

Chinese Fiction
of the
Cultural
Revolution

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Introduction

Both inside and outside China, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution ('CR' for short) was known as the most sensational political movement in contemporary China under the People's Republic. Some scholars prefer to date the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969 and to define the period from 1969 to 1976 as a radical leftist phase. This book adopts the definition which dates the CR from 1966 to 1976 and divides the decade into two periods. The latter definition was the post-CR Chinese government's official definition, and it is also widely adopted by Western scholars. In his *China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch 1949–1981*, Lowell Dittmer states, the Cultural Revolution 'consisted of two distinct periods, the first of which was characterised by spontaneous mobilisation of disprivileged strata, lasting from the summer of 1966 through the fall of 1968; the second of which was characterised by elite attempts to sponsor and channel mass mobilisation, which lasted from late 1968 until the downfall of the Shanghai radicals in October 1976'.¹

There is a multitude of books in the world which deal with the Cultural Revolution. Since the movement, in spite of its name, produced very little that can seriously be considered a contribution to China's cultural development, of those existing books referring to the Cultural Revolution, most concentrate on analysing its political aspects or describing its process.

This book is about the literature produced during the Cultural Revolution. It is well known that literature and art was one of the most prominent spheres with regard to the movement. On the one hand, the movement was initiated in this field which consequently was one primary target of the 'revolution'. On

the other hand, literature and art was cultivated as one of the most important measures to carry out the movement. Actually, during the Cultural Revolution, literature and art was the only domain which was consistently under the control of Jiang Qing and her followers.²

In 1972, Cyril Birch pointed out, 'It is a commonplace observation that no regime in Chinese history has been more assiduous than the present one in cultivating the garden of letters . . .'³ While criticizing literature and art from before the Cultural Revolution, the authorities headed by Jiang Qing vigorously attempted to create new literature and art. The following declaration of 1967 indicates their intention.

Under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party and Chairman Mao and under the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tse-tung's thought, we must create a new socialist revolutionary literature and art worthy of our great country, our great Party, our great people and our great army. This will be a most brilliant new literature and art opening up a new era in human history . . . To create a fine work is an arduous process, and the comrades in charge of creative works must never adopt a bureaucratic or casual attitude but must work really hard and share the writers' and artists' joys and hardships . . . There should be no fear of failure or mistakes. Allowance should be made for them, and people must be permitted to correct their mistakes . . . so that a work may become better and better and achieve the unity of revolutionary political content and the best possible artistic form.⁴

What are the characteristics of the new literature and art? There are studies of CR poetry, fiction, drama and film, although they are scanty and usually on a small scale.⁵

Some genres consist of two sets of works, official and unofficial. For example, amounts of underground and exile fiction were produced and circulated during the CR decade, most of which are short stories and novellas. It is only natural that the underground and exile works are separate from the new literature and art although some of them unavoidably reflect certain styles of that period. Probably due to accessibility of materials or scholars' special interest, existing studies of CR fiction are mostly concerned with unofficial works. No substantial scholarly treatment of official CR fiction has appeared in Chinese or English. Sporadic critical discourse in Chinese on official CR fiction has often been strongly subjective.

The present study is of novels officially published during the Cultural Revolution. It aims to reveal characteristics of CR novels by analysing a number of sample works and comparing them with works published before the Cultural Revolution, with a view to determining the position of CR novels in the history of contemporary Chinese literature.

My study will be from a perspective of combining literature and linguistics (linguo-stylistics). On the one hand, the combining perspective is in accordance

with the fact pointed out by Leo Ou-fan Lee that language and characterization are two emphasized aspects of pre-CR and CR literature.⁶ On the other hand, the dual perspective complies with the tendency of literary criticism stated by J. H. Miller, that is, the aims of literary study had shifted from an élitist interest in aesthetic appreciation of poetic text to an egalitarian emphasis on the importance of the assessment of textual value in both literary and ordinary language.⁷

In view of the prominent position of portrayal of heroes in the then current literary aesthetic views and the importance of words and expressions in linguistic style, this book includes two main parts: the characterization of the main heroes, and the lexical style of the language. Generally, the study lays more stress on those collective or period literary and stylistic characteristics of CR novels than on individual or isolated features of specific authors or works.

CR NOVELS AND CR AGRICULTURAL NOVELS

In Chinese terms, fiction is sub-divided into *changpian xiaoshuo* [literally, long fiction or novels], *zhongpian xiaoshuo* [middle length fiction or novellas] and *duanpian xiaoshuo* [short fiction or short stories]. However, no established quantitative criterion can be found for these divisions. For example, with regard to the division between novels and novellas, according to different publishers' labelling, Zhou Jiajun's *Mountain Wind* [*Shan feng*] with 341 pages and Chen Dabin's *The Surging Dongliu River* [*Benteng de Dongliuhe*] with 363 pages are novellas, but Liu Qing's *Wall of Bronze* [*Tong qiang tie bi*] with 245 pages and Liu Huaizhang's *Turbulent Current* [*Jiliu*] with 294 pages belong to novels. In spite of the disagreement, nevertheless, according to my investigation into different publishers' labelling, the confusing length mainly exists between 200 pages and 350 pages, that is, no work with fewer than 200 pages was labelled a novel, and a work with over 350 pages was generally labelled a novel. In the present study, in order to avoid possible confusion with regard to statistics, only fiction of over 200 pages is taken into consideration, all of which I consider novels.

Next, for the sake of convenience of analysis, I need to define three terms which are frequently used in this presentation: CR novels, pre-CR novels and post-CR novels. CR novels are those first published during the Cultural Revolution, pre-CR novels are those first published between the foundation of the People's Republic and the initiation of the Cultural Revolution (October 1949 – May 1966); and post-CR novels are those first published after the Cultural Revolution. CR novels generally were written after 1969, with a few exceptions where the drafts were completed before the Cultural Revolution. As the large literary periodicals, which often serialized long novels, were discontinued during the Cultural Revolution, CR novels were generally published in book form.

CR Novels

According to my statistics, there are 126 CR novels in total, among which about 25 have 200–350 pages, and the others are all over 350 pages.⁸ The statistics exclude reprints or revised editions of pre-CR works. For example, Liu Qing's *Wall of Bronze*, which was first published in 1951 but reissued in a revised form in 1976, is not included. On the other hand, a novel of more than one volume is counted as one unit even though the volumes were published in different years and the page numbers are not continuous. For example, Li Yunde's *Seething Mountains* [*Feiteng de qunshan*] is in three volumes, among which Volume 1 was published in 1972, Volume 2 in 1973, and Volume 3 in 1976.

The average number of CR novels produced per year is therefore about twelve. According to other statistics, the total number of pre-CR novels is about 170. The annual quantity produced during the seventeen-year period between 1949 and 1966 is therefore about ten. The number of post-CR novels produced between 1977 and 1986 is about 1,000. The annual quantity produced was about 100.⁹ Thus, although the annual quantity of CR novels only accounts for about one-tenth of post-CR novels, it is not below the annual production of pre-CR novels. The distribution of CR novels according to year is as follows.

| Year | Number of CR novels |
|-------|---------------------|
| 1972 | 10 |
| 1973 | 11 |
| 1974 | 21 |
| 1975 | 36 |
| 1976 | 48 |
| Total | 126 |

The first CR novel is *Battle Chronicles of Hongnan* [*Hongnan zuozhan shi*], which was published in February 1972. No novels were published in the five years between the beginning of the Cultural Revolution and the publication of this novel. As pointed out by Cyril Birch, the production of literature and art works during the first five years was reduced to an unprecedentedly low level. In the later period, even Mao pointed out that the country was 'short of poetry, short of fiction, short of prose and short of literary comments'.¹⁰ According to the above table, the annual quantity of CR novels increased by a big margin in 1975 and 1976. The change could reflect the adjustment of the relevant policies after Mao's criticism.

With respect to subject matter, the 126 CR novels cover different areas, including agriculture, industry, military affairs, counter-espionage, education, medicine, forestry, livestock husbandry, fishery, and so on. Some categories have unconventional meanings which reflect the times. For instance, novels on

medicine are mainly about barefoot doctors in the countryside rather than medical workers in urban hospitals. In the decade from 1966 to 1976, new policies pursued by the government gave rise to a variety of ‘socialist new things’ [*shehuizhuyi xinsheng shiwu*]. The promotion of barefoot doctors is an example. Another example is the practice of assigning school-leavers [*zhishi qingnian*] to work in the countryside, which was considered ‘re-education’. These ‘socialist new things’ became an important part of the subject matter for CR novels.

The four largest categories of subject matter in the 126 CR novels and their distribution are shown in the table below.

| Subject matter | | Time-setting | |
|------------------|----|--------------|-----------|
| | | 1927–49 | post-1949 |
| Military affairs | 32 | 17 | 15 |
| Agriculture | 24 | – | 24 |
| Industry | 18 | 2 | 16 |
| ‘Re-education’ | 17 | – | 17 |

The total number of novels in the four categories is 91, which make up 72.2 percent of the total 126 CR novels. The three largest categories are military affairs, agriculture and industry, reflecting Mao’s directives on serving workers, peasants and soldiers. In the novels of the fourth major category, main characters include school-leavers as students, who were then called ‘new peasants’ [*xinshi nongmin*], and local peasants as ‘teachers’. Among the rest, some novels describe the construction of large infrastructure projects such as the harnessing of the Hai River, in which workers, peasants and soldiers cooperated. Other works, classified as children’s stories, concentrate on children’s contribution to agriculture, industry, counter-espionage and so on.

Among the 126 novels, except for Li Huixin’s *Beside the Lancang River* [*Lancangjiang pan*], which describes a professional medical team working in the countryside, no others can be found which focus on professional intellectuals such as teachers, authors, artists, doctors (other than barefoot doctors) and scientists. Another characteristic of subject matter is that no CR novel has been found on historical themes (‘historical’ here refers to the time before the end of the imperial era in 1911). Although written evidence is hard to come by for this period, it was widely known that the CR authorities were highly suspicious of works set in traditional China. After Wu Han’s historical play *Hai Rui’s Dismissal from Office* [*Hai Rui ba guan*] was attacked by Yao Wenyan as criticism of the authorities by innuendo, historical settings became a forbidden zone in literature and art. Furthermore, as pointed out by Jeffrey C. Kinkley, no CR novel ‘about crimes committed by typical Chinese’ (‘crime fiction’) can be found since ‘socialist realist fiction was supposed “realistically” to reflect the brightness of

the future in the society of the present'.¹¹ Moreover, no CR novel can be called 'science fiction' (the Chinese usually call it 'science-fantasy fiction' [*kexue huanxiang xiaoshuo*]).¹²

The earliest time-setting in the 126 novels is the Second Civil War (1927–37), but only Li Ruqing's *Mountains in Red* [*Wan shan hong bian*] (Vol. 1) is set in this period. The other works are all set after 1937 when the Sino-Japanese War broke out. According to convention, I group time-settings into two categories: 1919–49 and post-1949. Among CR novels, those with a post-1949 time-setting make up the overwhelming majority. Such a distribution reflects the official promotion of subject matter concerning socialist revolution under the People's Republic and the disapproval or prohibition of historical subject matter.

I have not investigated in detail the distribution of pre-CR novels with regard to subject matter and time-setting. It is generally agreed that, among pre-CR novels, those with subject matter concerning industry, agriculture and military affairs also make up the majority. However, on the whole, pre-CR novels have a larger scope of subject matter by comparison with CR novels. For example, there were historical novels before the Cultural Revolution, such as Yao Xueyin's *Li Zicheng* (Vol. 1) (1963). Other novels, such as Yang Mo's *Song of Youth* [*Qingchun zhi ge*], Gao Yunlan's *Stories in a Small City* [*Xiao cheng chunqiu*] and Ouyang Shan's *Three Families in a Lane* [*San jia xiang*], focus on intellectuals in the underground movement rather than the struggles of workers, peasants and soldiers. Such novels were attacked in the Cultural Revolution for glorifying the petty bourgeoisie. Moreover, compared to CR novels, the greater proportion of pre-CR novels is set between 1919 and 1949.

According to the above table, military affairs rank first among the four major categories. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, during the Cultural Revolution, the campaign of learning from the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), which was initiated in 1963, reached its highest stage,¹³ and novelists who used military subjects were likely to win support. Secondly, military affairs had been prominent in contemporary Chinese literature and art before the Cultural Revolution. For example, of the eight model theatrical works (all based on pre-CR works), five focus on military subjects. Among pre-CR novels, the quantity of military novels is far ahead of others. This literary and artistic tradition necessarily had an impact on CR novel creation. Thirdly, the PLA had been active under different names before the foundation of the People's Republic and experienced numerous military events which offered a great quantity of material for plots and settings. This is the reason why, as shown in the above table, among the four major categories of subject matter, the distribution of 1919-49 time-setting in the military category ranks first. Finally, literary creativity in the PLA was especially encouraged by the authorities during the Cultural Revolution. For example, the authoritative official CR document with respect to literature and art was based on a forum convened in the Army

(the ‘Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Force with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qiang’).

CR Agricultural Novels

The quantity of CR agricultural novels ranks second. By agricultural novels we mean only those which focus on stories of farmers in the countryside. Therefore, novels also set in the countryside narrating stories about children, barefoot doctors, soldiers, school-leavers and so on are not included. Also, if the main story of a novel is not about agriculture, the novel does not belong to this category, although its main characters might be farmers. The 24 CR agricultural novels are listed in Appendix 1.

The present investigation focuses on the CR agricultural novels. Why should I choose agricultural novels rather than military novels which rank first according to the distribution of subject matter? Firstly, unlike military novels, agricultural novels all describe life in the People’s Republic. This post-1949 time-setting reflects the main trend of CR novels. Secondly, unlike military novels, in which the main stories are about fighting against enemy troops, CR agricultural novels mainly reflect inner Party struggles. The inner Party struggles are the basic ‘theme’ of the Cultural Revolution and also the most important motif of CR literature. Thirdly, from the point of view of literary creation, agricultural novels represent a recognized higher level of technique in the realm of novel-writing during the CR period. It is obvious that not all the 126 CR novels can be on the same level with regard to their literary quality. Post-CR Chinese critics generally gave more praise to the following four works: Hao Ran’s *The Golden Road* [Jingguang da dao], Ke Fei’s *Swift is the Spring Tide* [Chun chao ji], Chen Rong’s *Evergreen* [Wan nian qing] and Li Ruqing’s *Mountains in Red*. Of the four, three are agricultural novels. Moreover, the authorship of CR agricultural novels includes not only professional writers such as Hao Ran, who was the most important writer in the CR period, but also young writers of potential such as Chen Rong and Gu Hua, who later became well-known post-CR novelists.

With sub-types of subject matter taken into consideration, the 24 CR novels all concern specific politicized campaigns in the countryside during the pre-CR and CR periods. Below are the sub-types of subject matter and their distribution in the 24 novels.

1. Cooperative transformation, six works: *The Surging Dongliu River* (Chen Dabin), *The Peacock Flies High* (Gao Zhongwu), *The Golden Road* (Hao Ran), *Swift is the Spring Tide* (Ke Fei), *Mountains Emblazoned with Crimson* (Sun Feng), and *Battle Chronicles of Hongnan* (Shanghai Xian Hongnan zuozhan shi Xiezu Zu).
2. Opposition to quotas on a household basis, five works: *Evergreen* (Chen

- Rong), *The Roaring Songhua River* (Lin Yu and Xie Shu), *Spring Comes to Zhang River* (Wang Dongman), *The Jumang River* (Yang Chuntian), and *Xiangshui Bend* (Zheng Wanlong).
3. Socialist Education, two works: *Violent Thunder* (Wang Zhongyu et al.) and *Qingshi Fort* (Zhu Jian).
 4. Mechanization of agriculture, one work: *Billows and Waves* (Bi Fang and Zhong Tao).
 5. Learning from Dazhai, ten works: *Zhangtian River* (Cheng Xianzhang), *Yinsha Beach* (Feng Yunan), *The Mountains and Rivers Roar* (Gu Hua), *Mountains Green after Rain* (Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqu Baise Diqu Sanjiehe Chuangzuo Zu), *Dawn over Emerald Ridge* (anonymous, 'collective'), *Baizhang Ridge* (Shao Chuang), *The Long Rainbow* (Tian Dongzhao), *At the Foot of the Kezile Mountain* (Tuerdi Keyoumu), *The Daughter of Slaves* (Wang Zhijun), and *Mountain People* (Zhang Xue).

These sub-types of subject matter and their distribution are different from those of pre-CR and post-CR agricultural novels. In pre-CR agricultural novels, cooperative transformation (including consolidation of collectivization) is the sole subject matter. As for post-CR agricultural novels, only a few, which were published soon after the Cultural Revolution, primarily concern the two sub-types: cooperative transformation and learning from Dazhai. Soon after, the above five sub-types of subject matter generally disappeared from post-CR agricultural novels because such politicized campaigns were disapproved of. This situation does not mean that the campaigns have been banned from post-CR novels, but that they have not appeared as focal and glorified events as in the CR novels.

The CR novels about cooperative transformation were produced mainly in the early stage when CR novels appeared. The first two CR agricultural novels, *Battle Chronicles of Hongnan* and *The Golden Road* (Vol. 1), which are also the first two of all CR novels published in 1972, are about cooperative transformation. The former was written between June and December in 1971, and the latter between December of 1970 and November of 1971. The third CR agricultural novel is *Swift is the Spring Tide*, which also concerns cooperative transformation. These facts indicate that novelists still followed the example of pre-CR agricultural fiction on subject matter during the early period of the Cultural Revolution. In contrast, among the other 21 CR agricultural novels, which were mainly published between 1975 and 1976, only three deal with cooperative transformation. This situation indicates the changes in CR novelists' selection of sub-types of subject matter in agriculture in the late period of CR novel creation.

The other four sub-types of subject matter did not appear in CR agricultural novels until 1974. On the one hand, their appearance was related to the authorities' promotion of the Cultural Revolution. Even in the early CR period,

the authorities in charge of literature and art began to call for works on the Cultural Revolution.¹⁴ During the later CR period, writing about the Cultural Revolution was greatly promoted. The new literary magazine *Rosy Dawn* [*Zhaoxia*] (including the *congkan* [collection], started in 1973, and the *yuekan* [monthly], started in 1974), which was directly under the control of Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan, played a leading role in encouraging writing about the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, these new sub-types of subject matter about agriculture embodied the spirit of the Cultural Revolution and/or represented the current central tasks of the government.

The sub-type of ‘opposition to quotas on a household basis’ reflected the clashes between Mao and his Party opponents in the early 1960s, relating to the Party-line struggles of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁵

The Socialist Education movement was a nationwide political campaign carried out between 1964 and 1965. The purpose of the campaign was to struggle against the so-called capitalist-roaders (‘Party persons in authority taking the capitalist road’), in accordance with the subsequent struggles of the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶

Ever since Mao’s call to develop agricultural mechanization was issued in the 1950s with relation to the cooperative campaign, the goal of ‘mechanization of agriculture’ was periodically promoted. During the Cultural Revolution, the government once again attached importance to the problem while emphasizing the development of agriculture.¹⁷ Bi Fang’s CR novel *Billows and Waves* [*Qian chong lang*] is set in the Cultural Revolution. As indicated in the publishers’ description [*neirong shuoming*] of the novel, the theme of the novel is ‘to glorify with zeal the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ by describing the achievements of mechanization in agriculture.

Lastly, the sub-type of learning from Dazhai ranks first in distribution among the 24 CR agricultural novels. Mao issued the call ‘in agriculture learn from Dazhai’ in 1964, but the campaign did not reach its peak until the Cultural Revolution.¹⁸ In 1975, a conference on learning from Dazhai was held by the government; the central task of the whole country was announced as being ‘popularization of Dazhai-like counties’ [*puji Dazhai xian*]. Of the ten novels about learning from Dazhai, eight were finalized and published after the congress although writing generally began in 1974. Moreover, the novels about learning from Dazhai are generally set during the Cultural Revolution.

The Authorship and Readership of CR Novels

The authorship of CR novels may be classified into four types: single, joint, collective and collective-individual. Joint authorship and collective authorship are understood here as defined in Bonnie S. McDougall’s research into CR poetry.¹⁹ That is, in the former case, two or more (only two for CR novels)

authors have affixed their names to a work, and in the latter case, only the name of a writing group to which the work units are attached is given. The term *saniehe* [three-in-one], which represents the collaboration of leaders, professionals and the masses, is sometimes noted alongside the name of collective writing group. Examples of a collective authorship are Shanghai Xian *Hongnan zuozhan shi Xiezu Zu* [The Writing Group of *Battle Chronicles of Hongnan* of Shanghai County] (for the novel *Battle Chronicles of Hongnan*) and Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqū Baise Diqu Sanjiehe Chuangzu Zu [The Three-in-one Group of Baise Prefecture of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region] (for the novel *Yu hou qingshan* [*Mountains Green after Rain*]). By collective-individual authorship, I mean cases in which, apart from the name of a writing group, the individual(s) who did the actual writing is (are) identified. For example, in the novel *Jing lei* [*Violent Thunder*], the identification of 'Heilongjiang Sheng Shuangcheng Xian Geming Weiyuanhui, Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Jing Zi 801 Budui Lianhe Chuangzu Zu' [The Collaborative Writing Group of the Revolutionary Committee of Shuangcheng County in Heilongjiang Province and the PLA 801 Unit under the Beijing Command], is followed by recognition of the actual writers Wang Zhongyu, Chen Genxi and Xie Shu, although their individual contributions are not distinguished.

The distribution of the types of authorship of the total 126 CR novels is as follows:

| Type of authorship | Number of novels | Percentage of the total 126 |
|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Single | 107 | 84.92 |
| Joint | 8 | 6.35 |
| Collective | 9 | 7.14 |
| Collective-individual | 2 | 1.59 |

According to this table, single authorship still accounts for the overwhelming majority of CR novels. With respect to pre-CR novels, single authorship is even more prominent. Joint authorship also exists in pre-CR novels. However, I have so far found neither collective authorship nor collective-individual authorship in pre-CR novels although the data I have obtained is insufficient to exclude any occasional exception.

There are 122 individual authors in total. This number includes co-authors in joint authorship and actual writers in collective-individual authorship, but it excludes repetitive counting, i.e. an author who wrote more than one novel is counted only once. With a few exceptions, I do not know with precision the age, sex, social background, educational level, or family life of the individual authors. According to their writing experience, these 122 individual authors may be classified into two groups: Group One, which includes 13 individual authors who had literary publications before the Cultural Revolution, and Group Two,

which includes 109 authors who had no publications before the Cultural Revolution. This classification is based on Meishi Tsai's *Contemporary Chinese Novels and Short Stories, 1949-1974: An Annotated Bibliography*, and Kam Louie and Louise Edwards's *Bibliography of English Translations and Critiques of Contemporary Chinese Literature 1945-1992*.

The authors in Group One were generally middle-aged or older during the Cultural Revolution. Most of them began to publish fiction (short stories, novellas or novels) in the 1950s, and some had become noted professional novelists before 1966, for example, Hao Ran,²⁰ Lin Yu, Zhou Jiajun, Zhang Changgong, Zhang Jun,²¹ Mu Chongguang, Li Ruqing²² and Li Yunde. Four authors from Group One, Hao Ran, Zhang Changgong, Li Yunde, and Ke Yang, published more than one novel during the Cultural Revolution. In Group Two, the authors were mainly young or middle-aged during the Cultural Revolution. Some were labelled 'spare-time writers' [*yeyu zuozhe*]. Spare-time writing was promoted and well-organized during the Cultural Revolution. The spare-time writers were mainly workers, peasants, soldiers, school-leavers, and school teachers. Usually, their occupations were labelled by presses, which indicates the authorities' promotion and encouragement of spare-time writing. For example, Guan Jianxun, the author of *Yun yan* [*The Swallow through Cloud*], is labelled 'a young peasant', and Wang Lei, the author of *Jianhe lang* [*Waves on the Jian River*], is labelled as 'a school-leaver'. The authors in Group Two generally referred to themselves as novices in literary creation. No author from this group published more than one novel during the decade except for Xie Shu who is the co-author of two CR novels.

In view of the strict ideological control over the literary and art world during the CR decade, the ideological standing of the authors of CR novels may be assumed to be beyond reproach by the authorities. However, the ideological standing does not always mean that the authors had a 'good' political status or family background. Furthermore, to a certain extent authors had freedom to write by themselves although revision and publication were under close guidance and censorship. For instance, in Laifong Leung's *Morning Sun: Interviews with Chinese Writers of the Lost Generation*, only Zhang Kangkang,²³ Ye Xin, and Zheng Wanlong²⁴ are CR writers. Of the three, Zhang and Ye had similar experiences during the Cultural Revolution. They were both born in big cities: Zhang was born in Hangzhou and Ye in Shanghai. According to their accounts, Zhang was not a member of the Communist Youth League and was from a 'bad' class background; Ye's family were classified as members of the 'Five Black Categories', and Ye was not allowed to join the Red Guards. In response to the government's call, they went to the countryside in the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. Zhang went to the Great Barren North (in northeast China), and Ye to Guizhou Province (in southwest China). Zhang began publishing in 1972 and Ye in 1974. In 1974 Zhang wrote her CR novel *Fenjie xian* [*Demarcation*], and Ye wrote his novel *Yan Ying* [*Stone Falcon*]. Coincidentally they both sent their manuscripts

to Shanghai People's Press. They received replies from the press very soon, and were invited to the press to make revisions under the editors' guidance. Zhang's *Demarcation* was published in 1975. Ye's novel was under revision and was about to be published when the Cultural Revolution ended (the novel was eventually published in 1978). When they recalled their writing experience during the Cultural Revolution, both Zhang and Ye claimed that they wrote their fiction on their own initiative in the countryside, that the editors were willing to help them, and that their 'bad' family background did not hinder their writing and publication.

With regard to writing capability, a number of CR novelists did seem professionally competent. As regards the Group One novelists, they had been active in writing before the Cultural Revolution and their large numbers of literary publications showed their professional competence. As for the Group Two CR writers, apart from their experience in the CR period, many were still active in writing after the Cultural Revolution. A few of them, such as Chen Rong (Shen Rong),²⁵ Gu Hua,²⁶ Mo Yingfeng,²⁷ Li Huixin,²⁸ Zhang Kangkang and Zheng Wanlong have been recognized as talented novelists in the post-CR literary world. These facts indicate the potential of some of the young CR novelists. Moreover, according to the above stories of Zhang Kangkang and Ye Xin, the concerned departments and authorities mainly set store by the manuscripts themselves, which certainly showed the novice authors' potential.

In the CR period the authors of CR novels claimed to take a serious attitude towards their writing and showed themselves willing to talk about their intentions and motives. The following ideas are commonly found in their statements: Firstly, they claimed to be moved by real people and their deeds, which inspired their writing. Secondly, they attributed their works to the Party and Mao's line in literature and art. Lastly, they claimed to follow official literary and artistic principles and to strive for high quality both in content and in form. The following quotation from the postscript of *Shanchuan huxiao* [*The Mountains and Rivers Roar*] may be taken as a representative statement. The author, Gu Hua, later became famous for his post-CR novel *Furongzhen* [*Furong Town*] in 1981.

I am an amateur in literary writing. I have worked and studied in the countryside for over ten years, during which I have met a lot of heroic people who did well in the movement of learning from Dazhai. . . Their heroic deeds have educated me, encouraged me and inspired me. So I take this novel as an ideological report which represents my progress in the Cultural Revolution. . . Under the guidance of Chairman Mao's revolutionary line of literature and art, I am determined to remould my world outlook and to learn conscientiously the creative experience of the model theatrical works. . . I shall try to write works of high quality loved by workers, peasants and soldiers.²⁹

Some writers such as Gu Hua and Chen Rong kept silent about the period in retrospect in the 1980s. Some writers wrote about their anxieties in this

connection after the Cultural Revolution. However, other writers do not take an entirely negative attitude towards certain of their writings in the period. For example, Hao Ran's CR novel *The Golden Road* was reprinted in 1994. He was unwilling to, and did not, make any revision because he did not regret the stand he took when writing this novel. While recalling her writing experience, Zhang Kangkang admitted in 1988 that in the CR period she treated Mao's 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art' with an absolutely pious attitude. We thus have no grounds to conclude that the CR novelists' declamations during the Cultural Revolution about their writing were insincere although they acted in accordance with circumstances.

The readership of CR novels is open to question. No statistical survey was undertaken as far as is known. According to Chinese publishers' convention, the print-run of a book is usually indicated. Generally, the number of copies of the first printing of a CR novel was at least 100,000. A number of novels reach 500,000 copies or more in reprinting. By comparison with serious novels in the late 1980s and 1990s, of which the impression of a work usually has only about 10,000 copies, the print-runs of CR novels are certainly huge. However, the numbers are not substantively informative about the popularity of the novels. At most we may tentatively conclude that the first impression of a work mainly reflected the degree of positive evaluation by the authorities concerned, although, up to a point, the number of reprints indicated readers' attitude, apart from the authorities' judgement. Nevertheless, it is certain that CR novels published earlier had more readers. Works published in 1976 usually had little influence.

Perry Link pointed out, 'in contemporary China, as in other places and times, the place of fiction in society cannot be understood without at least some reference to levels and types of readership'.³⁰ He also analysed the difference between actual reader preferences and prescribed reader preferences, and observed a paradox, i.e. during the Cultural Revolution, 'literature became so politically bowdlerized that actual reader preferences were frightened almost entirely out of sight. Yet there was a sense in which enthusiastic Red Guards did enjoy such literature.'³¹ Roughly speaking, according to our observation, the organizational censorship caused the literary authorities of different levels and some fellow-writers of the authors to become the most attentive readers. In addition to political content, the censorship covered the form of a work, which was required to conform to a number of rules and regulations concerning newly established creative technique. Another group of enthusiastic readers were people who aspired to learn to write. Having studied the fashionable literary policies and theories, they read novels not for entertainment but for understanding the literary principles and rules in practice. The real voluntary readers were primarily school students and students who had just left school. The prohibition of classical works, foreign works and pre-CR works made CR novels the main novels to which they had access. The school education and the ideological environment cultivated their preconceived amusement from reading such novels.

As described by Jeffrey C. Kinkley, 'untutored "popular" taste was also served by hand-copied romances and thrillers that circulated underground even during the Cultural Revolution'.³² Moreover, in spite of official prohibition, classical Chinese works, foreign works and pre-CR Chinese works circulated underground among intentional readers during the Cultural Revolution. For instance, poets and novelists such as Bei Dao, Shu Ting, Mo Yan, Gu Hua, and Zhang Kangkang claimed that they read considerable foreign poetry and fiction and/or classical Chinese works during the CR decade.

LITERARY POLICY AND THEORY IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Mao Zedong's 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art'

From its publication in 1942 until the late 1970s, Mao's 'Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art' ('Yan'an Talks' or 'Talks' for short) dominated the literature and art of the Chinese Communist Party. After seven years' propagation and practice in Yan'an and other areas controlled by the Party, the principles of the 'Yan'an Talks' were announced to be the uniquely correct line of guidance for the literary and art world of the whole of China at the First National Congress of Chinese Literature and Art Workers convened in July 1949. According to Zhou Yang, every achievement in PRC literature and art must follow Mao's literary and artistic line, as represented in the 'Talks'.

During the Cultural Revolution, the literature and art of the previous seventeen years were fundamentally criticized. Although the previous literary and art authorities had consistently stressed carrying out the principles of the 'Yan'an Talks', the general charge against pre-CR literature and art during the Cultural Revolution was that they had opposed the 'Talks'. According to Li Chi's metaphor, the 'Yan'an Talks' was only a framework: 'A careful framework, then, was drawn for the literary workers and all that they had to do was to fill out that framework with particulars, each according to his ability, experience and understanding.'³³ The authorities in the Cultural Revolution tried to fill out the 'framework' in new ways, which they thought to be orthodox.

During the Cultural Revolution the 'Yan'an Talks' was given particular prominence among Mao's works. For example, between 1966 and 1967, the whole document was reprinted twice in *Hongqi* [Red Flag], the authoritative journal of the Party in the Cultural Revolution. It was announced to be the 'revolutionary programme [gangling] of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution'.³⁴ The following comments on the 'Yan'an Talks', quoted from an editorial of *Red Flag*, reflected the new official understanding of Mao's document.

The *Talks* are a compass which, in complex and acute class struggle, gives us guidance in finding our direction, and in distinguishing between fragrant flowers and poisonous weeds, between revolution and counter-revolution and between true revolution and sham revolution.

The *Talks* are a “magic mirror” to detect demons, the sharpest weapon for thoroughly destroying all monsters. Facing it, all words and deeds which oppose the Party, oppose socialism and oppose Mao Tse-tung’s thought will be shown up in their true form and will have no place to hide themselves.

The *Talks* are the clarion that sounds the advance. They call the broad masses of workers, peasants and soldiers to act as the main force, and on those who work in the field of literature and art to go among the workers, peasants and soldiers, to go into the heat of the struggle, to take an active part in this great proletarian cultural revolution, to repudiate thoroughly the reactionary culture of feudalism, capitalism and revisionism and to create an entirely new proletarian, socialist culture.³⁵

According to the above statement, the role played by the ‘Yan’an Talks’ in the Cultural Revolution was first and foremost a ‘weapon’ used to attack the previous literature and art. On the one hand, the previous literary and art world was attacked for carrying out a line which ran counter the principles of the ‘Talks’. On the other hand, the criticism in the ‘Talks’ of some negative views, which existed in the literary and art world of Yan’an in the 1930s and 1940s, was thought to be an example for attacks against the bourgeois and revisionist theories of literature and art.

With respect to literary and artistic creation, two propositions from the ‘Talks’ received particular attention in the CR period. Firstly, Mao had stated, ‘Whether at a high level or a low level, our literature and art serve the popular masses, primarily workers, peasants, and soldiers; they are created for workers, peasants, and soldiers and are used by them.’³⁶ This was known as the ‘direction of serving workers, peasants and soldiers’. It is evident that the ‘workers, peasants and soldiers’ in this proposition refer to the audience for the Party’s literary and artistic works. During the Cultural Revolution, however, a new interpretation was added, i.e. ‘to describe workers, peasants and soldiers, to sing the praises of workers, peasants and soldiers, and to create heroic images of workers, peasants and soldiers’.³⁷ The ‘workers, peasants and soldiers’ here exclusively refer to modern or contemporary workers, peasants and soldiers. It is obvious that this augmented directive became the theoretical basis for condemning subjects and imagery which were not directly related to modern or contemporary workers, peasants and soldiers. As mentioned before, no historical CR fiction can be found, and few CR works focused on the portrayal of modern professional intellectuals.

Secondly, according to Mao, ‘Life as reflected in works of literature and art, compared with ordinary actual life, can and ought to be on a higher plane, more intense, more concentrated, more typical and more idealized, and therefore has greater universality’ (‘six mores’ for short).³⁸ The ‘six mores’ had not been

especially emphasized until 1958, when Mao proposed the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism (2RR). In the discussion on the new creative method, some people pointed out that the spirit of 2RR was in accordance with Mao's 'six mores' in the 'Yan'an Talks'.³⁹ So along with the promotion of 2RR, the 'six mores' were given prominence. During the Cultural Revolution, the 'six mores' were further promoted, with a subtle change in use. Before the Cultural Revolution, the 'six mores' referred to life in general, whereas during the CR period, they were mostly concerned with the characterization of proletarian heroes.

The Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism

Along with his 'Yan'an Talks', Mao's slogan of 2RR was also further promoted in the Cultural Revolution. The authorities declared, 'As for creative method, we must adopt the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism.'⁴⁰ During that decade, the highly unified propaganda and strict censorship undoubtedly intensified the practice of this slogan. The eight model theatrical works and all other officially promoted CR works were claimed as achievements in carrying out 2RR.

Since the method of 2RR developed from Socialist Realism (SR), a development seldom taken into account by scholars, it is necessary to put it into brief historical perspective here. SR was introduced to China not long after it was proposed in the Soviet Union in 1932. In November 1933, Zhou Yang, one of the main leaders of left-wing literary circles in Shanghai, published 'On "Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism": The Negation of the "Dialectical Materialist Method of Creation"', which was later taken to be the first published document to introduce SR in detail. However, the influence of SR was limited in China in the 1930s because no nationwide political force or literary organization was ready to popularize the new slogan. Leftist intellectuals shared reservations that SR had its foundations in the conditions of the Soviet Union and that conditions in China were not yet ripe for adopting SR. Actually, a series of competing slogans based on the formula 'X realism' was proposed in the late 1930s. They include 'revolutionary realism', 'realism of the Three People's Principles', 'realism of the resistance against Japan', 'democratic realism', 'extensive realism', and 'national revolutionary realism'.⁴¹

Reference to SR became more frequent during the 1940s, especially after the publication of Mao's 'Yan'an Talks', in which Mao affirmed SR. However, the authorities began to promote SR on a grand scale only after 1949. It was declared by the authorities that the socialist elements in politics, the economy and culture were increasing, providing a substantial and practical foundation for SR. The promotion of SR reached a peak at the Second National Conference

of the Representatives of Literature and Art Workers (23 September – 7 October 1953). SR was officially confirmed as the criterion of literary creation and criticism in China, and a new evaluation of the recent past was officially put forward. According to the premier, Zhou Enlai, 'During the previous thirty years, the Communist Party and the proletariat held the leading position in the Chinese revolution, and so the dominant ideology in culture during the last thirty years was Socialist Realism.'⁴² Lu Xun was hailed as 'the great pioneer and representative of Socialist Realism' in China. The situation is similar to the Soviet Union, in which SR was established in the 1930s, but Maxim Gorky's 1906 novel *Mother* was announced as the representative pioneering work of SR. As for definition of SR, Chinese literary circles had adopted the following formulation confirmed by the Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934.

Socialist realism, being the basic method of Soviet imaginative literature and literary criticism, demands from the artist a truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. At the same time this truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic depiction of reality must be combined with the task of the ideological moulding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism.⁴³

In 1956, following criticism of Stalin in the Soviet Union, SR was re-evaluated worldwide. In China, under the new policy of 'letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend', the promotion of SR began to be questioned. The slogan was criticized for overemphasizing socialist ideology, excluding other creative methods and underestimating romanticism. In spite of some criticism, however, the attitude of Chinese literary intellectuals towards SR remained on the whole positive.

Later, as the political campaign against 'Rightists' developed, counter-criticism became dominant. One of the charges made against 'Rightist' critics and writers such as Qin Zhaoyang and Liu Shaotang was that they had opposed SR. Actually, from mid-1957 to late 1958, discussion of SR took the form of a massive reaffirmation. Just as the reaffirmation of SR in China reached its climax in 1958, the Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism came into being.

At a conference in March 1958, Mao Zedong discussed folk songs and new poetry:

New poetry ought to develop on the basis of folk songs and classical poetry. The forms of new poetry ought to be national, and the contents ought to be the unity of opposites of realism and romanticism. Poems cannot be composed in a too realistic way.⁴⁴

About two months later, in May, he said at another conference, 'Proletarian literature and art ought to adopt the creative method of the combination of

revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism'.⁴⁵ In the same month, Zhou Yang published 'New Folk Songs Have Opened a New Path for Poetry' in the first issue of *Red Flag*, which was later taken to be the first official document to announce and expound the slogan.

Although we cannot be sure whether the final form of the slogan was invented by Mao personally, it can be shown that Mao had been consistently in favour of 'revolutionary romanticism'. As early as 1939, Mao had juxtaposed the 'Realism of Resistance against Japan' and 'Revolutionary Romanticism'.⁴⁶ In the 'Yan'an Talks', some of Mao's elaborations on literary creation embodied romantic ideals, which were quoted later by some critics as support for 'revolutionary romanticism' or even 2RR. Finally, Mao's own practice as a poet incorporated elements of romanticism. Under 2RR, his poems were acclaimed as 'perfect representations of revolutionary romanticism, and models of a perfect combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism'.⁴⁷

The slogan was welcomed by the Chinese literary world. In addition to individual inclinations, there were social reasons for the support of the new slogan. The government was then promoting the Great Leap Forward and the atmosphere was full of fanaticism and extravagant fantasies. Writers and critics agreed that the noble spirit of the heroic and new epoch needed romanticism.

Initially, 2RR and SR were not seen as mutually exclusive and they ran parallel to each other. However, SR soon began to decline. At the Third National Conference of Chinese Literature and Art Workers (1960), Zhou Yang stated, 'Our Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism critically carries forward the advanced tradition of realism and romanticism in literature and art of the past, . . . and becomes a completely new artistic method.'⁴⁸ The last appearance of the term SR in the *Literary Gazette* [*Wenyi bao*] of the 1960s was in No. 13-14 in 1960. The entire disappearance of SR was evidently related to the political opposition between China and the Soviet Union during the 1960 and 1970s, during which SR was still promoted in the Soviet Union.

Unlike SR, which had an official definition, 2RR has never been given an established definition. The principles and definitions of 2RR existed only as scattered comments in the discussions welcoming its proposal by Mao. Nevertheless, although it replaced SR, 2RR inherited and developed the tenets of SR. The following generalized tenets are significant.

1. 2RR emphasises idealism. Realism had been dominant in Chinese literature and art since the 1920s and 1930s. In the early 1950s, this tendency was intensified to the point where realism was taken to be 'the most revolutionary, the most advanced and the most ideal creative method in the history of human literature and art'.⁴⁹ Correspondingly, other literary and artistic methods and schools including romanticism were denigrated or excluded. In 2RR, however, romanticism was treated on equal terms with realism. 'Revolutionary romanticism' in 2RR was deemed consistent with idealism

[*lixiangzhuyi*]. Zhou Yang stated, ‘The basic spirit of our revolutionary romanticism is revolutionary idealism, i.e. the manifestation of revolutionary idealism in artistic methods.’⁵⁰

2. 2RR emphasizes the Marxist world outlook of writers and the ideological utilitarianism of literature and art. The main trend in literary and art circles before the promotion of 2RR had been to advocate Marxist ideology for writers and an ideological nature for literature and art. Nevertheless, disagreements grew out of conflicting interpretations of the principles of realism. For instance, a well-known argument in the name of adhering to the principles of realism was that a true and profound depiction of life by means of the realistic method was helpful in mastering dialectical materialism and expressing it in literature.⁵¹ However, under 2RR, the dominance of a Marxist world outlook in literary and artistic creation and the political utility of literature and art was unconditional. Critics stated, ‘When considering the meaning of 2RR, we should emphasize the attribute “revolutionary”, which is the crux of the artistic method, rather than stressing the artistic concepts of realism and romanticism.’⁵² ‘In order to master 2RR, we have no method other than to plunge into the thick of life to build up a Marxist world outlook.’⁵³

3. 2RR emphasizes tendentiousness in literary and artistic *zhenshi* [truth or truthfulness]. Before 2RR, there existed a contradictory double standard about *zhenshi*. On the one hand, many critics and writers held that literary *zhenshi* was subordinate to *qingxiangxing* [tendentiousness] of class and party. But, on the other hand, it was also claimed that, according to the principles of realism, literature and art should be true to life and avoid glossing over reality. Zhou Yang stated, ‘In describing life, *zhenshi* is the highest principle of realistic art.’⁵⁴ More often than not, critics criticized individual works for being of poor artistic quality because they ignored the realistic *zhenshi* or the objectively descriptive *zhenshi*. However, after 2RR was promoted, the emphasis on tendentiousness in literary *zhenshi* reached a justifiably higher level because the status of revolutionary romanticism was raised. Thus, the previous rhetoric of advocating realistic *zhenshi* and objectively descriptive *zhenshi* was now taken to be revisionism.

4. 2RR emphasizes idealized heroic characters. Under the slogan of SR, an important task of socialist literature and art was thought to be the portrayal of new characters (heroic characters), showing their socialist or communist morality and ideology. After the advancement of 2RR, still more importance was attached to the portrayal of revolutionary heroes, and 2RR was taken to be the most effective way of fulfilling this task.

The above tenets of 2RR were established before the Cultural Revolution. During the CR period, the tenets of 2RR developed, under which the position of revolutionary romanticism was further advanced. In other words, the above tenets, which mainly grew out of the promotion of romanticism, were more emphasized and intensified. A fashionable expression indicating the principle of 2RR was *yuan yu shenghuo*, *gao yu shenghuo* [to be based on life, but on a

higher plane than life]. The 'six mores' from Mao's 'Yan'an Talks' became the typical interpretation of 2RR. More particularly, new principles about the portrayal of heroic characters were established. According to the 'Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing',⁵⁵ the idealized heroes were to be endowed with the following new qualities: they had to be heroes following the correct Party line, capable of distinguishing the correct from the wrong line. Revolutionary optimism was the keynote of their heroic spirit. Sentimentalism, especially love between men and women, was taken to be bourgeois.

'Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing'

According to her own testimony, Jiang Qing began to oppose pre-CR literature and art in 1962. Her main accusation was that large numbers of literary and artistic works propagated bourgeois or feudal ideology, and misrepresented the images of workers, peasants and soldiers.⁵⁶ Mao himself was also dissatisfied with the current literature and art. In the same year, while talking about struggles in the ideological sphere, he warned, 'The use of the novel for anti-Party activities is quite an invention.'⁵⁷ In 1963 Mao pointed out, 'Problems abound in all forms of art such as the drama, ballads, music, the fine arts, the dance, the cinema, poetry and literature and the people involved are numerous; in many departments very little has been achieved so far in socialist transformation . . . Isn't it absurd that many Communists are enthusiastic about promoting feudal and capitalist art, but not socialist art?'⁵⁸ In 1964, Mao issued an even more severe comment on the previous years' literary and art world: 'In the last 15 years these associations, most of their publications (it is said that a few are good) and by and large the people in them (that is not everybody) have not carried out the policies of the Party . . . In recent years, they have slid right down to the brink of revisionism. Unless they remould themselves in real earnest, at some future date they are bound to become groups like the Hungarian Petofi Club.'⁵⁹ In 1965, with Mao's permission, Jiang Qing commissioned Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan to write an article 'Views on *Hai Rui's Dismissal from Office*' [*Ping Hai Rui baguan*], published in November under Yao Wenyuan's authorship.⁶⁰ Its publication was the prelude to the Cultural Revolution.

From the 2nd to the 20th of February 1966, Jiang Qing organized the Forum on Work of Literature and Art in the Army in Shanghai, supported by Lin Biao. Under Jiang Qing's supervision, the content of the forum was summarized in a report, i.e. 'Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces with which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Jiang Qing' ('Forum Summary' or 'Summary' for short). Mao went over the manuscript three

times in person. The main content of the 'Forum Summary' was published in a *PLA Daily [Jiefangjun Bao]* editorial on 18 April. The original was a restricted document until its publication in *Red Flag* in September 1967.

The 'Forum Summary' significantly influenced the literature and art of the Cultural Revolution. According to the 'Summary', traditional Chinese literature and art were generally denounced as feudalism. Moreover, it argued that the Chinese literary and art world from the foundation of the People's Republic to the Cultural Revolution had been controlled by a 'black line'. The 'black line' was defined as 'the combination of bourgeois ideas on literature and art, modern revisionist ideas on literature and art, and the literature and art of the thirties'.⁶¹ Under this judgement, most Chinese writers, artists, and critics active in the left-wing literature and art movement in the 1930s (the only noted exception in the 'Forum Summary' is Lu Xun), and/or active between 1949 and 1965, were criticized personally and for their works.⁶² The 'Summary' also listed a number of views on literary and artistic creation as 'typical expressions of this black line'. They are 'truthful writing', 'the broad path of realism', 'the deepening of realism', 'opposition to "subject-matter as the decisive factor"', 'middle characters', 'opposition to "the smell of gunpowder"', 'the spirit of the age as the merging of various trends"', and 'discarding the classics and rebelling against orthodoxy'. These expressions will be discussed in the coming section.

Foreign literature and art were also generally criticized by the 'Forum Summary'.⁶³ Western literature and art bore the brunt of this criticism. American classical films were in particular mentioned as exercising harmful effects on the Chinese literary and art world. However, the 'Summary' laid more stress on Russian and Soviet literature and art. It praised Stalin for his disapproval of modernist literature and art, but criticized him for his acceptance of Russian and European classics. Of all Soviet writers and critics, Maxim Gorky, who was claimed to be the founder of the Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union, had enjoyed the highest reputation in the Chinese literary world, and had frequently been quoted by Chinese literary authorities. However, Gorky was neither mentioned in the 'Forum Summary' nor quoted by literary authorities during the CR period.

The 'Summary' proposed to oppose the previous long-standing admiration of the Chinese literary world for Soviet literature and called for criticism of 'big figures'. Mikhail Alexandrovich Sholokhov was criticized as 'the father of revisionist literature and art'. His representative works *Quiet Flows the Don*, *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *The Fate of a Man* were specifically targeted for attack. Sholokhov was one of the most prominent writers of Soviet Socialist Realism, and his fiction was commended as representative of SR works in the Soviet Union after the Second World War. Sholokhov himself consistently declared to advocate SR, even in 1965 at the ceremony in which he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Criticism of Sholokhov and his works implied denial of Socialist Realism in spite of no explicit criticism. However, as SR was the foundation from which 2RR developed, the denial of SR did not mean that SR was on the

whole opposite to the new Chinese literary trend during the CR period, only that it had not reached the characteristics of the new style of writing. For instance, in the later criticism against Sholokhov, one important argument put forward by Chinese critics was that his heroic characters often had 'shortcomings'. CR literature promoted perfection of heroic characters.

It needs to be noted that the general criticism of foreign literature in propaganda could not lead to the thorough elimination of any practical influence of individual foreign literary works on Chinese CR literature. Before the Cultural Revolution, Chinese translations of a considerable number of well-known foreign literary works had been published in China. They continued to be circulated underground among interested readers during the CR period. Some of the works were not criticized by name in the Cultural Revolution. In fact, the heroism of the protagonist in several foreign novels had some similarity to the promoted heroic quality in CR literary works. Generally, CR novelists had the chance to read a number of foreign works before and/or during the CR decade. Some young CR writers declared after the Cultural Revolution that the Soviet author Nikolay Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered* had been their favourite foreign novel. Zhang Kangkang recalled in the late 1980s that this novel and Mao's 'Yan'an Talks' had had a great impact on her youth.⁶⁴ Likewise, British author E. Y. Voynich's novel *The Gadfly*, which was also commended in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, impressed some CR writers. Wendy Larson and Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg recapitulate the post-CR representative 'hazy' [menglong] poet Bei Dao's observation which indicates the availability of foreign literary works during the CR and their influence on young writers' writing: 'During the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, restricted books often became available to students and youth, opening to them the possibility of writing in an unofficial language and the eventual possibility of developing their own language.'⁶⁵ It thus stands to reason that CR novelists could consciously or unconsciously take certain elements from individual foreign works.

Nevertheless, in spite of the influence on individual authors and works, the holistic trend determined by the 'Forum Summary' in the prelude to the Cultural Revolution was certain. That is, apart from modernism which had consistently been attacked by communists, other styles of literature and art to which communists had once consented or even promoted, such as classicism and critical realism, were denied. Consequently, the literature and art of the Cultural Revolution were designed to cut off all relationships with traditional and foreign literature and art, and became an unprecedentedly closed system in the history of contemporary Chinese literature and art.

On the basis of denying previous theories and works of Chinese and foreign literature and art, the 'Forum Summary' established a set of propositions, of which the creation of heroic images as a fundamental task of socialist literature and art was the most important. Special consideration will be given to this proposition later.

The Eight Negative Expressions

From 1949 to 1965, the general tendency in Chinese literature and art was towards increasing radicalism. However, the policies of literature and art often changed within certain limits in accordance with changing political situations and ideological views. In response to those relatively mild policies of literature and art or purely out of their individual artistic awareness and bravery, literary intellectuals or leaders challenged the radical tendency. The above eight expressions listed in the 'Forum Summary' may be taken as examples of the challenging views. Criticism of these views in the CR period formed an important part of CR literary and artistic policies and theories. In order to reveal the connection between the pre-CR literary radicalism and CR literary policies and theories, based on the data obtained thus far, I place them into a brief historical perspective here.

Truthful writing

This was a long-standing controversial proposition and was subject to massive criticism three times during the pre-CR period. In 1954, Hu Feng wrote his 'Views on Literature and Art' ['Dui wenyi wenti de yijian'] and sent it to the CCP Central Committee.⁶⁶ In his presentation, Hu stressed the principle of 'describing factual life truthfully, deeply and resolutely'. In the subsequent campaign against Hu Feng launched in 1955, his view on 'truthful writing' was attacked along with his other claims. Next, during the period of 'letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend' between 1956 and 1957, 'truthful writing' was put under discussion. Chen Yong, later thought to be the representative of those in favour of this view during that period, stated, 'If a work does not loyally reflect actual life but glosses over reality, it will lose artistic truthfulness and consequently have no artistic quality, even though it is very progressive politically. . . Truthfulness is the life of art. Without truthfulness, art will lose life.'⁶⁷ The views of Chen Yong and other literary intellectuals in favour of truthful writing were attacked in the Anti-Rightist Campaign. Later, in 1960, in view of the tendency towards untruthfulness in literature and art during the Great Leap Forward (1958 and 1959), Li Helin pointed out, 'The ideological quality of a work of literature or art depends on whether it reflects life truthfully; and its truthful reflection of life represents its artistic quality.'⁶⁸ Li Helin's point was soon criticized during the height of the campaign against 'revisionist ideology of literature and art' (1959-60). In the 'Forum Summary' 'truthful writing' was listed as the first negative expression.

The broad path of realism

In 1956 and 1957, the Soviet Union and East European communist countries

began to criticize Stalin and orthodox policies in areas like literature and the arts. In China, Mao proposed 'letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend'. During this relatively open period, writers and critics, such as He Zhi (Qin Zhaoyang), Zhou Bo and Chen Yong, expressed their views. One of the most important articles was He Zhi's 'Realism: the Broad Path' [*Xianshizhuyi — guangkuo de daolu*]. This article criticized the dogmatism prevalent in the literary and art world by analysing the shortcomings of Socialist Realism. According to the author, literature and art should not serve current politics at the cost of sacrificing the laws and characteristics of literature and art. He emphasized that literature and art could only spring from a broad realistic life and should reflect this life truthfully. After initial endorsements, He Zhi's article was subject to severe attacks in the Anti-Rightist Campaign. In the 'Forum Summary', the title of this article was listed as a negative expression of the 'black line'.

The deepening of realism

The main trend in literature and art during the Great Leap Forward was an overwhelming emphasis on romanticism, which was thought to bear out the new slogan 2RR. Later, along with the Party's policies of modification in politics and economy due to the failure of the Great Leap Forward, the literary and art world began to readjust its policies. In August 1962, at 'the Forum on the Creation of Agricultural Short Stories', Shao Quanlin, Party Secretary of the Chinese Writers' Association, proposed the concept of 'deepening realism'. He pointed out, 'Realism is the foundation of our creation; there is no romanticism without realism. Our creation should be closer to reality and reflect reality in a down-to-earth manner. . . Deepening realism is the basis on which we create the forceful revolutionary romanticism and explore the path for the 'Combination of Revolutionary Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism'.⁶⁹ This is the source of 'the deepening of realism' in the 'Forum Summary'.

Opposition to 'subject-matter as the decisive factor'

In 1961 when the literary and art world began to readjust the prevailing radicalism of the Great Leap Forward, *Wenyi Bao* published an editorial titled 'The Problem of Subject Matter' [*Ticai wenti*]. The editorial criticized the current promotion of important topics (mainly indicating sensational politicized events) only as subject matter. According to the editorial, 'It is necessary to do away with restrictions on subject-matter . . . Subject matter itself cannot be taken as the primary or decisive criterion, still less the unique criterion . . . Writers and artists have full freedom to choose their subject matter without any restriction.'⁷⁰ This article and its contentions became the source of the expression 'opposition to "subject-matter as the decisive factor"'.

Middle characters

At the same forum as mentioned in the section ‘The deepening of realism’ (page 24), along with the deepening of realism, Shao Quanlin proposed another point which challenged the pervasive emphasis on creating heroic characters, namely, the portrayal of ‘middle’ characters. According to him, ‘Heroes and backward people are in the minority; people in the middle are in the majority . . . To portray heroes is to set examples, but we should also portray the people in the middle. If we only create heroic characters but do not portray characters who suffer from hesitation and contradiction, the fiction’s realism will be insufficient . . .’⁷¹ This view was later criticized along with the deepening of realism in 1964, and was listed in the ‘Forum Summary’.

Opposition to ‘the smell of gunpowder’

Once, in 1964, while seeing the dance drama *The White-haired Girl* [*Bai mao nü*], one official from the Ministry of Culture commented, ‘The smell of gunpowder in this drama might be too strong and the armed struggle too prominent.’⁷² This incidental statement with regard to a concrete work was the source of the expression ‘opposition to “the smell of gunpowder”’.

The spirit of the age as the merging of various trends

In October 1962, Zhou Gucheng published his article ‘The Historical Position of Artistic Creation’ [*Yishu chuangzuo de lishi diwei*] in *New Construction* [*Xin Jianshe*], in which he gave an explanation of ‘the spirit of the age’. According to him, ‘the spirit of the age’ is a merged unity of ideologies of different classes in a specific age. ‘Although the spirit of an age is a unity, its expression from different classes or individual persons might be very different. Such differences reflected in artistic works become the characteristics or originality of the works . . .’⁷³ Zhou Gucheng’s idea was generally dismissed in academic and literary circles soon after its publication. In the ‘Forum Summary’, it was generalized as ‘the spirit of the age as the merging of various trends’.

Discarding the classics and rebelling against orthodoxy

In a conference on feature films convened in July 1959, a film official criticized current production for placing too much emphasis on military subjects. He said, ‘Among the twelve planned feature films reported by the studios across the country, there are eight on military affairs. Film production today is characterised by such stereotypes as “classics of revolution” and “orthodoxy of war” . . . Today, my speech simply discards the “classics” and rebels against the “orthodoxy”.’⁷⁴ In fact, ‘discarding the classics and rebelling against orthodoxy’ [*li jing pan dao*]

is a Chinese idiom. The speaker used it in this context as a humorous metaphor to encourage the diversification of subject matter in film production. In 1964, this humorous and incidental remark was attacked by Zhang Chunqiao and others. In the 'Forum Summary', it was defined as 'discarding the classics of Marxism-Leninism, of Mao Tse-tung's thought, and rebelling against the orthodoxy of people's revolutionary war'.

Soon after they were listed in the 'Forum Summary' as representative negative views on literature and art, the above eight expressions were frequently named as targets in official publications. They were attacked as the theoretical basis on which numbers of so-called anti-Party and anti-socialist works were produced in the pre-CR period.⁷⁵

Actually, according to the foregoing, the eight expressions appeared at different times before the Cultural Revolution. Criticized not long after they were proposed, they did not exert much influence on actual literary and artistic practice. The criticism of them in the Cultural Revolution exaggerated their influence on pre-CR literature and art. The 'Forum Summary' in effect dismissed all previous views on literature and art which challenged radical tendencies.

Portraying Heroic Characters: The Fundamental Task of Socialist Literature and Art

During the pre-CR and CR periods, official literary policies consistently emphasized the portrayal of new characters [*xin de renwu*], advanced characters [*xianjin renwu*] or heroic characters [*yingxiong renwu*] of workers, peasants and soldiers. Here the terms 'new character', 'advanced character' and 'heroic character' are synonymous. In the 1950s, before Mao proposed 2RR, the 'new character' and 'advanced character' were more frequently used in speeches or writings concerning literary and artistic theories and critics. While 2RR was in vogue, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, the term 'heroic character' was more frequently used. When the term 'heroic character' referred to a fictional character, the term 'heroic character' was often substituted with 'heroic image' [*yingxiong xingxiang*]. In addition, during the Cultural Revolution, 'heroic characters/images of workers, peasants and soldiers' and 'proletarian heroic characters/images' were equivalents.

The emphasis on creating heroic characters may be divided into three stages. First, before 2RR was proposed in 1958, and in spite of promoting the portrayal of new characters or advanced characters, no official opposition was found against careful portrayal of backward or middle characters. It was believed that the portrayal of backward characters was conducive to showing the contrast and contradiction between heroic and backward characters. In a speech of 1956, Zhou Yang openly encouraged writers to create backward or middle characters: 'It is as if to portray backward or middle characters has become unnecessary

because of the stress given to new characters. This is a kind of partiality. Like the realistic world, the artistic world should have a range of different characters . . .⁷⁶ Moreover, before 2RR, it was permissible to show the new characters' shortcomings and mistakes, although primary importance was attached to demonstrating their meritorious qualities and achievements. According to Zhou Yang, 'Shortcomings in the lives of heroes may be described . . . If a hero has no shortcomings in life nor mistakes in work, he would be a god.'⁷⁷ 'Certainly, we should not "deify" or "formularise" heroes . . . Heroic characters cannot be perfect in all aspects.'⁷⁸

At the second stage, which covers the period under 2RR before the Cultural Revolution, the previous propositions regarding the careful portrayal of other categories of characters and the description of the shortcomings and mistakes of heroes were altered. Shao Quanlin's case for 'portraying middle characters' was such an example. Actually, his endorsement of middle characters rested on his prior endorsement of portraying heroic characters. He said, 'It is necessary to emphasize advanced characters or heroic characters because they embody the spirit of our age. On the whole, however, in our literature, the characters in the middle are relatively insufficient.'⁷⁹ As for the shortcomings of heroic characters, Shao did not directly endorse describing them at that time, but commented, 'Heroic characters may not have shortcomings, but their development through experience ought to be described. If only their merits are described, that means that one class has only one typical character.'⁸⁰ However, his mildly challenging views were attacked as bourgeois propositions during this stage.

During the third stage, i.e. during the Cultural Revolution itself, the promotion of the portrayal of heroes reached its height. The principle that 'to try to create heroic characters of workers, peasants and soldiers is the fundamental task of socialist literature and art' had consistently been dominant among a number of newly established ideas since it was first declared in the 'Forum Summary'. According to the authorities' arguments for this proposition, to create the heroic characters of workers, peasants and soldiers was one way of serving the workers, peasants and soldiers. Moreover, according to this view, every class tried to create its own heroic characters in literature and art in order to advance its own politics, ideology and morality. Proletarian literature and art should also create proletarian heroic characters, even taking it as the fundamental mission. Below is a quotation from *Red Flag*, which shows the officially proclaimed significance of the portrayal of heroic characters.

To portray lofty, great, perfect and dazzlingly brilliant proletarian heroic characters is our most important political task, and also a new task in the proletarian revolution in literature and art. It is this which significantly distinguishes proletarian literature and art from the literature and art of the exploiting classes, which include the bourgeois literature and art of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the literature and art of critical realism in the nineteenth century.⁸¹

In a comparative sense, in theory and practice regarding the creation of heroic characters, the difference between the third stage and the second stage includes two aspects. Firstly, during the second stage, the portrayal of other categories of characters was simply disapproved of in principle, while at the third stage, unlike the previous disapproval, the portrayal of other characters was prescribed to set off the heroic characters. Secondly, and also during the second stage, although the proposition of describing shortcomings of heroic characters was criticized by radicals, the opposite — the promotion of perfect images — had not been openly established as yet. At the third stage, however, not only was the description of shortcomings unambiguously excluded, but the perfection of heroic characters was also promoted as the desirable goal. General standards were then established, i.e. 'lofty, great and perfect' [*gaoda, wanmei*], to which were sometimes added 'brilliant' [*guanghui*] or 'dazzlingly brilliant' [*guangcai zhao ren*].

Around the claimed fundamental task of socialist literature and art to create 'lofty, great, perfect and brilliant' proletarian heroic characters, other new theories and policies were established. In brief, the proposition of the 'fundamental task', and accompanying principles and techniques designed to fulfil this task, constituted the critical feature of the literary and artistic theories and policies established in the Cultural Revolution.

The Experience of 'Yangban Xi' [the Model Theatrical Works] and the Principle of 'San Tuchu' [Three Prominences]

While strongly criticizing traditional Chinese literature and art, foreign literature and art, and most especially communist literature and art before the Cultural Revolution, the Cultural Revolution authorities declared eight theatrical works as models in 1967. These were five Peking operas: *The Red Lantern* [*Hong deng ji*], *Shajiabang* [*On the Shajia River*], *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* [*Zhi qu Weihushan*], *Raid on the White Tiger Regiment* [*Qixi Baihutuan*] and *On the Docks* [*Haigang*]; two dance dramas: *Red Detachment of Women* [*Hongse niangzijun*] and *The White-haired Girl* [*Bai mao nü*]; and one symphony: *Shajiabang* [*On the Shajia River*].

Except for the dance drama, *The White-haired Girl*, which was based on an opera of the same name created in the Yan'an period, the other model works were revised or rearranged from a number of Peking operas shown in the National Festival of Modern Peking Operas [*Quanguo Jingju Xiandai Xi Guanmo Yanchu Dahui*] in June and July 1964 in Beijing. They were selected by the authorities headed by Jiang Qing after the festival, who intended to make them model works. The final revisions to these works were completed during the Cultural Revolution. It stands to reason that the former selection indicated that the original works had certain factors which complied with the selectors' literary and artistic views. Moreover, the later revision and finalization were made

directly under the care and supervision of Jiang Qing. Therefore, although their original forms were made before the Cultural Revolution, these works represented the direction of literary and artistic theories and practice promoted during the Cultural Revolution.

After they were set as models, a nationwide campaign to popularize the theatrical works was launched, in which the experience [*jingyan*] of their creation was also promoted throughout the literary and art world. Of the eight works, the five modern Peking operas were the most popular. This could be because they were relatively easy to perform and more readily understood by the masses than the dance dramas and the symphony. Moreover, the creation of operatic images was more appropriate for imitation in other forms of literature and art, such as fiction and films, than in music or dance.

The central point of the model theatrical works was to fulfil the 'fundamental task' of creating lofty, great and perfect proletarian heroes. The following paragraph by Qian Haoliang in 1967, who played the part of Li Yuhe in *The Red Lantern*, describes Jiang Qing's directives.

Comrade Jiang Qing asked us to create the proletarian heroic image of Li Yuhe through the use of magnificent things. That is, we must resort to the most beautiful music, the best arias, the most impressive movements, and the most important positions on the stage to make this heroic image more prominent, more ideal, and more lofty.⁸²

The experience of the model theatrical works was summarized into a set of general principles, of which *san tuchu* [the 'three prominences'] is the most important. This delineates the relationship between the primary hero and other characters within a work. The formula first appeared in an article by Yu Huiyong, Minister of Culture during the Cultural Revolution, published in May 1968. His definition is as follows:

Among all characters, give prominence to positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to main heroic characters; among the main heroic characters, give prominence to the central characters.⁸³

The standard definition of the principle was made by Yao Wenyuan in November 1969:

Among all characters, give prominence to the positive characters; among the positive characters, give prominence to the heroic characters; among the heroic characters, give prominence to the main heroic characters.⁸⁴

The two definitions differ only in terminology, and the terminology in Yao's definition referring to the classification of characters was also commonly adopted.

After the principle of ‘three prominences’ was established, another parallel formula, ‘three foilings’ [*san peichen*], was proposed.

Between the negative characters and the positive characters, make the negative characters serve as foils to the positive characters; between the positive characters and the heroic characters, make the positive characters serve as foils to the heroic characters; between the heroic characters and the main heroic characters, make the heroic characters serve as foils to the main heroic characters.⁸⁵

The principle of ‘three foilings’ is evidently another expression of the ‘three prominences’, emphasizing ways of creating the prominences. The two principles formularized a hierarchical relationship among the categories of character. In short, characters are given a four-level ideological classification from the lowest to the highest: Negative Characters [*fanmian renwu*], Positive Characters [*zhengmian renwu*], Heroic Characters [*yingxiong renwu*] and Main Heroic Characters [*zhuyao yingxiong renwu*]. Each type sets off the next type on the higher level, but the ultimate aim is to make the first three types set off the main heroic characters.

The principle of the ‘three prominences’ continued to be promoted during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In late 1975, it was reformulated as the ‘creative experience of the model theatrical works’ in line with Mao’s comments in 1975. According to Mao, regulations governing the model theatrical works were too strict: ‘It is not enough to have only the model theatrical works. Literary works are blamed only for small shortcomings. The policy of letting a hundred flowers blossom has disappeared.’⁸⁶ Mao’s comments discouraged formulaic expressions such as the ‘three prominences’, although the principles themselves were not under criticism.

The model theatrical works had a great impact on CR literature and art. Since its key principle focuses on the portrayal of proletarian heroic characters, the experience of the theatrical works is mainly applicable to those categories of works which have plots and characterization. For example, as McDougall pointed out in regard to poetry, ‘The limits imposed by the Gang of Four — chiefly the requirement to learn from the *yangbanxi* — did not directly impinge on the poet’s choice of compositional techniques.’⁸⁷ On the other hand, fiction is one of the most obvious genres in which the principles from the model theatrical works could be used. In fact, in the CR period novelists invariably claimed to be following the experience of the model theatrical works.

In 1968, Mark Schorer made the following remark on literary criticism, which was quoted by Leo Ou-fan Lee in his well-known essay ‘The Politics of Technique: Perspectives of Literary Dissidence in Contemporary Chinese Fiction’:

Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content as such is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the *achieved* content, the form, the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics.⁸⁸

To sum up, however, put into a holistic perspective, CR literary policy and theory intensified the tradition of modern Chinese literary writing and criticism analysed by Leo Ou-fan Lee, i.e. the tradition to give prominence to content rather than to form — literary technique. Therefore, in the following analyses, we shall deal with many aspects of CR novels by considering their social content and significance, although the whole book is intended to lay stress on the novels' literary and stylistic 'form'.

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