

Chronicle of Du Lala's Promotion: Exemplary Literature, the Middle Class, and the Socialist Market

Marco Fumian

Seated before a map of the Chinese territory, in a momentous scene situated two thirds of the way through Xie Jin's 1961 film, *The Red Detachment of Women* (Hongse niangzi jun), Wu Qionghua suddenly has her final illumination. An oppressed, uneducated peasant girl alone in the world, she has already learned to tame her rebellious soul, to cultivate her primitive revolutionary instinct, by joining the women's detachment and studying and adhering to Communist Party discipline. Her heart, however, was still full of personal hatred and a selfish thirst for revenge against her oppressor. Now, enlightened by a handsome and brotherly young man, larger-than-life Party Secretary Hong Changqing, she grasps through the lines on the map the objective vastness of China and sees how insignificant one's personal, subjective motivations are in the larger struggle for liberation. So after he pours some coconut juice into two rough, makeshift bowls—a plain sign of a revolutionary brotherly communion—she realizes that “every proletarian has a heart filled with tears,” and with a fierce look memorizes the lesson she has just learned: only the “collectivity, the class as a whole” counts. Finally the tension fades and a cheerful sequence of scenes of communal revolutionary life ensues, as if to indicate that Wu Qionghua has already

abandoned her “small self” and completely merged with the “great self” of the masses.

Fifty years later, we come across a wholly different story. Du Lala, protagonist of Xu Jinglei’s 2010 popular film, *Go Lala Go*,¹ is a young white-collar woman, clumsy and unassuming, who is starting a career in an American corporation quartered in one of the glittering skyscrapers of Beijing’s Central Business District. She has just written on her blog what she has learned, that “you won’t get anywhere if you don’t show your talent.” In the next scene, we see her in the Thai resort of Pattaya on a company incentive trip, buying souvenirs, when she fortuitously bumps into a colleague, a successful manager and handsome thirty-something bachelor, with whom she unexpectedly takes a romantic walk on the moonlit beach. Their lips eventually draw close for a kiss, but he is a superior, and the company forbids romantic relationships between colleagues, so she smothers her passion and turns away. But later, during a cocktail party, tipsy after a few glasses of wine, their eyes meet again, and she loses her inhibitions and goes after what she wants: at last we see them running toward a bedroom, and a scene of passionate lovemaking follows. At the end of the film, Du Lala will have it all: she attains both professional success, becoming a superb manager, and amorous fulfillment, celebrating a romantic happy ending with her lover.

These are two snapshots of different ages, different zeitgeists personified by heroines who could not seem more different. Wu Qionghua represents an era where everything belongs to the people, and nothing to the individual: human beings must learn to suppress their personal motivations and desires, identify with the goals and the struggles of the masses, submitting their subjective judgment to the “objective” political order that unquestionably decides what the goals and the struggles of the masses must be. Du Lala, by contrast, is an emblem of an era in which the individual can finally break free, master his or her own fate, and be allowed—indeed encouraged—to develop his or her personality and tal-

¹ *Go Lala Go* is the official English name of the Chinese film *Du Lala shengzhi ji*, which I refer to in the present discussion with the more literal translation *Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion*. The film, directed by the Chinese female film star Xu Jinglei, featured Xu Jinglei as protagonist and other stars from Greater China as main characters.

ent, pursue his or her own interests, and fulfill intimate desires in a private realm undisturbed by political power. These two characters epitomize opposite worldviews and are contrasting ideal-types that represent—from a Marxist point of view—two ideological “superstructures” growing out of two antithetical socioeconomic “bases”: on the one hand, communism, with its authoritarian, collectivist and ascetic nature; on the other hand, capitalism, based on the values of freedom, individualism, and hedonism.

However, as much at odds as these two heroines are, I have not juxtaposed them to make the obvious claim that today’s China and its Maoist counterpart are galaxies apart. Quite the opposite: my purpose is to show that in spite of their glaring differences, Du Lala and Wu Qionghua in fact share some fundamental attributes. We should bear in mind, in the first place, that although Du Lala’s story unfolds in an environment that appears dominated exclusively by the logic of capitalism, this very environment has been created, and is still governed, by the same political entity that fifty years before gave birth to Du Lala’s predecessor, Wu Qionghua. Surely the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), since it launched the construction of the “socialist market economy” (*shehuizhuyi shichang jingji*) in 1992, has at last abandoned any residual pretension to the proletarianization of the Chinese people. It has dramatically opened up Chinese society to market forces that to a large extent have replaced those of the state in organizing social relations and that have provided spaces of freedom where the individual can “exercise a multitude of private choices” (Ong/Zhang 2008: 2). Yet it is worth recalling that the CCP leaders did not open up to market forces because they suddenly surrendered to the creed of market liberalism; rather, they did it because they found them “advantageous,” as Deng Xiaoping underlined in his 1992 Southern Tour, for “developing the productive forces” within the scope of the socialist modernization of the country. The market, in other words, was an instrument of the socialist state for national development. More specifically, while converting the bulk of national socioeconomic life to the logic of capitalism, the CCP remained faithful to its Marxist-Leninist

heritage insofar as it continued to fashion itself as the “avant-garde” of Chinese society, an avant-garde that, having grasped the objective laws of social and economic development, had the unique mission of laying out the contours of the key national goals and leading the Chinese people along the path of their realization. This of course included, in addition to building the economic “base” most suitable for reaching these goals (the “socialist market”), the definition of the ideological “superstructure” most suitable for this economic base (we could accordingly call it “market socialism”), as well as molding the subjectivities of the Chinese people to the demands of such an ideological superstructure. In building the socialist market, the party also reshaped the values and goals of the Chinese people so as to make them serve the new socioeconomic system, a fact that does not always seem sufficiently highlighted or analyzed. I argue here that Du Lala should be considered not simply a spontaneous manifestation of a capitalist ethos and lifestyle somehow naturally produced by the market, but rather a component, however indirect, of the ideological apparatus of the CCP with the goal of educating its citizens to the values, norms, and aims of the socialist market. This state ideological role is ultimately what links Du Lala to Wu Qionghua: whereas her elder cousin exemplified the ideal subjectivity of the communist society, Du Lala exemplifies the ideal subjectivity functional to the socialist market society. What Du Lala and her Maoist predecessor have in common is that they are both *models*: as such, they typify the most desirable attitudes and behaviors sanctioned by their social order and therefore help their audience internalize and emulate the same kind of attitudes and behaviors.

Indeed, models in China are not just a legacy of socialism. Scholars have observed that the practice of educating the people to the standard values and norms sanctioned by the ruling social order through the establishment of exemplary models has always been a central feature of Chinese society.² In premodern China, models were most typically the “sages and exemplary men of the past” who embodied the ideal virtues prescribed by the Con-

² See Bakken 2000; and Munro 2000: 135–157; 2001: 96–99.

fucian doctrine (Bakken 2000: 60). As such, they could be found mostly in the immense repository of Confucian historical-biographical writing, which was produced mainly to provide examples of positive (and negative) moral conduct with the purpose of “encouraging goodness and reproofing evil” (Moloughney 1992: 1). When Chinese elites began to embrace the values of modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, models came to embody the “ideal personality of the future” (Bakken 2000: 60), exemplifying the way the Chinese citizens had to “remold” (*gaizao*) themselves to fit the patterns of the new society yet to be created. Certainly the most influential initiator of this epochal shift was Liang Qichao, who not only famously pointed out that to transform China into a modern nation-state it was first necessary to transform the Chinese people into modern citizens, but also identified the new didactic medium that was to perform this task: fiction. However, while rejecting the ancient teachings of the books of history that had “failed” to educate the Chinese, Liang Qichao (1996a: 72) assigned to literary writing exactly the same function that had been ascribed to books of history—namely, that of “influencing the way of man” (Liang Qichao 1996b: 76) and “establishing and nurturing the various norms of society” (Liang Qichao 1996b: 78) through the use of models: “[In the novel] the power of writing to transform people is carried to its limits. Therefore, if the protagonist of the novel is Washington, the reader will be transformed into an avatar of Washington, if it is Napoleon, he will feel himself an avatar of Napoleon; and if it is Buddha or Confucius, he will become an avatar of Buddha or Confucius” (78). This vision of literature was later inherited, and taken to an extreme, by the CCP when it took up the task of remaking the Chinese people during and after the revolution. The Communists envisioned literature as a “tool” (*gongju*) in the service of political power that should, first and foremost, promote class struggle against the forces that opposed the creation of the new social system (Yin 2006: 37–69). One fundamental function of this tool was to help shape the political consciousness of the masses according to the principles dictated

by the “correct” class “stand” of the “proletariat.” It did so by creating “types” (*dianxing*) that expressed the standard characteristics attributed to their class, which, as I explain later, were in substance models exemplifying the ideal values, virtues, and norms prescribed by the CCP.

But what has happened in the Reform Era (1978–), especially since the advent of the socialist market economy in the 1990s? In the early post-Mao period, Chinese writers and artists reacted with a vengeance against what they called the “instrumentalism” (*gongjulun*) of Communist literary practice³ and demanded—and to a certain extent were able to obtain—an autonomous artistic and intellectual space in which they could pursue their literary ideals without having to serve as mouthpieces of party propaganda or “engineers of the soul” charged with molding the ideological values of the masses. With the advent of the socialist market and the subsequent “marketization” (*shichanghua*) of cultural institutions, the most immediate concern of cultural producers, as discussed by Shuyu Kong (2005), became satisfying the tastes of consumers, selling them products rather than imparting to them some ideological instructions they couldn’t care less about. In this radically new economic and cultural context, did exemplary models continue to exist? If so, what kind of social values did they express, and what kind of subjectivities did they promote? What did they have in common with earlier models and how did they depart from them? How did they articulate the double task of conveying state ideology and satisfying the interests of the consumers? I explore these questions in this essay, taking as my case study the protagonist of *Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion*.

Before it became a blockbuster movie in 2010, *Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion* hit the market in 2007 as a novel, authored by a little known, amateur female writer named Li Ke (fig. 1). The book quickly became a best-seller and was followed by three sequels (2008, 2009, 2012), a theater adaptation (2009), a TV series (2010), a musical (2011), and a dramatic series made for the Internet (2012). Because the novel triggered the immense popular success of the character Du Lala, I take it as the principal object of

³ On this aspect, see Chen 1979 and Anonymous 1979.

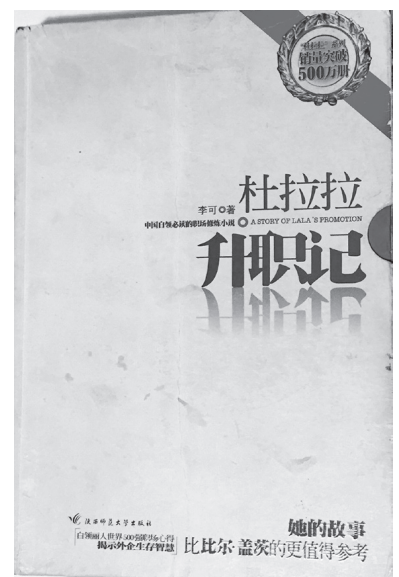


Figure 1: Cover of one of the editions of *Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion*.

inquiry in this essay. The other reason I focus on the novel is that although the film and the novel have more or less the same basic plot—both are about a young white-collar woman starting out in a corporation and finding love and career success in the end—they do it with partly different purposes. The film, as Yi Zheng (2014: 79–87) observes in her book *Contemporary Chinese Print Media: Cultivating Middle Class Taste*, is essentially a “white collar romance” aimed mainly at stimulating the fantasies of the audience with its fairy tale of love and success and its lavish display of fashionable clothes, trendy commodities, and chic locations (fig. 2). By contrast, the novel focuses on explaining in minute detail how the protagonist, “armed with an unbeatable spirit plus education and smartness” (Zheng 2014: 81), builds her career and finally achieves professional success, for the purpose of teaching its readers, through Du Lala’s exemplary parable, what they have to do to be as successful as her. The novel thus has an explicit didactic function that is downplayed in the film; as the cover of the book informs us, *Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion* is “a novel Chinese white collars must read for their professional self-improvement,” or, as the author herself explains in the introduction, it should be taken primarily as “a manual for office employees” (Li Ke 2007: 2). But the parable of Du Lala offers more to her readers than directions for professional growth; significantly, the author presents Du Lala as “a typical (*dianxing*) representative of the middle class: she has no background, is well educated and takes a regular path relying on her personal struggle to achieve success” (Li Ke 2007: 1). Du Lala’s career is marked as “typical” of a class, the middle class, which is defined in turn by social behavior peculiarly attached to the proper means, or the “regular path,” for achieving success in society. In short, Du Lala offers a model route for entering the middle class. At the beginning of the 2000s, the middle class in China had a special status: the Party has sought since 2002 to enlarge and strengthen the middle class, regarding its consolidation as fundamental both for the economic development of the country and for the maintenance of social stability. The middle class, in the



Figure 2: A poster of the film.

view of the numerous government-affiliated sociologists dedicated to the study of its “emergence,” is the social category that ideally embodies the qualities deemed necessary to the construction of a modern, prosperous, and harmonious “socialist market” society. Rather strikingly, the qualities Du Lala exemplifies are the very ones this state sociological discourse attributes to the Chinese middle class and the government seeks to instill in Chinese youth through the national educational system. She exemplifies, I argue in this essay, the Party’s ideal subjectivity for the socialist market. As “a typical representative of the middle class,” she illustrates the most desirable attitudes and behaviors of her time, not unlike the way “proletarian types” of the Mao era illustrated the most desirable attitudes and behaviors of the socialist ethos.

After summarizing in the next section the main narrative lines of Du Lala’s parable, I analyze in detail the didactic content of the novel: how it exerts its exemplary function by drawing from old patterns of exemplarity borrowed from the conventions of socialist realism and how it promotes traits of the ideal subjectivity of the socialist market ideological order. Finally, in the conclusion, by showing that *Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion* was not a unique and isolated cultural event but rather a representative case within a much wider phenomenon of popular culture, I make some general observations about the dynamics of ideological dissemination in the current system of “marketized” Chinese cultural production.

The Parable of Du Lala’s Promotion

At the beginning of the novel, Du Lala is not yet a member of the middle class; she is a young office worker with neither a privileged family background nor great beauty. After a disappointing experience in a state-owned enterprise, she decides to move to the bustling industrial area of the Pearl River Delta to work in a private company. There, however, the work experience is even worse: the boss is a coarse “peasant entrepreneur” who takes advantage of his position to make some awkward sexual advances.

⁴ The plot of the novel is partly different from that of the film (for instance, the novel does not feature an incentive tour in Thailand), and so are the settings. Although the backdrop of the film is Beijing, the novel's locations alternate between Guangzhou, where Du Lala is first hired, and Shanghai, where she gets her final position at the corporation's headquarters.

So after she delivers her resignation with great relish, she resolves to look for a job in a "Fortune 500" multinational corporation, because in that kind of company "you can get a fairly good salary," and because there "you don't have sexual harassment" (Li Ke 2007: 13). Finally she finds a job in the Guangzhou office of DB,⁴ a fictional American telecommunication corporation, where she is hired as a sales assistant for an initial salary of 4,000 *renminbi*.

Du Lala is immediately impressed, both by the prestige of DB and the generous benefits it provides and by the fact that everything is standardized and transparently managed, something that makes DB very different from her previous Chinese companies. In fact, the first thing she learns is that DB has a system of clear and detailed rules that elucidate the company's labor standards and define employees' rights and duties. For example, when she signs the contract, she also agrees to adhere to the "staff handbook" and to the "code of business conduct" of the corporation, which "explain to the employees what they can do and what they cannot do" and "make clear for them what according to the company's business culture is moral and what is not moral" (18). At the same time, Du Lala learns that DB has a hierarchical order where people enjoy highly different treatment and status according to their varying importance. Quite significantly, DB is presented at the beginning of the novel as a stratified class society, where Du Lala, being just a modest white-collar worker, is situated at the bottom level:

Those below the rank of manager were called "petit-bourgeois," which is the same thing as saying "poor"; usually they went to the office by public transportation because they had a mortgage to pay off. Those with the rank of manager were the "middle class": they didn't need to get a loan to buy their first house and typically drove a Bora if they were first-level . . . and a Passat if they were second-level. . . . Those with the rank of director were the "bourgeoisie"; they owned more than one apartment, which was normally located in a prime area of town, or a villa, and could freely pick a company car or buy a sedan with the company ben-

efits. . . . The vice president and president were the “rich”; they had a butler and a door keeper at home, the company provided them with a personal driver and they flew first class when they went on a business trip.

Lala thought she could not be a sales assistant forever: otherwise she would just remain a “petit-bourgeois” forever. (20)

It is not by chance that DB is characterized from the outset as both a regulated system and a hierarchical social order: the implication is that although the corporation has a vertical structure with clear-cut distinctions of rank, it nevertheless guarantees, with its rational and transparent arrangement of rules, not only fair protection to the employees but also an equal chance for upward mobility within the company. As Du Lala realizes during her first week of work, in addition to establishing a framework for employee discipline, the company’s regulations provide a “certain range of freedom and trust” (19) that facilitates initiative. All activities at DB are organized through “standard operating procedures,” which both safeguard the efficiency and impersonality of the system and provide stable and objective criteria for measuring employees’ accomplishments and assessing their professional merits and demerits.⁵ The golden rule at DB is that merit commands a reward commensurate with merit, a policy that translates into the possibility for advancement.⁶

Du Lala comes to grasp that although she occupies the lowest rung on the company’s social ladder, it is possible to climb the ladder; in her mind thus brews the notion of having a career. Climbing the corporate ladder should not be too difficult for her because, we are told repeatedly in the first fifty pages of the novel, Du Lala is “clever” (*congming*), “capable” (*nenggan*), and “responsible” (*you zerenxin*), “competent” (*zhuanye*) and “committed to work” (*jingye*), and, moreover, remarkably diligent. However, after two years, she manages to obtain only a modest promotion to administrative coordinator and a small raise. At this time, she is assigned to assist the administration manager of the Shanghai headquarters—a

⁵ The importance of adopting “standard operating procedures” (SOP) as a necessary system for running a corporation is stressed in the novel. A whole passage effusively explains the function of SOPs through the words of DB’s American president, who tells Du Lala how in a big American company like DB, everything must be organized by SOPs. “In this way,” he says, “there cannot arise disputes or confrontations; decisions are taken with a basis, all actions have an operational standard, every approval or disapproval is decided on the ground of a SOP. Big companies must do all they can to avoid personalized decisions; to make the system be in charge of managing the company is the correct norm” (Li Ke 2007: 200).

⁶ This meritocratic principle is summarized by the English expression “you deserve it,” which is pronounced in the novel each time an employee is rewarded or punished for his or her professional behavior (Li Ke 2007: 30, 35, 102–104). The principle stated by the author is that “each action you have done produces a corresponding consequence,” which roughly means that if you are good in your job you should get a promotion, whereas if you are bad, you should be fired (the author also declares to prefer the English expression to any Chinese equivalent because it is very straightforward and “emphasizes the cause-and-effect relationship”).

whimsical and overbearing woman named Rose. Although Rose offers her little help, Du Lala skillfully fulfills her tasks and learns to be autonomous in decision making. When DB decides to renovate the headquarters’ interiors, Rose shirks the responsibility for overseeing it by feigning pregnancy. The American director of Human Resources, Lester, then asks Du Lala to supervise this delicate and complicated project, and she accepts with enthusiasm. Plunging into the work for the next six months, Du Lala once again delivers an outstanding result.

But as a reward for her colossal effort, she gets a meager five-percent salary increase, instead of the promotion she deserves. Why? The narrator dwells on this point, explaining that Du Lala herself is solely to blame. In fact, Du Lala at this stage in her career still has an obvious shortcoming, which we can appreciate in the following passage:

Lala was hardworking by nature. After she got her degree, she had been allocated a job in a state-owned enterprise, where she kept annoying all her colleagues because she was always looking for some work to do. . . . Eight years later, when she was almost 28, she had not improved at all on this matter. As soon as there was more work coming her way, she would throw herself into it wholeheartedly, without a second thought about what she could get from it in return. . . . She absolutely did not have the mind to understand the planning of a professional career—let’s say she was a little dimwitted. (41)

In other words, the problem is that Du Lala is too hardworking and not calculating enough; she has an ingrained sense of duty, but she is not conscious of the gains that she should claim as a reward of her work, and thus is naïve and immature. And for all her selfless zeal, her boss, Lester, who despite being a little negligent is also quite just, does not duly appreciate her real value. She comes to realize this when she meets Wang Wei, one of the company’s sales directors, who is extremely high achieving also because “the results of his work are very easy to quantify” (57). The way

this realization is described is very telling and deserves to be quoted in full:

Lying motionless in the bathtub and staring at the mirror veiled by the steam, Lala sank into meditation: what was, after all, the difference between her and Wang Wei? Wang Wei had a dazzling life, while she did a lot, gained little, and was treated like dirt.

When she was small, teachers would explain that labor created the world. Therefore, she always loved labor without sparing herself, no matter whether it was mental or manual work.

She also had always thought that subordinates must help their superiors as much as they can, giving them as little trouble as possible and trying to sort out alone all the problems; otherwise, why on earth would your boss need to have you as an assistant?

On account of these beliefs, Lala very seldom bothered Lester, and preferred to quietly handle all the difficulties by herself.

Of course, she also had studied: "Mental laborers rule, manual laborers are ruled."⁷

Before now, it never dawned on her that at DB she was just regarded as "a typical drudge," that is, as a cheap "manual laborer."

As the water in the bathtub was slowly turning colder, Lala gradually disentangled her thoughts: it was because she had not made enough contact with Lester, it was because she had taken care of everything without uttering one word that he hadn't noticed at all the problems she met, the difficulties she had, all the work she had done. Thus he did not think that the person who had taken up all these responsibilities was important. And since he doesn't think you are important, how could you expect him to be good to you? (57)

⁷ This is my translation of a famous saying from Mencius.

What is noteworthy in this passage is that the process by which Du Lala comes to this realization is couched in ideological terms: at first, she exhibits a socialist consciousness, believing that work is the foundation of society, that all work has equal dignity, and that it is proper, and even honorable, to devote oneself to it without expecting anything in return. But suddenly she turns to a Confucian logic to remind herself that society is hierarchical, that hierarchy is based on merit, and that merit is in turn measured by the

value of one's occupational contribution. Finally, she expresses the capitalist principle that value has a price, and that to receive due payment for your valuable contribution, you must assert yourself.

After this, Du Lala decides to keep Lester meticulously informed about all her activities and even writes a blog where she recounts what she does to achieve this purpose. Her solution quickly yields positive results:

After some time, she and Lester had built a relationship based on mutual trust. He began to discuss with her every kind of matter and she, thanks to this training, matured very rapidly. Her consciousness about what professional development means, which initially was very fuzzy, finally became crystal-clear. Lala realized her strengths and acknowledged that her performance in that project had been excellent. Lester would have not made it without her Now that she had understood her personal value, she also recognized his carelessness toward her. She had not mastered the art of bargaining yet, but at least she had learned that when your boss is too absent-minded, the only thing to do is to defend your interest. (59)

It is only when Du Lala realizes her value and begins to assert her interests that the parable of her professional growth really begins. Although still as hardworking, eager to learn, and loyal to her job as ever, she also becomes far more self-conscious, confident, and enterprising; indeed, as her former superior, Rose, has to admit, "her competitiveness has grown much stronger" (73). What makes the difference now is Du Lala's understanding that to improve professionally she must have clear personal goals and carefully plan the actions necessary to achieve them. So she focuses on the goal of obtaining her longed-for promotion to manager; in no time, she is awarded the important position of manager of Human Resources, along with a remarkable salary increase to 10,000 *renminbi* per month (the narrator is very painstaking in recording all the changes in Du Lala's pay).

Thus begins the second act of Du Lala's career, in which we see her steeling herself in her new position as office administrator. In this capacity,

her first mission is training two employees she has hired. Both employees have serious attitude shortcomings that need to be redressed: one is opinionated, incapable of relating to the other coworkers, and sloppy in his work, but is too arrogant to recognize it and to correct himself; the other is smart and efficient, but also proud and scheming. So although Du Lala finds some ingenious solutions to rectify the behavior of the first, helping him to gain the awareness he needs to mend his ways, she decides to fire the second out of despair that her attitude will ever change. Her second mission, which she is entrusted directly by the president of DB China, Howard, is to reorganize all the Chinese sales offices of the company and to close the most unproductive ones. It is a very tough task, and she inevitably clashes with the company's sales department and aggravates many of DB's "tigers," as the sales managers are called. In the end, though, she accomplishes the mission, subdues the tigers, and devises some efficient operational procedures to standardize the functioning of the various sales offices.

Up to this point in the novel—well past halfway—we know absolutely nothing of Du Lala's private life, for the very simple reason that she apparently has none. By now she is already thirty and has received another salary rise, to an awesome 230,000 *renminbi* per year, but busy as she is working extra shifts day in and day out, she has not yet had the time even to think about a romantic life. In the meantime, at least, she has befriended Wang Wei, who appreciates her simple and unaffected manners and is always ready to give her plenty of useful advice for her work. Wang Wei occasionally invites her to dinner, and discreetly tries to seduce her, but she rigorously avoids being entangled in any sort of affair, aware as she is that relationships between colleagues are strictly forbidden, a rule she learned the very moment she stepped into the company; whenever a relationship does occur, one of the offending employees must quit.

With time, however, friendship grows into attraction; Wang Wei realizes that Du Lala feels something for him, so he asks her why she turns

him down even though she is attracted to him. To which Du Lala answers adamantly:

“Are there any managers having a relationship in the company? No. If the company knows, they can’t let you go because you are sales director, so the one who must leave is me. But I don’t want to leave so fast, after all the effort I made to become manager. Besides, the training I’m getting from Howard [the president of DB China] is such a unique opportunity; if by any chance he comes to know, his attitude toward me will very likely change, let alone that his favorite sales director is not you, but Tony. I’m afraid that if he knows about us he will grow indifferent to you too. Thinking about this makes me very nervous.” (176)

Instead of being put off by Du Lala’s lack of romanticism, Wang Wei proves very supportive, praising her sharp sense of practicality, and commenting that her line of thinking is “very reasonable and natural: every mature person would think like this” (176). He asks her what she has in mind, and she replies that she wants to postpone having a relationship for one or two years, so that she can have the time to undergo further training until “she will have grown into a mature manager” (177). By then she will have the “strength to be competitive in the market” (177), and it will no longer be a problem if she has to leave DB. Wang Wei once again agrees: “No problem, you are absolutely right. The outcome of a love affair is always uncertain, but work always repays those who strive hard. To have the support of the president is a rare opportunity for everyone; I fully approve your seizing it to carry on your professional improvement” (177). Eventually he proposes a secret relationship; if it works, then a year and a half later, one of them will quit DB. Although not fully convinced, Du Lala reluctantly agrees.

The decision, however, immediately brings trouble. Daisy, a woman with whom Wang Wei previously had a fleeting entanglement, visits him at home one day, seduces him into having sex, and learns about his relationship with Du Lala. Seething with jealousy, she tells Lala about Wang

Wei's infidelity. Du Lala loses trust in Wang Wei and breaks up with him, but she comes to see his infidelity as a moment of weakness and eventually forgives him. The whole incident is included in the novel not to explore the private issues of fidelity and trust, but as a workplace problem that specifically concerns Du Lala's career: because Daisy is also an employee at DB, she could cause Du Lala to lose her job if she exposed the couple's illicit romance. Moreover, the novel depicts Daisy not simply as emotionally unstable and unreasonable; what is underlined in the characterization is the complete lack of ethical principles in her professional conduct. As Wang Wei remarks, she is one "who does not play according to the rules of the game" (223). Daisy begins to blackmail them, threatening to expose them unless Wang Wei promotes her to regional sales manager; but Wang Wei does not yield. Meanwhile DB is in turmoil; a new vice president—a haughty and obtuse man from Singapore—arrives at the headquarters and gives everybody a hard time, including the president, Howard, who is ultimately driven to resign (thus depriving Du Lala of his precious training). While other managers are abandoning the sinking ship, Daisy obtains the promotion she has sought directly from the new vice president, who has clearly been hoodwinked by her. She also manages to achieve strong results in her sales performance, even though the general sales figures at DB are dwindling. Wang Wei, however, finds out that she has embezzled large sums of DB's money to bribe her clients and reports her to the top management. Daisy is brought before the director of Human Resources, Du Lala's mentor, Lester, who reprimands her for having violated DB's code of business conduct: "Our code of business conduct is as clear as the sun; the company's business activities must be carried out legally. You are the only one responsible for these actions, so you have to face the consequences" (231).

Daisy is undeterred and threatens to implicate DB in a scandal if she is punished. At this point everyone is unsure what to do—time for Du Lala to enter the picture. In a final battle, she confronts her arch-enemy, Daisy,

who is not so much her amorous antagonist as she is her opposite in terms of work ethic. Du Lala finds evidence that nails Daisy, learns that a higher-ranking manager is backing her up behind the scenes, and eventually saves DB by purging it of its bad apples and restoring order. This is the climax of Du Lala's professional parable, the triumph that elevates her to a pillar of the corporation. Lester, who is about to retire and ready to pass the baton of Human Resources to the new director, Roy, thus blesses Du Lala's dazzling career prospects: "I said to Roy that although you have not been in Human Resources for too long, you have progressed very quickly, and at the same time you are a manager with great potential; besides, you have an excellent character, you are a person who deserves to be relied upon. Roy told me he has been observing you for more than six months and he agrees one hundred percent with my judgment" (250). He also gives his blessing to her relationship with Wang Wei (Daisy had told him about the relationship, but he did not take the matter seriously, thinking that Du Lala and Wang Wei actually "make a good couple"). Unfortunately, however, Wang Wei has disappeared: he had resigned from DB hoping to appease Daisy and save Du Lala and no longer answers his phone.

We are finally ready for the epilogue of the novel and for the moral that the parable of Du Lala's career conveys. The first thing we realize is that Du Lala, by completing the trajectory of her professional growth, has also completed the process of her personal maturation: a process that has transformed her from the person she was at the beginning of the novel. We see this through the eyes of a stranger, a man named Li Du, who, noticing Du Lala on a plane, is struck by the charisma she exudes:

When the last passengers came on board, Li Du spotted a woman with a nice body and a beautiful carriage. She was slightly over thirty and looked like a high status white-collar worker. She wore a tight-fitting, light-colored Nike tracksuit jacket, dark sunglasses and dark-blue Nike trousers, which enveloped a pair of long and shapely legs. . . . As she took her seat in the plane, she dropped her LV handbag near the window, fastened her seat-belt and closed

her eyes Li Du thought she must have been a very experienced traveler: she really seemed a veteran in the art of plane-napping. . . . The flight attendant asked her what she would like to drink, and she said with a languid voice: "A mulberry juice, please, with ice..." . . . After she drank the juice she turned silent again, refused the meal-box and quietly began to leaf through a magazine she found in the seat pocket. (252)

Although at the beginning of her career, as the narrator writes in the very first line of the novel, Du Lala was "little more than an average beauty" (8)—a little clumsy, unsure of herself, and somewhat amorphous—now that she has given full play to all her talent she radiates self-confidence, personality, and femininity. The signs of this metamorphosis are inscribed on her body and in the brands she wears and the articles she consumes; they signal not only her wealth, but her class and taste, and announce that she has arrived as an elite member of Chinese society. In fact, what attracts Li Du as he watches her on the plane, besides her long and shapely legs, is the aura of class that she communicates with her features and gestures; it is for this reason that he approaches her, only to find out, to his amazement, that she is a formidable HR manager. As a professional dissatisfied with his current job, Li Du asks her advice about what kind of job would allow him to enjoy the "free and easy" "proper life" that is "fashionable these days," that of the middle class (254–255). To which Du Lala retorts, in a sloganeering tone that highlights the official character of her lesson, that contrary to what Li Du believes, members of the middle class have the "most tiring life," because "they don't have any special background, they count on their personal struggle to achieve success, they are public-spirited and law-abiding, and conduct a respectable life" (254–255).

This is thus the final message of the novel: being middle class does not simply mean enjoying a "free and easy" life. It does not mean, in other words, only to gain the privileges commonly associated with this class—the material comfort, social prestige, and cultural distinction that Du Lala

communicates when we meet her on the plane—but to have gained these privileges in a certain way, through a path of “personal struggle” based exclusively on merit and respect of the social rules. Du Lala’s parable embodies this true spirit of the middle class; in the end, the novel consecrates her, as Li Ke writes in the introduction, into a “typical representative of the middle class.” Moreover, as much as her parable warns that struggle is the necessary condition for entering the middle class, it also reassures that it is a sufficient one: if you do your best to improve yourself, regardless of your family background and gender position, you won’t fail to be rewarded, in the end, with a happy and successful life, because, simply put, you deserve it. That this is ultimately the moral of the story is shown by the fact that after having lectured Li Du, Du Lala also says that from now on she wants to enjoy a “free and easy” life. One more page, and voilà: the day after his encounter with Lala, Li Du tells his cousin, who coincidentally turns out to be Wang Wei, of the woman he met; Wang Wei is moved to finally return Lala’s many calls, and they meet in the rain for a classic Hollywood-style happy ending.

From the Heroes of the Proletariat to the Heroes of the Middle Class

Du Lala’s “romance” comes only at the end of the novel, as a reward for her professional success, which in turn stems from a tireless commitment to self-improvement and unfaltering dedication to her job. It is this parable of merit, this exemplary path of professional self-actualization, that constitutes the novel’s main theme; the love scenes and romantic climax are mere embellishments meant to entice the readers into the story and convince them that it is not really difficult to win a happy life, so long as you work your fingers to the bone. This parable, of course, is drawn from a definite gender perspective: after all, in her struggle to ascend in a male-dominated professional environment, Du Lala must overcome a series of obstacles characterized in many cases as gender-specific. For example, she

decides to leave her former Chinese-owned company to avoid the risk of being sexually harassed; then when she goes to the civilized and regulated DB, she must strive to be noticed and acknowledged by her male superiors, perhaps because she is "little more than an average beauty." Moreover, the process of her personal maturation is also articulated in gendered terms: finally gaining a fully feminine personality by the end of the novel transforms her into an empowered woman capable of impressing the likes of Li Du. The parable of Du Lala's advancement constructs a positive model of femininity (a woman who is strong, independent, rational, yet also sexy, *precisely* because of those qualities) that stands in contrast to the negative model of irrational and petty women, such as Rose and Daisy. However, as much as Du Lala's lessons are delivered from a female perspective and are addressed mostly to a female readership, they are by no means supposed to reach only the female audience. For example, when the book cover describes the novel as a "must-read" for Chinese white-collar workers, it does not specify to which sex they should belong. And the same cover also announces that Du Lala's "story is a better source of reference than that of Bill Gates," thus suggesting that she is more a model of capitalist success than a model of femininity. That her lessons are meant to apply to both "halves of the sky" is further attested to by the fact that it is to a man, Li Du, that she passes on her knowledge. And the lessons she delivers to him are ultimately twofold: how to become a competent and successful professional and how to become a "regular" member of the middle class, principles that, although taught from a female perspective, apply to the whole of society.

In what follows, I discuss in more detail the content of Du Lala's lessons and how it is taught. My aim in doing this is twofold: I want to both show how the novel ultimately serves the purpose of exemplifying the ideal attitude and behavior needed for the construction of the socialist market society, and highlight how the novel, in such a pedagogical undertaking, recycles and renews significant patterns of literary didacticism and exem-

plarity from the Mao era and earlier. For convenience, I have organized these observations into three points.

(1) *The novel inherits and adapts to the dominant rationality of contemporary Chinese society the pragmatic conception of literature characteristic of the Maoist and Confucian traditions.*

In both these traditions, literature is preeminently envisioned as something to be “used,” something that is valuable primarily in the degree to which it can serve some practical purpose (aesthetic value is also considered important, but only as a means to enhance the effects that a literary text is expected to produce).⁸ Both Maoist and Confucian traditions tend to imagine literature as an instrument, or a medium whose most fundamental function is to transmit knowledge, form the proper worldview of the individual, and fashion social conduct. It is not by chance that the most famous Confucian statement about literature, “literature is that by which one carries the Way” (*wen yi zai dao*), describes literature with the metaphor of a “carriage,” which must be used in order to transmit the virtues prescribed by the Confucian moral order (the “Way”). As for the Maoist tradition, it most typically equates literature to a “tool” (*gongju*) or a “weapon” (*wuqi*) that must be wielded in the struggle to destroy the old society and build the new, and must be utilized to mold the spirit and guide the actions of the new “proletarian” type of subject (one important function of the popular literary and artistic works of the Mao period was to instruct the people about party policies). A prototypical example of this instrumental imagination is found in the introduction of the “Yan’an Talks,” where Mao (1965: 70) defines “literature and art” as “component parts” of the “whole revolutionary machine,” whose function is to “operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy.”

Chronicle of Du Lala’s Promotion also has a notably pragmatic tenor. On being asked how she defined the novel, Li Ke replied that she conceived

⁸ James J. Y. Liu (1975: 106), for example, notices that the pragmatic theories of literature, “based on the concept of literature as a means to achieve political, social, moral or educational purposes, have been the most influential ones in traditional Chinese criticism, because they were sanctioned by Confucianism.” As to the notion of literature as something to be utilized, it was Confucius himself who first appreciated the value of the *Book of Poetry* because “it can be used to inspire, to observe, to make you fit for company, and to express grievances” (in James J. Y. Liu 1975: 109).

it primarily as a “tool” (*gongju*), the very word that defined the purpose of literature in the Mao era (Tong/Chai/Lin 2011). On another occasion, she described the book as a “textbook” she decided to write in the form of a novel in order to make it more “user friendly” and less “brain consuming” for the reader (Cai 2009: 25). Of course, the pragmatic aims of the book are very different from those of the Maoist period: the novel adapts the former’s political utilitarianism to the economic instrumentality of the capitalist system, professing as its declared intent to simply offer some practical, allegedly apolitical, instructions useful for navigating in the market economy. With reference to the purpose of her novel, Li Ke declares that “in the age of the Internet,” a book must provide “information,” making this information at the same time pleasurable to read, easy to understand, and useful for the reader (Li Ke 2007: 2). In an interview, she specifies that she wrote the book to “provide white collar workers with sources of concrete and applicable wisdom, knowledge and experience, prompting their reflections on issues such as career and financial planning and management of personal life” (He 2009). To this end, the novel familiarizes readers with the logic of the corporate world, the principles of corporate management, and the dynamics of the corporate workplace, all with the explicit purpose of teaching them the proper behavior to adopt, objectives to choose, and decisions to make to be upwardly mobile within the system. Clearly, although the novel provides this information for the edification of readers, it also does so to the advantage of the system itself, which certainly has a lot to gain from inducing a growing number of white-collar workers to internalize its rationality. The novel’s lessons turn out to be not so apolitical after all.

The author disseminates this practical information discreetly and unobtrusively within the narrative. For example, to insert technical, job-related issues—the principles of career planning, the assessment of task performance, or the evaluation of the feasibility of a project—Li Ke resorts to expedient devices, such as Du Lala’s blog or letters to her subordinates,

or simply intersperses this information into dialogues between colleagues. Many lessons, it should be said, focus on defining proper behavior in the workplace, especially with regard to employees' interpersonal relations. As underlined by the author, an employee must first of all understand the "organizational structure" of the company, grasping "who is a superior, who is an inferior and who is a peer" (1). Or, as literary critic Zhang Yiwu put it in his commentary on the novel: "If you want to stand out and have a smart life in the corporate world, you need not only good skills; you must also learn how to 'be a person' (*zuo ren*), how to approach people and deal with them, how to coordinate and cooperate with them, striking a clever balance between professionalism and individuality" (Xu/Xu/Zhang 2010: 21). In short, the balance that readers are invited to achieve is between respect of hierarchy, adherence to the rules and goals of one's professional institution, on the one hand, and development of one's professional skills and advancement of one's own interests, on the other (where transgression of hierarchy is also partially legitimized when one's superiors are acting against the principles and the interests of the institution). The novel in general indicates the proper behavior for specific working situations by creating narrative scenes that dramatize a problem in need of a solution, showing in the end the course of action that brings about a solution (chapters themselves are structured as exemplary scenes revolving around one specific theme, as the chapter titles often reveal: "Stay on the Same Page as Your Superiors," "It Doesn't Count If You Say You Are Good, It Counts Only If Everybody Says So," "Top-down or Bottom-up?," to name but a few).

(2) Du Lala's professional improvement is depicted as a parable of self-remolding that replicates to a large extent the patterns of the Maoist Bildungsroman.

As I noted in the first section, Du Lala is introduced by the author as a "type," more precisely as "a typical representative of the middle class"

(*dianxing de zhongchan jieji de daibiao*), where the meaning of *dianxing* is analogous to that in Maoist literary theory. The doctrine of socialist realism prescribed that writers create “types” (shorthand for the Marxist formula, derived from a statement by Friedrich Engels, “typical characters under typical circumstances”).⁹ Types were characters who were supposed to embody, to quote Zhou Yang (1996: 342), “the most characteristic traits, habits, tastes, aspirations, actions and speech” common to a “specific social group” at a “specific time.” The function of types was mainly to give expression, through their representative social features, to the most significant ideological tendencies attributed to the social classes they belonged to, and to the most momentous struggles their classes were engaged in, to “reflect” the general processes of history. But the main purpose of socialist realism was not to make sense of the actual processes of history; rather, it was to show how society was expected to transform according to the Marxist laws of historical development and the revolutionary goals of the CCP, so as to explicate to the people how they were to change themselves to participate in this revolutionary transformation of society. As vehicles through which this desired process of social transformation was to be illustrated, types did more than “typify” how social classes really were; they exemplified how those social classes were expected to be, so as to provide paragons for emulation to real people who were supposed to do the same. They were, in essence, exemplary models. For this reason, they were, first of all, highly schematized and divided into two overarching archetypes, polarized across the lines of division determined by class struggle: on one side were the “positive” (*zhengmian*) types representing the revolutionary classes (the “proletarian” masses of workers, peasants, and soldiers led by the Party); on the other side the “negative” (*fanmian*) types representing the enemies that had to be fought against.¹⁰ Second, they were exaggerated and idealized. Whereas the negative types underscored the attitudes and behaviors the masses had to reject and combat, the positive types, who were in a strict sense the true models to emulate, were intended to display

⁹ In this regard, see King 2011.

¹⁰ This principle can already be seen at work in 1936, when Zhou Yang (2009a: 43) declares that to accomplish the tasks set forth by the National Defense Literature, “writers have to depict the events and the characters of the struggle for national liberation striving to create the positive and negative types (*zheng fu dianxing*) of the national heroes and the national traitors.”

not the common ideological tendencies actually observable in their classes but the most “advanced” (*xianjin*), which in truth were the most desirable according to the point of view of the CCP. The types that embodied the correct class consciousness sanctioned by the Party were more commonly called “heroes” (*yingxiong*), or more precisely “heroes of the proletariat,” where to be a proletarian, in the Maoist understanding of the word, meant expressing the correct political consciousness prescribed by the Party more than belonging to a specific social group with some definite socioeconomic characteristics.

Because the essential function of types was to show the people how to pursue ideological remolding, Mao-era fiction was often centered on narratives of self-transformation that illustrate how a particular exponent of the people goes through a process of struggle in which he or she develops a mature revolutionary consciousness and a full-fledged proletarian personality. Although Mao stressed in the “Yan’an Talks” (1965: 71) that writers had to depict the process by which the people “remolded themselves in struggle” to help them “combat their own shortcomings and errors” and “discard what is backward and develop what is revolutionary,” the notion of self-transformation is probably best defined in a report given by Zhou Yang at the First National Congress of Literary and Art Workers in 1949:

Heroes are never born as such, they temper themselves in struggle. The people, in the process of remolding history, also remold themselves. The masses of the workers, peasants, and soldiers are not without shortcomings, as they inevitably carry with them bad ideas and bad habits inherited from the old society. However, thanks to the guidance and the teaching of the Party and with the help of the criticism of the masses, many have overcome their original shortcomings, so that those who were originally backward by overcoming their backward consciousness have become the new heroic characters. Many of our works have depicted the painful process by which the masses have remolded themselves in struggle. (Zhou Yang 2009b: 374)

Here, Zhou Yang is encouraging writers to continue to write about the masses' self-remolding; indeed, through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, the self-transformation of a socialist hero was a recurrent theme in novels, such as *Song of Youth* (Qingchun zhi ge; 1958), and films, such as *The Red Detachment of Women*, mentioned at the beginning of this essay.¹¹ Such narratives typically present a man or a woman born into a subordinated position in society and suffering from the iniquities of feudal society and the cruelty of some class oppressor (Wu Qionghua, for example, is a young peasant woman whose parents were killed by a landlord, a "local tyrant" who also enslaves her). This character has a rudimentary sense of what is revolutionary and a spontaneous desire to change things, but nevertheless is hampered by material and cultural subjection to the old order; he or she needs to be liberated and enlightened by somebody, inevitably an experienced member of the CCP, who understands the objective conditions of society and knows how to change them (Wu Qionghua is liberated from her slavery by Hong Changqing, who also enlightens her about the principles of the collective struggle of the proletariat). The hero-to-be then needs to take part in some arduous revolutionary task, where he or she withstands hardships, internalizes the goals of the Party, becomes one with the collective will of the masses, and finally accomplishes the task, proving that he or she has become a mature revolutionary hero (Wu Qionghua enters the Red Detachment of Women, takes part in the war against the landlord, and after having overcome her original selfishness becomes a disciplined soldier who, in the end, kills the landlord and liberates the local peasants from his yoke). As a result of this victory, the protagonist receives a reward, which inevitably consists of Party membership, whose most prestigious responsibility is to educate other people to the truth of the Party and to lead them on the path of other revolutionary goals (Wu Qionghua, after finally being admitted in the Communist Party, replaces Hong Changqing, who has died at the hands of the landlord's militia, as leader of the detachment).

¹¹ Of course, this narrative of self-transformation is not uniformly recommended by the Party across the whole Maoist period. Since the Party replaced the doctrine of socialist realism with "the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism," in 1958, the socialist heroes became more and more idealized and static, and eventually, during the Cultural Revolution, the proletarian heroes that the Chinese writers were allowed to portray could only be "lofty, great, perfect and dazzlingly brilliant" (Yang 1998: 27).

Du Lala's parable follows the same pattern. At the beginning of the story, when she enters DB, she is presented as a subaltern: first, because she "has no background," which means that she can count only on herself to carry out her "personal struggle"; second, because she is a woman and therefore occupies a vulnerable position in the male-dominated system of relations; third, because in the peculiar micro-society DB represents she is on the bottom rung (at one point she is described as a "cheap manual laborer"). Nevertheless, she has a set of positive natural inclinations, both moral and professional, that make her eligible for changing her condition by climbing the ladder of the corporate micro-society. However, she also has some fundamental shortcomings that interfere with fully developing her potential. As I noted earlier, these shortcomings are construed, although not explicitly, in terms of ideological consciousness: steeped in a socialist work ethic, Du Lala initially is too altruistic, too lacking in ambition and personal goals to be competitive and to improve herself. To develop her potential and talent, she needs to remold her mentality, adapting it to the principles of the capitalist system governing her workplace. She needs the guidance of a mentor, who, like Hong Changqing, is an experienced male figure who knows the rules and the goals of the social order. Du Lala first learns to advance her own interests, and as a result she becomes competitive and obtains a promotion, which confers on her enhanced status and allows her to more actively contribute to the development of the company. Equipped with this new consciousness, like Wu Qionghua, she must then go through an arduous process of struggle to temper herself and further identify with the norms and goals of the system. We see it especially at the end of the novel, when she fights and ultimately defeats Daisy, the colleague who threatens both her position at DB and the well-being of the corporation. We can easily notice in the "bad" colleagues Du Lala must confront, primarily Daisy but also Rose, a resemblance with the negative models of the Mao era: they are a foil to the positive feats of the protagonist and embody a negative ethic. When Du Lala proves her heroism with her

final victory, she receives a reward that, far from being merely economic, consists mainly of the honor of becoming a “leader” of the system she is part of. It is not by chance that in the end she is described as a terrific Human Resources manager, one who knows the rules of the corporation and is charged with administering them and who has the task of hiring employees and educating them in accordance with the demands and the goals of the system. Symbolically, Du Lala, who has been a painstaking student all through the novel, has become a teacher, a model responsible for guiding those who seek similar goals.

Last but not the least, Du Lala also exemplifies the normative traits necessary to belong to a certain social group—in her case, the middle class. Like the earlier Maoist types, as a “typical representative of the middle class” Du Lala embodies not the most common features of this group, but the most desirable and necessary for building the kind of society the CCP wants to build at this historical moment, as I discuss in the next section.

(3) Du Lala, with her “middle-class” features, personifies the ideal subjectivity of the socialist market ideological order.

To sketch the main traits of this new subjectivity, it is necessary to go back to the inception of the Reform Era, when Deng Xiaoping decided to abandon the revolutionary politics of the Maoist period and focus instead on the economic development and modernization of the country. To develop the nation’s productive forces, he first sought to emancipate the people from the “mental shackles” of Maoist political dogma and the fetters of the collectivist mode of production, so as to stimulate their “initiative” (*jijixing*), motivating them as individuals free to use labor to improve their living standards and no longer mobilizing them as masses bound to the collective (Deng 1979). He thus allowed, and actually encouraged, the people to pursue their material interests (*wuzhi liyi*), believing that by doing so they would contribute to the overall growth of the national economy, “combining the interests of the state, the collective, and the individual”

(Deng 1980). To this end, it was not enough to simply liberate people from previous social constraints; it was necessary to configure and disseminate a new ideology and a new vision of human nature that would justify and promote individual action. One of the keys to this new ideology was the notion of “personal struggle” (*geren fendou*), which Party reformers gradually endorsed through the 1980s, despite resistance from conservatives. Opposite the Maoist notion of struggle, which dictated that to pursue the collective interest, the individual learned to sacrifice his or her own self-interest, “personal struggle” meant that the individual strives to pursue his or her personal goals. This version of struggle was regarded favorably for two reasons: first, the selfish drive stirred individuals to actualize their potential; second, the individual creative power thus released could be harnessed for the goals of economic development and social progress.¹² The most fully-developed and articulate defense of the value of “personal struggle” is found in a 1989 article by Xia Weidong, a young ideologue who over the next two decades would rise to prominence within the ranks of the Party propaganda machine. In this article, Xia Weidong firmly rebuts what he calls the “personal struggle for oneself” (*wei geren de geren fendou*)—a struggle that the individual engages in only for his or her exclusive interest; this type of struggle, what Xia calls “radical individualism,” is harmful for society. At the same time, he praises what he calls the “personal struggle for society” (*wei shehui de geren fendou*), which springs from an attitude he terms “rational egoism,” about which he writes:

On the subjective plane is a struggle for oneself; on the objective plane is a struggle for society and for others. Those who conduct this kind of struggle, although being driven by the goal of maximizing their personal interest, do not yet completely erase from their mind the interests of society and of others, and actually hold, toward them, a certain degree of responsibility. Hence, while they strive to achieve their own goals, they also objectively give a boost to the interests of society and the others. (Xia 1989: 35)

¹² These beliefs strongly echo the ideas first expressed at the end of the nineteenth century by Yan Fu, who also believed that the secret for strengthening and enriching China was to liberate the individuals in order to release all their creative powers (see Schram 1984: 423).

Of course, the domain in which the logic of such “individual struggle” must be put into play, according to Xia, is that of the “individual” and “private” economy—namely, the system of the emerging market economy (Xia 1989: 36). It is not difficult to grasp, in the (Adam) Smithian language echoed by Xia Weidong, the attempt to draw the blueprint for a “socialist” form of capitalist ethics and the contours of a Chinese version of *homo economicus*, which eventually earns a full endorsement after the ratification of the “socialist market economy” in the 1990s.

Another important aspect of Deng Xiaoping’s politics was fostering talented individuals through the education system, so they could serve the project of national modernization. This led the Party during the 1990s to institutionalize “education for quality” (*suzhi jiaoyu*), a program whose primary goal was improving the “quality” of Chinese students to turn them into qualified “workers” (*laodongzhe*) and “persons of talent” (*rencai*), for the purpose of boosting China’s economic and techno-scientific development in the competitive global economy.¹³ Conceived essentially as productive forces, students in this program were expected to acquire a specific range of “qualities” instrumental to the development of an advanced, knowledge-based capitalist economy, among which the most emphasized were “innovativeness,” “spirit of enterprise,” “competitiveness,” “experimentalism,” “independent thinking,” “problem-solving,” and “practical skills.” Meanwhile the Party also continued to promote the values of socialism, proclaiming that the “new men” of the twenty-first century also had to be the “inheritors” of the “socialist cause” endowed with “ideals, virtue, culture, and discipline.” Although the “education for quality” program aimed to produce active, creative, and motivated subjects required to propel the national capitalist takeoff, it also sought to reaffirm the socialist bond tying the individual to the collective, causing these subjects to recognize their obligations to the state and society. This duality is perhaps most eloquently expressed in a passage from the 1999 Party Resolution, in which we read that the purpose of “education

¹³ The most important governmental documents on “education for quality,” which my references here come from, are the 1993 “Outline for Educational Reform and Development” and the 1999 “Resolution of the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council on Deepening the Educational Reform and Fully Implementing the Education for Quality.”

for quality” is to teach students to “actualize their individual value and at the same time serve the people and the motherland.”

At the turn of this century, the government completed the transition from the old, state-planned labor system to the new, predominantly market-regulated one. At the same time, the Party also began to revise the content of the “moral education” (*deyu*) taught in Chinese schools, to make them sync with the ethical demands of the market economy. The 2001 “Outline for the Edification of Civic Morality,” for example, states that “to fully develop the positive action of the socialist market economy” it is necessary to “strengthen the consciousness of individual self-reliance, competitiveness, efficiency, and the democratic legal system, together with the spirit of enterprise and innovation” (Central Committee of the CCP and State Council 2001). It also underlines “the necessity to establish moral conceptions and norms fit for the socialist market economy” (*ibid.*). At this point, in the high school and university textbooks of moral-ideological self-cultivation (*sixiang daode xiuyang*), Chinese students no longer found just the rudiments of Marxism-Leninism or political catchphrases of Chinese leaders, but also suggestions about how to develop their talent (*cheng cai*) and how to find the right path to express it. Predictably, because according to Marx labor is the activity that imbues life with worth, talent was to be expressed in the professional field (*zhiye*). At least this is what is said in one of the most authoritative of these textbooks, edited, perhaps not coincidentally, by Xia Weidong (2003: 265, 273), in which the importance of “personal struggle” (*ziwo fendou*) is once again affirmed as the effort of the individual to achieve self-actualization (*ziwo shixian*) in his or her field of activity.

It is in this context that the notion of the “emergence of the Chinese middle class” becomes key in Chinese sociopolitical discourse.¹⁴ The CCP had already started policies favorable to the expansion of the middle class in the late 1990s, but it was in 2002, at the sixteenth CCP National Congress, that the Chinese leadership officially announced the plan to “enlarge the

¹⁴ For a book-length survey on the “emergence” of the Chinese middle class, see Li Cheng 2010b.

size of the middle-income group" (Li Cheng 2010a: 8). Communist leaders considered the middle class important for a variety of reasons. First, as a category of "advanced" producers with a strong inclination to consume, this group was seen as the engine propelling the development of the Chinese economy. Second, as a group that had largely benefited from the market reforms implemented by the government, they were believed to hold a moderate political outlook that upholds the status quo and supports social stability. Third, and most relevant to this discussion, the members of the middle class were viewed as the ideal bearers of a set of social qualities deemed necessary for the construction of a modern, prosperous, and harmonious socialist market society. In a seminal study on the stratification of Chinese society issued in 2002 by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), for example, the "middle stratum" is defined as "the primary force pushing forward the development of a modernized society, driving social consumption, stabilizing the social structure, and fashioning the social norms and mainstream social values" (Lu 2002: 248). The specific functions of the middle class are threefold:

- (1) To set the example for suitable behavior in the order of the socialist market economy, such as observing the rules of transaction in the activities of the market economy in order to promote the formation of the social norms of "fair competition";
 - (2) To establish and guide the social values and norms of modernization, such as the spirit of enterprise, bold innovation, observance of law, and discipline in social life; a moderate and open attitude; respect of civility and order, plus active participation in the public affairs beneficial to the modernization of society; support for weaker groups, respect of personal choices, accumulation of wealth through legitimate means, and a will to repay society;
 - (3) To mitigate the contradictions between different social interests.
- (in Lu 2002: 254)

In this short catalogue, it is easy to see how the qualities attributed to the middle class tend to be more prescriptive than descriptive (indeed, a similar

¹⁵ For example, the CASS study states that “although this formation at the moment does not yet have clear behavioral contours and has a merely embryonic group awareness, it is however necessarily bound to gradually take shape in the course of its development and become a central force of the modernized Chinese social structure as long as the reform and opening-up will go on in the direction of a ‘planned socialist market economy’” (Lu 2002: 254). Among the English-language sociologists who have dealt with the Chinese middle class, Hai Ren (2010: 15) notes that many of the Chinese studies on it are “*proleptic* in nature: representing something that has not yet come into view as if it already existed in fact.” Guo Yingjie (2008), instead, notices that in the Chinese analyses of the middle class, description and prescription consistently tend to overlap.

characterization can be found in all mainstream sociological studies of the same period). The qualities listed here are not those already displayed by the Chinese middle class, but those the government wants it to acquire in the course of its “enlargement.”¹⁵ In fact, a comparison of educational documents—especially with regard to higher education—and the government-related sociological accounts on the emergence of the Chinese middle class reveals that they prescribe exactly the same type of qualities. This suggests that the subjects the government wants to produce through its educational apparatuses are ideal middle-class subjects. To put it another way, the government sees the middle class as first and foremost a symbolic category that groups together those who have successfully internalized the qualities required by the system and actualized them through their social achievements. Hence, given its idealized representation, the middle class can also be made to serve pedagogical purposes: to teach aspirants about middle-class material conditions and social status. Luigi Tomba (2009b: 592–593) has observed that in the early 2000s the middle class was held up in China as an “exemplary yardstick,” benchmarking “the social aspirations and behaviors with the creation of models of self-improvement.”

As to the more precise content of this exemplary function, it is clearly formulated in the following passage from another influential CASS study on the middle class:

The members of the middle stratum do not achieve success and social standing by relying on an ascribed status derived from family connections, nor by unlawful means such as speculation or corruption, but through industrious work, assiduous study, good education, accumulation of cultural capital, in addition to personal insight and capacity to seize market opportunities. Thus, they have the exemplary function of showing to the majority of the population how success and personal social status can be obtained in a fair way. . . . Moreover, they function as models for the common people because the patterns of their success are tangible and easy to imitate. It is indeed true that the models the most common families urge their children to study are often

those professional talents who have an upright conduct and rely on their hard-working struggle (*fendou*) to achieve success. If the members of our society are brought up to identify with these models, they will become active, dynamic, and competitive, but also supportive, trustworthy, and friendly, and thus we will be able to build a healthy and harmonious society. (Zhou Xiaohong 2005: 17)

The model the middle class is tasked with exemplifying is unmistakably embodied in the figure of Du Lala. She is also a model for the “common people.” In a statement that was widely amplified by the Chinese media, Cai Mingfei, the editor who supervised production of the novel, declared that “Du Lala brings hope to the struggles of subaltern groups (*diceng fendou*); by offering a happy ending to their yearning of having a professional career, she galvanizes their worn-out energies and at the same time establishes a model for the middle class.”¹⁶ It is not, I am arguing, just a coincidence that the novel reproduces state ideological discourses about the middle class: there seems to be a deliberate intention on the part of the author and the editor of the novel to create a middle class model in line with the ideological/educational objectives of the Party. It was, after all, Hu Jintao himself who pointed out, in his talk at the 2002 National Conference of Propaganda Department Directors, that “the forefront of ideological propaganda must revolve around the core of economic construction,” that it must establish “advanced models and experiences of success from all fronts,” and that the main ideological themes must be to “propagate a consciousness of seizing opportunities and speeding up development.”

Concentrated in Du Lala’s “typical” personality are all of the government-promoted qualities listed in the preceding quotations. She is well educated and embodies the goals of “education for quality” not just because she has solid knowledge and skills, but because she is moral and cultured. She is an “advanced” producer, as well as an “advanced” consumer: sensitive to the government’s wishes that the middle class become the propeller of consumption in society, she expresses her identity

¹⁶ An article of the *Beijing Youth Daily*, published a few days after the release of the Du Lala movie, goes as far as holding up Du Lala as a model against the foil of violent acts of desperation such as that of Zheng Minsheng, who some time before had murdered eight children in a Chinese school. “Society,” writes the journalist, “really needs this kind of motivational (*lizhi*) stories, and motivations supporting the advancement of the weaker people.” Stories like Du Lala’s “transmit the hope of the small characters to achieve success, and thus meet the psychological demands of subaltern groups. Unfortunately, many subalterns . . . do not even have the possibility of watching a film, so they cannot obtain inspiration and learning out of it” (Yu 2010).

¹⁷ Du Lala breaks the rules only once, when she agrees to have a relationship with Wang Wei even though it is forbidden by the company. But this rule, conceived as a deterrent to prevent colleagues from “allying” for their own interests, does not really apply to Du Lala and Wang Wei because both of them can be totally trusted, as Lester realizes, for their professional ethics.

at the end of the novel through the classy commodities she consumes (this element is emphasized much more in the film, where a hectic and unbridled celebration of consumerism is on display). As for Du Lala’s most distinctive qualities, they are certainly those required to build a dynamic and efficient capitalist economy. In the course of the novel, she learns to be self-motivated and self-interested, autonomous, enterprising, innovative, and competitive, finally embodying the perfect specimen of *homo economicus* who internalizes the principles of the market economy and applies the instrumental rationality of corporate management to the very management of her life. But she also has qualities that can be regarded as of a socialist kind, qualities that are conducive to harmony, stability, and order: she is well behaved and disciplined, observant of the rules and respectful of hierarchy, as well as altruistic, responsible, and devoted to the common interest.¹⁷ It is certainly true that the common interest, in Du Lala’s eyes, corresponds to the interest of a private corporation, but it is also true that in the age of the socialist market, the Communist Party no longer seeks to mobilize its citizens as political subjects participating collectively in the social sphere, but rather expects them to contribute, as workers of “quality,” through their achievements in their specific professional fields. To be devoted to the growth of one’s company, especially a competitive and progressive entity such as the high-tech corporation DB, is a way, in the language of “education for quality,” to “actualize one’s individual value and at the same time serve the people and the motherland.” A miniature society that is hierarchical but meritocratic, competitive but well regulated, DB is a metaphor of the socialist market order itself—not as it is, but as it should be. The rules and standards identified with an American corporation such as DB, in truth, are meant to represent the universal rules and standards of capitalism itself, rules that must also be transplanted into the Chinese economic practice in order to make it more rational, efficient, and competitive. But to this end rules are not enough; there is also a need for educated people who respect them and commit sincerely to their spirit.

Du Lala not only internalizes such rules, she also teaches them to other members of her community and fights against those who break them and jeopardize the well-being of the system.

Conclusion: We All Can Be Du Lala

Now that I have shown how the novel, echoing some of the most important ideological discourses of its time and replicating old literary patterns of the Mao era, ultimately constructs a model of subjectivity in line with the ideological/educational objectives of the Party, a few questions are in order. How did it happen that an entirely commercial novel such as *Chronicle of Du Lala's Promotion*, which does not claim any relationship with state propaganda, ends up reproducing its ideology? In the contemporary landscape of the production of popular literature and culture in China, is it a unique and isolated case, or one example of a more general cultural trend? How did readers receive its exemplary lessons? Was the novel effective in transmitting its ideology?

In exploring these issues, it is perhaps inevitable to start by mentioning the particular publishing phenomenon, raging in China at the beginning of the 2000s, referred to as *chenggongxue* ("success studies" or, perhaps, "successology"). In short, *chenggongxue* refers to the specific branch of self-help teaching material that aims to offer guidance to those who want to improve themselves for the purpose of achieving personal success, first in the educational field and then in the professional domain (generally with economic wealth as a main and final goal). Publication of self-help books first spread in China in the early 1990s, when many classics of the genre, mostly American, were translated into Chinese; it enjoyed a huge expansion at the end of the decade, when a thriving domestic production began to appear, and finally had an extraordinary commercial boom at the beginning of the next decade, when the category *chenggongxue* became ubiquitous on the shelves of Chinese bookstores (see Liang Liwen 2003). Although Chinese commentaries tend to present *chenggongxue* as a

purely commercial phenomenon that emerged in response to the demands of Chinese consumers (whose craze for success is generally described as a spontaneous outcome of the market logic that came to dominate Chinese society), it is not difficult to infer that a decisive push on the part of the government was behind the spectacular rise of the genre. As evidence of state favor, it is sufficient to point out that since 2000 a growing number of Chinese universities have established some widely attended extracurricular courses on the subject (Liang Liwen 2003). And more than one Chinese educator has explicitly put forward that the methods and teaching content of *chenggongxue* should be integrated into the regular curricula of ideological/political education (*sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu*), noting that *chenggongxue*, which aims at improving personal talent, is also a form of “education for quality,” and that given its popularity among Chinese youth, it is a much more effective mode of teaching than official courses of ideological/political education.¹⁸ The point is that a key educational goal of the government at the beginning of this century was to familiarize high school students with the mechanisms of the new job market system, helping them to internalize the principles of competition and self-reliance in the professional sphere. This educational goal was the direct consequence of the implementation in 1999 of the so-called “higher education expansion” (*gaoxiao kuozhao*), a policy that by 2003 had led to a growing number of graduates entering the job market, making it very difficult for most of them to find jobs matching their expectations. In a continuum that links official political education and commercial popular culture, the spread of *chenggongxue* in university classrooms and on bookstore shelves comes in very handy for the Chinese government for at least two reasons: first, it offers lessons the state wants Chinese youths to learn, not in the form of top-down ideological education, but as a free activity willingly undertaken by individuals out of their own interest; second, by positing as its fundamental assumption the notion that success depends exclusively on personal improvement, *chenggongxue* habituates its readers to consider

¹⁸ See Zhong 2004. In fact, since the early 2000s, significant references to the topic of success and the ways to obtain it have appeared in many textbooks of ideological/political education, becoming especially prominent in those used in the vocational college degrees (see, for example, Kan/Zhang 2007). However, given the idiosyncrasy between the subject of personal success and the still socialist official ideology of the Party, “successology” cannot be too openly taught in an official university course. It remains conveniently located in a gray area between official education and popular culture.

themselves as the sole makers of their own destiny, thus absolving society and its leaders of any responsibility for those who inevitably fail in the game of competition (the implicit philosophical framework of many of these books is social Darwinism: they generally describe competition in the market society as cruel but fair because it gives to all a chance to achieve success, provided they strive for it).

It is easy to find the traces of *chenggongxue* in *Chronicle of Du Lala's Promotion* (e.g., Zhang Huan 2010). Of course, the novel also has some literary antecedents that influenced its conception. It belongs to a popular fiction genre—the “workplace novel” (*zhichang xiaoshuo*), which emerged in the 2000s (Yan 2010; Zhou Lina 2011). The setting of this kind of fiction is typically the world of the corporations; its main narrative theme is the competition between different companies and businessmen, where the antagonisms between competitors are usually presented as conflicts between good and bad professional practices and where invariably the good win over the bad. This genre is in turn to a large extent derived from another very popular trend in fiction, the “officialdom novel” (*guanchang xiaoshuo*), which flourished in the late 1990s and whose narrative patterns are roughly analogous to those of the workplace novel, with the difference that its stage is the world of government officials rather than that of corporate businessmen. Even more than the workplace novel, the officialdom novel has a manifest moral tone: the protagonist is usually a virtuous, exemplary public servant who fights corrupt officials who harm the collective interest with their misdeeds and finally restores socialist public morality (Kinkley 2007).

Chronicle of Du Lala's Promotion clearly draws from these patterns, but it also expands them by incorporating elements of *chenggongxue*. Identifying aspiring white-collar workers as its target readers, the novel holds out the promise of helping them to achieve their professional self-improvement. To this end, it cleverly presents an ordinary character they can easily identify with; it makes her the protagonist of an exemplary

¹⁹ Cai Mingfei had a key role in both the production and the conception of the novel. She had the idea for the story and then commissioned the author, Li Ke, a professional corporate manager who had never written any fiction before *Du Lala*, to do the writing (Huang Beibei 2013).

bildungsroman with professional success as its goal; and it embeds within the resulting narrative the lessons it is intended to transmit. This formula immediately ushered in a trend: right after publishing *Chronicle of Du Lala's Promotion*, the editor, Cai Mingfei, produced several other novels with exactly the same plotline, although with different professional environments and narrative situations.¹⁹ One of them, *Fuchen* (Ups and downs), by Cui Manli (2008), is about a young woman who learns how to “survive” in the sales department of another multinational corporation based in Shanghai; it also became a spectacular best-seller, and then was followed by two sequels and turned into an extremely popular TV series. The *chenggongxue* formula thus became the distinctive feature of the workplace novel, which for this reason begins also to be called *lizhi xiaoshuo*, or “motivational novel.” As such it spread in the Chinese literary market, as well as on the Internet, to the point of influencing in turn the production of officialdom novels, which also have come to be frequently promoted as textbooks for aspiring officials (Li/Shang 2015).

Such an assimilation of the *chenggongxue* formula into the workplace novel is quite indicative, in my view, of some significant trends in the production of popular literature in contemporary China. First of all, it illustrates the enduring strength of the pragmatic conception of literature. The wide dissemination of this formula across the literary market shows the propensity of many Chinese literary producers to consider fiction as a medium that can provide even the most practical of instructions. Once again, in the case of the workplace novel, the exemplary properties of literature and its reading pleasures are exploited to illustrate certain principles and norms of behavior—never mind that these principles and norms might appear too practical to be associated with literature. Because economism seems to have become the dominant rationale of Chinese society since the beginning of the century, it is normal that even literature comes to be pervaded by its logic. Most readers of the workplace novel, it has been observed, are university students or young company employees who ap-

proach the works as “light teaching material” to improve their professional knowledge (Xu/Zhang 2011: 48).

Second, it offers a good illustration of how an entirely commercial product can ultimately serve as a vehicle of ideological education in today's China *without* being a product of state propaganda. To be sure, in the course of the Reform Era, the Party ceased to impose on Chinese writers and artists the obligation to serve as mouthpieces of the state, on the whole giving to them the freedom to create anything that did not challenge the authority of the Party and the stability of the socialist state. At the same time, after the “marketization” of the means of cultural production, it also repeatedly exhorted cultural producers to create popular works capable of satisfying the tastes of broad audiences to bring about both “economic benefit” and “social benefit”—that is, both generating huge commercial profits in the marketplace and conveying positive social and moral values in line with the ideological objectives of the Party (Shao 2003: 194–195). Borrowing from the themes of *chenggongxue*, the producers of the workplace novel hit both targets: they produce highly profitable best-sellers that contribute to the growth of the cultural market and disseminate the main ideological themes of the state, and they attract readers by offering them the knowledge they want, the same knowledge the national educational system would like them to learn (many Chinese commentators remark that the workplace novel has the merit of “supplementing” the teachings of the higher educational system) (Shi 2011; Xu/Zhang 2011: 48). There is a natural incentive for mainstream cultural producers to create works that both the market and the state like. With just a little political awareness, these producers can easily incorporate Party ideology and discourse discreetly in their works, as *Chronicle of Du Lala's Promotion* does with its “middle class” narrative. The mainstream media are then eager to amplify their messages, thus giving wider publicity to their works and increasing their sales potential. In the case of *Chronicle of Du Lala's Promotion*, the media were most enthusiastic in celebrating the novel (and the film as

well) as proof of the objective emergence of the middle class in China and in praising Du Lala, as its “typical representative,” as a positive model of “middle-classness.” The incredible success of Du Lala as a character was largely due to the role of the media.

But what about the reception of the novel? How did the readers take Du Lala as a model? Were they really influenced by her example? If we trust surveys like the one made by *China Youth Daily* in January 2010, the answer is yes (Wang Congcong 2010). Among the 1,844 interviewees polled on their opinions toward Du Lala, 66.2% of them answered that “for sure she is a model of Chinese female professionals,” and 71.6% acknowledged that they are “surrounded by many women like Du Lala.” Asked why they were fond of the novel, 67.3% said it could “teach them the skills to survive in the workplace”; 50.2% were “struck by the spirit of Du Lala’s independent struggle”; and 38.8% declared that “they could see in her their own shadow.” Likewise, if we read the book *We All Could Be Lala*, edited by Cai Mingfei and published in 2009, we are struck by the extraordinarily close identification evoked by Du Lala in her readers. The book comprised for the most part a collection of Internet posts written by Du Lala’s most enthusiastic fans, gathered in one big section titled *Learning from Du Lala* (Xiang Du Lala xuexi), and further divided into four subsections whose English titles are “The Power of Lala,” “The Incentive of Lala,” “I Hope,” and “Moved by Du Lala” (Cai 2009). That said, *China Youth Daily* is a publication run by the Youth League of the Communist Party, and *We All Could Be Lala* was a marketing ploy to both cash in on and fuel the popularity of the novel—not exactly the most neutral sources of information.

Perhaps the most telling sign of the audience’s response to Du Lala’s model is a paper fan I found in 2011 in a souvenir shop located on the popular Beijing tourist street Nan Luogu Xiang (fig. 3). On one side, the fan features a sturdy peasant with a proud look and a hoe on his left shoulder, drawn in the style of Maoist propaganda posters. In his right hand, instead

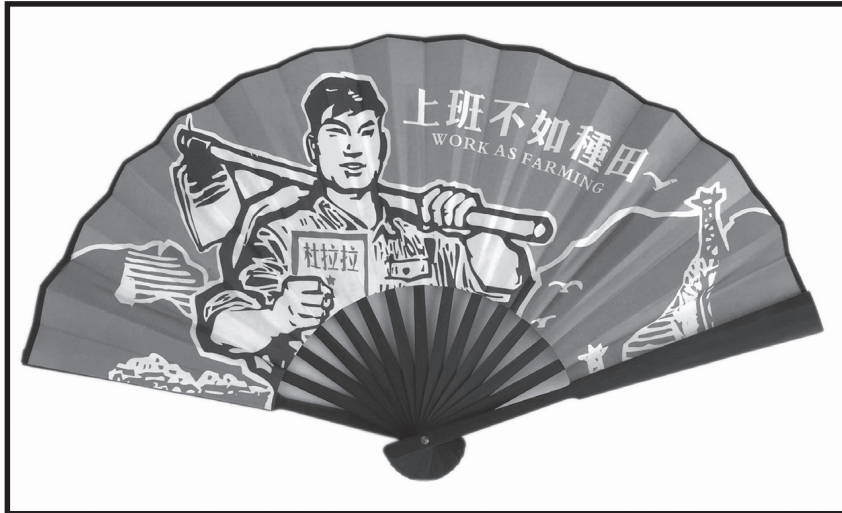


Figure 3: A fan mocking Du Lala as a model.

of the *Little Red Book*, he holds a volume with the title *Du Lala*. The caption reads: “Better to farm than work in an office.” The artifact, of course, is intended to be a playful grassroots subversion of the Du Lala model, a satire supposed to express skepticism toward its promise; its message—that it pays more to stay in the countryside and till the land than to pursue a Du Lala dream in the city that leads only to a life of office drudgery—reflects the widespread frustration and disillusionment, mounting especially after the onset of the global financial crisis, of the university graduates who found it increasingly difficult to find jobs matching their expectations and qualifications. At the same time, however, this ironic disruption also suggests that Du Lala is after all perceived as a model, and one that is cognate to the models of socialism. Nan Luogu Xiang is a hip commercial area where symbols of the socialist political tradition are mocked and put on sale: somebody might have thought it a good idea to put the new icons together with the old ones, the heroes of the “workers, peasants, and soldiers” side by side with the heroine of the white-collar class. Although it is a bit far-

fetches to consider Du Lala as the new Lei Feng, the fan at least reveals that she is already a part of the cultural imaginary. Du Lala is a familiar figure, and this is not only due to the enormous success of the novel (the first three novels of the series, up to 2013, sold more than five million copies, without considering the pirated editions and the fact that the novels are available online for free). It is also the result of the original story's being adapted into a film, a TV series, a theatrical drama, and so on. Du Lala, at some point, was even turned into a merchandise marketing brand. And, as of December 2015, while I was finishing the revision of this article, she was about to make a comeback, after five years, in Chinese cinemas, with the release of *Chronicle of Du Lala Getting Married* (Du Lala zhuihun ji). Such familiarity is probably the best guarantee for the continued efficacy of the model. Although people can certainly mock her, or simply ignore her, she remains there, in the realm of the everyday, saturating reality through a proliferation of images of her choices, aspirations, and desires, accompanied by many other models making the same choices and having the same aspirations and desires, ultimately contributing to make them all worth striving for.

Glossary

cheng cai	成才
chenggong jingyan	成功经验
chenggongxue	成功学
congming	聪明
deyu	德育
dianxing	典型
dianxing de zhongchan jieji de daibiao	典型的中产阶级的代表
<i>Du Lala zhuihun ji</i>	杜拉拉追婚记
fanmian	反面
gaizao	改造
geren fendou	个人奋斗
gongju	工具
gongjulun	工具论
guanchang xiaoshuo	官场小说
Hong Changqing	洪常青
<i>Hongse niangzi jun</i>	红色娘子军
jijixing	积极性
jingye	敬业
laodongzhe	劳动者
Lei Feng	雷锋
Li Du	李都
lizhi	励志
lizhi xiaoshuo	励志小说
Liang Qichao	梁启超
nenggan	能干
<i>Qingchun zhi ge</i>	青春之歌
rencai	人才
shehuizhuyi shichang jingji	社会主义市场经济
shichanghua	市场化
sixiang daode xiuyang	思想道德修养
sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu	思想政治教育
suzhi jiaoyu	素质教育
Wang Wei	王伟
wei geren de geren fendou	为个人的个人奋斗
wei shehui de geren fendou	为社会的个人奋斗
wen yi zai dao	文以载道
Wu Qionghua	吴琼花
wuqi	武器
wuzhi liyi	物质利益
xianjin dianxing	先进典型
<i>Xiang Du Lala xuexi</i>	向杜拉拉学习

Xie Jin	谢晋
yingxiong	英雄
you zerenxin	有责任心
zheng fu dianxing	正负典型
zhengmian	正面
zhichang xiaoshuo	职场小说
zhiye	职业
zhuanye	专业
ziwo fendou	自我奋斗
ziwo shixian	自我实现
zuo ren	做人

Bibliography

Anonymous. 1979. "Wei wenyi zhengming—bo 'wenyi shi jieji douzheng de gongju'" 为文艺正名: 驳'文艺是阶级斗争的工具'说 (On the rectification of names: against the theory "literature is the tool of class struggle"). *Shanghai wenxue* 4: 4–9.

Bakken, Børge. 2000. *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control, and the Dangers of Modernity in China*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Cai Mingfei 蔡明菲. 2009. *Women de Du Lala* 我们的杜拉拉 (We all could be Du Lala). Xi'an: Shanxi shifan daxue.

Central Committee of the CCP and State Council. 1993. "Zhongguo jiaoyu gaige he fazhan gangyao" 中国教育改革和发展纲要 (Outline for educational reform and development). (Feb. 13). URL (accessed 2/26/16): <http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/64184/64186/66685/4494250.html>

———. 1999. "Zhonggong Zhongyang Guowuyuan guanyu shenhua jiaoyu gaige quanmian tuijin suzhi jiaoyu de jue ding" 中共中央国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定 (Resolution of the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council on deepening the educational reform and fully implementing the education for quality). (June 13) URL (accessed 2/26/16): http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/moe_177/200407/2478.html

———. 2001. "Gongmin daode jianshe shishi gangyao" 公民道德建设实施纲要 (Outline for the edification of civic morality). (Oct. 24). URL (accessed 2/26/16): <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/16/20011024/589496.html>

Chen Gongmin 陈恭敏. 1979. "Gongjulun haishi fanyinglun: guanyu wenyi yu zhengzhi de guanxi" 工具论还是反映论: 关于文艺与政治的关系 (Instrumentalism or reflectionism: on the relationship between literature and politics). *Xiju yishu* 1: 1–4.

Cui Manli 崔曼莉. 2008. *Fuchen* 浮沉 (Ups and downs). Xian: Shanxi shifan daxue.

Deng, Xiaoping. 1979. "We Can Develop A Market Economy Under Socialism." In *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Vol. 2 1975–1982*. URL (accessed 2/10/16): <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol2/text/b1370.html>

———. 1980. "Answers to the Italian Journalist Oriana Fallaci." In *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Vol. 2 1975–1982*. URL (accessed 2/10/16): <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol2/text/b1470.html>

———. 1992. "Excerpts From Talks Given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai." In *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping Vol. 3 1982–1992*. URL (accessed 2/10/16): <http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/d1200.html>

Guan Yong 关勇 and Li Juan 李娟. 2010. "Xuxie Du Lala shenhua: zoufang zebian Cai Mingfei" 续写杜拉拉神话: 走访责编蔡明菲 (Rewriting Du Lala's myth: an interview with the book editor Cai Mingfei). *Beijing wenyi wang* (Apr. 29). URL (accessed 2/26/16): <http://www.artsbj.com/Html/interview/wyft/qt/74863155889798.html>

Guo, Yingjie. 2008. *Middle Class, Middle Strata, and Intermediate Groups: The Politics of Description and Classification*. London: RoutledgeCurzon.

He Li 何黎. 2009. "Li Ke: wo zhi shi ouran xie le *Du Lala*" 李可: 我只是偶然写了“杜拉拉” (I wrote *Du Lala* only by chance). *Qianjiang wanbao* (Dec. 21). URL (2/26/16): http://qjwb.zjol.com.cn/html/2009-12/21/content_201732.htm?div=-1

Hoffman, Lisa M. 2010. *Patriotic Professionalism in Urban China: Fostering Talent*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hu Jintao 胡锦涛. 2002. Zai Quanguo Xuanchuan Buzhang Huiyi shang de jianghua 在全国宣传部长会议上的讲话 (Talk at the National Conference of Propaganda Department Directors). (Jan. 11). URL (accessed 2/10/16): <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66690/4494568.html>

Huang Beibei 黄蓓蓓. 2013. "Shenme chengjiu le Du Lala" 什么成就了杜拉拉 (What brought Du Lala to success). *Kaijuan yanjiu* (Jan 7).

Huang, C. Joe. 1973. *Heroes and Villains in Communist China: The Contemporary Chinese Novel as a Reflection of Life*. New York: Pica Press.

Jeffrey, Elaine and Gary Sigley. 2009. "Governmentality, Governance and China." In Elaine Jeffrey, ed., *China's Governmentalities: Governing Change, Changing Government*. London: Routledge, 1–23.

Kan Yaling 阚雅玲 and Zhang Qiang 张强. 2007. *Daxuesheng chenggong suzhi xunlian* 大学生成功素质训练 (University training to quality and success). Beijing: Jixie gongye.

King, Richard. 2011. "Typical People in Typical Circumstances." In Ban Wang, ed., *Words and Their Stories*. Leiden: Brill, 185–204.

Kinkley, Jeffrey C. 2007. *Corruption and Realism in Late Socialist China: the Return of the Political Novel*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Kipnis, Andrew. 2006. "Suzhi: A Keywords Approach." *The China Quarterly* 186: 295–313.

Kong, Shuyu. 2005. *Consuming Literature: Best Sellers and the Commercialization of Literary Production in Contemporary China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Letian 乐天. 2009. "Zhichang xiaoshuo neng fou zhiyin women qianjin" 职场小说能否指引我们前进 (Workplace novels can guide our advancement or not?). *Xin qiancheng* 6: 84–86.

Li, Cheng. 2010a. "Introduction: The Rise of the Middle Class in the Middle Kingdom." In Cheng Li, ed., *China's Emerging Middle Class: Beyond Economic Transformation*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 3–31.

———, ed. 2010b. *China's Emerging Middle Class: Beyond Economic Transformation*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Li Ke 李可. 2007. *Du Lala shengzhi ji* 杜拉拉升职记 (Chronicle of Du Lala's promotion). Xian: Shanxi shifan daxue.

———. 2009. "Wo bu yuan dajiao duzhe de xiangxiang" 我不愿打搅读者的想象 (I don't want to ruin the fantasies of the readers). In Cai Mingfei

蔡明菲, *Women de Du Lala* 我们的杜拉拉 (We all could be Du Lala). Xi'an: Shanxi shifan daxue, 7–13.

Li Yunlei 李云雷 and Shang Xiaolan 尚晓岚. 2015. "Guanchang xiaoshuo: shidai zhenghou xianxing" 官场小说: 时代症候现形 (Symptomatology of the officialdom novel). *Beijing qingnian bao* (Apr. 17). URL (accessed 2/26/16): http://epaper.yynet.com/html/2015-04/17/content_128047.htm?div=-1

Liang Liwen 梁理文. 2003. "Biange shidai de shehui wenhua xin jingguan: 'chenggongxue xianxiang' jiexi 变革时代的社会文化新景观: "成功学现象" 解析 (The new socio-cultural landscape of a period of change: analysis of the "chenggongxue phenomenon"). *Dangdai qingnian yanjiu* 3: 5–9.

Liang Qichao 梁启超. 1996a (1898). "Foreword on the Publication of Political Novels in Translation." Tr. Gek Nai Cheng. In Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 71–73.

———. 1996b (1902). "On the Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the People." Tr. Gek Nai Cheng. In Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 74–81.

Liu Fusheng 刘复生. 2008. "Zuwei wenhua zhanlüe de 'zhuxuanlü'" 作为文化战略的"主旋律" ("Leitmotivs" as cultural strategy). *Bohai daxue xuebao* 3: 24–33.

Liu, James J. Y. 1975. *Chinese Theories of Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lu Xueyi 陆学艺, ed. 2002. *Dangdai Zhongguo shehui jieceng yanjiu baogao* 当代中国社会阶层研究报告 (Research report on contemporary China's social stratification). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian.

Mao, Zedong. 1965 (1942). "Talks at the Yen'an Forum on Literature and Art." In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*. 5 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, vol. 3: 69–98.

McGrath, Jason. 2009. "Communists Have More Fun! The Dialectics of Fulfillment in Cinema of the People's Republic of China." *World Picture* 3. URL (accessed 2/26/16): http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_3/McGrath.html

Moloughney, Brian. 1992. "From Biographical History to Historical Biography: a Transformation in Chinese Historical Writing." *East Asian History* 4 (Dec.): 1–30.

Munro, Donald J. 2000 (1977). *The Concept of Man in Contemporary China*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan.

———. 2001 (1969). *The Concept of Man in Early China*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan.

Ong, Aihwa and Li Zhang, eds. 2008. *Privatizing China: Socialism From Afar*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ren, Hai. 2010. "The Neoliberal State and Risk Society: The Chinese State and the Middle Class." *Telos* 151: 105–128.

Schram, R. Stuart. 1984. "'Economics in Command?' Ideology and Policy since the Third Plenum, 1978–84." *The China Quarterly* 99 (Sept.): 417–461.

Shao Yanjun 邵燕君. 2003. *Qingxie de wenxuechang: dangdai wenxue shengchan jizhi de shichanghua zhuanxing* 倾斜的文学场: 当代文学生产机制的市场化转型 (The inclined literary field: marketization of contemporary literary production). Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin.

Sheridan, Mary. 1968. "The Emulation of Heroes." *The China Quarterly* 33: 47–72.

Shi Wenjing 师文静. 2011. "Li Ke: zhichang xiaoshuo shi gaoxiao jiaoyu de buchong" 李可: 职场小说是高校教育的补充 (Li Ke: the workplace novel is a supplement of higher education). *Qilu wanbao* (Oct. 22). URL (accessed 2/28/16): <http://finance.qq.com/a/20111022/000905.htm>

Tomba, Luigi. 2004. "Creating an Urban Middle Class: Social Engineering in Beijing." *China Journal* 51: 1–26.

———. 2009a. "Middle Classes in China: Force for Political Change or Guarantee of Stability?" *Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* 6, no. 2: 1–12.

———. 2009b. "Of Quality, Harmony, and Community: Civilization and the Middle Class in Urban China." *positions: aast asia culture critique* 17, no. 3: 591–616.

Tong Wenxia 童雯霞, Chai Yin'gan 柴银赣, and Lin Jianhui 林健辉. 2011. "Li Ke: wo de benyi shi xie ben gongjushu" 李可: 我的本意是写本工具书 (Li Ke: my original plan was to write a reference book). *Yangcheng wanbao* (Oct. 30). URL (accessed 2/26/16): http://www.ycwb.com/epaper/ycwb/html/2011-10/30/content_1243902.htm

Wang Congcong 王聪聪. 2010. "Zhinü dangjia: 71.6% de ren kending shenbian you Du Lala" 职女当家: 71.6%的人肯定身边有杜拉拉 (71.6% of the female professionals are sure: there are some Du Lalas around them). *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (Feb. 2). URL (accessed 2/10/16): http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2010-02/02/content_3070021.htm

Wang, Gao and Rui Zhang. 2013. "How a Publisher Exploited a Bestseller." *Financial Times* (Feb. 25). URL: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/751b0ce0-7ac9-11e2-9c88-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2kVJZ4Rl6>

Xia Weidong 夏伟东. 1989. "Lun geren fendou" 论个人奋斗 (On personal struggle). *Jiaoxue yu yanjiu* 1: 34–39.

———. 2003. *Sixiang daode xiuyang* 思想道德修养 (Moral-ideological self-cultivation). Beijing: Zhongguo Renmin Daxue.

Xu Daojun 许道军 and Zhang Yonglu 张永禄. 2011. "Zhichang xiaoshuo: xin de wenxue jueqi" 职场小说: 新的文学崛起 (Workplace novel: a new literary rise). *Dangdai wentan* 6: 45–48.

Xu Gang 徐刚, Xu Yong 徐勇, and Zhang Yiwu 张颐武. 2010. "Zhichang wenhua yu dushi bailing de wenxue xiangxiang—guanyu zhichang xiaoshuo de bitan" 职场文化与都市白领的文学想象——关于职场小说的笔谈 (Workplace culture and the urban white collars' literary phenomenon—conversation on the workplace novel). *Yishu pinglun* 1: 20–24.

Yan Hanying 闫寒英. 2010. "Zhongguo dangdai zhichang xiaoshuo de wenhua jiazhi" 中国当代职场小说的文化价值 (The cultural value of the contemporary workplace novel). *Qiusuo* 6: 212–214.

Yang, Lan. 1998. *Chinese Fiction of the Cultural Revolution*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Yin Kangzhuang 尹康庄. 2006. *Zhongguo wenxue zhuliu huayu yanjiu* 中国文学主流话语研究 (Research on the mainstream discourses of Chinese Literature). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue.

Yu Renyue 余人月. 2010. "Du Lala ke ladeqi diceng de kundun" "杜拉拉"可拉得起底层的困顿 (*Du Lala can relieve the subalterns' difficulties*). *Zhongguo qingnian bao* (Apr. 29). URL (accessed 2/26/16): http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2010-04/29/content_3206281.htm

Zhang Huan 张欢. 2010. "Chenggongxue guanghuan xia de Du Lala" 成功学光环下的杜拉拉 (*Du Lala under the halo of successology*). *Nanfang zhoumo* (Apr. 19). URL (accessed 2/26/16): <http://www.infzm.com/content/44013>

Zhang Yiwu 张颐武. 2009. "Du Lala: shishi zao yingxiong" "杜拉拉": 时势造英雄 (*Du Lala: times produce their heroes*). *Jiefang ribao* (Mar. 9). URL (accessed 2/1/16): http://epaper.jfdaily.com/jfdaily/html/2009-09/03/content_249976.htm

Zheng, Yi. 2014. *Contemporary Chinese Print Media: Cultivating Middle Class Taste*. London: Routledge.

Zhong Hui 钟会. 2004. "Fahui chenggongxue jiaoyu zai sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu zhong de buchong xiaoying" 发挥成功学教育在思想政治教育中的补充效应 (*The supplement effect played by successology in the ideological-political education*). *Xueshu jiaoliu* 8: 166–168.

Zhou Lina 周丽娜. 2011. "Fanhua beihou shi shenme? Tan jinnian lai de 'zhichang xiaoshuo re' xianxiang" 繁华背后是什么? 谈近年来的"职场小说热"现象 (*What's behind the boom? The recent phenomenon of the "workplace novel"*). *Wenyi pinglun* 7: 74–79.

Zhou Xiaohong 周晓红. 2005. *Zhongguo zhongchan jiecheng diaocha* 中国中产阶层调查 (*Survey on the Chinese middle class*). Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian.

Zhou Yang 周扬. 1996 (1936). "Thoughts on Realism." Tr. Catherine Pease Campbell. In Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature 1893–1945*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 335–344.

———. 2009a (1936). "Dianxing yu gexing" 典型与个性 (*Typicality and individuality*). In *Zhou Yang wenlun xuan* 周扬文论选 (*Selected literary theory by Zhou Yang*). Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 39–44.

———. 2009b (1949). "Xin de renmin de wenyi" 新的人民的文艺 (*The new literature and art of the people*). In *Zhou Yang wenlun xuan* 周扬文论选 (*Selected literary theory by Zhou Yang*). Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 370–391.