

Introduction: Tiananmen in Diaspora and in Fiction

Post-Tiananmen Literary Diaspora

In our memories of Tiananmen, two images of power square off. Hannah Arendt, countering Mao Zedong two decades prior, as much as foresaw this. While Mao maintained that “power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” Arendt optimistically proposed that true power “always stands in need of numbers” and resides in the “living power of the people” (*On Violence* 41–42). These two theses find their historical embodiment and confrontation in 1989 Beijing. On one side, we recall masses parading through the streets and students occupying the Square; on the other, army tanks grinding down blockaded boulevards. This global iconography has ensured Tiananmen’s legacy, as a parable of regime violence as much as a tragedy in the human annals of popular protest. Whatever genre we invoke, recollections of Tiananmen almost always employ a political lexicon, for above all the episode has come to be enshrined as a political myth, the grand clash between totalitarianism and democracy at the near-end of the Cold War era. Its bloody denouement presents a most spectacular challenge of, even refutation to, the Arendtian hypothesis, a crux case for any theory of power in contemporary times. With good reason, then, has Tiananmen been conceived primarily in political terms, as an event with global political import. Accordingly, its legacy has been expressed most often in the language of failure.

What remains largely unrecognized is the significance of Tiananmen for literature—as an event whose tremendous *generative* power persists today, more than two decades later, not just for China but also for the

West. Indeed, the fates of their respective literatures have become irrevocably intertwined in the wake of June 4. This book examines the myriad literary effects of Tiananmen, with a focus on fiction. Its central thesis is that, more than any other episode in recent world history, Tiananmen has brought about, and into stark relief, a distinctly *politicized* Chinese literary diaspora.

First, this process can be observed purely on the level of representational content. Since 1989, the subject of Tiananmen has entered into the realm of literature, with history going hand in hand with fiction, giving rise to a body of Tiananmen narratives that continues to swell in number. Given that the topic remains under official censorship by the communist government, the majority of these works have been published outside the People's Republic of China (PRC). (As I will elaborate below, fiction writers within the PRC who attempt to address Tiananmen have necessarily resorted to evasive narrative strategies, and it is this necessary recourse to evasion, rather than an absence of authorial intent or a difference in political attitude, that most clearly distinguishes mainland from diasporic publications.) Whether originally written in Chinese or not, these works now circulate predominantly in cultural and linguistic contexts beyond the national boundaries of the protest movement's actual occurrence. If Tiananmen was first and foremost a national event in the spring of 1989, its representational afterlife has been catapulted beyond the nation—that is to say, it has become transnational, by necessity. In turn, precisely because the topic can be publicly, openly, and directly addressed only outside the PRC, Tiananmen has functioned as a particularly productive node for the diasporic literary imagination. After twenty-some years, as more and more writers seek to represent this incident, Tiananmen itself has become one of the hallmarks of diasporic literary identity. Writing Tiananmen thus constitutes a preeminently diasporic enterprise, one that spurs the expansion of diasporic literature even as it consolidates the literary diaspora's identity. As one scholar asserts, "In the years since the crackdown, Beijing 1989 has become one of the most popular time-space coordinates onto which overseas Chinese writers project their fictional worlds, making the portrayal of the Tiananmen Square Massacre one of the central themes in contemporary Chinese American and transnational Chinese fiction" (Berry 353).¹ On this level, the term "post-Tiananmen literary diaspora" can be construed quite narrowly, as a specific reference to those writers who give voice to Tiananmen's history via literary forms.

But more broadly, beyond representational content, the post-Tiananmen literary diaspora can be understood as a sociological phenomenon of mass migration that underpins the literature itself. Ever since Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy in 1978, there had been a steady stream of students and

intellectuals from the PRC to the West, but on the heels of Tiananmen, this flow suddenly turned, as one scholar puts it, into “a massive hemorrhage” (L. L. Wang 208). In the exodus immediately following the military crack-down on June 4, the most eye-catching group of evacuees comprised those top student leaders of the protest movement such as Wuer Kaixi, Chai Ling, and Li Lu (numbers 2, 4, and 17 respectively on the PRC government’s “21 most-wanted students” list), who managed to be smuggled out of the country and rapidly rose to celebrity status in the West just months after the massacre. Of slightly less visibility were the fugitive intellectuals who actively supported the students, including the astrophysicist Fang Lizhi, the cultural critic Su Xiaokang, and the novelist-journalist Zheng Yi, all of whom fled China within the next two years and eventually found refuge in the United States. There they joined other intellectuals such as the illustrious investigative reporter Liu Binyan, who had been a visiting scholar in the United States since 1988 and who was barred from reentering the PRC after he publicly denounced the massacre on American national television. In the years to come, these two cohorts of high-profile exilic dissidents would produce the most explicit and by now familiar diasporic writings on Tiananmen, including Liu Binyan’s coauthored account of the movement, “*Tell the World*” (1989); Fang Lizhi’s political essays, composed during his period of asylum inside the Beijing U.S. embassy and collected in *Bringing Down the Great Wall* (1990); Su Xiaokang’s autobiographical *A Memoir of Misfortune* (2001); as well as a host of memoirs by former student leaders such as Li Lu’s *Moving the Mountain* (1990), Shen Tong’s *Almost a Revolution* (1990), and Zhang Boli’s *Escape from China* (2002). Based on intensely personal experiences or reflections and often informed by a testimonial or authenticating impulse, this trove of memoirs, essays, and analyses generically anchors Tiananmen in first-person real-life encounters, constructing the episode as, above all, one of witnessing and truth-telling.

Much less recognized, however, is the vital and enduring impact of Tiananmen on Chinese literature at large. June 4 not only catalyzed a wave of political evacuation but also propelled several generations of creative writers into the diaspora. Consider the sphere of poetry. For an older generation of poets linked to the 1978–79 Democracy Wall movement and the underground magazine *Today* (*Jintian*), Tiananmen was decisive. Bei Dao, who happened to have been on an invited conference trip to Berlin in 1989, was subsequently forced into exile and spent the next decade or so drifting from country to country, alone and separated from his family. Yang Lian, who was a visiting scholar at the University of Auckland since earlier that year, joined an international protest against the Chinese government and consequently lost his Chinese citizenship; he was then granted political asylum in New Zealand and in due course settled in London. Gu Cheng,

also a visiting scholar at Auckland at the time, lived in self-imposed exile in New Zealand from 1989 until his suicide in 1993. Duo Duo, who was working for a small Beijing newspaper and who personally witnessed the protests in the Square, was fortuitously aboard a flight to London on June 4; thereafter for the next dozen years, he too was banned from the PRC. Together, these and other poets of the Democracy Wall generation embodied a group of self-identified dissident writers who were driven into exile by Tiananmen.² “In the ruins of Tiananmen Square,” one scholar notes, a “poetics of nightmare” surfaced in their works (Barnstone 37). Yet Tiananmen also contributed to what another critic calls “a robust growth” of Chinese poetry in the diaspora in the post-1989 era, as these exilic poets were joined by a later set including Wang Jiaxin, Song Lin, Zhang Zao, Zhang Zhen, and Bei Ling, all of whom settled down to write in the West in the 1990s, many as immigrants or scholars rather than political exiles (Yeh 283–84).

Indeed, on a macro view, the more protracted literary legacy of Tiananmen, if also more subtle and less easily pinpointed, is to be felt in the *voluntary* rather than coerced acts of writers—a premise that lies at the core of my study. Aside from enforced banishment, June 4 has induced considerable emigration or naturalization elsewhere on the part of those who may or may not have been activist during the 1989 protest movement. Gao Xingjian, for instance, had already moved to France in 1987, but he withdrew his membership from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after the massacre and was later branded a persona non grata by the Chinese government; thereafter, he continued to live in Paris and acquired French citizenship in 1997. Ma Jian, who had been residing in Hong Kong since 1986 but returned to Beijing in 1989 to see the demonstrations for himself, left for Germany after Hong Kong’s 1997 handover and now lives in London. Both Gao and Ma had published in the PRC in the 1980s but had moved away to avoid official suppression of their works, so their reasons for departure were as much professional as political. For both, though, June 4 was a key impetus for not returning.

At the same time, the massacre compelled countless international students who were already enrolled in graduate programs overseas to stay abroad. Many of them would go on to pursue creative writing and become celebrated authors in the diaspora. In the United States alone, there were some thirty thousand Chinese international graduate students in 1989, and President George Bush’s offer of temporary asylum to these students after June 4 substantially altered the demographics of Chinese America (L. L. Wang 196). In the field of literature, Ha Jin is perhaps the best-known case.³ He had been studying comparative poetics at Brandeis since 1985 and had originally intended to return to China after graduation to teach

at the university level, but after watching television images of the Beijing bloodshed, he decided to remain in the United States and is now a professor of English at Boston University. Similarly, Qiu Xiaolong, who had been a visiting scholar at Washington University since 1988, resolved to stay on in the United States and begin a writing career in English after the massacre. Shouhua Qi, arriving in early 1989 as a master's student at Illinois State University, likewise decided to continue writing in the United States following June 4 and now teaches English literature in Connecticut. Comparable stories unfolded in Canada. Ting-xing Ye, on scholarship at York University since 1987, decided not to return to China after her studies ended in 1989 and went on to become an author of young-adult fiction in English, settling near Toronto. Ying Chen, in a slightly different scenario, left Shanghai in the spring of 1989 just before the crackdown and remained in self-imposed exile in Montreal, first to study creative writing at McGill University and later to become an established Francophone novelist. Nor are these trajectories unique to the Americas. A notable European counterpart to Ha Jin is Dai Sijie, who had been studying in France on a scholarship since 1984 and who remained there after June 4 to become an acclaimed filmmaker and best-selling novelist in French.

Finally, a significant contingent of emigrants left the PRC shortly after the massacre to become professional writers in the West, with many of them in interviews and essays attributing their departures at least in part to Tiananmen. Among them are Yan Geling, who came to the United States at the end of 1989 and now lives in the San Francisco Bay area; Diane Wei Liang, who also left in 1989, first for the United States and then for London, and now holds dual British and American citizenship; Liu Hong, who left in the same year for Britain; Sheng Xue, who likewise left the same year and now lives in Toronto; Shan Sa, who went to France in 1990; and Hong Ying, who moved to Britain in 1991. As June 4 set the initial conditions for an epochal exodus out of the country, the post-Tiananmen years saw a definite burgeoning of Chinese emigrant authors in the West. That the trend persisted into the 1990s, albeit in a more diffuse manner, is suggested by the advent of a younger generation of writers such as Annie Wang and Yiyun Li, who came to the United States in 1993 and 1996 respectively, and who have risen to literary prominence in the first decades of the twenty-first century. As the post-Tiananmen era now enters its third decade, the ranks of Chinese diaspora writers will continue to grow, even as their orientations inevitably evolve in the shifting milieus of globalization. In this broadest sense, the post-Tiananmen literary diaspora can be said to encompass not just those writers who left the PRC or chose to stay abroad in the few years after June 4, but also those who continue to follow this trajectory into the new millennium under the long shadow of the massacre.

Demographic considerations alone, though, can stretch limit points to infinity and make categories lose coherence. Of greater import to my argument is that Tiananmen has substantially altered the *disposition* of the Chinese literary diaspora by galvanizing its politics. To be sure, the Chinese literary diaspora is a long-standing and vast phenomenon that predates 1989, and those who write post-June 4 by no means constitute a wholly new or cohesive group. Yet, after the massacre, we can detect in diasporic literature an intensified engagement with matters of political power, a new kind of negative identificatory tug-of-war with the communist state. If Tiananmen had the effect of temporarily politicizing the Chinese diaspora at large during that Beijing spring (recall the mass demonstrations and vigils in Chinese communities worldwide in 1989 in support of the pro-democracy activists), this politicization has endured in much contemporary diasporic literature.

My book spotlights this key political variant of the literary diaspora following June 4. The authors within this configuration, though geographically located abroad, nonetheless continue to imagine and write about China in their works. Yet, instead of simply indulging in homeland nostalgia, they now marshal the cultural authority of world literature, especially in the West, in order to critique the excesses of communist state power. Much more so than in preceding decades, these writers are supremely preoccupied with challenging authoritarianism and the communist regime's discursive monopoly on Chineseness. In the massacre's wake, they exhibit a much stronger tendency to actively dispute and disrupt the PRC government's constructions of what it means to be Chinese, and to reconstruct this identity more heterogeneously for the world. Their task is not a straightforward one, however. Particularly on the subject of Tiananmen, diaspora authors straddle a fine line. While they extend counternarratives against the official PRC version of this history and multiply antihegemonic visions of China as a site of diverse and competing political actors, they also risk perpetuating Cold War perceptions of China as a brutal totalitarian country by artistically resurrecting an episode of violent state repression and failed protest. Viewed in the polarizing terms of liberal democracy versus communist totalitarianism, West versus East, the global cultural impact of Tiananmen literature, and of this politicized literary diaspora, may well seem bounded by a tension between anticommunist contestation and potential neo-orientalism. My study, though, strives to reach beyond this agonistic viewpoint by highlighting the capacity of a diaspora to serve as a third, transformative space.

First, in terms of cultural identity, diaspora writers assume a seminal role in defining the parameters and meanings of Chineseness after 1989. No longer is the definition of Chineseness solely or even primarily the

activity of those living within the PRC, nor are the geopolitical regions of Taiwan and Hong Kong the main alternative spots for self-representation. Instead, the cultural geography of Chineseness has been considerably redrawn. Abundant work has already been done by scholars to lay the foundation in the broader theoretical project of decentering or deessentializing the category of Chineseness, whether via the vocabulary of diaspora, transnationalism, hybridity, or the global (Tu; Wang G., “Chineseness”; Ong and Nonini; Ong, *Flexible*; Ang; Ma and Cartier; Ng and Holden; L. Chen, *Writing*; Shih; Tsu and Wang). Perhaps earliest in this regard was Tu Wei-ming, who posited in the early 1990s a notion of “cultural China” as encompassing three interactive “symbolic universes: (1) mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, (2) overseas Chinese communities throughout the world, and (3) the international communities of scholars, students, officials, journalists, and traders who provide a global forum for China-related matters.” As Tu states, his expansive formulation was aimed to “challenge the claims of political leadership (in Beijing, Taipei, Hong Kong, or Singapore) to be the ultimate authority in a matter as significant as Chineseness” (viii). My study concentrates on the second symbolic universe on Tu’s grid, but as each chapter will show, this universe never exists in isolation but always in symbiotic relation with the first and third. While Tu’s neo-Confucianist, capitalist-oriented, and origin-recentering model has been vehemently rejected from several quarters (Dirlik, “Critical” 318–20; Nonini and Ong 8–9; Ang 42–44; Cheah 121–26), there is nevertheless wide consensus among scholars about the plurality of ways to be Chinese in the world today—including, as it were, the very negating of Chineseness. And as I will elaborate in chapter 2, not by chance did these scholarly rearticulations of Chineseness proliferate post-Tiananmen, and we can view this phenomenon as an elongated, if oblique rather than reductively causal, ramification of June 4 on diasporic intellectual discourse.

Additionally, the presence of Chinese diaspora writers working within the national and linguistic spaces of the non-Sinophone world has reconfigured contemporary literature in a number of geographic areas. As I argue elsewhere, the influx of the post-Tiananmen generation of Chinese writers into the United States has significantly transformed the terrains of Asian American literature, as exemplified by the work of Ha Jin (B. Kong 145–47). This literary impact can also be discerned in other Anglophone countries, particularly England, where a contingent of renowned Chinese emigrant writers resides today. Aside from Ma Jian and Hong Ying, who both write in Chinese, there are the English-language best-selling Jung Chang, Xinran, and most recently, Guo Xiaolu. In Europe, Gao Xingjian, Dai Sijie, and Shan Sa have done the same for Francophone literature, while Lulu Wang’s debut Dutch-language novel was a smash hit in Holland. If the

term “Chinese diaspora” has customarily referred to the Sinophone world circumscribing the PRC, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and sometimes Malaysia and Singapore, my study transfers critical attention toward the ascendance of cultural agents displaced from those traditional hubs and now scattered across multiple Western milieus.

Furthermore, Chinese diaspora writers help to guard against the forgetting of June 4 by mediating between the official silence inside the PRC and the attenuation of world memory at large. The 1989 Beijing movement was extraordinary from the perspective of world politics, but as an occasion of mass demonstrations or state aggression, it was not exceptional, even in twentieth-century Chinese history. The 1919 May Fourth student movement was its most well-known predecessor and the 1976 Tiananmen Incident its most recent, but in between were the much less-remembered Tiananmen Square antigovernment protests of 1925 and the ensuing massacre of civilians by army troops in 1926 (Spence 298–303). June 4 therefore has its lineage. What partly distinguishes this latest Tiananmen is its global dimension in an age of technology and speed. Unlike its precursors, the 1989 incident unfolded via media venues that enabled it to become an international drama almost instantaneously. As Fang Lizhi observed from his Beijing asylum within months of the crackdown, this specific Tiananmen would be “the first exception” to the “Technique of Forgetting History” enforced by the CCP since its coming into power, for unlike previous instances of national persecution and disasters that had been systematically erased from the historical record by the regime, in 1989, for “the first time,” thanks to the presence of foreign journalists inside China and their instrumental role in positioning the world as “opinion makers,” “Chinese Communist brutality was thoroughly recorded and reported, and . . . virtually the whole world was willing to censure it” (274). As one scholar further comments on the long-term effects of Tiananmen’s global mediatization: “The media spotlight placed on Beijing during the spring of 1989 created repercussions that continue to affect how China is seen globally, how it sees itself, and how the Chinese outside the People’s Republic see themselves” (Marchetti xi). Yet what Fang’s optimistic projection could not anticipate is that this very rapidity of information dissemination entails a kind of imagistic compression, so that the lived reality of one locale can come to be flattened into a series of easily consumable images transmitted across the globe—the most famous example being the Tank Man. One key theme of this book, then, is that the globalized imagistic propagation of June 4 has been extremely uneven, for world memory proves itself to be all too susceptible to globalization’s vicissitudes and its attendant sporadic amnesia. If 1989 can be comprehended as the first Tian-anmen to bear out Paul Virilio’s thesis about human experience in

the age of “glocalization”—on his wry metaphor, “a constricted planet that is becoming just one vast floor” (23)—then it has also fallen prey to what he calls “a bug in the memory,” as the human perceptual horizon shrinks from the skyline to the television box, from “the *line* of the visible horizon” to “the *square* horizon of the screen” (26). Particularly in the context of China’s current economic ascent onto the world stage, issues of human rights and political freedom have frequently and tactically been forgotten by world governments and institutions in favor of market interests. In this climate, diaspora writers of Tiananmen may reflect and reproduce global changes in their writings, but they all deliver a reminder, so that 1989 will not go the way of 1925–26.

This is not to say, however, that all Tiananmen writers travel the same ideological path, or that they even agree in their basic assessment of the pro-democracy movement. A potential mistaken assumption here may be that all diaspora writers are equally sympathetic to or supportive of the student activists. Actually, far from it. Another theme running through these pages is that Tiananmen has become a heatedly disputed matter over which sundry groups now vie for representational and discursive power, not just within the PRC but in the diaspora. June 4 might have united Chinese communities worldwide against the communist government in the moment of 1989, but since then, the topic has turned increasingly into a point of fracture, between artists and activists as much as intellectuals and former student leaders (see especially chapters 1 and 4). It is within this fraught circumstance of conflicting diasporic judgments, more than a world polarized between East and West, that writers take on the task of representing Tiananmen. Together, the authors here impart an array of diasporic positions political and philosophical, ethical and aesthetic.

Nonetheless, it merits underscoring that all the writers in this study, their dislocation notwithstanding, are extremely privileged subjects. On one end of the displacement spectrum are those vulnerable illegal transmigrants whom one scholar calls the “clandestine diaspora” (L. Ma 23). On the opposite end is this literary diaspora, comprising highly visible individuals who have found success and fame in their emigrant or transnational lives. Without substantial social and cultural capital, these writers simply cannot enter into the Tiananmen discourse in the first place, much less adopt a voice of authority about this history and its relation to Chinese identity. Indeed, they instantiate a claim on “China” with every act of writing Tiananmen. If the critic C. T. Hsia put forth the oft-cited thesis some forty years ago that modern Chinese writers display an “obsession with China” (533–54), the post-1989 literary diaspora has partly inherited this attitude—perhaps even more so than those writers who stay on in the PRC, given the atrophy of the intelligentsia’s authority there

from the 1990s onward. The intellectual proclivity for “China obsession,” we might say, has become partly diasporized in June 4’s wake. Nowhere is this diasporic inheritance more apparent, and more fertilized, than in Tiananmen fictions, which literally move toward or situate themselves at the Square, that symbolic seat of national political power. Little surprise, then, that one scholar would say of many post-Tiananmen exilic intellectuals that they are “stuck by a notable lack of peripheral thinking” and have not “entirely changed their ‘centrist’ frame of mind—the elitist belief that they can ultimately influence the reformist leaders in the Party to their way of thinking” (L. Lee 233). As one facet of diasporic intellectuals’ cultural production, Tiananmen literature is not always so rigidly oriented as this remark would suggest, but the gravitational heart of this canon does undoubtedly lie in the land left behind, weighed with an imaginative if not always emotional nostalgia. Despite the varying degrees to which these writers personify and perform Chineseness, the place they have chosen as their “contingent and arbitrary stop” of fictional self-positioning, what Stuart Hall calls a “‘cut’ of identity” (230), is not one of radical rupture but firmly harkens back to origin’s center. What this book delineates is one geometry of their diasporic stopovers, with each chapter outlining one side of the diasporized Square. This is not to say that all diaspora authors necessarily resort to national allegories, that all post-Tiananmen roads lead to Fredric Jameson’s notorious thesis on third-world literature’s inevitable allegorical impulse (69), but it is instructive to keep in mind that Tiananmen fictions give traction to the Jamesonian theory precisely because of their authors’ elite status.

Ultimately, perhaps due to this very eliteness, the writers here all possess the means of self-advocacy that permit them to shed light on the creative and transformative potential of not just the Chinese literary diaspora but of diasporic subjects in general. The need to recognize this agency is arguably more pressing than ever before, as the diasporic condition now operates as a principal rather than supplemental feature of human existence. Although the large-scale dispersal of peoples is millennia old, numerous social scientists have recently shown that human migration experienced a revolution in the late twentieth century, resulting in a contemporary world order much more profoundly shaped by diasporas than ever before (Van Hear 1–5; L. Ma 1–2; Parreñas and Siu 1). According to the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), the number of those who live outside their country of birth skyrocketed from 82 million in 1970 to 175 million in 2000 to nearly 200 million in 2005, and of all diasporas, the Chinese one is the world’s largest, estimated at 35 million at the dawn of the new millennium (83–84).⁴ Excluding the populations of Hong Kong and Macau since their repatriation to the mainland but inclusive of generations

born abroad, the latest count of overseas Chinese given by Taiwan's Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission hovered at 39.5 million at the end of 2010. An excessive focus on magnitude, though, can breed misconceptions. Indeed, some scholars object to the very use of the term "diaspora" to categorize non-mainland Chinese populations, wary of its potential connotations of homogeneity and unity that could reinforce the PRC's hegemonic claims on identity as much as Western racialized views of Asian otherness (Wang G., *Don't* 240–45; Wang G., "Single" 38–41; Shih 23–28). At the same time, scholars who do adopt the term have severally pointed out that definitions of "diaspora" in migration studies can sometimes be too caught up in mass statistics, or else overly constricted by criteria of forced expulsion or economic exploitation, crises and catastrophes (Van Hear 5–6; L. Ma 2–4; Goh 1–7). This image of diasporas as victim populations, as nameless hordes of the dispossessed and persecuted, can obscure an appreciation for diasporic subjects' ability to re-create and transmute not only themselves but the milieus into which they are dispersed. My book's spotlight on Tiananmen fictions illumines exactly this reanimating capacity. A diaspora, after all, comprises not just bodies in motion but also the production of culture in transit. For the diaspora authors here, literature offers a forum to fine-tune, modify, or forge anew the world's understanding of China, Chineseness, and Tiananmen. These writers do not simply bear out an inescapable identity that predetermines them or a wounded psyche that haunts them. On the contrary, they resignify "diaspora" as much as "Chineseness" via plural roles: as architects of political counter-discourses about the homeland state, as remakers of cultural identity in transplanted environments, and as mediators of historical memory and human rights between the PRC and the rest of the world. Indeed, Tiananmen allows these writers to persistently activate literature's manifold uses. As the PRC grows ever more visible as a global power today, Tiananmen fictions offer a timely focal point for reinvigorating critical interrogations of the functions of literature, not merely within China or the West, but in the overlapping spaces of the quickly converging first and second worlds.

Four Tiananmen Fictions

As mentioned above, diasporic memoirs and personal essays constitute the most recognizable genres of writing on Tiananmen. This study, however, is not narrowly concerned with life-based narratives for which firsthand experience serves as the prime justification. It should be clarified from the outset that by "Tiananmen fictions" I refer not to works by those who personally participated in the demonstrations or witnessed the massacre and then converted their memories into autobiographical stories. In

fact, two of the authors here, Gao Xingjian and Ha Jin, were not located in the PRC in 1989 and learned of the incident only from afar, via television images and news reports. The other two did repeatedly visit the Square that spring, but Ma Jian left Beijing about a week before the crackdown to tend to his comatose brother in their hometown of Qingdao, and Annie Wang was not in the Square herself during its final evacuation. Moreover, Wang was too young and Ma too old to be counted within the ranks of college student protestors, together sandwiching the Tiananmen generation from either side. This book, then, centers on writers who were *not* insiders of the movement or eyewitnesses of June 4.

Indeed, the role of the witness is a complicated one for the historiography of Tiananmen. More than twenty years later, the massacre has become an episode cloaked in mythologies spun from both hemispheres, misrepresented by the PRC's official erasure of it as much as the international community's fixation on eyewitness accounts, however inflated, however mutually contradictory. Where free expression is absent, especially when the media fail and the cameras go black, into the void steps the witness. Tiananmen is hence an event heavily saturated with testimonial claims. I will expound on this matter in chapter 4, in relation to what one commentator calls the actual "geography of the killing" behind the misnomer "the Tiananmen Square massacre" (Munro 811). Yet, despite the mounting significance of the political witness in international arenas since World War II, particularly in instances of mass atrocities and certainly with what transpired in the early hours of June 4, this book does not rely on the figure of the witness as the sole mediator of history or the principal purveyor of historical knowledge. An overdependence on the witness can lead to a moral and intellectual complacency on our part, where we feel obviated from the need to probe further for history's continuities, meanings that exceed mere facticity to impinge on our present and future. Biographical authenticity will thus not be taken as the legitimating criterion for evaluating representations of Tiananmen here, and the works examined in turn will not premise themselves on the truth-claims of personal life experience.

Instead, I am interested in the multifarious ways that Tiananmen has come to be written in the diaspora, not as an individually lived event but as a collective historical idea that has found an afterlife in literature. Here I borrow Walter Benjamin's concept of *afterlife* as the non-organic continued life of something that "has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history," a continuation that is at once "a transformation and a renewal" ("Task" 71, 73). Benjamin's perspective enables us to conceive of a temporality of Tiananmen that is itself living history, as that which has not yet lapsed but survives into our time, manifesting ever-newer meanings for the changing present. My objective is to tease out the nonbiographical,

nonpast knowledges of Tiananmen as provided through fiction, and the ways fiction compels us to think beyond strictly historical or Chinese contexts to new dilemmas that confront the post-1989 world. Indeed, fiction yields a special efficacy for charting an event's afterlife, since its province is often that of meaning's distillation and life's renewal, in a realm less bound by the stringencies of organic decay.

The four works I concentrate on—Gao Xingjian's *Taowang* (*Escape*) (1989), Ha Jin's *The Crazy* (2002), Annie Wang's *Lili* (2001), and Ma Jian's *Beijing Coma* (*Beijing zhiwuren*) (2008)—are exemplary in this regard.⁵ Eminent figures in the diaspora, these four authors exemplify the increased propensity of the post-Tiananmen literary diaspora to critique communist state power, for they all highlight various sites where this power exerts itself most violently—on individual freedom for Gao, intellectual labor for Jin, female sexuality for Wang, the biological body for Ma. More crucially, their Tiananmen fictions mark major moments in the evolving afterlife of the diasporic imagination of June 4, together reflecting the ongoing development of global concerns since 1989. Each text proffers a discrete conceptual angle onto the Square: the existentialist (Gao), the aporetic (Jin), the global-capitalist (Wang), and the biopolitical (Ma). Accordingly, each work prompts an investigation into a distinct nexus of issues and problems that go far beyond the singular events of Tiananmen, from human displacement and political responsibility to diasporic trauma and melancholia, and ever more proximately to our time, from the challenges posed by global capital and its determinations on transnational subjectivity to the biopolitical dangers facing those who remain behind in globalizing authoritarian countries. The unique theoretical arc I chart via these four texts, then, should profoundly illustrate that the perceptual horizon of the post-Tiananmen literary diaspora is far from provincial. This diaspora evolves alongside planetary realities, and Tiananmen endures as not an unshakable specter but a continually revitalizable history that allows writers to ponder, struggle with, and elucidate contemporary global questions.

In chapter 1, I consider the 2000 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Gao Xingjian, and his play *Taowang* (*Escape*), the first full-length fictional work on Tiananmen to come out of the Chinese diaspora. Born in 1940, nine years before the establishment of the PRC, Gao is the oldest writer in this study and also the one with the greatest generational distance from the Tiananmen students. His imaginary approach to the Square of 1989 is freighted with a long personal history of encounters with China's national upheavals and political repression, a trajectory that has culminated in his philosophy of existentialist flight. Hence, in *Taowang*, the June 4 massacre is not an occurrence unique to the Chinese communist regime or even an archetypal instance of totalitarian state violence but an allegory

for human existence within any polis, any community. For Gao, the tanks of Beijing denote the most extreme form of collectivities' oppression of the individual, but they differ from the pro-democracy movement only in degree and not in kind. In the face of both modes of collective power, the singular human must flee in order to preserve integrity and freedom of the self. As I will argue, Gao's universalizing of the Square empties Tiananmen of its concrete social and political import, abstracting it into a human condition that takes place everywhere and nowhere. The conceptual insights afforded by his play are thus mostly negative, leading to a quietist view of political action and of humanity. Yet his very contextualizing of Tiananmen within these philosophical discourses behooves us to seek alternative models of exile, of the human, and of politics as such. Tiananmen through Gao's fiction therefore brings to the fore the critical challenge of theorizing dislocation and dispossession, and the relationship between the human and the polis—perennial preoccupations of diasporas, to be sure.

While Gao's play takes place in an unnamed country and city, the other three Tiananmen fictions of this study all solidly anchor themselves in the real geography of the post-Mao PRC, albeit each with its own inventive accents and alterations. In chapter 2, I turn to Ha Jin, one of the most prominent Asian American writers today. Of the four works here, Jin's *The Crazy* most closely approximates the tenets of contemporary diaspora theory, especially in the novel's representation of the Square as a site of failed arrival, a destination that the protagonist approaches but never gets to. In literary criticism and cultural studies, conceptual models of diaspora proliferated in the early 1990s, as numerous postcolonial critics drew on ideas from deconstruction for political critiques of the nation and empire. Jin's arrival in the United States in 1985 as a graduate student of comparative poetics, and his subsequent continuation in American academe after June 4, coincides with this institutional emergence of deconstructive diaspora theory. *The Crazy* hence marks a historical moment in the development of Tiananmen literature, a product of Jin's postmigrant status in the 1990s U.S. academy. So too, although the novel shares with Gao's play a self-distancing from the scene of the massacre, Jin, unlike Gao, casts this narrative absence as a form of diasporic rather than existential alienation, that is, as a sign of his own removal from the ostensible setting of the carnage. The Square, for Jin, epitomizes China's core, in both its hope and horror, an origin from which he has irreversibly, if mournfully, detached himself. Indeed, from his long-distance vantage point in the United States, most of Jin's oeuvre can be interpreted as a compulsive attempt to imaginatively return to the lost homeland, whose heart at Tiananmen is now accessible only as a fictional gap or aporia. Thus, I also read Jin's novel through a paradigm of diasporic melancholia, interweaving theories of

diaspora with those of trauma to illuminate his distinctive mode of aesthetically vanishing the Square.

I confine my analysis of diaspora theory to this chapter so as to highlight that no one formulation of “diaspora” is sufficient to explicating all four diasporic texts here, much less all diasporic texts in total. Likewise with trauma theory. While recent work by a number of critics adopting the overarching frame of historical trauma has been valuable for our understanding of twentieth-century Chinese literature and culture (Yang, *Chinese*; B. Wang; Berry), including the Tiananmen authors I address here (G. Xu; Schaffer and Smith; Schaffer and Song), my study aims to supplement this perspective by drawing out the multifaceted and shifting complexities of Tiananmen fictions. As will become evident in my appraisal of Jin, any application of trauma theory to diaspora writers must also grapple with the problem of remote witnessing—or nonwitnessing—which is in turn entangled with the dynamics of diasporic perception and politics. Furthermore, as my analyses of the other texts will reveal, it is simply not the case that every Chinese author fits the mold of a melancholic victim of the massacre, inexorably caught in the throes of writing and rewriting a primal scene of diasporic trauma. Tiananmen fictions are not mere symptoms. Despite the primacy I assign to June 4 as a major condensation point for the literary diaspora, the faculty I wish to emphasize in these writers is their creative vitality. The diasporic life Tiananmen has yielded them and the afterlife they engender for Tiananmen are reciprocal, symbiotic.

This vitality will become even more apparent in the second half of the book with Annie Wang’s *Lili* and Ma Jian’s *Beijing Coma*, two works that unhinge Tiananmen from its strictly historical basis. In chapter 3, I discuss Wang’s novel in relation to more specific diaspora theories of femininity, globalization, and neo-orientalism. While Jin formalizes his diasporic distance from origin via a narrative that ends in a moment of failed arrival at the Square, Wang by contrast explicitly thematizes this distance as a cultural-political confrontation between American and Chinese perceptions of China. In other words, Wang concretizes Gao’s existential and Jin’s diasporic alienation as a geopolitical difference. Of all the Tiananmen writers here, she is the youngest, and the only one who is younger than the Tiananmen student generation: born in 1972, she was sixteen at the time of June 4 and grew to adulthood only in the post-massacre period. As a sign of her generational belatedness, her novel’s portrait of late-1980s Beijing anachronistically invokes the hypercapitalist atmosphere of the 1990s instead of the cautious liberalization of the previous decade. Yet this anachronism usefully resituates Tiananmen within a more current framework of the PRC’s globalization, enabling Wang to tackle issues of a contemporary Chinese neocoloniality within the global capitalist order.