Although, without exception, they met with all kinds of growing pains during their development, they almost would rather see it as a necessary experience for becoming an adult, than blame an imaginary era (so-called "no history outside of self" and "history is just personal memory of growth"), even to the point of not having the slightest desire to point blame. The texts were written simply with the desire to clear up the memories, commemorate the time of past youth, and search for a kind of previously experienced "know what's forbidden, yet still do it." They feel grieved their whole lives because of the tragedy of the short periods of suffering and the long periods of difficulties, clearly replacing their individual words with those of a great, ambitious history. It was as if everyone's life was a deep well, and as a result every protagonist's "growing-up" was extraordinary and brilliant. The complexities, difficulties and individual differences of "growing-up" became the objective for trying to explain growing-up novels. Representative works include, Yu Hua's *Cries in the Drizzle* (*Zai Xiyu Zhong Huhan*), Su Tong's *The Age of Tattoo* (*Ciqing Shidai*), Chen Liang's *A Toast with the Past* (*Yu Wangshi Ganbei*), and Lin Bai's *One Person's War* (*Yi Ge Ren de Zhanzheng*). When writing about growing up, "authors of children's literature" mainly write "youth literature."

In his work *Three Levels and Two Main Categories: New Territories in Children's Literature (San Ge Cengciyu Liang Damenlei: Ertong Wenxue de XinjieShuo)*<sup>14</sup> Wang Quangen divided “children’s literature” into “young children’s literature,” “children’s literature” and “juvenile literature.” The “juvenile literature” is geared towards teenagers between the ages of eleven and seventeen. Since youth is the “critical period” of sudden change in the transition from childhood to adolescence, unstable emotions and sexual development being prominent characteristics, juvenile literature must pay particular attention to aesthetic education and instruction, and help them strongly move towards adolescence, towards maturity. The “youth novel” is the main genre of juvenile literature, also belonging to the category of coming of age novels. Qin Wenjun (*A Boy Named Jia Li (Nansheng JiaLi)*), Chen Danyan (*Locked Drawer (Shangsuode Chouti)*), Ding Ahu (*Tonight's Bright Moon (Jinye Yue Er Ming)*) are examples of authors who mostly write about the growing-up stories of modern middle school students and the emergence of the elegant manner of their development, cherishing the tears and laughter of their growth. At present, Cao Wenxuan, Yang Hongying, Chang Xingang, and Rao Xueman are among the authors who represent the group which takes “growing-up” as the theme for their “juvenile novels,” which are very much enjoyed by young readers and to a certain degree take on the role of their spiritual guides.

Since the 1990’s, during the transformation from a planned economy to a market economy, material desires were placed above spiritual, the collective was dismembered for the individual, the big I was replaced by the little I, and the change in historical cultural context went from benefiting others to benefiting oneself. The Chinese people born in the 1970 are welcomed the golden age of their development. At this time, because the use of powerful speech was abandoned, literature naturally lost the passion of the “great narrative.” The constantly changing mixed landscape of the new age made the youths born in the 1970’s unable to get a handle on the overall character of both the period and themselves, the so-called case of “it’s not that I don’t understand, it’s that the world is changing too fast.” Though the new era seemed indescribable, the impulsiveness and imagination of their speech was without bound. Contrarily, speaking for the individual, displaying the attitude of an individual facing the times, to them is both a sense of resignation and the only option. Generally speaking, writings are just memories, the recollections and imaginings of people who have experienced life. According to the “post 70’s authors” the relatively deep memories of human life are for the most part about “growing-up,” or experiences that took place during the period of adolescence. Therefore, their starting point for writing happened to converge on the topic of “growing-up,” as “there is no story without growing-up.” “If I have a passion, then it is to tell you all the nightmares of my youth” (Wei Hui). “Good kids don’t have stories.” In the novels of “post 70’s authors,” where development is the theme, nearly all the protagonists are from the same mold of “problem boys and girls.” Some examples include Wei Hui’s *S hanghai Baby (Shanghai Baobei)* and Mian Mian’s *Candy (Tang)*. The “post 70’s authors” used the original ecological display of the cruel truth of sexual development as a popular writing tactic. In other words, except for sex, they practically had nothing to write about and the impetus and passion for writing would have ceased to exist. The reasons for “sex” being the only thing they had to write about can be broadly summarized as follows:

They never endured the trauma of the age and never experienced occasions of turmoil or starvation, basically living a life free from worry about life’s necessities. This kind of growing-up experience was of course plain! Furthermore, their shallow life experience left them powerless to grasp a severely changing age, powerless to recollect the cultural context of taking shelter. Of course, for the time being the age apparently had no need for them to reflect on anything, the turbulent tides of the age coercing them to look forward (to money), to rush towards moderate prosperity, to cross the century....what else was there worth writing about? Just write about yourself! But what to write? Having undergone the baptism of the tidal wave of consumer goods, they heavily packaged themselves, made elegant roads, thoroughly understanding that the only thing that they could grab on to was growing-up’s “early death of sex.” Consequently, they wrote about sex---the sexes that was unthinkable to the fathers of one generation and made them lament their “lives lived in vain.” Without a doubt, those born in the 70 have enjoyed an unprecedented era of sexual openness, indulgence and satisfaction compared with the developing youth of any age. A considerable part of their “sexual experience” was something unimaginable to most in their “father’s” generation. While the father’s generation criticized their experience of youthful sex, a number of them were hiding jealousy, envy, and voyeuristic impulses. Sexual development became these authors’ fashionable coat of “refined literature.”

<sup>14</sup> Wang Quangen, *Xiandai Zhongguo Ertong Wenxue Zhuchao*, Chongqing Chubanshe, 2000, 487-488.



They spared no effort and were unscrupulous in revealing personal affairs and writing about sexual climax, not even avoiding sexual perversion or promiscuity. As long as it was eye-catching and universally shocking, then who cared if it was “shameless” or carried the “lowest morals?” Who’s to say what real literature is, or what is the most basic aesthetic responsibility of literature? On the contrary, the only thing they worried about is that readers would not take it as reality. Therefore they painstakingly promoted their works as “autobiographies” or “semi-autobiographies.” The ultimate aim of their writings was to earn the maximum secular interests, what’s known as “getting fame as soon as possible and abandoning scruples to avoid poverty.” From this perspective, most of the “growing-up novels” written by authors after the 70’s are just kind of parasite dwelling under the guise of Chinese literature! However, works by authors such as Feng Tang (*Everything Grows (Wan Wu Shengzhang)*) and Lei Ligang (*Aiqing he Yixie “Yaojing”*) stand out like a swan among ducklings because of the depth of their investigation into growing-up, and their serious way of writing about “sexual development.”

In China today, “juvenile literature” is the main subject of “growing-up novels,” and its popularity among readers is rising. The concept of “juvenile literature” has been a media sensation in recent years, and has been used to generalize the works of authors from the 1980’s. Representative works include *Triple Door (Sanchong Men)* by Han Han, *Red X (Hong X)* by Li Shasha and *Far Away Peaches (Yingtaozhi Yuan)* by Zhang Yueran. As a literary term, however, no consensus had been reached as to its aesthetic characteristics. Yet it can broadly be summarized as a fictional text in which the main character is an adolescent, and in which is displayed his rich, diverse story of growing-up. It still belongs to the category of “growing-up novels.” Of course, the lack of vitality with regard to the cognitive reasoning of most works of “juvenile literature” weakens the strength and depth of the “growing-up” novels.

This explains why “growing-up stories” have a bit more “anxiety about the desire to create new words” sentiment, and a bit less submergence; a bit more self-love, a bit less of the manner harmonious with the atmosphere of society; a bit more diligently “making a scene” by going against the norms (the so-called unconventional), a bit less introverted, and amidst indescribable uproars and unfounded hoots cannot find their direction. This kind of development that only sees “this side” and not the “other side” becomes the adolescent’s main cause of distress. The adolescent (the author and his main character) remain in an incomplete state of growth. However, some works have no lack of artistic talent and cleverness, their contemporary sense and feeling of being on scene, and personal experience, is not something an ordinary author could reach. The fashion of the writing skill, the freshness and tension of the language and the fullness and showiness of the passion, truly pour new blood into the field of literature. Like Li Shasha, Zhang Yueran, and others who received a good, higher education, their awareness of writing is explicit and clear, and their attitude towards writing is serious, so it should be worthy of reader’s anticipation.

In fact, as far as Chinese literature is concerned, the concept of the “growing-up novel” is foreign, and was not introduced until the late 1980’s, early 1990’s. Prior to this it had in its place the so-called “educational novel.” Undergoing an ideological intervention and transformation and coupled with the difficulty of stitching together the different cultural contexts of China and the west, China’s “growing-up novels” have already undergone some fundamental changes. The most obvious difference is: In Western coming of age novels, the main point of development is the individual who is growing-up. Although it is often unavoidable that on his path of mental growth the individual has need of guidance from the “other” (a mental advisor or elder), all of these “others” serve merely as background on the individual’s path toward development. Growth is primarily based on the observations of his own personal series of experiences, practices, and enlightenments. If his true self was still in a state of chaos prior to the elevation of his personality and social position, then it will be declared following this elevation. The principle of this type of subject is mainly produced by the individual, the theme namely being “self-clarity.” Take Huck from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as an example. Huck’s original motivation for running away from home and setting out on the long, hard road to maturity was to “escape that demon-like father” and attempt to revolt against the restricts on his freedom that he suffered as a result of being seen as a “lost sheep.” Although in his wanderings he met the black slave Jim (who can be seen as Huck’s first spiritual guide) on Jackson Island on the Mississippi River, they were separated quickly. Huck had to set off again alone on the slow road to development, and experience again and again the tests of life and death. Despite the fact that the novel carefully planned several later meetings between Huck and Jim, Jim was basically absent on Huck’s path of development, and Huck had to rely on his own experience and understanding to slowly mature into an adult. In fact, each time that Huck and Jim met, Huck had changed. It can be said that Jim’s main role was to witness to Huck’s “growing up” rather than be his spiritual guide.

However, in most “growing-up novels” in China, the main adolescent character could be considered completely absent, thereby making “growing-up” only slightly significant, and not possessing the true meaning of a coming of age novel. Due to the fact that on his path of growth, the developing individual and his mental guide are inseparable and that the guide cannot avoid taking matters into his own hands, the guide changes into another “developing individual.” Rather than the “developing individual” growing-up, it is the guide who matures. Even if the developing individual’s “principle nature” is produced, it is at best just a copy of the guide’s. Because this kind of “growing-up” is completely borrowing the strength of the “other,” it loses the essential meaning of growing-up. So clearly, this kind of growing-up did not achieve the essential leap, and growing-up is still on the path of development. Taking Yang Mo’s *Song of Youth (Qingchunzhi Ge)* as an example, Lin Daojing was the main adolescent character, but because she received meticulous care from Lu Jiachuan and Jiang Huahua, obtaining instructions and advice drop by drop, her “growing-up” (changing from a rotten bourgeoisie to a revolutionary woman), and way of thinking naturally had nothing to do with “self.” Rather, Lu Jiachuan and Jiang Huahua’s thoughts became her thoughts. It is obvious that Lin Daojing’s path of development was essentially walked by the “other.” Lin Daojing served merely as the “prop” for development, her role as the main character completely obscured. Objectively speaking, the differences in the “growing-up” novel, occurring due to the different cultural contexts, have led to a gap in the aesthetic functions of the “growing-up novel” in China and the west. It is no wonder that some critics say that, “growing-up novels” which truly contain the significance of the meaning of growing-up, have as yet not appeared in China. I believe that comparatively speaking, novels with growing-up as their main subject are more in agreement with actual “growing-up” written about in modern Chinese novels. That is to say, Chinese modern novels about “growing-up” are themselves in the process of growing-up. Although a number of texts about “growing-up” have been written, because they lack the “growing-up novel’s” aesthetic requirements, using the name “growing-up novel” is quite implausible, whereas the title “growing-up themed novel” is more appropriate. “Growing-up themed novels” can be seen as unfinished “growing-up novels.”

A pleasant surprise is that after entering the twenty-first century, China’s coming of age novels have made breakthrough developments. Representatives include Hong Ying’s *Daughter of the River (Jie de Nüer)* and Wang Gang’s *English (YinggeLishi)*. The biggest success of these two works is that when the hero emerges from his setbacks he finally grows up, and realizes the “independence” that an individual life should have.

#### **4. Conclusion**

As the “core” of development, “sex” naturally is one kind of common resource for writing “growing-up novels.” The subject of “growing-up” cannot avoid the topic of “sexual development,” so much so that it is an indispensable kind of visual threshold. However, “sexual development” was a once a restricted area and blind spot. I believe China’s development between the 50’s and 70’s of the twentieth century was a “sexless development,” and coming of age writings were “sexless writings.” A “sexless development” is not a complete or perfect development, and “sexless writing” is a shortcoming of coming of age writings.

However, in coming of age novels of all themes, “sexual development” seems like a thorny rose or a dizzying red poppy. Although up to today, China’s sexual cultural context has already undergone unprecedented changes, overall literary writing about “sexual development” still carry the mentality of one fearful of repercussions. Most authors are still anxious and hesitant because they are hemmed in on either side by “taboos” and “indulgence.” Indeed, “sexual development” is like a double-edged sword. On one hand, the mystic and sense of shame that people feel towards “sex” is the insurmountable moral bottom line that separates people from animals. Furthermore, “promiscuity” and other sexual taboos ensure that the human race will continue, as well as guarantee that normal human relations are maintained. On the other hand, sexual indulgence is a manifestation of man’s natural instincts, recourse back to the natural state of survival and freedom. Yet, its negative impact can be disastrous. Because of the dispelling of the mystical and shameful feelings towards sex, the feelings of reverence towards life vanished. Sex for the sake of sex thereby reduced the existence of the spirit of human character. This kind of sexual indulgence which looks for “liberation” and “freedom” is often unable to gain true liberation and freedom, even to the point of it becoming a kind of shackle. For example Mian Mian and Wei Hui’s spreading of “body writing.” They did not hesitate to pay the price of self-injury, taking the image of life as the essence of humanity, thus reaching a compromise with the mediocrity of daily life and involuntarily caving into the pleasures of the stimulation of the organs.

In addition, upon entering the twenty-first century, new characteristics have emerged in China's cultural context, and development has also taken on a new look. With the ever-changing internet technology innovations, internet life has already become a kind of everyday life. The immediate growth of an individual is no doubt deeply impacted by the E-age, so his growth inevitably introduced new contents: because of the richness of material life, physical growth comes early, sexual development (puberty) and maturity come unprecedentedly quickly, but the development of physical sexuality and mental sexuality are clearly not in sync; "early love" is no longer a fresh subject, "internet love" is no longer fashionable, and for the most part have replaced the influence of the traditional forms of love; cohabitation had already been tacitly accepted by most people; "one night stands" are still imperceptibly increasing.... Therefore, Chinese authors must make new adjustments in their writings about "sexual development" in order to enhance the immediate sense of the text and in increase the feeling of being on the scene, thereby achieving an order of writing which can direct today's growing youths.

In short, as a special style of literature, the function of the coming of age novel is clearly complex. It is an expression of literature, trying its utmost to manifest the spirit of entertainment and play. At the same time, it is duty-bound to carry part of the "educational function; paying close attention to the individual's growth and directing their development. If the coming of age novel cannot bring realization to the individual, cannot induce the individual's growth to adulthood following his experience of trials and hardships, then it does carry the true meaning of a "growing-up novel." Coming of age novels' expression of emotion regarding "sexual development" should be serious, probing, reflective, poetic, enlightening, try to avoid the original naked state, avoid inciting and exaggerating natural desires, and avoid neglecting art in the search for true life experiences.

This essay will come to a close, while development is currently moving forward. China's coming of age novels are still trudging forward, awaiting completion of the collective development, and thus pushing China's coming of age novels to new heights. Liberty and freedom of development is still necessary for the coming of age writings to become the individual's elixir for growth.

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