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Chinese Exilic Intellectual: Escaping from Collectivism

Having removed the mask, he could not help feeling somewhat awkward.

He was tense and didn't know what to do, but, for better or worse, he had discarded hypocrisy, anxiety, and unnecessary restraint. He had no leader, because he was not controlled by the Party or some organization.

He had no hometown, because his parents were dead. And he had no family.

He had no responsibilities, he was alone, but he was free and easy, he could go wherever he wanted, he could drift on the wind. As long as others did not

create problems for him, he would resolve his own problems,

and if he could resolve his own problems, then everything else would be insignificant, everything else would be inconsequential.

He no longer shouldered any burdens and had cancelled emotional debts by purging his past.

Gao Xingjian

One Man's Bible

Introduction

As Dorothy M. Figueira notes in *Otherwise Occupied*, “Most immigrant intellectuals are not forced exiles but voluntary self-exiles,” (Figueira: 81) Chinese exilic intellectuals in the late 20th century, to a considerable degree, face the same situation. However, in addition to disentangling themselves from the obsession with the homeland to find their new life in exile, Chinese exilic intellectuals simultaneously unveil their strong desire for individualism in their writing, which makes their works present the tendency of extreme detachment.

Similarly, considering the distinguished political structure and social ideology, how to define Chinese exilic intellectuals in the context of exile theory is one of the issues worth pondering. The major purpose of this paper, therefore, is to reveal how Chinese exilic intellectuals unshackle the collective identity imposed on them as well as to probe the profound reason behind it.

Four sections are included. First, Li Yiyun's article "To Speak is to Blunder" will be discussed, which leads to a question – is Li the exilic writer as she self-claims? Second, through employing Edward W. Said's theory of exile, the exilic identity of Li will be questioned and examined. Then, in the next section, the emphasis will be placed on the analysis of Chinese exilic intellectuals who are virtually different from the exilic intellectuals in the contexts of postcolonialism and imperialism. To be more specific, Chinese exilic intellectuals, as a special intellectual group, unfold a rather conflicted quandary: on the one hand, the rich heritage from their culture manifested in their writing; on the other hand, they endeavor to self-exile themselves – geographically and culturally – from the collective experience while striving for self-expression and individualism. And finally, the motif and the reason imbedded in their self-exile will be demonstrated.

“To Speak is to Blunder”

“To Speak is to Blunder” is published in *The New Yorker* in January 2017. In the article, through analogizing her writing experience and personal history to Vladimir Nabokov, Joseph Conrad, and George Eliot, Li Yiyun, a Chinese-American writer, claims herself as an exile. The reason, however, is the absoluteness of her abandonment of Chinese. As she states,

Before I left China, I destroyed the journal that I had kept for years and most of the letters written to me, those same letters I had once watched out for, lest my mother discover them. What I could not bring myself to destroy I sealed up and brought with me to America, though I will never open them again. My letters to others I would have destroyed, too, had I had them. These records, of the days I had lived time and time over, became intolerable now that my time in China was over. But this violent desire to erase a life in a native language in only wishful thinking. One's relationship with the native language is similar to

that with the past. Rarely does a story start where we wish it had, or end where we wish it would.

(Li, 2017a: 31)

Over the years, my brain has banished Chinese. I dream in English, I talk to myself in English. And memories – not only those about America but also those about China; not only those carried with me but also those archived with the wish to forget – are sorted in English. To be orphaned from my native language felt, and still feels, like a crucial decision.

(Li, 2017a: 31)

In Li's view, as a human being, our thoughts and memory are slavishly bound to language. Therefore, the process of eradicating one language is equal to the process of burying one's private tragedy. However, if private tragedy needs to be revealed, it can only be depicted by her "private language" (Li, 2017a: 33) – English. In this sense, when encountering the recurrent memory as well as the desire of suppressing them all, to realize the self-reconciliation with the past, Li attempts to use English to replace her memory created and stored in Chinese. Hence, unlike Nabokov, whose private tragedy is to detach from natural language and idiom, Li suggests, her "private salvation," on the contrary, is self-disowning the native language.

Yet one thing needs to be pointed out, in "To Speak is to Blunder," Li exquisitely portrayed the childhood trauma she received from her family and implies that ethnographical, historical, and political factors are not the reason why she considers herself as an exile. Paradoxically, despite Li resists any political or historical interpretation and denies her abandonment of Chinese derives from "country's history," in "To Speak is to Blunder" and the memoir *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life* (2017b), Li not only weaves her youth closely into the "gray, Soviet-style apartment complexes," (Li, 2017a: 30) Tiananmen Square Protests, and the turbulent late 20th century; but also unfolds the struggles she went through as a teenager – "to defy any political authority, to endanger myself in a righteous way, to use my words to distinguish this self from people around me – these, at eighteen, were shortcuts to what I really wanted: confirmation that life, bleak and unjust, was not worth living" (Li, 2017b: 28). Meanwhile, she admits that,

The tragedy of Nabokov's loss is that his misfortune was easily explained by public history. His history – of being driven by a revolution into permanent exile – became the possession of other people. My decision to write in English has also been explained as a flight from my country's history.

(Li, 2017a: 31)

The paradox, therefore, demonstrates “the crucial decision” Li made is possibly based on both private tragedy and public predicament. Yet Li decides to blur the boundary between individual memory and collective history through eradicating her native language. And as the product of cultural phenomenon, social life, and national culture, language embodies the collective identity shared by the certain group. By the same token, thinking and writing in English entails a considerable shift of identity and self-positionality, requiring a sum of social and cultural self-transfiguration. Through banishing Chinese, therefore, Li suggests she not only exiles herself from the language but also from the individual memory, collective identity and history. In this sense, Chinese exceeds its inherent scope while being endowed with more complex and significant meaning.

Nevertheless, one question still remains: in spite of Li claims that she exiles herself linguistically and geographically, can she be counted as an exile in the context of literary and cultural criticisms?

Exile: Standing from Said's Perspective

According to the *Cambridge English Dictionary*, *exile* indicates either a person or a condition of “being sent or kept away from their own country, village, etc., especially for political reason,” while the *Oxford English Dictionary* loosely defines *exile* as “the state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons”. Yet standing from the perspective of Edward W. Said, who captures the fate of exile, *exile*, as a literary and cultural concept, possesses a more profound connotation.

In “Reflections on Exile,” Said defines exile as a metaphor of death but “without death's ultimate mercy” (Said, 2000: 174), which, normally embodies regret, sorrow, doubt, and nostalgia. As he states,

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted... The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.

(Said, 2000: 173)

Being an exile, meanwhile, indicates one is willing to live “outside habitual order” (Said, 2000: 186) while feeling “their difference as a kind of orphanhood,” (Said, 2000: 182) which is also the condition that makes one a permanent outcast. Nevertheless, it does not mean the complete separation from their place of origin; instead, it is a condition where the intellectual oscillates between old and new, past and future. In the meantime, since the exilic intellectual that Said refers to is the one who is unwilling to make adjustments and still remain marginal, which, furthermore, leads him to conclude that exile, in essence, is not only an actual condition but also a metaphoric condition,

Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. You cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation.

(Said, 1994: 53)

Moreover, in “Intellectual Exile: Expatriates and Marginals,” Said stresses that metaphysical exile is able to bring “happy with the idea of unhappiness” (Said, 1994: 53) as well as “a mind flourishing, not to say benefiting, from such productive anguish” (Said, 1994: 53). To be more specific, it offers exilic intellectuals the critical edge, which allows them to

see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way. Look at situations as contingent, not as inevitable, look at them as the result of a series of historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings, and not as natural or god-driven, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible.

(Said, 1994: 60–61)

Hence, *exile*, in light of Said’s argument, is a profoundly ambivalent state. Despite being an exilic intellectual, one doesn’t need to be an actual exile, they’re required to juxtapose the experience between past and present, to stand from

the perspective of an outsider, and more importantly, to think on the margins. As Gadamer remarks, “means to be beyond oneself, to think with the other and to come back to oneself as if to another” (Gadamer: 110).

The experience of “an intellectual as an outsider,” therefore, is crucial to the one whose oeuvre is written in the second language and addresses not only the audiences from one’s ethnic community but also the worldwide readership. Such artistic and existential goals faced by the exilic intellectual, as Said notes, is a challenging condition where marginality coexists with solitude. And Li Yiyun, to a certain extent, fits Said’s definition. In “To Speak is to Blunder,” she mentions the criticism she received from American and Chinese readers, in which her writing is considered not political enough while her English is “neither lavish nor lyrical as a real writer’s language should be” (Li, 2017a: 31). As one of American professors in graduate school once told Li, she should stop writing, since English would, invariably, remain a foreign language to her. And ironically, a Chinese immigrant even sent her an email in a fury, “you write only simple things in simple English, you should be ashamed of yourself” (Li, 2017a: 31). This is a common plight that Said describes: Li is not accepted while being viewed as an outsider by both sides, linguistically and culturally, which makes her become an “orphan”. Moreover, after two attempts of suicide, Li spent two years on the memoir, which records not only her confusion and despair regarding life and death but also portraying a conflicted person who is struggling as well as isolating herself. As she writes, “I have turned away from the people and the language and the landscape. Homecoming, in my case, would only be meaningful followed by leave-taking. A permanent homecoming would be a resignation” (Li, 2017a: 50). Li Yiyun, therefore, presents a kind of “unhealable rift” and ambivalent condition in Said’s sense: without Chinese, English, as her private language, becomes a means of expression to seek for self-healing; her writing, nevertheless, normally focuses on her trauma and the stories of Chinese immigrant. In this sense, on the one hand, she endeavors to forgive and heal the past through abandoning both her cultural and social identities; on the other hand, the sorrow, anger, despair, and more importantly, Chinese elements still penetrate the writing. Ultimately, Li herself and the societies which keep her foreign and marginal transform her into an exile.

However, while Said consistently advocates for worldliness and Orientalism, his concern regarding exile mostly concentrates on, as he points out, “the fate of the Jews, the Palestinians, and the Armenians” (Said, 2000: 177). And nearly all the figures he numerates and respects, Joseph Conrad, Erich Auerbach, Theodor Adorno, Mahmoud Darwish, and Faiz Ahmad Faiz, are exilic intellectuals who have no doubt regarding the centrality of modern western culture. Accordingly, questions still remain: is his reflections on exile comprehensive enough to be applied to Chinese exilic intellectuals? How should the Western world precisely describe Chinese intellectuals, and vice versa? And how should world critics interpret Chinese exilic intellectuals in new ways of other long-standing and far-reaching ideologies such as nationalism and postcolonialism?

Chinese Exilic Intellectual

In “Reflections on Exile,” Said clarifies the prerequisite of exile, “our age – with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers – is indeed the age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration” (Said, 2000: 174). Li Yiyun is one of the Chinese immigrants who flowed into overseas during the 90s, yet she is not the victim of “modern warfare,” “imperialism,” or the “quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers”. For Chinese intellectuals who are active after the 80s, Great Cultural Revolution, Economic Reform launched and implemented in 1978, and the infamous Tiananmen Square Protests in 1989 are three significant watersheds, which, on the one hand, liberates them from a comparatively long-term isolated cultural environment; on the other hand, discards while exposes them to the endless doubt, struggle, and vacillation – the whole world is now palpable and visible, while a series of social issues, for instance, human and press rights, are revealed as well. Thus, these Chinese intellectuals were suddenly caught in a rather similar predicament: where do we come from? And where should we go? Under such circumstance, between the late 20th century and the early 21st century, a large number of Chinese intellectuals, who, more or less, bore the weight of historical memory, political trauma, or private tragedy, chose to flee from the country and became exile of their own culture. To a certain extent,

they are both the victim and the survivor of the times. Fortunately, they never experience exile in the traditional sense; however, unfortunately, they need to physically and metaphorically banish themselves from the status quo to accomplish self-expression and self-extrication. And such self-exile reveals one potential tendency that, in China, without the violent image of war, drought, persecution, or ethical cleansing and without the involvement of nationalism, imperialism or cosmopolitanism, exile is no longer a terminology that only exists in postcolonial and imperialistic discourses, which has been evolved and developed as a kind of regional phenomenon shared by the Chinese intellectuals who are unable to locate and settle themselves in their homeland.

Gao Xingjian, a Chinese émigré novelist who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, is viewed as the epitome of Chinese exilic intellectuals. *Soul Mountain* (1989), the fiction brought him Nobel Prize is written in Chinese.

Born in an intellectual family in 1940, Gao received his education in China and graduated from the Department of French at Beijing Foreign Studies University. During his early years, he developed an interest in traditional Chinese theatre, Western modern theatre, and modern Western art. However, at the height of the Great Cultural Revolution, Gao was sent to the remote countryside for “rehabilitation” for six years because of his “bourgeois ideology.” To keep from being labeled as the Rightist, he had no choice but to destroy all his early writings including several novels, articles, and plays. In 1975, Gao was recalled to Beijing after Sino-Western relations had eased. However, both his painting or writing, no matter the content or the style, had drastically transformed into the highly abstract and introspective concept during this period. As he notes,

If the self-expression of an artist becomes the direct expression of self, then one’s art will be a mess. As the self (or ego) is a chaotic mass, or a black hole to begin with, unless an artist exercises self-knowledge and removes himself for dispassionate observation of the world (including the self), then what is there to see?

More than self-expression I see art as a case of self-purification – observing with a pair of somewhat sober eyes the ever-changing world and one’s own mainly unconnected self. And although he may not understand the riddles of life, the artist can leave behind a surprise or two.

(Gao, 1995:25)

Unfortunately, while Gao employed such a conservative style, his very first novel, *Stars on a Cold Night* (1980) and the play *The Bus Stop* (1981) were still censored by the Chinese authorities. After that, the government put him under surveillance. In late 1986, after the failure of an Anti-Liberalism campaign started by Chinese students, Gao, with his unfinished manuscript of a novel, moved to Paris and eventually settled there in 1987. Then in 1989, he wrote a play entitled *Exile* (1989) based on the Tiananmen Square Protests, but the play pleased no one in either West or China.

In this play, a young woman, a young man, and a middle-aged man take refuge in the basement of an abandoned warehouse after the tanks pulled into Tiananmen Square. When the young man starts discussing the current political climate, he is bewildered by the middle-aged man's refusal of belonging to any faction or doctrine – he is merely a bystander without taking any stance. And in “Jottings from Paris,” an essay written in 1990, Gao offers his interpretation,

The writer is not the conscience of society nor is literature the mirror of society. The writer flees to the margin of society: he is a non-participant, an observer who looks on dispassionately. There is no need for the writer to be the conscience of society for there has long been a surplus of social conscience. The writer simply uses his own conscience and knowledge to write his own works. He has responsibility only to himself.

(Lee: 91)

Gao's exile, more or less, is related to certain political factors. His writing, on the contrary, is particularly personal without political and cultural agendas. As he claims in “I Advocate a Cold Literature,” Cold literature, different from “the literature of moral teaching, of social engagement, of political criticism,” is, fundamentally, “a personal affair” (Gao, 1990: 18–20). Moreover, he posits that literature, in essence, “provides the ‘fragile individual or writer’ the opportunity to find his own voice” (Huang: 370). Thus, it is different from the Scar-Literature¹ in the post-Mao period which typically focuses on the retrospective or reflection regarding the painful history. One of the distinguished

¹ Scar-Literature, 伤痕文学, is a genre of Chinese literature emerged in the late 1970s. After the death of Mao Zedong, Chinese literary works and intellectuals started to face up to the suffering as well as the traumatic experience during the Cultural Revolution and the rule of Gang of Four (“四人帮”).

motifs throughout Gao's works is his concerns with individual existence, the abandonment of his social responsibility and consciousness. Gao voluntarily becomes "the margin of society," and ultimately allows his private voice to pervade the oeuvre. However, marginality, to a certain extent, is considered as the other form of ambiguity. And similar to the characters in his writing, Gao is laden with split, complex, and ambivalent natures in spite of he tries to ideally place himself into a neutral state – isolated yet not reclusive, part of the society yet remain to stay apart. Hence, the medley of Chinese elements, obscure storytelling, and ambiguous identity in Gao's writing makes some literary critics categorize his works as Root-seeking Literature².

According to Marian Gálík, his "search for roots" is essentially a "search for identity" (Gálík 2003: 626–627). As an exilic intellectual, instead of cutting off the root, Gao insists on writing in Chinese and thinking as a Chinese. Despite disclaiming to belong to China, Gao's works, especially *Soul Mountain*, are replete with an exile's nostalgia for a homeland. However, deeply influenced by western existentialism and postmodernism, Gao is wrapped by the western ideology, which places him in a rather conflicted condition and makes him become an exile who is unable to pinpoint the identity. The duality of exile should not be ignored, "search for identity," however, cannot accurately demonstrate the whole picture of his works' motif. Gao considers himself as an outsider, "a non-participant," and "an observer," as he writes in *Soul Mountain*, "I would rather drift here and there without leaving traces. There are so many people in this big wide world and so many places to visit but there is nowhere for me to put down roots, to have a small refuge, to live a simple life" (Gao, 2000: 400). Instead of searching for an identity, therefore, Gao desires to escape both collective responsibility and any identity imposed on him through the fulfillment of self-expression and individualism.

As the victims of Chinese politics and history, Gao and Li refuse to admit it while simultaneously claim that what have been recorded are merely their private thoughts, experience, and voice, which bear no weight of historical reflection or any political stance. Meanwhile, they insist that individualism

² Root-seeking Literature, 寻根文学, is a literature genre began in the late 1980s, which focuses on the minority cultures, Chinese identity, and tradition damaged by the Cultural Revolution while aiming at the reconstruction of Chineseness.

– produced by self-exile – is the focal point of their writing, which leads them to consistently endeavor to get rid of the identical stereotype – a Chinese writer. As Li states in her memoir,

It has been pointed out by some critics that my fiction is not political enough. A young man confronted me at a reading, questioning my disinterest in being a political writer. A journalist in China told me that most writers believe in their historical responsibility toward our time. Why can't you live up to that expectation? They ask, and my reply, if I were to give one, is this: I have spent much of my life turning away from the scripts given to me, in China and in America; my refusal to be defined by the will of others is my one and only political statement.

(Li, 2017: 65)

Similarly, in one of the essays written in 1993, Gao points out his view on nationalist myth,

Chinese intellectuals have never been able to separate the idea of the State from the idea of their own. They have been extremely timid in freethinking... While there have been quite a number of heroes in the past century who willingly sacrificed themselves for the Party or the State, there have been extremely few who dared to challenge the entire society in defense of individual freedom of thinking and writing.

(Gao, 2000: 128)

Despite the attempts at self-expression typically at the cost of self-banishment, Chinese exilic intellectual, however, is happy with that decision. In addition, viewing from Gao and Li's confessions, a more significant reason is embedded in their self-exile: the collective identity and ideology rooted in Chinese tradition hinder and even stifle Chinese intellectuals to pursue their personal voice as well as artistic individuality. Thus, to solve the dilemma and maximize their voice, banishing themselves from their origin, geographically and culturally, seems to be the only option.

Said observes that the reason why writers, in most societies, are endowed with sublime status is because "many people still feel the need to look at the writer-intellectual as someone who ought to be listened to as a guide, as a leader of a faction... or group vying for more power and influence" (Said, 2005: 16). Chinese exilic intellectuals, on the contrary, stand in sharp contrast

to the widely and commonly accepted role of intellectual in postcolonial and anti-imperialist discourses.

Viewing from social and historical contexts, collectivism is a far-reaching ideology deeply rooted in Chinese culture. Especially during the period of Mao and post-Mao, the propaganda of collectivism constructed by Marxism and Maoism has been profoundly infused into Chinese society. As Wang Yiling implies, Chinese collective identity consists of cultural and political identities, the conflation of these two identities, in essence, can be understood as “resulting from the so-called this-worldly orientation of Chinese culture;” meanwhile, “both the self-discovery of the individual and the strengthening of the nation were considered two dependent aspects of the same process” (Wang: 95–96). Hence, in ideal Chinese society, acknowledging collectivism is interwoven with the realization of individualism. Yet the long-term collective tradition has buried and greatly damaged Chinese intellectual’s voice. Thus, only through extricating oneself from cultural engagement, political intervention, collective memory and identity, can Chinese intellectuals ultimately realize “self-discovery” and obtain individualism.

The Chinese intellectual who self-exile themselves, therefore, is the special group who is yearning to escape from collectivism and embrace individualism. On the one hand, they shun the masses, the collectivism, and the increasingly polarized world which constantly urges them to take a stance; on the other hand, their writing is laden with all kinds of nostalgia regarding the cultural symbol and the collective past that they intend to abandon. In this sense, while they are desperate to get rid of the shadow cast by their cultural and ethnic background, the duality of exile, to varying degrees, keeps pulling them back. Ultimately, these self-exiled Chinese intellectuals, willingly or not, become the margins who remain wandering between the borderlines.

Conclusion

Exile, as an inclusive notion, can be presented as many different forms. From striding across geopolitical borders, to escaping an oppressive regime, to distancing oneself from incompatible ideology, the concept of exile is constantly being extended and adapted. When the individual conflicts with the prevailing

ideology or circumstance, it's an option of going into exile to find a new voice, regardless the exile is self-imposed or forced upon. In China, the tradition of self-exile goes back to ancient times, which is considered as a sublime means of achieving the inner harmony, furthermore, fulfilling the reconciliation with oneself. Yet the Chinese exilic intellectual in the late 20th century, wrapped by the tide of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, presents a newer version of exile and self-exile.

Despite Said admits that exile is essentially a way of thinking rather than a means, "Marginality and homelessness," he declares, "are not, in my opinion, to be gloried in; they are to be brought to an end, so that more, and not fewer, people can enjoy the benefits of what has for centuries been denied the victims of race, class, or gender" (Said 2000:385). Hence, as a group of outsiders who wander between the borderlines, the marginal condition of Chinese exilic intellectuals is in accord with Said's definition – a painful state of being torn from one's geography, family, and tradition. However, they are not the victim in the postcolonial and imperialistic discourses: they have no intention to contrast their insular ideology with the serious social discussion; they're not interested in becoming any sort of authority or opinion cacique; more importantly, Chinese exilic intellectual is the one who releases all the internalized experience and reflection only for seeking self-expression as well as individualism. Moreover, in spite of China is an indispensable element in their works, they insist to eradicate the "Chineseness" on themselves – instead of being viewed as a "Chinese," they prefer becoming an independent voice. And no matter which form and what content they choose to present, one motif is prominent and consistent throughout their oeuvre: the meditation on individualism as well as the necessity of exile.

Thus, to Chinese exilic intellectual, exile does not suggest the significant geographical or cultural transformations inflicted by postcolonialism and imperialism. No matter in their writing or in reality, they do not uphold the social, national or cosmopolitan responsibility as Said claims. What individualism manifests is not only their spiritual pursue but also the method to respect their own existence. Despite under many circumstances, it implies the permanent marginality, Chinese exilic intellectuals still endeavor to negotiate the interstitial

space between different realms, in the meantime, creating their own voice which is not associated with any collective responsibility or identity.

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Summary

During the 1960s and late 1980s, Chinese modern history is full of turbulence and controversy. Chinese exilic intellectuals who chose to flee to overseas during this period bore the weight of private tragedy, historical trauma, and political disputes, which, more or less, is mirrored in their writings. And encountering a profoundly ambivalent, marginal, and "unhealable" condition, Chinese exilic intellectuals fit the notion of metaphoric exile in Said's sense. However, unlike the exilic intellectuals in the contexts of postcolonialism or imperialism, they on the one hand, voluntarily self-exile themselves from the Chinese collective consciousness to pursue individualism; on the other hand, "Chineseness," as an indispensable element, is deeply inscribed in their writing with particular nostalgia. Thus, it is unlikely to categorize Chinese exilic intellectuals into any existing theories regarding exile while the understanding of *exile* should be extended and reconsidered.

Keywords: Chinese literature, Li Yiyun, collectivism, exile literature, Edward W Said, Gao Xingjian, individualism

Słowa kluczowe: literatura chińska, Li Yiyun, zbiorowość, literatura emigracyjna, Edward W Said, Gao Xingjian, indywidualizm