

Chapter 1

Introduction

“The queen of crime,” “the mistress of fair deceit,” and “the first lady of crime” are just a few of the epithets used to describe the British detective fiction writer—Agatha Christie. Her detective fictions span from 1920 to 1976, an age developing from pre-industrial society, industrial society, to (post-industrial) risk society.¹ My dissertation will chiefly focus on her detective fictions published after 1940, especially from 1950s to 1970s—a period when Ulrich Beck notices a social reality changing from an industrial society to a post-industrial risk society. The “modernity”² in a post-industrial risk society is no more restricted to a narrow definition as a homogenizing and normalizing process manipulated by a dominant social order. To Ulrich Beck, a risk society characterizes a social discourse of “reflexive modernization” (1994, 2) and social masses’ rising anxiety and sense of uncertainty toward their daily life experience in which the spatio-temporal perceptions

¹ Ulrich Beck, in discussing the rise of a risk society from an industrial society, defines three distinctive epochs; they are “pre-industrial society” (traditional society, the societal development before the industrialization in the 20th century), “industrial society” (first modernity) and “risk society” (second modernity). Beck regards the dominant social order of an industrial society as a kind of industrial/rational modernity. Christie’s novels correspond to the time background of Beck’s development of a social reality in terms of industrializing/modernizing process. Thus, the discussion of Christie’s works can be also roughly divided into three periods—the pre-industrialized age (1920s-1930s), industrialized age (1940s-1960s), and post-industrialized age (after 1960s). Each period may respectively highlight a pre-modernizing, modernizing, and high development of a modernizing process. I focus the study of Christie’s novels between 1940s and 1950s (the industrialized age) and mention several novels in the early or later (high) development of this industrializing/modernizing process in a social reality in order to examine the rising, dominance, and declining of the industrialized modernity. For the rising of a risk society, please see Beck’s *Risk Society: Toward A New Modernity*, London: Sage, 1992 and “The Reinvention of Politics: Toward A Theory of Reflexive Modernization.” Eds. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge, Politic Press, 1994, 1-55.

² Modernity is a term that refers to the modern era. For historians, the Early Modern Period refers to the period roughly from 1500 to 1800. The early development of industrialization in the 19th century marks a new rising of modernity. The later industrialization in the 20th century forms another emergence of social/ cultural trend of modernity. In my discussion of the issue of modernity in Christie’s works, I roughly distinguish the development of the modernity in the 20th century, basing on three periods of industrialization growth. Henceforth, the industrialized age (1940s-1960s) also presents the modern period, and the pre-industrialized age (1920s-1930s) denotes the pre-modern era. Finally, the post-industrialized age (after 1960s) indicates the post-modern epoch. For more information, please visit the available FTP: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernity>.

also become more and more abstract. Anthony Giddens actually observes that the so-called *modernity* “is essentially a post-traditional order,” which lies in a “transformation of time and space, coupling with the disembedding mechanism” (1991, 20). These social changes, under the impact of industrialization, urbanization, and trans-national circulation of capital flux, enable social masses to conceive a new aesthetic of cognitive mapping out of a new perception of space and time as well as an ambiguous hybridity of two contrarities—the past/the present, the urban/the rural, and the classical/the modern. Social masses’ rising consciousness of these alternative spatio-temporal concepts and aesthetic ambivalence finally turns into a sort of reflexive and critical perspective, forming a social discourse of “reflexive modernity,” which scrutinizes the modernizing process of an industrialized and capitalistic society.

Christie’s detective writings are not just affected by a social background of an industrial society and later an emergent risk society but also influenced by a literary tradition of detective writing. However, her reflexive perspective of her social reality and critical metafictional writing differentiates from the writing tradition of classical detective novels, which often ends with an ultimate truth and a restoration of a stable social order. If “truth” can be regarded as a rational construction and is fabricated by a dominant social order, Christie’s scrutinizing of the rational and disciplinary control of social institutions implicates her interrogation of the truth. Viewed in this light, can she still be recognized as a classical detective writer? This study attempts to find out the answer to this question.

In classic Poesque/Holmesian detective fiction³ from late-Victorian age to 1940s, the mission of a detective, to find an absolute truth, helps consolidate a

³ Poe’s private sleuth Dupin and Doyle’s master detective Sherlock Holmes in the early detective writing of the nineteenth century, with the plot of their outstanding power of investigation and solution of crime, constitute the “pattern” of classical Poesque/Holmesian detective writing. Dupin and Holmes become the prominent figures in classical detective stories. See John G. Cawelti’s *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976. pp. 80-98.

dominant social order and guarantees a social justice. But, in later development of non-Poesque (American hard-boiled) detective novels⁴ and metaphysical detective ones,⁵ the finding of truth is not very important or even the truth dose not exist. More precisely, the development of detective novel, from early Poesque/Holmesian tradition, hard-boiled school, to metaphysical detective fiction, can exemplify this changing perspective of rational modernization.

Poe's detective stories, such as "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Roget" (1843), and "The Purloined Letter" (1844), have been described as classical detective stories, in which a detective's ratiocinating process is much emphasized for pinning down an ultimate truth of a puzzling mystery (Cawelti 81-2). The detective Auguste Dupin always highlights a rational explanation and a scientific analysis in solving suspended mysteries. Nevertheless, in Poe's detective stories, the ultimate truth in the end of these stories seems to be not very essential; instead, it is the ratiocinating method and intellectual analysis that become the focus of these stories. For instance, in the end of "The Purloined Letter," no one knows the content of the letter due to the fact that the detective hides the truth of the letter from the public. Although providing an open ending and not giving a rational truth in this story, Poe stresses the detective's intellectual ratiocination and the police's investigation (mainly conducted by a national government), both of which reveal the domination of a rational modernity. Viewed in this perspective, the early detective stories, like Poe's, affiliate with the modernization of a rational control and of a nation-state.

Conan Doyle continuously follows this Poesque tradition to write detective novels. His Sherlock Holmes is indebted a lot to Poe's Aguste Dupin. The scientific

⁴ The hard-boiled detective novelists include Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.

⁵ The metaphysical detective novelists include Thomas Pynchon, Paul Auster and many others.

investigation and rational analysis in Sherlock Holmes series detective stories are more noticeable than those in Poe's detective stories. Unlike the open ending in some Poe's writings, Doyle's detective stories often end with an ultimate truth and justice of a dominant social order. Doyle's Sherlock Holmes functions like a guardian of "official truth" and "official justice." Criminals often receive the lawful sanction under the master detective's rational investigation. Doyle, like Poe, still regards rationality and scientific knowledge as a dominating modernization of an official authority. His detective stories also provide a noteworthy relationship between detective's investigating methods and modernity.

However, Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series designate a cultural theme of urban crimes and the racial issue in British Empire. In Doyle's stories, the city seems to become the emblem of decadence and the hotbed of crimes. The urbanization of city resembles a central control based on "the nature of authority" (Twynning 20). In Doyle's stories, the city London has a double face; it is not only the power center of police authority that maintain a dominant social order but also the headquarters of underground mafia, the crime organization of the criminal mastermind—Professor Moriarty, whose organized crime undermines the stability of public security in London. Holmes's residence in 221b Baker Street and the headquarters of Scotland Yard in the city London spotlight London the center of a rational control, where the rational ratiocination is put into practice and legal strategy is enacted to send the social misfit into jail. Whereas, the criminals in Doyle's stories often hide in the dark corner of slum or in suburban area; this signifies the criminal, after a "cultural conflict,"⁶ is excluded from the authorial center of the city and marked as an

⁶ See John Twynning's *London Dispossessed: Literature and Social Space in the Early Modern City*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Twynning argues that the early modern London becomes an arena where cultural conflict takes place. After the conflict, an urban topography is formed. For example, some people with lower social class, such as prostitute and immigrant, will be dispossessed to suburban area, where gradually becomes the place of hotbed breeding crime. Thus, the urban city center forms an

expatriated social misfit, who is still under supervision by a rational control of the central city in a nation state.

Christie's writing also partakes with Doyle's trace of modernist writing in Sherlock Holmes's stories. Her police authority in central London probing the murder mysteries in a country house setting under an urbanizing process exemplify the impact of modernizing control from urban and capitalistic city toward the rural area.⁷

Moreover, like Doyle, Christie's detective novels are concerned with the security of a dominant social order by pinning down the law-violating criminal. Yet, she embraces a critical attitude toward her nation-state and a changing social order under the impact of a trans-national capitalism. In Christie's detective stories, this reflexive awareness creates a critique of the modernizing process of a dominant social order and an interrogation of the classical tradition of detective writings from Poesque/Holmesian tradition to the Golden Age.

The detective stories rise in the short stories written by Edgar Allen Poe and Conan Doyle and reach its culmination in the interwar period, the time between two world wars, the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction, in which, the investigation of crime is usually conducted by an eccentric or amateur detective who often sits in a big armchair and gives his ratiocination to a murder mystery in a country house setting.⁸ Authors like G. K. Chesterton, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ellery Queen, S. S. Van Dine, and Agatha Christie, illustrate the notable writers of *whodunit*⁹ in this period. Unlike Poe and Doyle, whose crime scenes in their stories often associate with big

authorial institution manipulating a force of social control.

⁷ This part of discussion will be mainly explored in Chapter Four.

⁸ The detective's unique and eccentric ways of ratiocination as well as criminal's misleading red herrings and false alibis in a country house setting in the Golden Age become the tradition and "model" of detective writings, providing the "cliché" for the literary using of "parody" in later development of meta-detective-stories (or metaphysical detective novels).

⁹ The whodunit is derived from "Who done it?" It is mainly referred to the mystery novel flourished in the Golden Age. It is also featured with complex plot, red herring, and investigation conducted by an eccentric and amateur detective.

city streets (in London or in Paris), these Golden Age detective novelists like to set the stage of crime in an idyllic setting of country house, where the rational control seems to be no more ensure, and consequently becomes the crime-breeding hotbed. But, the shifting setting from an urban city to a rural village also indicates an expansion of the crime into the country area with advancement of modern technology. The modern transportations provide criminals a faster path getting away from city to countryside. Also, the criminal's being good at using modern technology¹⁰ (often utilized in urban city) in order to create red herrings and false alibis in rural mansion can be characterized as an effect of an industrializing and urbanization process. The Golden Age detective novelists actually have dabbled with the theme of industrialization and urbanization in the city and in the countryside.

Raymond Williams regards the detective novel in Golden Age as a modern evolution of the English country house in a capitalist rather than a landed gentry (1973, 298-9). Actually, though most Golden Age detective novelists prefer country house setting, the owner of the country house in their novels—the rich capitalist who accumulates and invests his capital in rural area—can stand for the expansive urbanization to the countryside.¹¹ If crime can be associated with the dark side of city, then the crime in the idyllic country house can symbolize the negative impact of the urbanization on a tranquil and pastoral village, where is gradually “contaminated” and “criminalized.” Henceforth, the capitalist's country house setting in the Golden Age manifests a complicated process of industrialization and urbanization.

¹⁰ The detective writers in the so-called Golden Age period like to depict criminal's using modern technology to create (especially) false alibi. This often misguides the police's investigation. For example, the murderer in Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) (in Chapter 23) uses gramophone to design his “perfect” alibi. The criminal in S.S. Van Dine's *The Canary Murder Case* (1927) (in Chapter 29) utilizes phonograph to arrange his misguiding temporal order of committing murder.

¹¹ To David Harvey, the accumulation of capital and capital circulation lead to the elimination of spatial barrier and forms consequently the urbanization process. See his *The Urban Experience*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell Press, 1989.

As Stephen Thomas Knight points out, the Golden Age detective novels illustrate a clue-puzzle form containing “puzzle and its conceivably readable clues to interest the reader” (88). But, what is attracted to reader in these novels is the super-heroic, yet eccentric, sleuth, who examines a lot of puzzling clues with his/her talented intelligence in order to solve out all mysteries. G. K. Chesterton’s Father Brown, Dorothy L. Sayers’s Lord Peter Wimsey, Ellery Queen’s Ellery Queen,¹² S. S. Van Dine’s Philo Vance, and Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple are the instances of the outstanding figure of amateur detective in these novels. No matter how intricate and well-arranged the criminal’s scheme is, the master sleuth can always see through the criminal’s cunning mind and find out the truth.

The “Golden Age” detective novels set patterns and formulas for writing detective novels, but these patterns of detective novel finally become clichéd devices. They are criticized and prohibited by some writers like Raymond Chandler and Ronald Knox, who criticize some cliché employed by classical detective novelists. In his “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” from *Simple Art of Murder* (1928), Chandler establishes twenty rules, including “no deceptions may be placed on reader” (rule 2), “no love interest” (rule 3), “the detective himself, or official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit” (rule 4), “methods like slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic séances, are taboo” (rule 8), and “there must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed” (rule 12), as criteria of writing detective novel. Similarly, Ronald Knox’s “Ten Commandments of Detection” (1929) share lots of similarity with Chandler’s rules. His “Ten Commandments” also engulf a codification for writing detective stories, in which “the criminal should not be someone you have intentionally presented as totally

¹² The name Ellery Queen is actually the pseudo name of two cousins, Manfred B. Lee and Frederic Dannay (both also pseudonyms), as well as the pen-name used by the detective himself in his alter-ego as a mystery writer. Available FTP: www.mysterylist.com/queen.htm

trustworthy” (similar to Chandler’s rule 2), “the detective must not himself commit the crime” (Chandler’s rule 3), and “no supernatural or preternatural explanation” (Chandler’s rule 4) are overlapped with Chandler’s criteria.¹³

Although Christie mostly follows the formulas of detective stories and tends to duplicate these to her novels, she sometimes subverts this normative convention of writing detective novel in presenting lots of significant differences that smash the “rules” or “commandments” of writing detective stories. For example, Chandler’s “no deception should be placed on reader” has been challenged by Christie’s narrator-murderer in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* and *Endless Night*, in which the reader is beguiled by a narrator, who is actually the murderer in disguise. Chandler’s “no love interest” apparently falls down in Christie’s novels; she posits the subplot of romance between male and female characters into at least half of her detective novels.¹⁴ The detective in Christie’s *Curtain: Poirot’s Last Case* and police sergeant in her *Hercule Poirot’s Christmas* prove to be the murderer committing the murder by himself. This is obviously contradictory to Chandler’s rule 4—the detective or the official investigators (the police) should never turn out to be the culprit. Moreover, Christie’s dealing with many supernatural elements, such as ancestral curse, haunted house, and ouija board in séances in novels like *Endless Night*, *Peril at End House*, and *Pale Horse*, subverts the “commandment” of “no supernatural explanation.” Finally, the group-murderers in her *Murder on the Oriental Express* overturn the “one culprit” rule submitted by Chandler.

¹³ Ronald Knox actually lists more than twenty commandments, including his revised version, for writing detective stories. I just mention two of them that are repetitive with Chandler’s rules. The other commandments portray the minor and particular situations, so they are skipped in this part of discussion. [For more information, please click the available FTP: www.mysterylist.com/declog.htm](http://www.mysterylist.com/declog.htm)

¹⁴ The female detective writers in the Golden Age seem to prefer to add the subplot of love interest into their detective novels. Besides Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers is another detective writer preferring romantic subplot. Whenever the female detective Harriet Vane, in her series novels, is puzzled by unsolved mystery or caught in a dangerous situation, her lover Lord Peter Wimsey will come in time to her rescue and find out the truth of an unsolved mystery. They finally get married and become husband and wife.

The Golden Age detective novels highlight a rational control of a dominant social order by means of eliminating the social miscreants. In this sense, the modernization of a rational control established by social institutions dominates a social reality. But, this dominant social order may be akin to Harvey's "universal acceptance of a social mode" which can be undermined by "militant particularists" (2001, 193). Robert Barnard regards the village life as a kind of social mode, claiming that "beneath the surface calm of village life there lurks a seething lava of crimes, sins, oddities and other potential disruption" (80). This disruption creates a sense of the uncertainty to the stability of a rational modernity. Agatha Christie's novels, with her distrust and discontent toward a universal mode of rationality under its interactions among industrialization, capitalism, and urbanization, exhibit an uncertainty state of a social reality in wartime and postwar England.

Viewed in this perspective, the detective novelists in the Golden Age tend to posit "the detective plot in a socioeconomic context" (Hühn 453). The entanglement of social background with the detective stories seems to culminate in the American hard-boiled tradition of detective fiction, which is synchronically resonated with Christie's description of social change in England. Frederic Jameson argues that the hard-boiled detective novels reflect a social reality in American society, especially the de-centered world of Los Angeles.¹⁵ Stefano Tani notices the differentiation of hard-boiled detective novel from its classical predecessors, stating:

American city wastelands replace the idyllic countryside setting of the British detective novel, and the hard-boiled dick, a lonely hero who clings to a personal moral code, no matter how absurd his devotion to it may seem, take the place of Dupin and Sherlock Holmes. (22)

¹⁵ See Jameson's "On Raymond Chandler" Ed. Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe. *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich P, 1983. pp. 122-48.

The personal moral code exerted by a hard-boiled detective manifests that the detective hero, unlike Poe's and Doyle's, strongly distrusts the official discourse of truth and justice. The hard-boiled detective's personal truth and justice shift from Poesque/Holmesian tradition, in which a rational, static, and intellectual detective is emphasized, to non-Poesque/Holmesian (American hard-boiled) one, which features a not-so-smart, adventurous, and even decadent sleuth. This development actually produces a blending trait of Poesque/Holmesian school with hard-boiled school of detective novel in detective writings. Christie's works inherit from the formulation of Poesque/Holmesian tradition but seem to be unavoidably affected by some features of hard-boiled tradition.¹⁶ In many Christie's novels, the detective, or quasi-detective figure, clings to a personal moral code that is higher than the secular law in order to deal with criminals, ignoring the manipulation of an "official truth" and "official justice." Detective's personal truth and justice exemplify a distrust of and an uncertain sense toward the discursive practices of social institutions. This helps shape the later development of metaphysical school of detective novel, in which the rational construction of a truth and of a stable social order becomes impossible.

Poe's literary device of open ending (like that in the short story "Purloined Letters") has its revival in the development of metaphysical detective novel. In other words, the ultimate truth of a crime is not necessarily contained in this novel. This trend of novel can be exemplified by Thomas Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* and Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*, in which the gumshoe detective gets confused and disoriented because of his/her involvement in a textual labyrinth and his/her being entangled by seeking of his/her own identity. Detectives in these novels show apparent inability to decipher the mystery. As the mystery remains unsolved, the novel

¹⁶ Christie's writing is apparently under the impact of the American hard-boiled detective novels. In some of her works, like *Murder on the Oriental Express* and *One, Two Buckle My Shoes*, she even mentions and criticizes the writing convention of hard-boiled detective novels and the detective hero.

ends with a multiple and opening interpretations. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney have recognized that “[a] metaphysical detective story is a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective story convention” (2). The parodic and subversive nature of metaphysical detective novels signals a self-reflexive and self-critical narrative toward a rational modernity as well as a sense of uncertainty in the era of reflexive modernity.

These features of reflexive modernity are actually exhibited in Christie’s detective writings. She obviously inherits the Poesque/Holmesian conventions of novel writing, but her writings depart as well from this writing tradition. The formula of classical detective novel (in the Golden Age) expressed in Christie’s novels can be instanced by the device of impeded retardation (a lot of false clues and red herrings),¹⁷ the correlation between the eccentric dandy detective (Hercules Poirot) and his friend narrator (Arthur Hastings), character’s imbecility (no one, except the detective, ever suspects the real criminal), and finally the isolated and idyllic country house setting. Nevertheless, her ambiguous perspective of an official truth/justice and “modern” conceptions of space and time, along with an unusual intrusion of supernatural elements and metafictional writings, convey a significant variety from other detective writings in the Golden Age.

Agatha Christie actually presents in her novels both “repetition” of and “difference” from the normative tradition of detective writings, which, to some extent, resemble features of a social discourse of “reflexive modernity.” If it is the form, the conforming and differentiating writing formula or convention of detective novels, which associates Christie’s novels with the reflexive modernity, so does the content of her novels, which projects her reflexive consciousness of a social background of a risk

¹⁷ These narrative principles of classical detective fiction are discussed by Dennis Porter. See the article “Backward Construction and the Art of Suspense.” in Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe (Eds.), *The Poetics of Murder*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1983. 327-40.

society. Broadly speaking, most of her early detective writings in prewar period (1920s-1940s) still follow the tradition of detective writing in the Golden Age; yet, her postwar novels, with portrayals of an uncertain truth and a shaky social order, gradually reveal differential writings of detective stories. Her way of dealing with the truth resembles one of a British modernist writer Ford Madox Ford, who advocates an “Impressionist Movement” in writing a novel, thinking that all events in a novel are kind of “various unordered pictures” which confine readers to a limited perspective of reading comprehension, and they have to deduce the truth by themselves.¹⁸

When Agatha Christie passed away in 1976, she left us a huge body of work, some of which, including *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), *Murder on the Oriental Express* (1934), and *Death on the Nile* (1937), are well-known and even considered as classical detective fictions. Yet, her novels are often still treated as kitsch by some literary critics, and therefore there are few serious studies on her works in the past decades. Most of the studies of Agatha Christie’s works in the past three decades focus on the following approaches, such as moral criticism, genre study, structuralist, and feminist. John G. Cawelti in his *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (1976) applies a structuralist approach to the convention and the artful narrative form of Christie’s fictions. In Earl F. Bargainnier’s *The Gentle Art of Murder* (1980) as well as Patricia D. Maida and Nicholas B. Spornick’s *Murder She Wrote* (1982), a structuralist approach is employed again in discussing the structure of Christie’s detective fiction and the feature of Christie’s detective, criminal, plot, setting, and methods of murder.

In the 1990s, Alison Light put the study of Agatha Christie’s novels into the research of modernist form in “Agatha Christie and Conservative Modernity” (1991).

¹⁸ This reader’s seeking the truth by themselves is exemplified by Ford’s *Good Soldier* (1915), in which Ford uses a device of “unreliable narrator,” so the readers may feel befuddled and have to find out the “truth” by themselves.

To her, Christie's works evince a conservative society and a new type of modernist form. This modernist form lies in Christie's demonstrating the mixture of old culture and new one as well as a mocking tone toward a dominant social order. In Light's examination, Christie unfolds an anxiety about a new English social life and simultaneously adopts a critical stance to the dominant culture and the patriarchal tradition in her age. This adumbrates a reflexive consciousness of a modernizing process in Christie's contemporary society.

In recent years, the impact of modernism and high-modernism has affected the study of Christie's detective fictions. Vagstad Kristi's article "Yankees on the Oriental Express" (1995) illustrates Christie's critical attitude toward American capitalistic modernity embodied by a vulgar and murdered American capitalist. Pierre Bayard's *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd? The Mystery Behind the Agatha Christie Mystery* (2000) points out the unreliable murderer-narrator in Christie's novel can complicate the ending and produce reader's multiple interpretations. This uncertain state and disorder of a social reality found in Christie's novels, to Bayard, challenge a well-constructed absolute truth of a dominant social order. In *Agatha Christie: Power and Illusion* (2007), R. A. York regards the sense of uncertainty Christie presents in her works, like a person's feeling befuddled about a crime puzzle in a regular and daily life (in a dominant social order) as a new perception of modernist aesthetics. This artistic vision juxtaposes the regularity of everyday life with "irregular strangeness," which can be exemplified by Christie's shocking arrangement of an unexpected murder scene with an uncanny atmosphere it may cause in her detective novels. Her spooky way of presenting her detective stories reveals her differential detective writings from her predecessors and also creates a sense of uncertainty in an age of social change. York actually leads the discussion of Christie's novel to an exploration of a new social reality in Christie's age.

Many of these early studies on Christie's works are mainly based on structuralist approaches, the discussions of narrative forms and social norms, in order to define Christie as a traditional or classical detective novelist who ends her novel with an ultimate truth. Yet, the recent researches in late modern age find that Christie novels focus more and more on modernist or high-modernist approach,¹⁹ examining Christie's perspective of interrogating the ultimate truth and the dominant social order. Several modernist or high modernist theories, especially those of scholars who study the ambiguity exhibited in a reflexive modernizing process of a social reality, will be the main approaches to my study on Christie's novels. But, my study will concentrate more on social masses' new spatio-temporal perceptions and reflexive consciousness of a modernizing process by means of examining industrialization, urbanization, and capitalism phenomenon in Christie's contemporary society full of various risks, namely a changing societal trend.

Many critics have viewed Christie as a classical detective writer due to the fact that she seemingly espouses the Poesque/Holmesian writing tradition, giving an ultimate truth after a detective's ratiocinating process. My study will re-examine the construction of "rational truth" and various daily and routine life experiences in Christie's novels. Owing to the trend of social change in Christie's age, these rational and functional practices gradually become uncertain. In several Christie's novels, her detectives (or quasi-detective characters) often tell lies and hide the truth of a murdering case from police. As a consequence, her detectives, unlike others in classical detective fictions (in the Golden Age), no more assure an absolute truth or even attempt to interrogate the authorial law enacted by social/national authority. This

¹⁹ Anthony Giddens notices that "high modernity" can be characterized by "widespread skepticism" especially in an emergent risk society of his so-called "late modern" age, which is similar to Beck's age of reflexive modernization and Habermas' high development of modernity. Please see Giddens' *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991. pp. 27-29.

study aims to justify that she is not merely a classical Poesque/Holmesian detective novelist but also a forerunner of a “reflexive” modernist writer and even a trail-blazer of metafiction novelist whose writings reveal an author’s self-reflexive awareness of a “grand modernizing tradition” of a literary background and of a social evolution but simultaneously maintains a critical distance from these grand traditions, questioning the construction of a rational truth and the modernizing process of a disciplinary and dominant control of her contemporary society.

The uncertain truth in the end of her detective novels asserts her distrust of her contemporary social/national bureaucracies that frame the so-called “truth.” She becomes more and more interrogative and critical toward the daily life experiences and social institutions. More concretely, Christie presents an uncertain and uneasy attitude in depicting an industrialized and capitalistic society, perceiving that cultural dynamics in her contemporary England evidence what Ulrich Beck calls a rising risk society.

The notions of “risk society” and of “reflexive modernity” in a shaky social order are applied to explore Christie’s contemporary industrial and post-industrial society. The theory of other modernist scholars, including that of Harvey, Lefebvre, De Certeau, and Benjamin, are also applied to discuss the alternative perspective of rational “truth” and cognition of time and space displayed in Christie’s novels. These four scholars’ theories are mutually influenced by one another. They probe into the issue of modernism, examining the spatio-temporal conceptions influenced by a high development of industrialization and urbanization, or by the prevalence of capital circulation. More important, they interrogate the rational and disciplinary control of everyday life in an industrial society and deal with the problem how a human subject reshapes his innate concept of space and time when faced with a brand new spatio-temporal construction resulting from the advancement of modern

technologies.²⁰ This new spatio-temporal construction produces cultural dynamics and foretells social changes in a rising risk society. Seen in this light, they share the same concern with Ulrich Beck by investigating social changes in an interlocking development of industrialization, urbanization, and circulation of capitalism.

To Beck, there are two phases of the industrial modernity; one is the “first” industrial nation-state modernity and its foundation, and the other the “second” and *reflexive* modernity “which breaks up the premises and contours of industrial society and opens paths to another modernity” (1994, 3).²¹ Christie’s novels, especially those published after 1940, actually present two kinds of social reality: an industrial society and a rising post-industrial risk society. The latter creates, to use Beck’s term, a “risk”²² which mostly conforms to but await its timing “chance” to deviate against a stable modernization of a dominant social reality in a nation-state. The simultaneity of conformation and violation signifies a double-edged feature of both creative and destructive development of a highly modernizing and industrializing process. To Beck, a high development of industrialization “necessitates self-reflection on the foundations of social cohesion and the examination of prevailing conventions and foundations of ‘rationality’” (1994, 8). In other words, the “traditional” conception of

²⁰ Although these five scholars share same concern about some social phenomena in an industrial society, they still have different critical viewpoints among one another. This will be explicated in each chapter.

²¹ Beck sees the modern society as a risk society because cultural phenomenon and national bureaucracy are contingent and shifting. He regards a cultural dynamic of cultural and political change as “risk” that probably undermines any phase of modernity. They always threaten to undermine and substitute another cultural phenomenon and bureaucratic institution. In this perspective, modernity becomes “uncertain” and “reflexive.” See his “The Reinvention of Politics: Toward A Theory of Reflexive Modernization.” Eds. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge, Politic Press, 1994, 1-3 and “Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics and Research Programmes” in Ed. Barbara Adams, Ulrich Beck and Joost Van Loon. *The Risk Society and Beyond*. London: Sage, 2000. pp. 211-229.

²² In accordance with Beck, the concept of “risk” delineates a cultural dynamic in an intermediated state between security and destruction of a societal (capitalistic) modernity. As mentioned earlier, it can be viewed as a dynamic of cultural and political change challenging any dominant modernity. See Beck’s “Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics and Research Programmes” in Ed. Barbara Adams, Ulrich Beck and Joost Van Loon. *The Risk Society and Beyond*. London: Sage, 2000. p. 225.

rational knowledge, normalized daily life, and social relations in an industrial society gradually become precarious and are self-reflexively recognized or critically interrogated by social masses in a rising post-industrial risk society. This self-awareness of conformation to and interrogation of a social reality results in “the self-concept of risk society, [and] society becomes reflexive” (Ibid.). The social reality in Christie’s postwar works echoes Beck’s notion of “reflexive modernity,” a self-reflexive awareness of “industrial modernization itself” (1994, 10).

Christie records a social discourse of reflexive modernity in her postwar²³ England, especially in her novels written between 1950s and 1970s. Her characters’ distrust of the law and ultimate truth as well as critical awareness of cultural and social changes demonstrated in her works underscore the rational and disciplinary control of everyday life manipulated by a modernizing process of social institutions, including school, hospital, police/judicial authority, city government and nation state. “Social institutions do produce risks” (Mythen 68) because social public may reflexively “grow against expert systems” (Ibid.), namely the rational and systematic knowledge, which is enacted by these social authorities. Put simply, this state of reflexive modernity incurs the undermining of the first phase of the modernization, the rational foundation, of an industrial society and paves a possible path to another new but temporal modernization.

Similarly, Jurgen Habermas regards high development of modernity as an “incomplete” project (before a modernizing process is fully complete and comes to an end), “a capitalist modernity in its transition from early to later forms.” For Habermas, the “projection” of modernity signifies a discipline and normalizing process with aesthetic significance (3), providing a double-edged standpoint: it defends democratic progression but simultaneously criticizes this progression and domination with a view

²³ The “postwar” refers to the period after World War II.

to reconstructing another modernity. This study attempts to explore this transitory “reflexive” modernity transforming from Christie’s industrial society to a risk society presented in her detective stories.

The social change and social unrest described by Christie in her several wartime and postwar works testify to a changing social reality from an industrial society to a rising post-industrial risk society, in which rational and disciplinary controls of a modernizing process characterized by everyday life experience, including the construction of so-called “truth,” the functional measurement of space and time, normalized conception of an urban experience, the security and domination of a social reality or a national bureaucracy, gradually turns unstable.

As mentioned earlier, Ulrich Beck’s risk society can be regarded as a transitory state of a social reality before another domination of a new social reality is formed. The dynamics of social change in Christie’s novels is also demonstrated by her delineation of new perceptions of space and time. Thus, David Harvey’s and Henri Lefebvre’s theory of spatio-temporality can substantiate these new conceptions. Harvey’s concept of “time-space compression”²⁴ indicates that once rationalized and functionalized measurement of space and time is undermined by shrunk space and shortened time under the impact of new modern transportation means or computer technologies. These new modern technologies disorient the “traditional” and rational conceptions of space and time, altering the daily life experience in a homogenizing and modernizing city life.

Harvey’s “militant particularist movement,” the personal and political impetus

²⁴ The term is from Harvey’s article which is titled with “Time-Space Compression and the Rise of Modernism as a Cultural Force” in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Changes*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell 1990. pp.261-307. Harvey asserts that the capital circulation and industrial advancement can transform the traditional construction of space and time. For instance, the multi-national capitalism and the advancement of modern technology shrink the geographical distance and shorten the measurement of time. In this sense, space and time becomes compressed.

to social changes, in an urban center also cast a shadow of a sense of insecurity and create a double-edged force of creation and destruction affecting the stability of a social reality. He notices the close tie of social movements to urbanization, connecting urbanization with processes of capital circulation. His theory of urbanization is based on an urban experience that is resulted from a reconstruction of time-space compression under the impact of a trans-national flux of capital.

Similarly, Lefebvre notices the power relation and its affiliation with space and time—a dialectic triad of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces, which can substantiate the complicated power relation between the police and criminals in Christie's works. His notion of *urban fabric*, *urban core*, and *rurban* can exemplify the interweaving of urbanization and capitalism (commodity market and consumption) with new perceptions of spatio-temporality in Christie's fictions, especially those written after 1940.

Michel de Certeau also explicates the everyday life in the age of changing social reality in terms of space-time significance. His argumentation of the strategy and the tactic is helpful to elaborate the complicated practices of spatio-temporality among the police, detective and criminal. For him, the "strategy" assumes a spatial location generating a dominant control of a powerful enforcement (1984, xix). While, the "tactic" is not totally severed from that of "strategy;" it is mostly subjected to the disciplinary control of "strategy," usually repeating the regular and normalizing practices of the strategy, but awaits its "time" to create differential practices that challenge the "strategy." In Christie's detective stories, the police/detective seemingly holds the "strategy" and the criminal appears to manipulate the "tactic." Yet, this binary opposition—self/strategy and other/tactic—in her stories turns ambiguous and henceforth denotes that the traditional determination of an official truth/justice as well as take-it-for-granted life experiences in a disciplinary society have been under

questioning.

Walter Benjamin's thought of a flâneur who owns an "elbow room" in a moment of "Messianic time" can be applied to this discussion of some social masses' everyday life in an industrial and capitalistic society. His alternative perspective of space and time connotes a human subject's intention to get away from a dull and disciplinary control of everyday life experience under the impact of a development of industrialization and prevalence of capitalism. This disciplinary control of daily life finally causes social masses' "boredom" (*ennui*) experience. Benjamin's "boredom" has a double-edged significance; though "boredom" experience signifies barren and motionlessness, it also implies revitalization and functions as a primary impetus to a cultural dynamic that makes possible a new experience of social life. He also suggests that the autonomy of a flâneur lies in his temporary alienation from his historical mode of existence—the domination of industrialized and capitalistic society—to own his autonomous "elbow" space in a momentary time.

To Benjamin, a possible way for social masses to get away from the "boredom" of daily life is to conceive a "flâneuristic" vision, with which a human subject can temporarily reprieves himself from this dull and boring life experience, one that is nullified and intoxicated because of a rigid manipulation of industrial and capitalistic modernity. This "dreamlike" vision of a new life experience can relatively highlight an old social reality dominated by a dull and rational control of an industrial society before the later emergence of a risk society.

The study of Agatha Christie's novels will be divided into six chapters; in the following Chapter Two, social masses' rising sense of uncertainty and discontent of the secular law highlight the triumph of personal truth/justice over the official truth/justice. In novels like *Murder on the Oriental Express* (1934) and *Five Little Pigs* (1942), murderers do not receive their lawful sanction, due to that the detective

Poirot purposely lets them get away. In *And Then There Were None* (1939) and *Curtain: Poirot's Last Case* (1946), the judge and detective, who should be aware of the law, even become criminals exerting a personal justice to kill a suspect (actually this suspect does not commit any lawful crime) in accordance with his personal cognition of truth. Thus, if the confrontation between the “righteous” police and the “vicious” criminal can suggest a binary opposition, how can Christie’s criminal-detective fit into the dichotomy of the police and the criminal owing to the fact that her detective becomes an ambiguous character vacillating between the role of an assistant who cooperates with the police and that of a sympathizer who sides with criminal? Christie’s revelation of the ambiguous triads in traditional dichotomy thinking indicates the rationalized truth and scientific knowledge can be no more secured or determined in a post-industrial risk society.

In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926) and *Endless Night* (1967), the reader finally finds that he is beguiled by a quasi-detective narrator because the narrator is the murderer himself, but he keeps wearing a narrator’s mask and confesses that he is the murderer near the end of the novel. But, if the reader knows that the narrator is an unreliable liar, how can the reader expect an ultimate truth from this narrator? In fact, each reader has his own interpretation of clues and produces multiple meanings of language. The unreliable narrator-murderer leads the text to enact multiple interpretations; and the truth turns into various personal explanations conceived by each reader. Christie does not offer an ultimate truth in these two novels; rather, she turns the one and only truth into multiple interpretations. The changing perspective of a rational and ultimate truth can exemplify a trend of social change. How Christie presents her view of a truth in this changing social reality becomes essential to this chapter.

Chapter Three continues to examine the social change in a rising risk society by

discussing some new conceptions of spatio-temporal practices in Christie's detective novels. The social reality in many of Christie's wartime and postwar detective novels is dominated by an industrialized modernity, which is threatened by some cultural dynamics and social changes in an impending *risk society*. The social change in this social reality also characterizes a new conception of a time-space compression, which is generated by highly-industrialized technologies and a trans-national circulation of capital flux. Modernity, in a narrow sense, can be explained as an enforcement of rational and systematical knowledge to form cognitive and homogenized mappings of time and space as daily spatio-temporal practices. Accordingly, a subject practice of cognitive mapping, in a Foucaultian sense, may induce a power relationship. This power relationship can be applied to the triad of detective story—the police, detective and criminal. In detective novels, criminal, detective, police, and the truth of a murder case can be explored through a construction of spatiality, temporality, and power relation. Detective, trying to conceive a spatial network which organizes all fragmentary clues into a meaningful totality, is engaged in a process of figuration. This conceptual figuration is by no means linked only to a construction of spatiality; it also relates to a symbiotic framework of temporality because a detective's disparate ideas and emotions are unified into a spatial form that is mapped cognitively *in a moment of time*.

Novels like *The A. B. C. Murders* (1936), *Ordeal by Innocence* (1958), *Cat among the Pigeons* (1959) and *The Clocks* (1963) can substantiate a rational and functional measurement of space and time which produces a disciplinary control on human mind and leads social masses to perceive a dull and boring life experience especially in an industrialized and capitalistic society.

Other novels like *Toward Zero* (1944) and *They Do It with Mirrors* (1952) present a new conception of space and time when the traditional cognition of

spatio-temporality reveals its limitation and uncertain state. *Sparkling Cyanide* (1945) and *Sleeping Murder* (post-humorously published in 1976, originally written in 1946) emphasize how a Lefebvrian spatial practice regulates a conception of an “irrational” space into that of an official spatial practice in a crime scene, where all mysteries and irrational elements are ultimately excluded and only rational explanation can be regarded as an official truth. This chapter tries to examine how the interlocking of spatio-temporal practices and the triad of detective story—the police, detective, and criminal—highlight alternative perspectives of life experience that discriminate from disciplinary practices of daily life in an age of social change.

Chapter Four mainly stresses a trend of social change revealed in an urbanizing process of the rural area, or a “ruralization” of urban area, in Christie’s England. How the traditional country-house setting in Christie’s detective stories grows into a new “rurban” society setting is an important theme in this chapter. This new spatial conception of urban city and of rural countryside in Christie’s novels will be examined mostly in Henri Lefebvre’s theoretical perspective of urbanization.

The rural landscape and urban city delineated in Christie’s novels, like *A Pocket full of Rye* (1953), *4.50 from Paddington* (1957), *The Mirror Crack’d* (1962) and *Hallowe’en Party* (1969), instance the ambiguous distinction between the “urbanization” of the rural area and the “ruralization” of the urban city. Several urbanized small town settings, such as massive buildings of factory or apartment flat, railway transportation, capitalist’s investment, and new fashion or new art prevail in rural area, depicted by Christie in her works, like *Body in the Library* (1942), *The Clocks* (1963) and *Third Girl* (1966), can signal the complexity of this urbanization phenomenon.

Under the influence of capitalism, the high development of industrialization and of urbanization lead to a modern technology of massive mechanical reproduction,

which impedes a cognitive subject's access to his perception of an "artistic beauty" because the "aura" of artistic works is gradually waning due to the mechanical reproduction. What is the social significance found in a complicated process of industrialization and urbanization in Christie's contemporary England? This problem will be discussed as well in this chapter.

Chapter Five attempts to explicate Christie's meta-narratives in a social background and in a literary background. Christie's critical awareness of a modernizing process is not just demonstrated by her interrogating of the socio-cultural value in her contemporary England but by her questioning about the literary form of a great novel-writing tradition. Under the impact of the social discourse of reflexive modernity in a risk society and a metafictional writing in a literary tradition, Christie's detective novels present two sorts of meta-narrative: a social background of a risk society and a literary tradition of metafictional writings. This chapter will explore the juxtaposition of these two sorts of meta-narrative in Christie's works.

Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Waugh regard Agatha Christie as one of the metafiction writers in accordance with Christie's writing traits that resemble those of other metafictional novels. Both Hutcheon and Waugh have noticed the close tie of this new kind of metafiction to its social background. Like other metafiction writers, Christie actually expresses her metafictional writings with a social significance in her postwar novels. The discussion of Christie's meta-narrative writing cannot be only viewed in a literary perspective; instead, the social background that influences and generates this kind of meta-fictional writing is equally essential to this discussion.

Pale Horse (1961) presents Christie's two kinds of meta-narrative. Her historian in this novel unfolds a new perspective of history and an anxiety of the rational/scientific control of modern technologies in an industrial society. In the meantime, her detective novelist in this same novel becomes her mouthpiece who

frequently points out the detective writer's predicament of writing fictions. Novels like *Mrs. McGinty's Death* (1952), *Dead Man Folly* (1956), and *Hallowe'en Party* (1969) accentuates chiefly Christie's meta-narrative of a detective novel in a literary tradition. Yet, these novels also designate a social reality in a social evolution. For this reason, the literary tradition of metafictional writings in Christie's detective novels still encompasses the social background of a risk society; nevertheless, the social background of a risk society displayed in Christie's novels relatively contains the literary tradition of metafictional writings. In addition, an ambivalent prospect of time and space is seemingly implicated in these two kinds of meta-narrative in Christie's postwar novels. How the spatio-temporal connotation interconnects with the social significance and with the literary background in Christie's detective writing will be also explicated in this chapter.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, concludes the issue of social change in a rising risk society presented in Christie's works, especially her postwar spy novels. Many Christie's espionage novels, like *They Came to Baghdad* (1951), *Destination Unknown* (1955), and *Passenger to Frankfurt* (1970), unravel a post-industrial society within a burgeoning trend of a trans-national world, which Beck regards as the impetus to an emergence of a risk society. These various risks in her novels indicate a social reality on its stage of reflexive modernization—the Beckian second modernity of a post-industrial society and an intermediate phase before a new social order is formed. In Christie's spy novels, the variation and alternative development of her detective stories, she seems to adumbrate a new social order rising from a global world. Why does Christie punctuate this new social order? This chapter tries to link this formation of a new order to a discourse of reflexive modernity in a rising risk society.

My study aims to examine this stage of reflexive modernity and a sense of

uncertainty in Christie's age of social change to show that she should not be ignored or underestimated in the field of studying modernist literature. In her novels, the once rational truth and disciplinary life experiences in a first modernity of an industrial society have been undermined by the second and reflexive modernity of a post-industrial risk society. Her critical awareness of her contemporary society and reflexive consciousness of a modernization process resemble the later development of novel-writing in a high modern or a late modern age. That is, the ultimate truth in her novels is no more secured and the controlling bond of daily routine life in an industrial society is gradually withering in the trend of social change.

For this reason, Christie's self-reflexive perspective of the social reality responds to what Beck calls a "sense of self-reflection on modernization"²⁵ in a period of an emergent risk society, which criticizes a dominant and grand narrative exerted by social institutions in a higher narrative level. With this sort of meta-narrative, the traditional and *grand narrative* of a rational truth is challenged and interrogated.

The interrogation of industrial modernization and critique of everyday life experience under a rational control of a dominant social order, or a national bureaucracy, will be the thematic topic in my discussion of Christie's novels. Her novels, especially those written in a postwar era, present a transnational setting, including Middle East, African, and Caribbean Countries. For this reason, the future scope of the study can be examined in more various post-colonial or further globalization study approaches.

Although lots of literary criticisms relate the discussion of Christie's novels to the modernization unfolded in the writing conventions of detective stories of the

²⁵ See his "Reinvention of Politics: Toward a Theory of Reflexive Modernization" in Eds. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash. *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge, Politic Press, 1994, 5-6.

Golden Age, few criticisms explore the feature of high modernity, or reflexive modernization, and her differential writing traits evinced in her works. The aim of my study is to examine the interaction between Christie's literary texts and their social background, and finally to shed a high-modernist perspective upon Christie detective writings as opposed to the traditional approaches of moral criticism, structuralism, and genre study.

Christie's works are mainly published in modern period of British literary development. When the novels of Ford Madox Ford, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce are broadly investigated, Agatha Christie's works seem to be ignored or underestimated. Many literary critics often regard Christie's detective novels as kitsch with regular plot and easily-understood meaning. In fact, Christie's detective writings before 1940s mostly demonstrate a narrative pattern in accordance with the Poesque/Holmesian detective writing. Yet, a great deal of her postwar works, with more and more descriptions of the complicated process of industrialization, urbanization, and capitalism as well as the presentation of a critical awareness and an interrogative attitude toward this process, reveal a complex spatiotemporal significance and a new modernist aesthetic dimension. What is the significance of Christie's writing change before and after the World War II? How can this change affiliate with the literary development of detective writings and the social evolution of an industrial society? Due to the fact that her texts interconnect with the issue of serious discussion of literary writings and social changes, can we still reduce her to an ordinary pop fiction writer? I hope that my study can find out answers to these questions.