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Interconnecting public interests with private concerns: biopolitics, female bodies, and guilt in Mo Yan's *Frog* and Zola's *fruitfulness*

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Abstract
China underwent a major change in population policies, from "more is better" during the 1950s-70s to the one-child policy that began in the early 1980s and ended in 2016. With reference to Agamben's and Foucault's theories of biopolitics, this article considers population policies as biopolitical mechanisms that subject individuals to national interest. Mo Yan is one of the contemporary Chinese writers who reflect on the sacrifice of individual rights and freedom for the common good, which is problematic in that it leads to objectification and politicization of female bodies and collective guilt on the part of executors and supporters of the policy. Resistance against collectivism, represented by Wang Dan in Mo Yan's novel *Frog* (*Wa*, 2012), is a recurring theme in contemporary Chinese literature. While the Western literary tradition frequently celebrates individualism, some works like Emile Zola's *Fruitfulness* (*Fécondité*, 1899) show concerns for extreme individualism that causes social alienation, self-centeredness, and personal guilt. Through a comparative reading of *Frog* and *Fruitfulness* from the perspectives of biopolitics, gender, and ethics, I argue that *Frog*, as a representative work of contemporary Chinese rural literature, engages in a dialogue with *Fruitfulness* and enriches world literature by providing a critical insight on population crisis and exploring tensions between individualism and collectivism and between public and private spheres, serving as a reference for reconsidering current demographic issues around the globe.

Keywords Birth · Mo Yan · Biopolitics · Zola · Guilt

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The population crisis has been a central subject in national and world literature. The discussion of this crisis often relates to the nation's mechanisms of biopower, such as family-planning policies, punitive measures, and discursive construction. According to Michel Foucault, "biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem" (qtd. Campbell & Sitze 2013, p. 66). From a biopolitical perspective, people are regarded as figures of population measurement and as political objects. Fundamentally, population policies reflect conflicts between individual agency and government intervention and between public and private spheres. Through a comparative analysis of Mo Yan's *Frog* (*Wa*, 2012) and Emile Zola's *Fruitfulness* (*Fécondité*, 1899), this article explores those two conflicts to illustrate how contemporary Chinese rural literature responds to and interacts with Western literary tradition of celebrating individualism and its critique to enrich world literature.

Mo Yan, the Noble Laureate in Literature in 2012, is one of the many Chinese writers (Jia Pingwa, Lu Xun, Shen Congwen, Xiao Hong, Chen Zhongshi, etc.) whose works are classified into Chinese rural literature. The main theme of Chinese rural literature is to lament the corruption of simple rural life by the greed for wealth and power during China's urbanization and globalization. Mo Yan is unique among those Chinese writers in terms of his style of writing and his scope of concern as he "has clearly absorbed influences from several foreign authors—Gabriel García Márquez, William Faulkner, Gustave Flaubert, and James Joyce" (Inge, 2000, p. 501). It has been widely acknowledged, including by Mo Yan himself, that William Faulkner had a huge influence on his writing (Inge, 1990, p. 20). William Faulkner's novels, such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930), make vivid representations of alienation, "not just of single characters or types, but of whole communities" (Moreland, 1995, p. 25). The use of stream-of-consciousness technique shows characters' sense of being alienated from the outside world. In *Frog*, the theme of alienation manifests in the cruelty of some local government officials in forcing women pregnant with a second child to get an abortion. What matters to those government officials is to successfully implement the policy irrespective of whatever consequences for the individuals and their family. Furthermore, under the impact of Márquez's and Faulkner's magical realism, Mo Yan's novels add mythical and magical flavor into his realistic representation of rural life across generations in his hometown, the Gaomi county.

Although his fictional world is set in his hometown, Mo Yan's works transcend geographical and ideological boundaries, making his works considered representative of both national and world literature. This article adopts the definition of world literature as not only literature circulating and read across geographical and historical borders, but also as literature engaging in similar human concerns emerging from different national and cultural backgrounds. In "Cosmopolitanism and the internationalization of Chinese literature," Wang Ning (2014) states: "The success of Mo Yan's work lies mostly in his narration of the fundamental problems Chinese people are confronted within a broad cosmopolitan context with regard to human concerns at large" (p. 167). *Frog* (2012), which won the most prestigious Mao Dun Literature Prize in 2011, focuses on individuals' lack of procreative agency due to government intervention, in this case, China's one-child policy, a biopolitical mechanism to

address the crisis of overpopulation. As there was no clear line between public and private spheres in the Chinese society, the interests of individuals might be sacrificed for the benefit of the collective if necessary. Population crisis is also of major concern in Western literature, with Zola's *Fruitfulness* as an example. On the one hand, individualism is celebrated in Western literary tradition that gives emphasis on individual freedom, happiness and personal achievements. On the other hand, it is blamed for causing problems of alienation and self-centeredness. *Fruitfulness* reveals that self-centeredness, as a result of extreme individualism, accounts for women's disinterest in childbirth, intensifying the crisis of depopulation and weakening the national strength. Moreover, female individualism challenges the Western patriarchal system that establishes a fixed line between public and private spheres as women invest in themselves, rise up, and become important public figures. Chinese and world literatures engage in a dialogue concerning how individualism and collectivism and how public and private spheres can be reconciled in the context of population crisis, serving as a reference for reconsidering the crisis of depopulation and population aging in the twenty-first century.

Population policies, discourse, and biopower

The turn of the new millennium was a time of population declining and aging in China. In the population census in 2000, China's National Population and Family Planning Commission (NPFPC) found that the national fertility rate dropped rapidly. Statistics also show that by the year 2000, "the total number of elderly people aged 65 and above account[ed] for 7% of China's total population," which necessitated new programs of promoting childbirth and caring for the elderly (Lu & Liu, 2019, p. 25). That is to say, in the early 2000s, Chinese people realized that the twenty-year-old one-child policy needed a re-examination because it could no longer keep up with the nation's demographic transformation and it faced strong oppositions from citizens due to moral and ethical concerns.

The one-child policy, with which the government attempted to withhold the rapid growth of national population, subjected childbirth to national interest. The sovereign power, which, according to Foucault (2003), manifests in "increasingly the right to intervene to make life" (p. 248). Supported by the government, family-planning policies underwent a change in accordance with the national condition of development. Beginning in the 1950s, the Chinese government intervened in life-making decisions by encouraging its citizens to have more children. Xiao Kedou (Tadpole), the protagonist-narrator in *Frog*, says: "My mother said that the nation needs people, needs workers, and values people" (Mo, 2012, p. 54). A higher birth rate translates into more laborers who would contribute to the nation's economic growth. Thus, in the 1950s and 60s, China witnessed a national growth rate of 20-28.38% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2000). In the early 1980s, because of the drastic population increase, the government implemented the coercive one-child policy to address the crisis of overpopulation, with the result that "the birth rate dropped by more than half" (Wang et al., 2013, p. 121). In 1980, the national growth rate dropped to 11.87% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2000). In *Frog*, the one-child policy receives

some compliments: “Birth control is the national policy and of paramount significance […] If the population is out of control, then China comes to its ruin” (Mo, 2012, p. 87). The one-child policy achieved goals of social development by reducing childbirth effectively.

Another biopolitical mechanism is the use of discursive power to shape citizens’ attitudes toward childbirth so as to make them change their reproductive decisions on their own. One method of “changing constituents of a population policy” listed is “changing beliefs about what the relevant reasons for procreative decisions are” (Räikkä, 2001, p. 69). Discursive power initiates a change in beliefs. In *Frog*, the dominant discourse manifests in the national propaganda concerning childbirth in the 1960s, as the following slogan indicates: “One child not less; two is just right; three being too much” (Mo, 2012, p. 54). The narrator’s aunt, as a spokesperson of the government, keeps reminding the local people in the Gaomi county that “Chairman Mao has taught us that human must control themselves and multiply under a plan” (Mo, 2012, p. 102). The one-child policy was glorified by the government to be the truth as it could benefit social development and improve the quality of people’s lives. The word “truth” relates to Foucault’s “general politics of truth”: “that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (2012) , p. 74). Starting from the 1960s, citizens were made to believe that they should reduce childbirth to one or two children per married couple. As it is shown in the novel, following the one-child policy was further related to patriotism. When the narrator’s mother asks him to perform the duty of a son and have a male heir to pass down the family name, the narrator replies: “It is not a business of my own but the glory of our Party” (Mo, 2012, p. 115). His mother fails to persuade her son, because as a good citizen serving the national interest, he firmly believes that breaking the one-child policy is a betrayal of the government.

Mo Yan’s other novels also concern issues of collectivism, mostly from a critical perspective. Set in the Gaomi county during the 1950-2000s, *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* (*Sheng Si Pi Lao*, 2006) narrates Ximen Nao’s experience of being repeatedly reborn in the body of a donkey, an ox, a pig, a dog, a monkey, and finally a big-headed baby. Ximen Nao’s death is a result of the government’s execution of some guilty landlords to start a land reform movement, showing that the government’s power has permeated the rural areas that used to be autonomous and self-sustaining. Ying Chun, Ximen Nao’s second concubine, is asked to join the People’s Communes led by the Farming Village Labor Bureau of the Provincial Party Committee that aims to control farmers and regulate their agricultural production. *The Garlic Ballads* (*Tian Tang Suan Tai Zhi Ge*, 1988), Mo Yan’s second novel, also describes sufferings and rage of Chinese farmers who respond to the government’s call to grow garlic, but fail to sell it on the market. “Collectivist government encourages farmers of Gaomi township to produce a large crop of garlic but then decides not to purchase it when the crop is overwhelming,” (Inge, 2000, p. 501). Responding to the call of the government, Chinese farmers engage in a collective act of growing garlic, leading to a drastic fall in price as supply exceeds demands. The government’s decision not to purchase the crop was made in accordance with what is best for the nation as a whole, which could be disastrous for farmers.

Contemporary Chinese rural literature, represented by authors like Mo Yan, Jia Pingwa, and Chen Zhongshi, reveals complex attitudes toward collectivism. They come to the painful realization that the utopian imagination of the collectivist rural life as represented in Shen Congwen's *Border Town* (*Bian Cheng*, 1934) is but an illusion. The rural life in Cha Dong village, where young people freely fall in love and get married and where villagers kindly help each other out for free, does not exist in real life. On the one hand, some superstitious and traditional customs, signaling the backwardness of rural areas, were still believed and practiced by local villagers in modern China. For example, in *Frog*, the elderly wants more boys to pass down the family name, and in Jia Pingwa's *Qin Opera* (*Qin Qiang*, 1994), villagers on Qingfeng Street put melons on the bed of San Can's wife to cure her infertility. Those actions are not done on individuals' free will, but are required due to the interest of the family and the local village. On the other hand, rural areas where people can live a simple life were gradually disappearing during China's modernization and urbanization. Tempted by wealth and power as modern China provided more opportunities for young people in cities, people living in rural areas could no longer suppress their ambitions and desires.

Western literary tradition does not favor collectivism because it goes against the enlightenment spirit that embraces individualism. One distinctive feature of dystopian fiction, such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), lies in their critique of the totalitarian control of citizens. Tragically, most characters get accustomed to living under the government's control and surveillance. In "Historical Notes" attached to *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood explains that she intends to use her novel to warn people of the danger of political control and call for a rebellion rather than simply imagining a fictional world full of pain and sorrow (qtd. Ketterer 1989, p. 212). Zola's *Fruitfulnes*s challenges this Western literary tradition by implying that political control is sometimes necessary, especially when it can benefit the collective while not being totalitarian to the extent that completely deprives individuals of their free will. The French government intends to control individuals' sexual activities and procreative decisions, not through coercive policies, but through penalties. In the late 19th century, which is the setting of the novel, the French government adopted various penalties, especially "for abortion and the sale of contraceptive devices" (Cole, 1996, p. 642). Giorgio Agamben (1998) claims: "The foundation of sovereign power is to be sought […] in the sovereign's preservation of his natural right to do anything to anyone, which now appears as the right to punish" (p. 106). Nonetheless, punishment is an ineffective biopolitical mechanism because procreative right still lies in the hands of citizens who make decisions on their own will disregarding what is best for the nation.

Fruitfulness further challenges the public-private dichotomy in the Western patriarchal tradition by suggesting a kind of interconnection between them as private choices can lead to public consequences. In the novel, characters' procreative decisions are closely related to the nation's prosperity. Individuals have the free will to decide how many children they want to have, with Mathieu and Marianne having "one hundred and fifty-eight children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren" and with Angelins, Constance, and many others having no child of their own (Zola, 2017, p. 375). When individuals like Mathieu and Marianne choose to give birth to more

children, they not only enlarge and strengthen their family, but also contribute to the increase of national population, which is the foundation of the nation's strength and prosperity. This public-private dichotomy does not exist in *Frog* as the public makes decisions for individuals.

Agency and politicized female bodies

Although China's effectiveness in addressing overpopulation was credited to collectivism, Chinese individuals, women in particular, are deprived of their agency while performing the biopolitical agenda. Rural women are under the double objectification by both the government and the patriarchal social system, the latter viewing women as reproductive tools for men. In *Security, territory, population*, Foucault (2007) defines biopolitics as "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power" (p. 16). Women's biological bodies were endowed with a political function of regulating national birth rate. That is to say, women's fertility was used as a strategy to increase the nation's level of prosperity. In the 1950s, when the Chinese government advocated "more is better," women were rewarded for giving birth to more children. However, as the crisis of overpopulation intensified in the 1970s, rapid population growth was thought to be detrimental to social development. Women pregnant with a second child were asked, sometimes forced to have an abortion. "In the decades before the 1990s, the natural right of Chinese women to be mothers conflicted with national biopolitics" (Du, 2014, p. 67). When Chinese women's procreative decision was conflicted with the nation's biopolitical agenda, the nation exerted its power by taking away their procreative rights and terminating any unlawful pregnancy. In *Frog*, women like Zhang Quan's wife and Wang Renmei lose their agency not only in becoming pregnant but also in keeping the baby and saving themselves from the danger of abortion.

Ethical concerns could not be avoided in the implementation of population policies by the collectivist government. The first concern is whether unborn fetuses can be counted as human. From Agamben's perspective, those mothers in *Frog* who violate the one-child policy and insist on giving birth to a second child resemble what Agamben refers to as forms of "bare life," which is under threat because it lies outside the law. Bare life reflects the sovereign's political sphere in which "it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice" (Agamben, 1998) , p. 83). When Wang Dan is pregnant with a second baby, the narrator's aunt is eager to take her to the surgery room because, in her words, "[b]efore it is 'out of the pot', it is a piece of meat and can be sliced. As soon as it is out, even if it lacks an arm and a leg, it is still a person protected by national laws" (Mo, 2012, p. 151). The moment the fetus is born, it acquires a political body under the protection of law.

The second ethical concern is the death of those mothers by accident during potentially dangerous abortions. Although Zhang Quan's wife has severe rheumatic heart disease and would die during an abortion, local officials still take her to the surgery room by force, which causes her death. The narrator also witnesses Wang Renmei's death due to the failure of an abortion operation: "I burst through the door to the

surgery room and saw a white sheet covering Renmei, her body and her face" (Mo, 2012, p. 138). Unlike Zhang Quan's wife who is forced to have an abortion, Renmei agrees to take a risky abortion and sacrifices her life to alleviate the pressure of overpopulation. In addition to "the right to intervene to make life," the sovereign power also manifests in "the right to take life" (Foucault, 2003, p. 248). The government exerts its biopower to take the lives of unplanned fetuses, which might cause the death of some innocent mothers, who get pregnant not on their own will, but due to their husband's desire to have a boy as a second child with the hope that they will get away with it. Some scholars argue that *Frog* criticizes China's one-child policy by revealing its adverse consequences, such as forced sterilization and abortion and the killing of the unpreferred sex (cf., Shriver 2015; Zhang & Hall, 2011). Agamben (1998) believes that "the very body of Homo Sacer is, in its capacity to be killed but not sacrificed, a living pledge to his subjection to a power of death" (p. 99). Women like Zhang Quan's wife and Renmei become what Agamben called the "Homo Sacer," subject to various kinds of violence, sometimes dying in the name of nation-building.

By celebrating Chinese women's pursuit of individual agency, *Frog* serves as a counter-narrative that challenges the dominant discourse demanding women's subservience to sovereign power. One of those Chinese women is Wang Dan, who, pregnant with a second child, refuses to have an abortion and hides inside a well from the search team. Thereafter, she goes all the way north, from Gaomi to Jiaozhou, from Jiaozhou to Yantai, from Yantai to Dalian, and finally to Harbin. By correlating movements of resistance with revolts of conduct, Foucault (2007) argues that resistant movements attempt to achieve "a different form of conduct" (p. 257). Wang Dan resists the government control as she wants to become a free and respected individual who can decide how many children she will have and who is able to protect them after they are born. Another way to interpret her resistance is through Agamben's theory of resistance, which sees it as a way to eliminate violence. Agamben (1998) emphasizes "the subjects' capacity not to disobey but to resist violence exercised on their own person" (p. 106). Through her act of escape, Wang Dan intends to resist the violence of the one-child policy that treats women as biopolitical tools and forces women to undergo potentially dangerous abortions to address the national crisis of overpopulation.

Contemporary Chinese rural literature in general attempts to question the dominant ideology that prioritizes the collective over female individuals. Průšek (1980) argues that modern Chinese literature can be measured by "one of the symptoms of the emancipation of the individual from feudal tradition, the breaking of all those fetters restricting freedom of the individual in the old society" (p. 1). Female individuals are bound in fetters of the patriarchal society that deprives them of their agency. Contemporary Chinese rural literature speaks up for those female victims by depicting some female characters who fight for their agency and are not afraid of leaving the negative impression of being weird and unruly. For example, in Jia Pingwa's *Ruined City* (*Fei Du*, 1993), Tang Wan'er gains her agency through choosing to be with a man whom she loves rather than doing what is perceived as normal for girls at her time, which is accepting an arranged marriage. Similarly, in Mo Yan's *The Garlic Ballads*, Fang Jinju rejects arranged marriage and elopes with her lover. The new

woman "symbolizes the vision of a future strong nation and her character highlights the revolutionary qualities of the modern [women]," "search[ing] for the female subjectivity" (Stevens, 2003, pp. 86–7). Images of new women like Tang Wan'er in Jia Pingwa's *Ruined City* and Wang Dan in Mo Yan's *Frog* are role models for women to escape the control of fatherly and authorial figures.

Zola digs into the fundamental question of what freedom really means for women. In *Fruitfulness*, female characters like Madame Angelin and Constance believe that children leave them no life of their own, as they must spend most of their time caring for their children: "[Marianne] chatted with Madame Angelin, and it appeared that the latter wished to enjoy life, at all events for the present, and did not desire to be burdened with children" (Zola, 2017, p. 60). She is unwilling to sacrifice her time and energy to stay at home and take care of a child; this makes her an ideal embodiment of radical feminism, which according to some "was to blame for the decline" in reproduction (Offen, 1984, p. 648). Madame Angelin disregards motherly duty and makes herself the priority. On the contrary, for Marianna, freedom lies in performing her motherly duty. She says: "If I didn't do my duty to the little one I should look on myself as a criminal, as a mother who grudged her offspring health and life" (Zola, 2017, p. 96). While Madame Angelin considers freedom as being free of troublesome children, Marianna sees freedom as being free of the guilt of not taking up her duty as a mother. Each pursuing what is understood to be their individual ways to achieve freedom, they have the agency to choose the kind of life they want to live and avoid the political manipulation of their procreative decisions.

By showing preference for Marianna's way of achieving freedom, Zola's *Fruitfulness* debunks the myth that children are a burden to women and supports the nation's dominant discourse that encourages women to give birth to more children to address depopulation crisis. Marianna, who gives birth to a dozen children, turns out to be in a better health condition and live a happier and more content life than those who selfishly choose not to have children. "[Constance] found [Marianna] still young, still fresh, overflowing with joy and health and hope. And she was there, like the goddess of fruitfulness, nigh to the funeral bier at that hour of the supreme rending, when she, Constance, was bowed down by the irretrievable loss of her only child" (Zola, 2017, p. 210). Compared with Constance, who becomes old and gloomy as the years pass and has no child to accompany her, Marianna is healthier, younger, and happier, implying that bearing and raising a child can do a woman good. As unofficial narratives, both *Fruitfulness* and *Frog* acquire a political function of influencing their readers' private choices to benefit the nation: the former suggesting women to give birth to more children to help France go through the depopulation crisis, and the latter criticizing the one-child policy and emphasizing the nation's debt to female victims as it overcomes overpopulation.

Mo Yan's *Frog* joins the Western literary tradition that criticizes the politicization and objectification of female bodies and respects female agency. For example, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a dystopian future in which women's value lies in their fertility in the period of drastic population decline caused by serious global pollution. Fertile women who are forced to provide children to families with infertile wives are called handmaids. Like Wang Dan in *Frog*, Offred, one of the handmaids, attempts to escape her mission of childbirth in a world with "the

lack of freedom, the constant surveillance, the routine" (Ketterer, 1989, p. 211). In Zola's *Fruitfulness*, women's procreative rights and free will are respected, despite the fact that the government tries to intervene with their procreative decisions to ease the crisis of depopulation. By associating women's procreative decisions with the nation's prosperity, the novel challenges the patriarchal system that sets a firm line between public and private spheres and increases women's social position. World literature tries to find a balance between individualism and collectivism and between public and private spheres to prevent the two extremes: at one extreme, women selfishly make private choices that negatively affect the nation; at the other extreme, the government deprives women's agency in making procreative decisions, turning them into victims of national development.

Personal guilt, collective guilt, and ethics of collectivism

In contemporary Chinese literature, guilt emerges from both harmful actions and the sacrifice of individuals for the common good. While individuals who have caused harm to other individuals develop a sense of personal guilt, guilt can also be shared by the collective when a group is responsible. The collective guilt derives from harmful actions ingroup members inflicted on members of another group (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). Guilt becomes more complicated in moral, ethical, and political contexts. Räikkä (2001) argues that "[w]hen changing the population policy, it may be morally desirable to affect people's procreative decisions more rather than less, and that sometimes it may be morally desirable to prefer a population policy that does not maximize procreative freedom to a population policy that does maximize it" (p. 75). By revealing the adverse consequences of the one-child policy as an effective means to address overpopulation, such as forced and potentially dangerous abortions, Mo Yan's *Frog* is granted an ethical mission to reflect on the government's use of coercive policies that negatively affect individual lives. Forced and potentially dangerous abortions inflict harm on mothers by taking away their procreative rights, freedom, and sometimes their lives, but it is also undesirable to watch people suffer from extreme poverty caused by overpopulation.

When it comes to ethical dilemmas, individuals will feel guilty no matter what they choose. An ethical dilemma is presented to our protagonist, Xiao Kedou, in *Frog*. It is unethical for him to follow the one-child policy and not be a good son, abandoning the family tradition and not having a male heir to pay tribute to ancestors and pass down the family name. However, it is also unethical for him to break the one-child policy and let his wife go through an illegal pregnancy that may be terminated at any time with the threat of life, not to mention that he makes the procreative decision disregarding the national interest. The ethical dilemma makes it inevitable for him to feel guilty about his personal choice, even though his wife does not put blame on him and agrees to make sacrifices for the nation. As the first-person narrator of *Frog*, Xiao Kedou narrates his story as a way of reconciliation with himself. Guilt in *Frog* is more than an individual issue, but a collective one. Xiao Kedou's guilt is shared by all fathers who get their wife pregnant illegally and demand them to have a potentially dangerous abortion when they find out that they cannot get away with it.

Moreover, government officials who enforce the one-child policy, gynecologists who perform forced and potentially dangerous abortions, and onlookers who stand by and do nothing to oppose the one-child policy, feel guilty of abusing mothers and killing unborn fetuses under the justification of addressing overpopulation. As a member of the collective that enforces and supports the one-child policy, the narrator's aunt, a local government official and gynecologist, is tormented with the guilt for causing the death of mothers and unborn fetuses during abortions. Haunted by her memories of killing unborn fetuses, the aunt becomes "a remorseful woman in her old age" (He, 2018, p. 6). Her guilt manifests in her fear of frogs, as the Chinese word for "frog" is pronounced the same as the word "child" (Wa) and the sound frogs make is also "Wa." Moreover, a frog is also similar to a fetus in terms of physical appearance. Little Lion, the narrator's second wife, says: "Have you seen a fetus within three-month-old? It has a long tail, looking nearly the same like a tadpole" (Mo, 2012, p. 223). Seeing frogs reminds the aunt of those female victims who die at her hands and intensifies her guilt.

Mo Yan's novels are commendable for giving voices to Chinese people's collective memory of the traumatic past. In *Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out*, landlords like Ximen Nao are executed to start a nationwide land reform. In *Big Breasts and Wide Hips* (*Feng Ru Fei Tun*, 1996), Shangguan Lu, who finally has a son after giving birth to seven daughters, endures great sorrows and pain as her daughters sacrifice their lives during the political turmoil. Both novels bring to light "the tortuous, traumatic history of the twentieth century" in which "Gaomi's peasants are depicted as having no control of various inhuman social systems and brutal political forces" (Tang, 2016, p. 111). This traumatic past was the result of the clash between old and new social systems. Those local peasants, who adhere to rural tradition, need to be sacrificed for the nation to proceed forward. In this circumstance, new social systems and political forces are unjust and inhuman to local peasants. Though new social systems and political forces are to blame, anyone who conforms to those systems and forces feels responsible for the victimization of local peasants. "Feeling guilty for events that an individual is not personally responsible for is possible because people can and do categorize themselves as members of a group" (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004, p. 4). Since no particular person is to blame for the tragedy that happened to local peasants, anyone related feel a sense of guilt, which forms their collective memory of that tumultuous time when China experienced frequent social and political movements in the process of modernization.

Compared to *Frog* that describes the collective guilt in the middle to late twentieth-century China, *Fruitfulness* focuses on some mothers' personal guilt for causing the death of their own children as a result of extreme individualism. Most mothers in *Fruitfulness* refuse to nurse their children, causing their death in the hands of nurses. "But to send a child away to be nursed means almost certain death" (Zola, 2017, p. 127). Constance's mental anguish is not simply attributable to her only child's death, which means the loss of hope for her family, but also derives from her guilt for only caring about her own interests and ignoring her child's needs. Constance's guilt is shared by other self-centered mothers who fail to perform a mother's duty. Those mothers who are excessively individualistic want a free and happy life undisturbed by a child. "Every year did these crows of ill omen carry off from Paris no

fewer than 20,000 children who were never, never seen again!" (Zola, 2017, p. 122). When mothers send their children away from a safe and warm home to nurses who take care of children for money, children may suffer from lack of nutrition, illness, and accidents. Thus, *Fruitfulness* is tragic in that the French government encourages childbirth, but many women are not prepared to assume a mother's duty.

Guilt is a recurring theme in both national and world literature. Some Western literary works also portray collective guilt coming from the harm done by one group to another, such as the guilt of racist executors in Holocaust literature. There is barely any guilt of making others sacrifice because in the West, "sacrifice" is a word with a religious connotation: Abraham sacrificing his son, Isaac, to God, and Jesus sacrificing his own life for the sins of humanity. In this case, "sacrifice" is a voluntary act that arouses faith instead of guilt. Additionally, Agamben proposes the idea of survivor's guilt: "the real issue […] is that the survivor as a thinking being knows very well that he is not guilty, as I, for one, know about myself, but that this does not change the fact that the humanity of such a person, as a feeling being, requires that he feel guilty" (Agamben, 1999, p. 89). Though not inflicting harm on others, some individual victims feel guilty because they survive while many others do not. For instance, in Art Spiegelman's nonfiction *Maus*, his father has the collective guilt shared by other survivors of the Holocaust, and Spiegelman also feels guilty of not identifying with his father's identity as a Holocaust survivor and understanding his traumatic experience. *Frog* enriches world literature by providing a new meaning of guilt, which is the guilt coming from sacrifices, and suggesting that collective guilt can contribute to nation-building.

The dialogue between Mo Yan's *Frog* and Emile Zola's *Fruitfulness* reflects interactions between Chinese and world literature on the topic of a nation's population policies and practices, which provides critical insights on ways of nation-building across historical and geographical boundaries. While official narratives embody the dominant discourse and present a positive image of the government through emphasizing the effectiveness of its policies, unofficial narratives in the form of literature, such as *Frog* and *Fruitfulness*, offer a critical perspective by exploring conflicts between collectivism and individualism and between public and private spheres. Those conflicts lead to moral and ethical dilemmas as a matter of personal choice and provide space for literary writing.

From *Frog* and *Fruitfulness*, we learn that collectivism and individualism are not completely opposed to each other and that the line between public and private spheres is not fixed as public interests are closely related to private concerns. *Fruitfulness* warns that radical individualism, with problems of alienation and self-centeredness, can lead to personal choices that impede national growth. In *Frog*, individual rights and freedom are minimized to increase the sovereign power of control and contribute to national development, which nevertheless encounters resistance by some victims. From a gendered perspective, a few female victims, such as Wang Dan, refuse to be objectified and politicized for the national interest. China's modernity can be signified by women's awakening of individual rights and freedom, which is enlightened by the celebration of individuality in Western literature like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Henry Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879), which were widely received in China in the early twentieth century. Those conflicts are representative of China's

process of modernization: on the one hand, imitating the Western tradition of individualism, Chinese government values individual rights and freedom; on the other hand, the government also wanted to inherit its collectivist tradition and protect public interest. Drawing on the condition of national development and looking at those conflicts from different angles, national and world literature engage in a dialogue to find a balance between public interests and private concerns.

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