

# [Breaching of mao china in ha jin’s ‘in the pond’](https://assignbuster.com/breaching-of-mao-china-in-ha-jins-in-the-pond/)

Ha Jin’s In the Pond is a tactful yet an oscillation between subtle and violent upheaval delineation of the decadent post Mao-China in a pro communist setting repleted with shades of corruption. Jin meticulously captures the panoramic view of the unscrupulous China which witnesses the shuddering and decimation of the brawny humanitarian structures that once dominated the country. The strain in the thread of the religious fabric of China by the brutal intervention of forces tainting not just the rudimentary principles but also the fundamental belief system held by the people of China.

Maoism or Mao Zedong Thought is a political theory disseminated by the teachings Mao Zedong, a Chinese political figurehead. Deemed as anti-Revisionist exemplar of Marxism-Leninism, a resistance to attempt to alter, revise and desert the fundamentals of revolutionary theory and practice in a communist setting by its followers called Maoists. The theory was constructed as a way of propagating political and military ideology of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and as a fuel to spread revolutionary movements around the world. The theory emphasized that peasants should be a significant insurgent class in China contrary to the bourgeoisie, and industrial working class and that the peasants are more suited to construct a revolutionary and socialist society in China.

After the Sino-China war ceased in 1945, Chinese Civil War took place in which the Chinese Communist Party overthrew the Republic of China which was led by Kuomintang followed by the establishment of People’s Republic of China (PRC) which was vaguely based on ‘ Mainland China’. With the declaration of PRC, Mao primary target was the equal division of land and this novice communist belief clashed with the puritanical views of the complete landlord ownerships of the farmlands. With the subversion of this rigid complete ownership or the stark capitalist society, Mao Zedong further expanded his attempt to eradicate the epidemic of Capitalism in China. Mao vision of a socialist community as a brawny ideology that would elevate China not just politically but also on an economic scale. Maoism, which was formed as a theory of resistance, stood as an opposition to not just the contemporary political theories such as Marxist-Leninism but it also breached the powerful structures of religious beliefs of communities in China by challenging the very roots of its existence and propagation. Religious teachings including Confucianism, Taoism and teachings of various people such as Buddha.

In the Pond by Ha Jin witnesses the tempestuous collision of the pro Mao China studded with the heavily communist setting and the parallel value system moving in a preceding way by delving each and every value and going back to the very embryonic version scrutinizing the rudimentary structure. The novel is embedded with these value systems ranging from Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism in the colossal communist arena struggling to survive. Confucianism or Ruism can be described as a religion, a philosophy, a tradition keeping on the forefronts the humanitarian or rationalistic approach, a way of administrating or in an elucidated form, a way of life. It can be traced from the archaic teachings of one of the greatest Chinese philosopher Confucius. This philosophy initially stemmed and developed from what later came to be known as Hundred Schools of Thought. Confucius who lived during 551- 479 BCE was considered as a re-transmitter of the values of Zhou dynasty which he disseminated in his life time. With his strong resemblance to the Taoist culture, both the teachings are kept at close proximity to each other.

On a humanitarian and rationalistic base, the basic principles of Confucianism emphasizes on the importance of family and social harmony or Dharma in Hindu mythology. It discreet itself from the materialistic and superficiality keeping the humanism as the core value of Confucianism. It basically accentuates the prosaic activities of human life highlighting mainly the relationship between humans as they are fundamental source for the expression of genuine human nature known as ‘ xing’, which further acts as an anchorage in Heaven (Tian) and respect for spirits and gods (shen). In the Pond takes a subtle dig at the pro Mao China, when the very roots for which Mao Zedong subverted the principal and elemental system of China. Ha Jin’s portrayal of the novel’s protagonist Shao Bin tormented by the mundane distress, struggle and the incessant effort to elevate his position from a prosaic manifestation of a character to a larger than life one. His stratagems to expose the corruption of the leaders Secretary Liu and Director Ma. The novel is laid meticulously in a workplace called the Harvest Fertilizer Plant and he trying his best to accommodate his wife, Meilan and his two years old daughter in a room there. But due to the cheap tricks and forgery he always ends up getting nothing. His portrayal as an amateur painter and calligrapher aids him to expose the fractured system and the fissures and breaches existing in it.

In the Pond is a discreet microcosmic exemplar of the macrocosm communist China. Jin tactfully raise the curtains from a concealed gateway and giving a peek in the life of the ordinary people amidst the heavily communist setting and the cultural revolution in China. The Cultural Revolution or the The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, a sociopolitical movement which was set in to motion by the leader of People’s Republic of China, Mao Zedong. This movement marked the returning of Zedong and congealing his position further after the bizarre ramifications of his old draconian campaign, Great Leap Forward. The aim of this campaign was to transcend China making it socially and economically sound and to push it in the transition gyre and rapidly transform it from agrarian society to a socialist one through industrialization and collectivization.

Jin sketches the murky images of the commune China by constraining it in a small town called Dismount Fort. The novel is set in 1977, a year later after the Cultural Revolution ended. Jin through his remarkable writing skills tries to incorporate the tainted smudged area and the ramifications resulting in the breaches and the fissures in China. The obscure pictures becomes clear after the economic conditions of the protagonist and people living there start surfacing exposing the corrupted and tarnished working conditions. One of the instance from the novel is when Shao Bin writes a letter accusing Director Ma and secretary Liu for lacking transparency in the system.

“ Where is the communist conscience? Why are they more vicious and more avaricious than landowners and capitalists in the old china? Should they still remain in the Party?” (35)

The reservations and questions raised by the protagonist Shao Bin gives an unambiguous insight in a China outside the fiction which narrates a completely distorted story of the corruption prevailing in the country. The fundamental aim of the Cultural Revolution was to preserve and nurture the genuine Communist ideology in China by purging the remnants of Capitalists and traditional China, which once defined the country as an agrarian community. The hidden motive behind this resistance of Capitalism in China was to reimpose the Maoist ideology of a socialist country. The novel can be said as a record of all the outcomes of the Great Leap Forward and during the Cultural Revolution as it is set against the backdrop of these humongous and momentous movements.

Ha Jin assimilation of of the Cultural Revolution and Mao Zedong Thought is spiraling in a positive compass in his novel. The author pro Mao setting just exposes the remnants of Capitalism in the town. It can be said that the Ha Jin consciously tries to skip the interim of the Great Leap Forward and being cryptic about it when it resulted in one of the most draconian and on a massive mass killing of humans in millions which a century has ever seen. One of the instances in the novel when the protagonist Shao Bin idealizes the ideology of Mao Zedong and tries to disseminate his teachings through his calligraphy and art.

“ In his mind Chairman Mao’s instruction began reverberating: “ The boundless joy in fighting Heaven, the boundless joy in fighting Earth, the boundless joy in fighting Man!” Those words, representing the mettle of the proletariat, warmed Bin’s heart and invigorated his blood” (73)

Although the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution fractured China politically and had a negative impact on the economy of the country with some of its strategies that were savage and regressive, the revolution as a whole brought the country to a uniform and homogenous state of mind. The congruency in the psychology of people invigorated the country to a larger extent. Jin delineated a China which was set in a Post Mao setting repleted with images and scenarios where Capitalism, landowners and primitive ways are striving hard to surface again while the Mao Zedong ideology with a greater inclination towards the Marxist Philosophy and his regime had just ended and still holds stronger influence on people.

n the Pond celebrates Mao Zedong ideology and construct itself strengthening People’s Republic of China’s the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution that transformed China from politically and economically fragile nation to something powerful and brawny. Even the leaders who are portrayed as antagonists and coming out as closeted Capitalists in the commune and socialist society. Director Ma and Secretary Liu are still following the teachings of the Mao government. The antagonists though are violating the crux reason behind the commune China; cannot really eliminate or detach themselves from it. One such instance in the novel is when Director Ma is reacting when the painting by Shao Bin reaches the newspaper.

“ This is not our fault. When we were young, the government encouraged us to make babies, the more the better, and there was no family planning at that time. Chairman Mao announced at the conference, ‘ Among all things in the world the most precious are human beings.’” (27)

The recurring mention of Chairman Mao and his teachings in a positive way throughout the novel, to some extent reveals the political thought process of the writer himself. The writer’s political views becomes more clear as the novel proceeds. Through the protagonist Shao Bin, Jin motive to expose China withering again and preceding back to the Capitalist society where Bin is seeing struggling in Harvest Fertilizer Plant and is being tormented by the leaders exposes the tenuous state of political system China is moving towards. He tries to show new breaches, fissures and fractures in the new political system and tries to exhibit them through his artistry. Through Shao Bin calligraphy and art, he tries to incorporate the primitive and traditional ways and strategies to tackle the corruption and indecency of the leaders. Through this, he propagates the power of art forms and how China believes in the autonomous forms of art and how it is still a powerful tool to disseminate a message to a greater mass. The truth and beauty goes in a parallel concept and that’s how the indecency of leaders is revealed in the novel.

“ That night, he took out a big brush made of goat’s hair and wrote on a large piece of paper: “ Yang Chen Always Persecutes Me!”…. To him the five words looked strenuous and elegant each as big as a brick.” (57)

The infusion of conventional techniques in the Modern Post Mao China such as Calligraphy and art forms imbued in the novel acts as a primary breach or crevice. This fracture holds a significant importance due to its traditional or primitive essence. These conventional tools stood the test of time and are still strenuous enough to exist as an autonomous entity. China had always been known for its unique culture and traditions and its distinctive nature sets it apart from other countries. Jin in his novel uses archaic ways and let those tools exist in isolation celebrating not only their uniqueness but also their power. These tools though are endangered still creates a deep gash on people’s mind such as inspire them or change their opinion. One such instance was when Shao Bin went up the aisle to convey piece of art and show the fraudulent nature of leaders and change the course of many people to vote the leader in the election.

The comprehension of primitive and archaic techniques and value system in the modern Post Mao China are those very strategies that creates breaches, fissures and fractures. There is always a stench, impression or influence of these techniques on the modern carvings. These techniques have although evolved with time and have filtered during that interim, going through modifications either at a colossal level or diminutive one does not really dissipate. The novels worked on two autonomous fragments or shards oscillating between the conventional and traditional concepts when these concepts are seen as resurfacing to the crest and another one works on a modern concept of how these concepts stood the test of time and emerged with slight and large modifications. Like a pendulum Jin’s In the Pond keeps going back and forth and sometimes overlaps the concept of archaic with that of the newfangled concepts and this novel can be seen as an exemplar, a microcosm of the ramifications that are happening in the reality.

One such primitive value system assimilated by Ha Jin in the novel is the shard of Religion. This basic belief system of China. Jin embodies this demoded belief system to delineate the transgression and fractures in the Post Mao China. He renders the modified version, a filtered value system that stood the test of centuries; Confucianism and Buddhism. Religion has always been deemed as an entity which in certain ways is in a momentum to have a head on collision with the modern codes of conduct. It existence is constrained to a whole different plane with no possibility of overlapping or coinciding. Its nature is purely autonomous and therefore it clashes violently as if in a juxtaposition or conceit if it is solely brought closer without any modifications or filtered system. For Religion to smoothly glide in the different plane without distorting any conducts of the Moderns, it has to undergo a transition phase to come in sync and simultaneously offer altogether an independent choice. This transition is inevitable as the society moves in the forward motion or its puritanical codes of conduct might result in its complete extinction of the per-endangered entity. Therefore Religion harmonizes with the Modern concepts, going through modification, massive or diminutive, for its survival.

Confucianism and Buddhism are two major belief system imbued in the novel by Ha Jin. The protagonist Shao Bin and his wife Meilan time and again reiterates these traditional concepts either by getting influenced by them to purge the remnants of Capitalism or taking an inspiration to continue their task by acquiring wisdom from these sources. The rummaging and selection of values from these traditional sources in the uber modern era acts as a transgress or a breach that allows one’s way into another dimension: Religion. There are many such instances in the novel when Jin is seen invigorating the rudimentary belief systems.

“ If only they had lived in Worker’s Park, the plant’s apartment compound, which was just hundred of paces away from the waterside. These days Meilan prayed to Buddha at night, begging him to help her family get an apartment in the park soon.” (5)

The characters in the novel are seen relying on these traditional concepts and are trying to merge merge them in their daily modern lifestyle. Another instance from the novel when Shao takes inspiration from the traditional concept, a belief system of the Han Dynasty.

“ He remembered that the materialilst thinker Wang Chong of the Han Dynasty had said something about punishing the evil with the writing brush. That passage must have been in the paperback The Essence of Ancient Chinese Thought, which he had read a few weeks before.” (15)

It has been a recurring event when the protagonist Shao Bin took the inspiration from the archaic value systems before waging a war against his leaders Director Ma and Secretary Liu. He is seen reading these old texts or remembering the belief system before indulging in any of work he initiates. Jin’s artistry in the construction of his characters and rendering them by encompassing traits which either transcends them to the level of good or descends them based on their choices as bad characters. We see that these characters works on three distinctive planes. Either they are very traditional characters and represents the archaic culture and traditions. The second plane represents modern characters with traits and personality representing the values. The third plane can be called the plane of hybrid characters who exist simultaneously on the former and the latter planes or are either oscillating like a pendulum between the conventional concept and the modern concept.

Initiating with the character representing the traditional culture is Meilan. She is the wife of the protagonist Shao Bin and can be said as the stark manifestation of the Confucianism and Buddhist teachings. She preaches the teachings of Buddha and his belief system and tries to make an unadulterated fissure in the Post Mao China through her portrayal as a conventional character. She represents the old culture of China and therefore can be said as the exemplar of dying China. Another unadulterated characters who are the manifestation of Modern China or the Post Mao China are Secretary Liu and Director Ma. They are the new formed remnants of Capitalist society. These characters can be rendered as a violation of Mao Zedong Thought and therefore becomes the first and elemental choice as antagonists. They are the corrupted leaders and stand against Shao Bin as a resistance to let him elevate. These characters portray a China which is moving forward at a rapid pace.

The third plane character is Shao Bin, the protagonist himself. He is a character who moves back and forth in the archaic concept and the modern way. Once he realizes that his hold on Modern society is getting fragile, he goes back to his roots to rummage a value that helps him get justice in the Post Mao China. Shao Bin is the bond that connects two concepts, conventional, primitive and traditional one to the modern one. He is the manifestation of an Old China but strengthening it and modern China by giving a message that Modern China will remain crippled without the aid of traditional concepts. Jin author’s note of on choosing the protagonist tells about Shao Bin as a character.

“ The virtuous man has been turned into a sort of horse and there’s no author who has ridden him, urging him on with his whip or whatever comes to hand. Now I feel the time has come to make use of a rogue. So let’s harness him for a change.” (4)

The synchronicity of two autonomous shards whose existence is based solely on its ability to exist in isolation is what Ha Jin’s novel In the Pond delineates. The mechanics of these two independent fragments although exist at opposite poles and work completely on a different level, one cannot separate the other from each of them. The dichotomy shared by them s just the ramification and a reminder that a traditional concept survived the test of time even if its existence is like a parasite in nature. Jin incorporates these concepts as a way to disseminate several ideologies co exiting together, at times in harmony and at times in violations. He tries to paint a picture highlighting the breaches, transgressions and fractures in his society. Through the commune setting, he sketches a distorted portrait and express his views on the social-political and economic conditions of China and even tries to expose the obscurity in the system. This is delineated through different concepts such as the assimilation of Art and Religion, traditional concepts that are trying to connect with the Modern China in order to survive. He artistically imbues the historical facts such as Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution of China keeping it parallel with the traditional concepts. He exposes the breaches in Post Mao China through these historical facts and primitive concepts.