



African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Publisher's Home Page: <https://www.svedbergopen.com/>



Research Paper

Open Access

National Discourse in Civic Life: 'Publicized' Narratives of the Private Sphere in Late Left-Wing Writers

Juanjuan Liu¹  and Zhaoyang Wang^{2*} 

¹Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: 18838973343@qq.com

²School of Literature, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: wzy19970318@163.com

Article Info

Volume 5, Issue 1, February 2025

Received : 05 January 2025

Accepted : 08 February 2025

Published : 25 February 2025

doi: [10.51483/AFJHSS.5.1.2025.164-171](https://doi.org/10.51483/AFJHSS.5.1.2025.164-171)

Abstract

The writing of the private sphere by late left-wing writers is often characterized by "publicization". The correction of "leftist tendency" is the incentive for the late leftist writers to write about the private sphere, and the context of the rented world provides an opportunity for the leftist writers to turn to the private sphere to reflect the combination of revolution and life. Doors and windows gave a gap between the private space and became a channel and reflection between the private and the public, not only as a sign of identity, but also filling the private sphere with public discourses of nationality, class and politics. The "urban island" character of the tenement provides a possibility for the writers living there to write about the "hidden" private sphere. The "publicization" of the private sphere is the flexible integration of family morality and public morality, and the writing of civic life transcends the narrow spiritual realm, highlights the flexibility of morality, and realizes the transition from the radical spirit of revolutionary pragmatism to the realistic spirit of life, and realism realizes the shift from the class discourse to the national discourse.

Keywords: *Late left-wing writers, Private sphere, Publicization, National discourse*

© 2025 Juanjuan Liu and Zhaoyang Wang. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

1. Introduction

The private sphere of late left-wing writers is not simply a description of the emotions, atmosphere and interpersonal relationships in private space, but its boundaries are intertwined with those of public space. It is this interlacing that gives the private sphere more space for expression, in the small or limited space, there are both personal emotions and life, and a more comprehensive social landscape is reflected. In the small or limited space, there are personal feelings and life, but also reflect the more comprehensive social landscape. The tension of the text is emphasized in the contrast between the small and the big. On the other hand, we should also see that the intersection of the boundaries of private space and public space, in addition to reflecting the interaction between the two, also makes the personal emotions contained in private space squeezed, more impactful and contradictory. The reason why private space is not private is that it is always subject to external scrutiny. The interpersonal relationship in the private sphere is different from the collection of unfamiliar people in the public space, which can only be categorized as a collection by the "big tradition" of custom, politics, class, gender, nationality and law, but the emotional connection in the private space makes them classified as an entangled group by the "small tradition". The emotional connection of private space makes each other "small traditions" into an entangled but integrated existence. Complex relationships exist between people. In the private

* Corresponding author: Juanjuan Liu, Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing, China. E-mail: 18838973343@qq.com

spaces written by left-wing writers in Shanghai in the context of the rented area, there are often relationships between “landlords and tenants”, “neighbors”, “merchants”, etc. It is the existence of such relationships that makes Shanghai left-wing writers feel that they are in the same boat with each other. It is because of the existence of such relationships that there is a relationship between “direct expression” and “side disclosure” in the writing of private space in literary works, giving birth to “self-narrative” and “other-narrative” at the same time. There is a relationship between “direct expression” and “side disclosure” in the writing of private space, giving birth to the two modes of writing, “self-narrative” and “other-narrative”. In this sense, if the public space depicted by the late left-wing writers in Shanghai serves as the “foreground” of various discourses, then it is necessary to explore its “background” as the private realm to which the world of emotion and life is attached, and only in this way can a complete urban imagination in urban literature be constructed. Only in this way can we build a complete urban imagination in urban literature. The injection of civic life is more a reflection of how the trend of thought in the historical change of society has landed in the smallest living space. In the past studies on the spatial writing of the Left League writers, no matter in the streets, hotels, coffee shops, department stores and so on, most of them focused on the public space, but neglected the private sphere. Therefore, it is of profound significance to explore the publicization of the private sphere by the Left League writers in order to grasp the creative shift from class discourse to national discourse in the later period of the Left League.

2. In the Concessions: The Creative Turn of Late-Period Left League Writers

Most of the left-wing writers had the experience of living in Shanghai, but it seems that not many of them actually wrote about their own apartment life. Xia Yan wrote in his “Record of Old Dreams” that after “April 12th”, he, who had been developing the left wing of the KMT in Japan, was expelled from the KMT by the Xishan Conference. Even though Wang Jingwei and Chen Duxiu issued a joint statement of “Letter to the Comrades of the Two Parties” at that time, the situation in Wuhan was not clear. When he first returned to Shanghai, he spent a sweltering early summer in a small street-facing room upstairs at Shaodun Company, with little to do but read news papers. These experiences can be said to have laid an important foundation for Xia Yan’s future play writing. Therefore, it is worth noting that the left-wing literary creation in the 1930s could not be separated from the context of Shanghai’s rented area. The word “concession” divides the city of Shanghai and gives it the attribute of a heterogeneous space. At the same time, there is also a difference between “common” and “individual” belongings.

The French Concession and the Public Concession opened by the modern colonizers in Shanghai became the “private domain” of the colonizers. Enjoying a unique system of rule of law and institutions, the Concession not only served as a place for revolutionaries to escape from the political whirlpool after the failure of the revolution in the late 1920s and to continue their revolutionary movement in a place beyond the reach of the government, but also as a place of refuge during the war of resistance against Japanese invasion in the 1930s. It also became a place of refuge during the Anti-Japanese War in the 1930s. Thus, it became a place of refuge for many revolutionaries and intellectuals in China in the 1930s. As a result, various social organizations existed in the rented areas, and they were the main places where the revolutionaries operated. As we all know, the Communist Party of China (CPC) was founded at No. 76 Xingye Road in the Huangpu District of Shanghai, or No. 106 Wangzhi Road in the French Concession. The Sun Society and the later Creation Society, which were the main constituents of the Left League, were also located in the Concession, and the bookstores, newspapers and magazines, and even entertainment venues in the Concession ensured the survival of the political and revolutionary activities. For example, the café “Gongfeng” was very important for the Left League. Lu Xun mentioned in “Revolutionary Café” that “I saw the revolutionary advertisement of the revolutionary café in the newspaper yesterday, and I have the fourth “leisure” to copy the following paragraph: ‘.’ But readers, I have found such a paradise which is ideal for us, I went there twice in total, and I met there the celebrities of today’s literary world, Gong Binglu, Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, etc. And I met Meng Chao, Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, and so on. And know Meng Chao, Pan Hannian, Ye Lingfeng, etc., some of them are there to talk about their ideas, some are there to meditate, I was there to learn a lot of lessons.’”² Although this was a satirical article written by Lu Xun in 1928 in the face of the Sun Society’s attack, the café was still the main venue for revolutionary activities during the founding of the Left League in 1930. Xia Yan recalled the first preparatory meeting of the Left League, saying, “I remember that the first preparatory meeting called by the Party was held in mid-October 1929 (shortly after the Double Tenth Festival), on the second floor of the Café “Kung Kah”, near the terminal of the tram at Szechuan Road. Lu Xun attended the preliminary preparatory meetings on the second floor of the

¹ Xia, Y. (1985). *Record of Leisurely Searching for Old Dreams*, Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, p. 125.

² Lu, X. (2005). The Revolutionary Café by Lu Xun. *Lu Xun, The Complete Works of Lu Xun*, Volume 4, The Three Idle Collections, The Two Hearts Collections, The Southern Accent and the Northern Accent Collections [M]. Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, p. 117.

café, probably only once or twice.”³ These included progressive books that were only available in the bookstores run by the Japanese in the Concession. At the same time, the prosperous economy of the Concession also provided the literati with the financial means to survive. For example, Cai Shuhou, the owner of the Shaodun Electric Company, who was called “Boss Cai” by the members of the Sun Society, raised funds through fund-raising at the early stage of the founding of the Leftist League and provided financial support for the activities of the Leftist League. More importantly, the publishing organizations and bookstores in the Shanghai Concession, as well as the press and newspapers, gave the literati in the 1930s the support they needed to survive. Literati were paid for their works on current affairs, literary novels, and translations. Literary groups in Shanghai, such as the early Yuanyang and Butterfly School and the New Sensibility School, were professional writers who made their living from the sale of their works and the number of people who read them, based on the reading preferences of the public. They were professional writers who earned their living from the sales of their works and the number of people who read them. The literati also earned their living by getting their fees from bookstores and newspapers.

Left-wing writers’ writing on the private sphere was concentrated in the late period of the Left League. That is to say, the Left League gradually got rid of the “left-leaning line”, overcame the line that literature and art were completely subordinate to politics and were the propaganda tools of politics, returned literature and art to reality, and emphasized the content and subject matter of literary and artistic works. Since the beginning of the Sun Society, there has been a clear tendency of “left-leaning”, and it was not until the Party Central Committee began to prepare the Left League, in order to ease the relationship between the Sun Society, the Late Creation Society, and Lu Xun, that there was some initial self-criticism within the Left League of the Left League of “left-leaning”. Li Chuli of the Latter Creation Society wrote that “the writer of Proletarian literature should put all the phenomena of social life on the chopping board of his criticism; he should write not only about the workers and peasants, but also about the capitalists, the peasants, and the landlords and gentry.”⁴ However, this change did not really materialize, and after the founding of the Left League, left-leaning ideas continued to dominate. Under the influence of the left-leaning ideas of the Third Communist International, anti-rightism and “closed-doorism” appeared in the Party, which led to the formation of a critique and controversy over the “third type of man” and “free man”. This led to the formation of a critique and debate on the “third kind of man” and “free man”. This became the demarcation point between the early Left League and the late Left League. The controversy started with Hu Qiuyuan’s “A Dog’s Theory of Literature and Art”, and then Su Wen also took the same line. This aroused the opposition of Feng Xuefeng, Qian Xingcun, and Qu Qiubai of the Left League, and then Lu Xun also joined in the controversy and published *On the “Third Kind of Man”* and “On the “Third Kind of Man”. Later, Mao Dun, who was then the administrative secretary of the Left League, also told Xia Yan and others, “If we exclude petty-bourgeois writers, the Left League will not be able to develop, and the tone of criticizing the ‘Third Kind of People’ is almost the same as that of criticizing my book *From Guling to Tokyo*. The criticism of the ‘Third Man’ is similar to the criticism of my ‘*From Guling to Tokyo*’.”⁵ At the center of this debate remains the question of “the relationship between literature and politics and the attitude of revolutionary literary artists toward petty-bourgeois writers.”⁶ At the initiative of Qu Qiubai, the Left League published “*New Tasks in Chinese Proletarian Revolutionary Literature*” in November 1931, which revised the previous attitude towards petty-bourgeois artists and was regarded as a turnaround in the later period of the Left League. However, Xia Yan argued that Zhang Wentian’s *Shut-Doorism on the Literary and Artistic Fronts and On Our Propaganda and Agitation Work*, published in 1932 under the pseudonym ‘Gete’, were the milestones of the Left League’s break from its “Leftist” tendency.” This ideological breakthrough opened the way for the literary line and literary creation of the League, which made the literary creation of the League no longer confined to a narrow range of subjects, and the alliance with the petty-bourgeois literary artists also strengthened the revolutionary power of the League in literature and art. The expansion of the contents and subjects of literary creation also made the practice of popularization of literature and art clear. The expansion of the scope of popularization was not only confined to the variety of subjects of literary creation, but also, more importantly, to the expansion of revolutionary solidarity, which went beyond the self-enclosure of a single class to the revolution of the whole society. As in Lu Xun’s early controversies, he used a dialectical perspective to guide the revolutionary youth, but in return he was verbally attacked. However, the young revolutionaries like Xia Yan finally realized years later that “they were in a hurry to form a system out of their scanty knowledge and put it into unlimited faith.”⁷ However, it was the revolutionary youths who used the doctrine as a simple explanation of all history and society, and made it the only thing they could do. They also ignored the leftist ideology that Lu Xun opposed as “the only one”, abandoned their own sectarianism, and practiced dogma in isolation from reality. Behind all this was the idea of pluralism, openness, and mutual assistance to the revolutionary youth. In this way,

³ Xia, Y. (1985). *Record of Leisurely Searching for Old Dreams*, Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, p. 146.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

the late Left League's artistic and literary creations realized the combination of revolution and life, as well as the combination of the private sphere and the public space.

3. The Gap in the Private Sphere: Doors, Windows and Public Discourse

The private sphere is defined by Uvindoğan as “a set of objects, experiences, and activities. These objects, experiences and activities belong to an individual subject who is independent of the social whole. By the social whole, we can mean either the State or the family.”⁸ But the whole needs a space to carry its abstract meaning. Therefore, in this paper, the theorist regards it as a “living area outside the public space”. Whether it is a pavilion or a detached house, in general it is a living area separated from the public space as mentioned above. Therefore, doors and windows create a gap in private space, thereby becoming a link between private and public spheres.

The door as a boundary between inside and outside can, on the one hand, indicate that the private sphere can be used as a way to ignore the threat of the secular world outside, but on the other hand, it also indicates that the private sphere needs to be artificially divided, and that it is not a stable space in itself. There is a division between the front door and the back door. If the front door is a cut-off from the public world, the back door is more hidden, often at the intersection of identity, emotion and morality. Moral self-recognition is often based on a shift in identity between the public and the private. Lu Xun's comment on A-Jin in “But this is none of my business. Unfortunately, the back door of her master's house was diagonally opposite to my front door, so I always shouted, ‘Ah Jin, Ah Jin! I was always a little affected, sometimes I couldn't finish my articles, sometimes I would even write the word ‘Jin’ on my manuscripts.”⁹ When someone else's back door is opposite to one's front door, the sense of self is often squeezed by the public. As a foreigner's maid, Ah Jin can only enter and exit through the back door, but she is facing the author's front door. The private and the public are now transformed into a confrontation between the Chinese and the Western nations, and personal identity is transformed into national identity. Lu Xun felt in “A Jin” that “it was even more unfortunate that I had to walk under her sunbed to get in and out of her house, and she didn't like to walk up the stairs, and bamboo poles, planks, and other things often fell straight down from the sunbed, so that I had to be very careful when I walked by, and look first to see if this A Jin was on top of the sunbed, and if she was, I had to go around a little farther. Naturally, this was mostly because I was too timid and valued my own life too much; but we also had to think that her master was a foreigner, and it would not be a problem for her to be beaten to a bloody pulp, and even if she were to die, there would be no use in opening a hometown association or sending telegrams, and I don't think that I would be able to open a hometown association either.”¹⁰ At this point, the perception of whether one still has to avoid going away is manifested in the dwarfing of national identity, revealing a kind of national backwardness, shame and self-deprecation.

The vulnerability of the private sphere lies in the fact that the slightest talk about things “outside the door” will immediately emphasize the two very different worlds inside and outside the door. In A Jin, the author finally writes because of A Jin's “alley fight”: “I have never believed that Zhaojun's departure from the fortress would secure Han, or that Mulan's enlistment in the army would protect Sui; nor do I believe in the old sayings of Daji's demise in Yin, Xi Shi's swamping of Wu, or Yang Fei's disruption of the Tang Dynasty. I thought that in a male-dominated society, women would never have such great power, and the responsibility for the rise and fall should be borne by men. However, male authors have always put the blame of the great crime of defeat on women, which is really a worthless man with no talent.”¹¹ The public space naturally wraps up the private space, pointing to the narration of the war situation. At this point, the dual identities of the characters are also constructed, with A Jin transforming from a maid into a “queen” with the ability to subvert the government by causing “chaos” rather than “doing nothing”. In Xia Yan's play A Corner of the Metropolis, the beginning of the play is set in a “private area” such as a dancer's residence in a lower-middle class residential area in the middle district of Shanghai, “in front of which the windows are tightly covered by richly colored draperies, and a ray of sunlight comes in through a crack in the draperies.”¹² The crack in the window opens the passage

⁸ Owen, S. (n.d.). *The End of the Chinese Middle Ages* [M]. Cited in Yang, X. S. (2009). *Transformations of the Private Sphere: Gardens and Play in Tang-Song Poetry* [M]. Jiangsu People's Publishing House, p. 88.

⁹ Lu, X. (2005). “A Jin”. In *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (Volume 6, Qiejiating Zawen (Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Erji (Second Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Mo Bian (Final Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters)) [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, p. 205.

¹⁰ Lu, X. (2005). “A Jin”. In *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (Volume 6, Qiejiating Zawen (Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Erji (Second Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Mo Bian (Final Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters)) [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, p. 205.

¹¹ Lu, X. (2005). “A Jin”. In *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (Volume 6, Qiejiating Zawen (Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Erji (Second Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Mo Bian (Final Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters)) [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, p. 208.

¹² Xia, Y., Huilin, H. and Shaowu, S. (Eds.). (1984). *The Collected Plays of Xia Yan* (Volume 1) [M]. Beijing: China Theatre Press, p. 3.

between the private sphere and the public space. While the conversation in the room has been centered on the private relationship between the dancer and her boyfriend, the knocking on the door breaks the atmosphere, and the neighbor's entrance invades the private sphere into the public space. The neighbor answers the dancer's questions about the war abroad and the decline of the dance business, and reads the dancer from "The Declaration," "The News," "The People's Daily," and "The Social Daily" to her: "The first is the world's general situation. Meanwhile, the Italian army was recognized by the League of Nations as an international police force sent by the international community.....". Then they talked about "local" news, and when it came to the dancing business. A neighbor asked, "How was the flood relief dance last night?" The dancer said, "People who go to the dance floor get a headache when they see words like flood or national tragedy!"¹³ Then he added the dancer's lipstick, "Rouge of foreign goods, please refrain from using it in the future."¹⁴ The private sphere is also filled with war, national tragedy, and national discourse.

Each person who enters through the door seems to bring public discourse into private space. The "reflection" and reorganization of the private sphere is connected to the translation of the rule of the body and the rule of the state. The basic philosophical concept of "cultivating one's body, aligning one's family, ruling the country, and leveling the world," as traditionally recognized in China, is crucial in the transition between the private sphere and the public space. The body, which moves between private and public space, also receives attention. When the dancer's brother comes home from school, he says, "I have to do the Scout's outfit," and "I'll fail if I don't join the gymnastics class."¹⁵ "The emphasis on the private nature of the body in the May Fourth period became a vehicle for national and class discourse in the 1930s. The clothing worn on the body and the identity it represented also brought political discourse into the private sphere. Scouting and gymnastics symbolized the prolongation of the crisis of the "sick man" and "weak nation" that had characterized the country's demise since the Opium War in the late Qing Dynasty. "It is no longer the emperor's state that the body fights for, but through the fusion of the concepts of private and public, the private body and the public state become one, the body defends the body itself."¹⁶ As well as when reading from a textbook: "The northeastern part of the country is bounded by the three eastern provinces, the Russian Eastern Seaboard Province, and the Japanese-administered Koreas"¹⁷ A similar scene occurs in *Under the Roof of Shanghai*, where the play ends with a children's song: "I'm not afraid, I'm not afraid! I'm not afraid, I'm not afraid! We're all brave little dolls, let's unite to save the country! Save the country!"¹⁸ Thus, the private sphere became the place where the discourse of the nation-state grew.

Window is the way and path for individuals to link to the public space on their own initiative, and it is subjectively limited. By framing the limited public space through the window and adding one's own subjectivity, one accomplishes the subjective construction, envisioning, criticizing and reflecting on public things. As the saying goes, framing the public, reflecting the public. Lu Xun wrote in "A Jin": "Suddenly I heard someone whispering on the road, though I couldn't hear him clearly, but it wasn't A Jin, and it certainly wasn't me. I thought to myself, "Who else would be calling at this hour of the night? At the same time, I stood up and pushed open the window of the building to look, but I saw a man standing looking at the window of Ah Kim's embroidery pavilion. He did not see me. I regretted my rashness, and was about to close the window and return, when the small window opening diagonally across the street showed the upper body of Ah Kim, and immediately saw me, said an unknown word to the man, pointed his hand at me, and waved his hand again, and the man ran away with a big stride. I am very uncomfortable, as if I have done something wrong, the book can not be translated, and thought: in the future, always mind your own business, to be refined to the mountains crumble in front of the color unchanged, bombs fall on the side and body unchanged!"¹⁹ The author's view from the window is undoubtedly private because it is an extension of the view from the private sphere. This is the case with Akin's alley fight. The author's portrayal of Akin's life usually takes the form of an "other narrative". The author's account of Akin's "alley fight" is a framing of the author's vision from the private sphere, "and framing is a way of observing and controlling things". Because many elements in the real world are often disorganized, but the line of sight with the limited slit of the "window", the public space into a linear activity composed of two points, to extract the

¹³ Xia, Y., Huilin, H., & Shaowu, S. (Eds.). (1984). *The Collected Plays of Xia Yan (Volume 1)* [M]. Beijing: China Theatre Press, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Lu, W. T. (2012). *German Romanticism and Chinese Literature* [D]. Wuhan University.

¹⁷ Xia, Y., Huilin, H., & Shaowu, S. (Eds.). (1984). *The Collected Plays of Xia Yan (Volume 1)* [M]. Beijing: China Theatre Press, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁹ Lu, X. (2005). "A Jin". In *Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 6, Qiejiating Zawen (Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Erji (Second Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Mo Bian (Final Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters))* [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, p. 206.

meaningful elements, and connect them into an orderly, unified and rich in meaning ideological phenomenon, and belongs uniquely to the author. It is the author's "private" one. Thus, the "alley fight" in Akin, under the author's chain, is injected with the meaning of war metaphor, "The alley fight was very fast, and in the morning, so there were not many observers, and the winning and losing armies went their separate ways, and the world was temporarily at peace. But I was still uneasy, for I had heard it said that the so-called 'peace' was only the time between two wars."²⁰ It refers to the inevitable disillusionment of the Japanese army's step-by-step encroachment into the country in search of a restful sleep.

At the same time, the scene is a plot framed by the window, or a public space framed by the window, and thus the "landscape" is structured and contained by the window. It is worth noting, however, that the window also serves as a "double intermediary" through which Akin and his lover can see the author in the private sphere. While the private frames the public space through the window to construct the first level of public space, the public space "reflects" the private sphere through the window to include the private sphere within the scope of the public space. This will make the individuals in the private sphere produce a mirror reflection of "reflection". This mirror reflection encompasses the dual attributes of public and private at the same time. This is also a reflection of the period in which the author feels that he has done something wrong. It seems that the landscape of "reflection" gives birth to a kind of moral self-identification. At the same time, this discernment is also used in public, pointing to the irony of "bombs falling on one's side, but not one's heart", which seems to be a sharpening of one's own morality, but in fact is a critique of public morality. It is a satire on the national government, which was caught in the fire of war and was invaded but did not resist. By now, the private sphere has become a spatial area that has been "invaded" by the public, linked to politics and the nation-state, and has the attribute of publicization.

4. "Middle Hidden": Ethnic Discourse in Civic Life

The Concession is a concentrated manifestation of modern Shanghai's urban culture and landscape, with a developed commercial economy, industrial factories, and a large community of citizens. However, the Concession itself is an "island", and as a private sphere, the residences within the Concession and the Shanghai Concession are spaces of meaning with the same attributes. Whether it was a place to stay away from politics, to escape the fire of artillery, or to survive, the Concession seems to have provided, in addition to its colonial attributes, an area for revolutionaries, intellectuals, and citizens to "live in seclusion". The same is true of the "Pavilion". The literati who lived in the Shanghai Concession also had the attribute of seclusion. Though different from what we used to think of as the "seclusion" of the intellectuals who left the temple and returned to nature, there are similarities. But there are similarities. The traditional Chinese seclusion often has two levels: the big seclusion in the city and the small seclusion in the countryside. However, the rented world is different from the city, because the rented world itself is a "heterogeneous space", which has the characteristic of being separated from politics. At the same time, the literati and revolutionaries could carry out their political and revolutionary activities in the tenement, which had the spiritual transcendence of being hidden in the city, and those literati and revolutionaries living in the pavilions had a broader social movement in mind. On the other hand, they were different from those who chose to live in the countryside in order to keep themselves clean.

The Tseung Kwan O provided the literati with the space to live in "medium seclusion," making it possible for them to have a private sphere in the city. This "middle seclusion" in the pavilions of the Concession could not only maintain the spiritual transcendence of active connection with politics, but also enjoy an abundant material life. Therefore, it is possible to summarize the political, economic, interpersonal and social factors that satisfied the left-wing literati's "middle seclusion" in the pavilions of the Shanghai Concession. The Concession was like an independent society, a "country within a country", where the celebrities of the time were gathered. Together with the many public spaces, such as pubs, cafes, parks, department stores, movie cinemas, etc., the interpersonal interactions of the literati living in the Concession were more varied and rich, and together they created a "cityscape" of the Shanghai Concession. Therefore, it can be said that the literati living in the pavilions of the Shanghai Concession, no matter active or passive, were indeed in a state of "middle seclusion", not only in relation to the revolution and politics, but also in relation to the actual material needs of the literati. The choice between returning home and staying in Shanghai became an inherent contradiction, and this contradiction was reconciled in the "hidden" civic lifestyle and field, where they could enjoy the reputation of cultural celebrities on the one hand, and the cultural, economic, and personal security guarantees of urban life on the other.

²⁰ Lu, X. (2005). "A Jin". In Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 6, Qiejiating Zawen (Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Erji (Second Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Mo Bian (Final Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters)) [M]. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, p. 208.

The “middle hidden” transcends the narrow spiritual realm and emphasizes a moral flexibility. The private sphere is loaded with the citizen’s life, providing space for popularized practice, while the public sphere corresponds to the national discourse, and the two are coupled. Xia Yan’s *Under the Roof of Shanghai*, *A Corner of the Metropolis*, and Lu Xun’s *A Jin* all deal with the “re-assessment” between marginalized characters and intellectuals. In *Under the Roof of Shanghai*, Zhao’s wife has a problem with Shi Xiaobao, a “cheap modern young woman” who lives in the front building, thinking that the money she earns is not clear, and calling her “shameless”. But as an intellectual Zhao Zhenyu said, “This can not be blamed on her ah, this is also for life ah,……. No family property, no skills, can not earn money, you want her three chastity, this is not too ……”.²¹ Similarly, the dancer and the neighbor in “*A Corner of the City*” seem to play the same role. And the author of “*A Jin*” makes this comment at the end: “In the past, Confucius “knew the fate of heaven at fifty”, but for a mere *A Jin*, I even have a new doubt about the personnel, although saints and mortals can not be compared, but it can also be seen that the greatness of the *A Jin*, Ah Jin’s formidable power and my utter powerlessness are thereby laid bare.”²² “删掉, and I can not be full of it. 改为 Jin’s formidable power and my utter powerlessness are thereby laid bare.” Unlike the past contradiction between the “dancer” who “doesn’t know the hatred of the dead country” and the rule of the country, when the public discourse enters the private sphere, the “modern girl” is also a part of the public. When the public discourse enters the private sphere, the “modern girl” is also a member of the masses, and becomes the bearer of the national discourse and the class discourse. The spirit of this reality of life, as a concentrated expression of the connotation of “*Under the Roof of Shanghai*”, is not only manifested in the family like the Huang family, who came to the city from the countryside and struggled to survive, or in the attic of Li Lingbei, who lived in the attic because his son lost his life in the revolution, or in the landlord, Lin Zhicheng, with his wife, Yang Caiyu, and his ex-husband, Kuangfu, who had been in prison for ten years for his participation in the revolution. All these people, with different identities and experiences, live under the same roof.

It is worth noting, however, that most of the private writings of Shanghai’s left-wing writers have taken the national, class and political discourses of the public sphere as their core and direct expression. Although the scene of public life is used as the scene of the narrative of the works, it is indisputable that the writing in the private sphere is a kind of “publicized” private space, implanted with all kinds of revolution, politics and other public narratives, so that the readers inadvertently, or metaphorically, potentially feel the wave of revolution and social change. For example, in *Under the Roof of Shanghai*, Li Lingbei, whose son was killed in the revolution, suffers from mental problems. As a result, he suffers from mental problems, imagines that his son is a big official, and hums the song “*Li Lingbei*” every day. The intellectual Zhao Zhenyu, as the main source of “public information”, talks a lot about “the state”, “society”, “neighboring wars”, “the country”, “society”, “wars”, “wars”, “wars”, “wars”, “wars”, “wars”, “wars”, “wars” and “wars”. The wars of neighboring countries”. Lin Zhicheng, as a good friend of revolutionary Kuangfu, also recounts what happened to the revolutionaries after the revolution through his memories. The private lane becomes a “publicized” narrative space due to the identity of each individual, and in their emotional entanglements with each other, they express economic difficulties, urban-rural conflicts, class differences, wars, social problems, and revolutionary narratives. The most important of these is the emotional entanglement of Lin Zhicheng, Kuangfu and Liu Caiyu. The moral flexibility lies in the fact that, instead of expressing the passion, tragedy and determination of the May Fourth revolutionaries, the author writes about the reality “after the revolution”. Lin Zhicheng said to Kuangfu, who was released from prison, “Those who were on the same case with you have been waiting for news of you for three years.” “Every time I see Pao Zhen, I always think to myself that I must protect her, so that she can go to school and continue with your ambition.”²³ In this way, the author focuses on the life after the revolution, which has never been envisioned. This also constructs a new value system, and provides an explainable logic for Liu Caiyun’s dilemma of facing her ex-husband Kuangfu and Liu Zhicheng, who has lived with her for ten years, and Kuangfu’s choice to run away in order to fulfill Lin Zhicheng and Liu Caiyun. It is this fusion of the private sphere and public events that makes their revolutionary narratives more relevant to the reality, more attentive to the most subtle and deep changes in the social changes, and also provides a more diversified and open form of revolution.

The seeming plurality of ideas in the public sphere has not led to greater openness and integration of the human spirit, but rather to greater polarization and homogenization of individuals. As a result, groups in the public sphere have been divided into more subtle classes and more intense conflicts have arisen. It is precisely in the private sphere, in the

²¹ Xia, Y., Huilin, H. and Shaowu, S. (Eds.). (1984). *The Collected Plays of Xia Yan (Volume 1)* [M]. Beijing: China Theatre Press, p. 192.

²² Lu, X. (2005). “*A Jin*”. In *Complete Works of Lu Xun (Volume 6, Qiejiating Zawen (Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Erji (Second Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters), Qiejiating Zawen Mo Bian (Final Series of Essays from the Semi - Colonial Quarters))* [M]. Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, p. 209.

²³ Xia, Y., Huilin, H. and Shaowu, S. (Eds.). (1984). *The Collected Plays of Xia Yan (Volume 1)* [M]. Beijing: China Theatre Press, p. 210.

living space far away from politics, such as the lane of “Under the Roof of Shanghai”, or Ajin at Lu Xun’s front door, or the corner of the metropolis, that the wisdom of pluralistic civic life lies. Those groups that have been trying to save the society, to reform it, lack sufficient political imagination and political wisdom, which is precisely formed in the private sphere as a place of life. Although it seems to be the life of various ordinary people, it is still necessary to be able to deal with various relationships in such a complicated environment, and to express the differences, contradictions, struggles, and harmonies among people. In the private sphere, the complex but orderly living pattern, the diversified lifestyles, and the diverse collection of people, on the contrary, form a unity of the citizen’s existence and inner strength. The intersection and mutual embedding of the private sphere and the public space is important because of the difference in the ability to distinguish from family morality to public morality, realizing the transition from the radical spirit of revolutionary pragmatism to the realistic spirit of life, and from class discourse to national discourse through realism. Moreover, in this spirit of living reality, a unique moral and value system is established, which covers the basic logic of popularization and nationalization.

5. Conclusion

The boundary between public and private is not static, but often shifts, usually in response to ideology, social trends and historical events. The hierarchical and sequential order of the public-private relationship led private space to give way to public space in the 1930s, and private space became “publicized” space. There are two modes of dealing with public-private relations: on the one hand, there is the order of precedence, i.e., public before private, or the private giving way to the public, and on the other hand, there is the mode of understanding the two as separate from each other, in which the public has been publicized, but the “public” has not taken the place of the “private”. Although we regard public space as a symbol of modern urban civilization, it has been given a place to carry a variety of public discourses. However, in some corners of the city, in some private areas, there are a large number of active people and a variety of lifestyles, and this is where the discourse can take root. Under the Roof of Shanghai”, “A Corner of the Metropolis” and “A Jin” of the later Left League writers all show the value of the private sphere, and their works not only reflect the interests of the civic class and the petit bourgeoisie, but also the cultural field of urban life, and even embed the background of political and social reforms in them, and the shaping of all groups of people is no longer confined to a certain group of people, but also to a certain group of people, which is no longer confined to a certain group of people. The shaping of all groups is no longer confined to the “individual” group, but is directed towards the “group” society. In this sense there is an overlap and displacement with the nation, and the revolution draws on the power of the nation through the communal belonging of social groups. Although the private sphere is often invaded by the public discourse, the private sphere offers more moral flexibility when it carries the public discourse on an emotional basis. This moral flexibility is the logic of the “unity” of the private sphere, which makes class discourse overlap with national discourse in the practice of massification.

Funding

This Research are supported by “Analysis of the Evolution and Characteristics of Higher Normal Education Thought in Modern China” (Southwest University, Project Number: SWUB13014).

Cite this article as: Juanjuan Liu and Zhaoyang Wang (2025). National Discourse in Civic Life: ‘Publicized’ Narratives of the Private Sphere in Late Left-Wing Writers. *African Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(1), 164-171. <https://doi.org/10.51483/AFJHSS.5.1.2025.164-171>.