Jonathan Quang  
Ms. Schechter  
Freshman Composition  
October 2, 2014

"Satire Through a Buffalo Tail": *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* by Dai Sijie

In Dai Sijie's novel, *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress,* the aptly named character, Four-Eyes, is used by the author to satirize communist bureaucrats by being subject to somewhat humorous ridicule. The novel takes place during the cultural revolution in China. Chairman Mao decides to send several young adults to be re-educated in remote villages and bans western literature. There, the narrator and Luo are subjected to the labors of village life. They occasionally visit their old friend, Four-Eyes, who has also been subjected to re-education, but he brought along contraband books. When the duo visit him, the narrator describes Four-Eyes' current situation by explaining that "He was tilling the soil with the aid of a plough and a water buffalo ... our friend was making slow progress ... one split second of inattention was enough for Four-Eyes to receive a blow to the face from the buffalo's tail ... [He] was unable to distinguish us from the jeering peasants in the neighboring paddy fields" (Dai 46-47). From the perspective of the villagers, who support re-education, Four-Eyes is a prime example of re-education in progress. Four-Eyes becomes a subject of satire because he is knocked down by something as small as a tail while being subjected to ridicule by the villagers. This contrasts cultural revolution propaganda of cheerful boys farming in a field. From a wider point of view, he is actually an example of a failed attempt. He was harboring books and ended up being released from re-education by working for a literary journal. Essentially, Four-Eyes' city life was only paused. Re-education did absolutely nothing for Four-Eyes in terms of its original goals, making Four-Eyes a prime example of the little success the re-education process implemented by communists bureaucrats.