While J. D. Salinger lived a reclusive life in his New Hampshire home in the 1980s, a poor young Chinese man who was living in obscurity and yet thirsty for literary fame and success was painstakingly writing a series of short stories in a cramped apartment in Nanjing. Influenced by Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and *Nine Stories* (1953), this young man would later become one of the most prolific and renowned writers in contemporary China. His name was Su Tong.

Enchanted and inspired by Salinger’s teenage colloquial speech and sentimental adolescent perspective, Su Tong wrote his Toon Street...
Series fiction. This includes ten coming-of-age short stories, ("Memories of Mulberry Garden," "An Afternoon Incident," "The Sad Dance," "Roller Skating Away," and others) and the Bildungsroman novel *North Side Story*. Written between 1984 and 1994, the series set out to explore a group of street teens’ coming-of-age experiences during the Cultural Revolution.¹ In these stories, Su Tong captures the cultural and geographical ambience of Suzhou, a city he knew intimately, by setting the narratives on the fictional Toon Street in an unnamed southern city. Toon Street was modeled after the street on which Su Tong himself grew up. Most importantly, he relates how a group of teenaged school drop-outs struggle blindly and in vain to assert their individuality and find meaning in a society where revolutionary collectivism has overwhelmed people’s lives while leaving no space for individualist idealism, and where effective adult mentors are absent. After writing a series of works in such genres as the family saga, neo-historical stories, and stories about women and urbanites, in 2009 Su Tong returned to the coming-of-age subject again and published another Bildungsroman novel *The Boat to Redemption* with a lot of motifs evident in his previous “Tong Street Series.”²

In earlier Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo*, the young protagonists demonstrate a trajectory from rebellious modern students, to progressive new youth, to radical revolutionary youth, and finally to tamed socialist youth. This trajectory more or less conforms to the historical course of twentieth-century China. However, the teenagers in Su Tong’s narratives are doomed fallen youth in a country that often appears to be on the verge of falling off of an historical cliff. In this chapter, Su Tong’s coming-of-age narratives will be examined in great detail in order to illustrate how he presents the psychological and spiritual course of youth during the chaotic era of the Cultural Revolution—particularly the autonomy and subjectivity that the dissatisfied and rebellious youth often assert, along with the failure of youth to achieve maturity while coming of age in an anti-individualistic society that lacks good role models. These elements turn Su Tong’s coming-of-age narratives into a sly parody of both earlier Chinese *chengzhang xiaoshuo*

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¹ Su Tong, “Xunzhao dengsheng” [Groping for the lamp switch], in *Zhishang meinü* [Beauty on paper] (Taipei: Maitian chuban gufen youxian gongsi, 2000), 140.