Ghosts and Social Critique in Yu Hua’s *The Seventh Day*

By Mark Schaefer

**Abstract**

This paper writes about Yu Hua’s latest novel, *The Seventh Day*. Taking a close reading of the novel, this paper discusses how Yu Hua explores the concepts of life, death, and ghosts, as well as how he manipulates and molds these concepts in his story. To elaborate, Chinese writers since the advent of vernacular literature have expressed the same anxious and worried sentiments about the state of Chinese society as well as the future and well-being of the Chinese people. Yu Hua has upheld this tradition through a unique narrative style in his new work, in which he gives full narrative authority to a ghost, Yang Fei. As Yang Fei, already dead, travels through the spirit world, the reader is invited to think critically about how the meanings of life and death are manipulated to elicit discussion concerning the state of Chinese society.

This paper also examines how Yu Hua makes use of his historical status in modern Chinese literature, thematic and symbolic dichotomies of narration, as well as the strategic development of the relationship between certain characters in order to expose the absurdities that he notices in society. In order to understand how he creates social critique out of his prose, this paper will also be looking at how Yu Hua reorients the current meaning-constructions around symbols representative of socioeconomic progress and normal social institutions, which he sees as deleterious to the well-being of the Chinese.