

THE CHINESE SHORT STORY OF 1917-1927

PATTERNS OF INFLUENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

While the assertion that the early modern Chinese short story was greatly influenced by foreign as well as traditional elements has been all too often made, it seems to me that no research has really provided detailed historical evidence to support such an argument. This thesis is, then, an attempt to remedy the situation by trying to ascertain and single out the specific elements which contributed to the making of the modern Chinese short story.

The organization of this thesis basically follows an inductive method. Chapter One explains the need and scope for this study. Chapter Two reviews the history of the first decade of modern Chinese literature in the hope of discovering the major theoretical issues being debated and discussed then. Chapter Three describes three thematic features that have been identified in the short stories produced in the same period. Chapter Four tries to relate what is described in Chapter Two and Chapter Three in a meaningful way. It specifically attempts to determine if the literary theories in vogue exerted any discernible influence on contemporary literary practice. The last chapter of this thesis simply and briefly recapitulates two conclusions: The modern Chinese short story (1917-1927) was first and foremost influenced by the propagation of two Western literary trends-- "realism" and "romanticism"; the customary practice of labelling the Association for Literary Study realistic and the Creation Society romantic is too simplistic. In fact the two literary rivals were not as exclusive in their literary taste as they might have appeared on the surface.

Preface

For students of Chinese-Western comparative literature, the first decade of modern Chinese literature (1917-1927) is a rich mine yet to be exploited. Not only is it a period which witnessed an iconoclastic tendency well captured by Lin Yusheng in his *The Crisis of Chinese Consciousness*, but also a time when Western literature, rather than its science and gunboats, spellbound a large number of Chinese intellectuals. Concerted efforts were made by the vanguards of the New Literature Movement to introduce foreign literary works and theories to readers as well as writers. As a result, the Chinese literature produced in this period took on a new look, the genre of the short story being the most convincing testimony of this change. To anyone familiar with traditional Chinese tales, the short stories written during this period appear somehow alien to their traditional counterparts. Indeed, they seem to be more akin to those written by Gogol, Chekhov or Maupassant than by Feng Menglong 冯梦龙, Ling Mengchu 凌蒙初 and their anonymous predecessors. No wonder Zheng Boqi 郑伯奇 should have declared in his preface to Vol. 5 of *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 [An anthology of modern Chinese literature] that modern Chinese short stories came into being largely as the offspring of foreign influence.

Although there exists a considerable body of literature on the impact of foreign literature on modern Chinese literature, explorations into the genre of the short story to determine what

these influences specifically are seem to have remained anything but comprehensive and systematic. This thesis then grows out of an attempt to remedy the situation. By looking into short stories collected in *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* and, by examining the literary convictions espoused by two groups of modern Chinese writers--the Association for Literary Study and the Creation Society--I have been able to ascertain two major literary trends at work in modern Chinese short stories: the realistic and the romantic.

I am aware the employment of such words as "realistic" and "romantic" is bound to create confusion if an operational definition is not provided here. In this thesis then, "realistic" refers to a tendency which proposes to record social reality through an objective and sympathetic presentation of the wretched plight of the poor and the oppressed; whereas "romantic" suggests a tendency which extols Nature and subjective emotions by means of lyrical language and an unabashed revelation of inglorious impulses and conducts.

The organization of this thesis basically follows an inductive method. Chapter One explains the need and scope for this study. Chapter Two reviews the history of the first decade of modern Chinese literature with the hope of discovering the major theoretical issues which were debated and discussed then. Chapter Three describes three thematic features that have been identified in the short stories produced in the same period. Chapter Four tries to relate what is described in Chapter Two and

Chapter Three in a meaningful way. It specifically attempts to determine if the literary theories in vogue have exerted any discernible influence on contemporary literary practice. The last chapter of this thesis recapitulates two points worthy of special attention.

An investigation of this nature necessarily involves a large amount of translation from Chinese into English. As all translation is done by myself, I am fully responsible for whatever mistakes that the reader may find in this thesis. For the sake of easy reference and consistency, the *Pinyin* system has been adopted for the romanization of all texts in Chinese.

Acknowledgements

Fine literary works have always fascinated me, but it is only now that I dare to call myself a student of literature. A mere one or two years ago, I was still a dilettante in the study of literature.

The turning point which marks this change from an amateur to a professional was the commencement of my M.Phil. study in Chinese-Western comparative literature at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. In the two short years here, my horizons have been broadened not only by an unfamiliar way of life that I daily confront, but also by a better access to literary works from different nations and a closer contact with scholars from the East and West. Impressing me most, however, is the professional knowledge of my instructors in the English Department of CUHK and the attitude with which they apply themselves to the study of literature.

In the course of preparing and writing this thesis, apart from the enlightenment existing literature has afforded me, I have particularly benefited from the keen insight and the invaluable suggestions of my supervisor, Dr. Kwok-kan Tam. It would be no exaggeration to say that the constant encouragement of Dr. Ying-hsiung Chou, Dr. John J. Deeney, my thesis supervising committee members, Dr. H.H. Yuan, Dr. K.Y. Wong and Dr. Y.T. Luk and the affective support of my family and friends are what makes the completion of this thesis a reality.

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Chapter One: Scope and Task

This chapter answers the following questions: Why is the short story of 1917-1927 the subject of study for this thesis? Why is the investigation mainly based on three volumes of short stories compiled by Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) and Zheng Boqi 郑伯奇 (1895-1979) respectively? And finally, why do we have to study this subject in relation to foreign and traditional influences?

WHY THE SHORT STORY OF 1917-1927?

By common consent the years 1917-1927 constitute the first decade of modern Chinese literature. One decade in the long history of Chinese literature seems to be really too short a period for serious research, but insofar as modern Chinese literature is concerned, this decade is particularly worthy of serious consideration as it is an epoch-making period in which the foundations of subsequent development until the present day were laid. In this period all forms of Chinese literature--poetry, drama, fiction, and essay--underwent drastic changes that afterwards their original countenance became almost unrecognizable. For the genre of the modern Chinese short story, it was not only in its formative years, but also an age when it made greater achievements and enjoyed greater popularity than other literary forms, including its sister art, the novel.

If one is to review the fictional works of the period 1917-

1927, one will be struck by the rapid progress the short story made and by the enormous output of short stories the decade produced. The data collected by Mao Dun in 1921, though incomprehensive, shows that a three-month total of short stories published in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小说月报 [The short story magazine] exceeded 120, nearly doubling the figure of the preceding three-month period.¹ This figure can in no way be compared with the number of short stories written and published in the United States and France of the same period, but to anyone who is even slightly familiar with the literary situation in China then, it marked a gigantic step forward toward the acceptance by the Chinese reading public of this form of literature. One may well remember the fact that many of these short stories were untraditional, if not anti-traditional, in both their subject matter and method of presentation. They were all greatly influenced by foreign models. It would be not an overstatement to say that some of them could even be regarded as foreign stories retold in the Chinese language.

In 1909, some twelve years earlier, such stories were so alien and unpalatable to the Chinese reading public that the publication of two collections of translated foreign stories met with a disheartening reception. I am referring to *Yuwai xiaoshuojì*, 域外小说集 [Stories from foreign lands] Vols I & II, which were translated by Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1968) and his brother Lu Xun. Out of 1,500 copies printed and put on sale, only 41 were sold. In 1920, barely eleven years later, however, the short story had become so popular that Lu Xun and his brother decided to

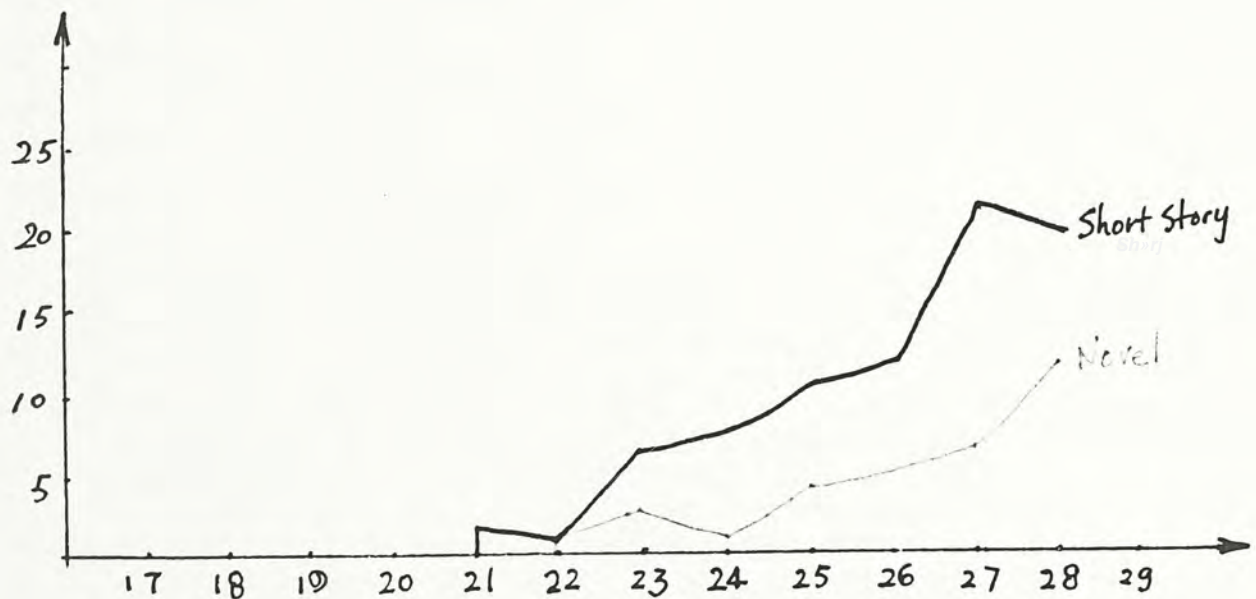
reissue the two collections.² This drastic turn of fortune for the short story within a period of eleven years offers an intriguing area of research. Since this thesis is mainly concerned with the influence of foreign and native literature on the themes of the short story in the first decade of modern Chinese literature, suffice it for me to suggest that this change may have been brought about by the introduction and promotion of the genre which took place in the interval.³ The dramatic increase of the number of short stories written by Chinese writers was accompanied by the emergence of several masterpieces. Lu Xun's "Kuangren riji" 狂人日记 [Madman's diary], "Ah Q zhengzhuàn" 阿Q正传 [The story of Ah Q] and other stories were instantaneous national hits acclaimed by critics and general readers alike.⁴ Mao Dun even claimed that each of Lu Xun's short stories written in this period broke new ground and served as a model for other short story writers.⁵ Yu Dafu's 郁达夫 (1896-1945) short stories such as "Chenlun" 沈沦 [Sinking], "Yinhuisè de sǐ" 银灰色的死 [Silvergray death], though provoking a national outrage among the conservative quarters of the day, charted a new course to be taken by many generations of Chinese short story writers.

During the same period, however, the novel had to be content with a less glamorous position. Major works were yet to make their debut. In his introduction to Vol. 2 of *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 [An anthology of modern Chinese literature], Zheng Zhenduo observed: "The novel in this period progressed slowly. Wang Tongzhao 王统照 and Zhang Ziping 张资平 were the only writers experimenting with the genre. Yang Zhensheng's 杨震声 *Yujun* 玉君 smacked too heavily of the old tradition."⁶ Below

is a table which attests convincingly to the comparatively late growth of the novel.⁷

Year	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Novel	0	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	4	5	6	12
Short Story	0	0	0	0	2	1	6	7	10	12	21	19

What is readily noticeable in the table is a big jump between 1926 and 1927 for the short story. If translated into a diagram, this jump marks a remarkable rise in fortune:



Except for 1921, the patterns for the first four or five years for both the novel and short story appear to be identical in this diagram, but the short story greatly increased in number in the late 20s. We also notice that the publication of the first collection of short stories was one year earlier than that of the novel. I must make it clear at this point that here and in subsequent discussions, when I talk about short stories and

novels, I am referring to, unless otherwise specified, those that are nowadays normally considered the fruit of the New Literature Movement. Short stories and novels in the manner of "Heimu Fiction"⁸ 黑幕小说 and "Yuanyang hudie Fiction"⁹ 鸳鸯蝴蝶派小说 which had mushroomed since the late Qing dynasty are not the focus of the present study and are therefore excluded.

It should also be pointed out here that although in the first four years of the period, that is, from 1917 to 1920, there was practically no collection of short stories published, it does not mean that the production of the short story was nonexistent. There were many short stories carried in newspapers, magazines and journals. But, generally speaking, it is a fact that in these years, the number of published short stories was, taken as a whole, relatively small. Besides they seem to be less significant in that they are seldom remembered by their later generations. Mao Dun once said retrospectively:

Now when we look back at the first five years of the Republican era (1917-1921), which is the first half of the decade of modern Chinese literature, we feel that new works were really few. There was only a limited number of writers and the media for publication was also dishearteningly restricted. But if we turn to view the situation of the second half of the period (1922-1926), we are surprised by the great change that had taken place. Literary activities across the nation flourished from the eleventh year of the Republican era (1922).¹⁰

The emergence of such a surge is demonstrated by the mushrooming of numerous literary societies and publications which Mao Dun went on to enumerate in the same article.

Mao Dun also pointed out that the works produced in the first half of the decade displayed two shortcomings: "The

first is the absence of a panoramic picture of social reality. Only a small arena of the life of an individual has been depicted. The second is conceptualization."¹¹ As I understand it, Mao Dun is here saying that the scope of subject matter of those stories was rather narrow and the technique immature. Mao Dun correctly attributes this situation to two factors:

Objectively, there were scarcely any translations of masterpieces from Western literature; therefore it was virtually impossible to speak of learning new techniques unless a writer is able to read Western works in the original. Besides, a widespread national interest in literature was yet to come. The talent of the masses of young people still lay dormant. Subjectively, most of the writers at that time were students whose experiences were limited. Their life and its consequent scope of vision limited them in discovering other subject matters.¹²

In the second half of the decade, however, the situation completely changed.

There was first of all diversification in a number of areas. The scope of subject matter had been greatly broadened. The eyes of writers had turned from their personal school life to the events in society. The so-called New Literature had turned from the study of students to street corners.¹³

Technically, there appeared works that were not only novel in subject matter but also completely rid of the influence of traditional fiction in the "Zhang hui" (章回) style. They employ the living language--vernacular--and try to capture the reality of society.¹⁴ The changes noted and described by Mao Dun are by no means small and insignificant. By the time they had been completed, I believe, we have every reason to declare the coming of age, so to speak, of the modern Chinese short story.

WHY THESE SHORT STORIES?

Three volumes of short stories compiled in 1935-36 by Lu Xun, Mao Dun and Zheng Boqi, three authoritative writers as well as critics of the genre, were examined for this thesis. These volumes are part of a comprehensive anthology entitled: *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* compiled under the general editorship of Zhao Jiabi 赵家璧 in 1935-1936, which covers practically all the major genres of literature, ranging from poetry to fiction and theory to practice. Works and articles collected in this anthology aim at reflecting the achievement and the general pattern of progress of the first ten years of the New Literature Movement. Although the compilers were not yet sufficiently removed from the period in question, their first hand knowledge about the literature produced in the period and scholarly minds enabled them to turn out an anthology which has stood the test of time in its value as a representative anthology of the period.

WHAT PATTERNS OF INFLUENCE?

All those who study the May Fourth Movement in modern Chinese literary history agree that this Movement is characterized by a headlong determination to sever the umbilical cord with tradition and to nurtur itself with foreign protein in the hope of giving birth to a new China. It was the general belief shared by the pioneers of the Movement that China's future lay in its willingness to look to the West for models. This position may, in retrospect, seem a little too radical but it was strategically necessary to arouse the Chinese people, who were accustomed to a

sinocentric world view and to make them realize that their ancient empire was already a past phenomenon and that they were already lagging behind the "barbaric" West.

Most pioneers of the May Fourth Movement were introducers and admirers of Western literary schools and trends. They belonged to the generation of writers who turned out the first tangible fruits of modern Chinese literature. No wonder then their works display clearly the impact of foreign influences. As a matter of fact, the creative impulse of many of them was first aroused by the foreign works they had read. Lu Xun, for instance, repeatedly acknowledged his indebtedness to foreign sources. Once he owned, while talking about his own stories, that "I mainly learned from foreign writers."¹⁵ On another occasion, he revealed that the direct impulse to write stories was begotten from reading foreign stories:

After I read some foreign fiction, especially that of Russia, Poland and small nations in Scandinavia, I realized for the first time that there were also people suffering from the same lot as we did in the world and that some writers were already exhorting and fighting against this injustice. With this realization, the miserable plight of our people in the countryside now began to present itself all so sharply before my eyes. When occasions offered themselves, I grasped them and wrote and published stories which exposed the corruption of the upper class and misfortunes of the lower class.¹⁶

Another major short story writer of the period, Yu Da-fu, who turned out the first collection of short stories in modern Chinese literature, also claimed that he had read more than one thousand books in Western languages before he attempted to write fiction. If I were to give a list of writers of this period who

acknowledged, in one way or another, foreign influences in their works, it would include virtually all major writers. Although sometimes we need to be skeptical about writers' own declaration of the origin of their creative impulse or motive, there is no question about the fact that for the writers of the first decade of modern Chinese literature, the reading of foreign literature did kindle their urge to write.

We may now sum up the rationale for the present investigation. Since the short story in the decade from 1917-1927 is the most important field of achievement accomplished by assimilation of extensive foreign influences and, since investigations into such issues as how short stories in this period differed from traditional ones as a result of foreign influences are still relatively scarce and remain unsystematic, the present thesis attempts to remedy the situation by sharing with the reader some of my preliminary discoveries and tentative conclusions.

Nowadays no one would deny that Western literature played an important role in ushering in a new age of modern Chinese literature. But in our affirmation of the influence of foreign literature we may have overlooked another aspect: the penetration or infiltration of traditional literature. Were the champions of the May Fourth Movement as iconoclastic as some scholars might have us believe? Are there traditional elements that have survived and managed assert themselves in one way or another in modern Chinese literature in general and in the short story in particular? If so, what are these elements and why are they so?

These questions are important not only because they have not been adequately answered, but also because they affect our understanding of the nature of modern Chinese literature.

Notes

¹ Mao Dun 茅盾 ed., *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 [An anthology of modern Chinese literature], vol.3 (1936 Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe 上海文艺出版社, 1982), 2.

² Lu Xun 鲁迅 Preface to *Yuwai xianshuoji* 域外小说集 [Stories from foreign lands] (Changsha: Yulu shushe 岳麓书社 1987), 1-2.

³ Hu Shi 胡适 suggested a possible reason for this failure. He pointed out: "Although they [referring to Zhou Zuo-ren and Lu Xun] were able to read foreign works in the original, and although their style was more lucid and readable than that of Lin Shu, their *Yuwai xiaoshuoj* sold only twenty-one copies in a year! This story proves that to translate foreign stories by using classical Chinese is a futile enterprise. This is because the people who are able to read stories in classical Chinese are strictly limited. Besides, as we all know, classical Chinese cannot adequately capture the complexity of syntax and the meticulousness of description characteristic of recent foreign literature." *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.1, 4.

⁴ About the enormous impact Lu Xun's *Ah Q zhengzhuan* exerted on the readers of the day, Yin Xueman 尹雪曼 has this to report: "The penname of Lu Xun did not become widely known until the publication of *Ah Q Zhengzhuan* which was published in the literary supplement of *Chen bao* 晨报 [Morning News] in 1919. This story caused a tremendous confusion. Han Lu 涵序 (Gao Yihan 高一涵) recollected in the 'Gossip' column of *Xiandai pinglun* 现代评论 [Modern Review]: "I remember many people lived in dread and

apprehension as the installments of *Ah Q zhengzhuang* came out, fearing that it would be their turn to be ridiculed. One of my friends told me the other day that the last installment seemed to be making fun of him. He suspected that the story must have been written by a certain acquaintance of his, for only that person alone knew the incident described in the story.... From then on, he became so nervous that he regarded all mocking to be targeted at him and the people contributing to the newspaper carrying the story all became suspects authoring it." *Wusi zuojia he zuopin* 五四作家和作品 [The writers and writings of the May Fourth era] (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe 成文出版社 1980), 55-56.

⁵ Cf. "Lun Nanhan" 论呐喊 in *Wenxue zhoubao* 文学周报 [Literary weekly], 91 (Oct. 1923).

⁶ *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.2, 16.

⁷ These figures are based on Zhou Jin's *Zhongguo xinwenxue dashiji* 中国新文学大系 [Major events in modern Chinese literature] It must be pointed out in the case of the short story, the word 'number' in the table actually refers to the number of collections of short stories.

⁸ This is an alternative term for *Qianze xiaoshuo* 谴责小说 [Fiction of exposure] which flourished in the last years of the Qing dynasty. It is generally considered "a fairly homogeneous body of literary works unified by a common tendency to expose social abuses and lash out at contemporary politics, sometimes at social convention as well." Quoted from *The Chinese Novel at the*

Turn of the Century. Milena Dolezelova-Velingerova, ed.
(Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 1.

⁹ This is a type of *Caizi jiaren xiaoshuo* 才子佳人小说 [scholar beauty story] which flourished in the late Qing dynasty and early Republican era. The themes of such fiction are described by Leo Ou-fan Lee as "usually centred upon the trial and tribulations of a pair of sentimental lovers--the pale tuberculosis-ridden scholar (T'sai-T'zu) falling hopelessly in love with a glamorous but weathered sing-song girl or fallen beauty.... The critics from the New Literature camp branded this type of fiction, written in literary or semi-vernacular style, as "Yuan-yang hu-tieh p'ai (Butterfly school)." Quoted from Leo Ou-fan Lee's *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 300.

¹⁰ *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, III, 4-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵ "Zhi Dong Yong shu" 致董永书 Aug., 13. in *Lu Xun Shuxin quanji* 鲁迅书信全集 [Collection of Lu Xun's Letters] vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1976), 398.

¹⁶ *Lu Xun wenxuan* 鲁迅文选 [Works of Lu Xun], vol.5. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1973), 632.

Chapter Two: the Propagation of Realism and Romanticism

Throughout the history of modern Chinese literature, especially on the mainland between 1917-1977, two literary concepts, namely realism and romanticism, seem to have enjoyed unsurpassed popularity. Among the many factors, literary or political, the efforts of two literary groups--the Association for Literary Study and the Creation Society--at propagating them in the first decade of modern Chinese literature (1917-1927) must have played a decisive role. In what follows, an attempt will be made to demonstrate how these two concepts arrived on the scene and took root some sixty years ago.

Of the two groups, Zheng Boqi 郑伯奇 remarked in the 1930s: "In recent years, the literature of the May Fourth Era has been the subject of a re-evaluation. The Association for Literary Study is considered to be realistic and the Creation Society romantic in their respective artistic inclinations."¹ This observation, though made half a century ago can still guide us in our understanding of the artistic affiliations of the writers and writings of the May Fourth Era.

"REALISM" ADVOCATED BY THE ASSOCIATION FOR LITERARY STUDY

Among the members of the Association for Literary Study, the

most conscientious advocate and propagater of Western realism, especially realism in Russian literature, is none other than Mao Dun, the first literary critic of modern Chinese literature. While announcing the editorial changes he intended to introduce to *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, he made the following suggestion:

Although recently realism is already showing signs of fading, and although it thus seems unworthy of laborious introduction, the true spirit of realism and its masterpieces are still unknown to the literary circles in China. We therefore think that a systematic introduction to the school is still very necessary.²

As a policy statement by the editor of a most prestigious literary magazine, the above announcement should not be taken lightly. To say the least, it anticipates a series of articles aimed at propagating realism. It also implies that the magazine would welcome creative writings in that vein.

Mao Dun's efforts at propagating realism in China actually started earlier than his complete take-over of the *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. One year earlier, in his announcement for a new fictional column named "Xincao" 新潮 [New Trend], he said that in order for Chinese literature to catch up with the rapidly changing times, it was necessary to introduce new trends in fiction "beginning with realism and naturalism".³

In the same issue Mao Dun set about introducing modern Russian literature in earnest. In the Editor's column, he recommended Gogol's "Overcoat" to the readers of the magazine, calling it "the work that heralded realism or humanitarianism." He said: The uniqueness of "Overcoat" lay in its depiction of the miserable life of the poor, in its satire of the corruption of

bureaucrats and in its portrayal of the revenge upon oppressors on the part of the oppressed. This was something unprecedented in Russian literature. Although the works of Dickens in England and Maupassant in France, he went on to say, also depicted the life of the lower classes, they were often characterized by a patronizing attitude and the concern for their lot seemed to be less sincere. The realistic literature of Russia, however, was most sympathetic to the plight of the poor. Besides, it could also educate and enlighten the people.⁴

The preeminence given to Russian realist literature is also borne out by the report on the death of Andreev in the same issue. The reporter Mao Dun thus commented on the works of the newly deceased: "The works of Andreev are single-minded in attacking the corrupt government and protecting the people." In Mao Dun's opinion, Andreev represented Russian literature since the beginning of the century up to the time of his death.⁵

Judging from the allocation of space of the issue we can clearly see that Mao Dun intended to familiarize the Chinese reader with Russian realistic literature. In the following issue of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, Mao Dun pointed out: "Modern Russian literature is characterized by its concern for society and concepts of social revolution. American novelists pay much attention to plot, whereas their Russian counterparts to 'cause' [Mao's own word, meaning social effect].⁶

The propagation of Russian realism certainly had its own objective: to arouse the interest of Chinese writers in describing social reality. But to some of the early advocates of realism, the Russian realists represented by Tolstoy and others

fell short of their objective of ushering in social change. Xie Liuyi 谢六逸 in his "Eguo de minzong xiaoshuojia" 俄国的民众小说家 [Russian folk-novelists] introduced the works of some Russian folk-novelists which are tinged with a strong subversive spirit. He urged: "Please behold the feats of these novelists. Russia was once the most cruel and totalitarian country in the world. But now it has been baptized by a revolution. The serfs have been liberated, and the evil forces in society are also being eradicated. Whose work is it? It is the work of Russian folk-novelists."⁷

The 1920 issues of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* seem to be single-minded in introducing realism and naturalism.⁸ The editorial of No. 11 is entitled "Ziranzhuyi xiaoshuo" 自然主义小说 [Naturalist fiction]. At the end of this article, the author concluded: "So far I have elaborated on the origin, significance and features of naturalism. In view of the situation of our country, what we need is just this kind of fiction. We must go out of our way to introduce and create literature of this type."⁹

The "Xincao" column of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, though a misnomer in the sense that the column also carried play scripts, published many translations of stories by Western realist and naturalist writers, including Chekhov, Ibsen and Maupassant.

It should be pointed out that *Xiaoshuo yuebao* was not alone in promoting and adding momentum to the propagation of realism/naturalism. The tide, so to speak, had been there for quite some time. One of the events that seems to have been overlooked by many present researchers concerning the

dissemination of realism in China is the publication of a translation carried in Vol.2 No.6 of *Xingqingnian* 新青年 [New youth]. This is actually a translation of a preface by the Goncourt brothers in which the authors demanded to know if the low society did not deserve a place in fiction in a century when universal suffrage, democracy and individualism were said to be its hallmark. They further wondered if the tears of the low were different from those of the rich and the noble.

This translation was undoubtedly one of the earliest attempts at introducing Western realism. Chen Duxiou's 陈独秀 "Wenxue gemin lun" 文学革命论 [On literary revolution] is yet another theoretical treatment that raised the banner of realism in China. He maintained that the aim of the New Literature Movement was to replace the outdated and florid classical literature with an up-to-date and sincere realistic literature.¹⁰

Here, Chen Duxiou was actually supporting the ideas laid out in Hu Shi's seven "don'ts". One of the "don'ts" was: Don't tread in the footsteps of the old practice. While explaining this, Hu said: True literature is that which depicts the reality of the present society.¹¹ Although here he did not mention it by name, we know that he was referring to realistic literature in the West.

Another pioneer of the New Literature Movement, Zhou Zuoren, also advocated a "Pingmin wenxue" 平民文学 [literature for common people]. He said that a literature for common people should employ a plain style, and depict ordinary events and familiar ideas. Writers need not concern themselves with the feats of heroes and warriors and the happiness of scholars and their beauties. They

should turn their attention to the joys and sorrows of ordinary people in this world. Since heroes and warriors, scholars and beauties are not that numerous in this world, writers should depict the life of the common people which compose the majority of the society.¹²

In "Wenxue yanjiuhui xuanyan" 文学研究会宣言 [Manifesto of the Association for Literary Study], Zhou pursued this idea and declared: "The time is gone for those who regard literature as a toy when happy and an outlet for release when disillusioned."¹³ This statement, according to Mao Dun, was then generally understood to mean that literature should reflect social reality. It should also give expression to and discuss the problems we encounter in our life.¹⁴ This understanding of the function of literature eventually evolved into the slogan *l'art pour la vie*, a slogan now closely identified with the Association for Literary Study.

From the above documentation, we can see that the rise of realism in the early decades of the twentieth century in China had much to do with the conscious efforts of the pioneers of the May Fourth Movement at propagating this Western literary school.

Judging from available material, it seems the efforts of the advocates of Russian realism did pay off. As a matter of fact, among those translated and published in China in the years from 1917-1927, short stories by Russian and French masters of the genre constitute the majority. A table follows showing the number of translated short stories from four different countries:¹⁵

Country:	Britain	France	Japan	Russia
Total :	410	179	58	166

This table could be misleading if I do not specify that more than 300 of the British short stories were either detective stories (over 120) or tales adapted from Shakespeare by Charles Lamb (over 200). On the other hand, most of the 166 Russian short stories were written by masters of the genre, such as Chekhov (over 60) and Tolstoy (over 50). This is also the case with French stories (Daudet over 30, and Maupassant over 50). Turgeneve and Gogol, however, did not turn out to be as frequently translated and anthologized, although their influence has been acknowledged by some early modern Chinese short story writers.

The data above agrees with an assertion by Zhao Cong 趙聰 in his *Wusi wentan nizhua* 五四文壇泥瓜 [Vignettes of the May Fourth Movement]:

In so far as translated works are concerned, Russian pieces are most numerous. The translators include Li Binzhi, Gen Jizhi, Gen Mianzhi, Gen Shizhi, Cao Jingua, Li Qiye, Dong Qiufang, Wei Congwu, Zhang wentian, Hu Nianzhi, Zhang Yousong, Zheng Zhenduo, Zhao Jingshen and others. A certain portion of the play scripts and fictional works of such major writers as Chekhov, Gogol, Turgeneve, Tolstoy, Andreev, Pushkin, Austolovsky, Dostovesky were translated into Chinese. Next comes the works of French writers. The translators include Li Jieren, Li Qingya Liu Bannong, Xu Weinan, Jin Mancheng, Gao Zhenchang, Bao Weiwen, Zong Zongmin, Xie Guosheng, Fu Lei and others. The two Li's are most active in this field. The works of Maupassant, Daudet, Zola, Hugo, France, Flaubert, Moliere, the Dumas and Roman Roland came to be known among Chinese readers through their translations. Japanese works rank the third in quantity. The most important translators are Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren.¹⁶

To us the fact that Russian literature should be so popular at that time poses a question. In his preface to *Eluosi mingjia duanpian xiaoshuoxuan* 俄罗斯名家短篇小说选 [Short stories by famous Russian writers], Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 explained as early as 1920:

The study of Russian literature is now in its heyday. Why? The most important reason is: the Bolshevik revolution in Russia has brought about fundamental changes in political, economic and social life, attracting the attention of the world. With the current vogue of exploring the causes, cultural and otherwise, of these changes and surveying its culture, the eye of the world is now focussed on Russia and Russian literature. The collapse of Czarist Russia has generated a great impact on the Chinese people, who are trying to find a way out of their dark reality. It is therefore no wonder that everyone in China should have become interested in studying Russia and Russian literature.¹⁷

One of the curious impacts of the Oct. Revolution on China is that while it did attract the attention of Chinese intellectuals to the literature of that country, it is not postrevolutionary Soviet literature but prerevolutionary Russian realist literature that was accorded the highest admiration. In the above quotation, Qu has provided us with one reason for this apparently strange phenomenon: Chinese intellectuals were looking for causes of that revolution. Thus it is by necessity that they look to the past rather than the present for possible answers. As is suggested by another of his essays, prerevolutionary Russian literature was more relevant to China, because nineteenth century Russia was more like early twentieth century China, both being precapitalist countries on the eve of a revolution.¹⁸ At that time in China, prerevolutionary Russian literature was generally regarded as a

realist one characterized by a strong social concern and a sincere sympathy for the down-trodden, the serfs and the "superfluous". Russian writers such as Tolstoy and Gogol preached that "literary works are to be viewed foremost as social documents, as reflections of material reality."¹⁹ This emphasis on the reflective function of literature vis-a-vis society may have eluded Chinese intellectuals altogether. Many of them seemed to have taken it for granted that to reflect or expose the injustice of the status quo would naturally lead to an urge to change it. In addition to this, they were drawn to Russian literature because, to them, it carried a nationalistic overture which was, like the concern for the poor and oppressed, embodied in works whose artistic value was not thus compromised.²⁰ Such a literature was felt to be what China needed most by many Chinese writers.

These qualities of Russian literature rendered it especially appealing to Chinese writers who were in search of a literary medium that would promote social change. In the wake of the May Fourth Movement, they were distressed to see that the atrocities of warlords, the corruption of bureaucrats and the misery of the masses still remained very much a fact of life. Although China emerged as one of the victorious countries out of World War I, things went from bad to worse in the ensuing years. Externally, certain imperialist powers were still trying to divide their sphere of influence in the Jiaodong Peninsula 胶东半岛. Internally, the results of the 1911 Revolution was so disillusioning: instead of a democratic and unified republic they

hoped to establish on the ruins of a dynastic China, the country was further plunged into civil war. The warring factions dugged up more national resources in order to sustain their war, but the national economy was further collapsing under the double oppression of foreign imperialist powers and burgeoning warlords. Thus the peasants became poorer and the bourgeois worse off.

Faced with such a social reality, some writers realized the role fiction could play in enhancing social change, a realization which started as early as Liang Qichao 梁启超,²¹ and the need to expose its evils, hence the adoption of the Western, Russian in particular, realistic school.

Wang Fengyuan 王丰园 thus accounted for the rise of the *L'art pour l'art* school in China:

In the May Fourth era, the petty bourgeoisie in China suffered a great deal under the oppression of imperialists and feudal forces. Being irresolute in their will to rebel, and unwilling to degrade themselves, they adopted a hostile attitude to social reality. As they wavered in their ideological affiliations, they could only depict the woe of living and the darkness of society. In the final analysis, this position derives from their subscription to humanitarianism.²²

Lu Xun offered a similar explanation for the endorsement of Russian realism:

Russian literature since the time of Nicholas II has been an art for life. Whatever its manifestations, whether asking a question, providing an answer or delving into the mysterious or degenerating into indulgence, its objective is always to serve the purpose of living. This kind of concern became a shared concern of Chinese intellectuals attempting to disseminate foreign literature among Chinese readers. Thus the names of Dostoevsky, Turgeneve, Chekhov and Tolstoy began to appear in Chinese publications. Translations of their works appeared in large

quantities. At that time the Association for Literary Study in Shanghai was trying to introduce the so-called "literature of the oppressed nations". The above mentioned writers belonged to those who wrote for the oppressed.²³

French short stories, especially those written by Maupassant, Daudet and others, displayed the same social concern. This explains why France ranked the second in the number of short stories translated into Chinese. H. E. Bates pointed out while comparing Chekhov and Maupassant:

Both writers knew a very wide world teeming with a vast number of types: not only peasants but aristocrats, artisans, school teachers, government clerks, prostitutes, ladies of the bored middle-class, waiters, doctors, lovers, priests, murderers, children, thieves, the very poor and very ignorant, students, businessmen, lawyers, adolescents, the very old, and so on.²⁴

Although here Bates has not told us if Maupassant had in any way been influenced by Chekhov, one is certain: Maupassant had been greatly impressed by another Russian writer Turgeneve. In fact he respected Turgeneve so much that he dedicated his first collection of short stories to him. Once he even revealed that the secret of his art was to do exactly in the way stipulated by the author of "Hunter's Diary", i.e., to mirror life and nothing more.²⁵ This similarity between Russian and French literature tells us why both Russian and French short stories were translated in large quantities, though it does not explain why Russian literature enjoyed more admiration among Chinese writers. W. L. Phelps in his treatise on Russian novelists compared the works of the pioneers of Russian naturalism with the works of their French counterpart, especially those of Flaubert and Maupassant, asserting that the former possess a more moralistic and social

spirit than the latter.²⁶ French critic Federick Loliee also confirmed that the realism of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy was moralistic. It tries to teach its reader a lesson. The realism in France, however, whether it is manifested in the works of E. Goncourt or J. Goncourt or Zola or Maupassant, is preoccupied with the presentation of an objective world. For them, such is an end in itself.²⁷

Although Zheng has reservations about the way Loliee defined realism in the above mentioned article, he agrees with Loliee's analysis of the difference between Russian and French realistic works.²⁸ He further added:

The realism in French fiction regards fiction as a means of recording social reality. So it is historical documents at most. But in Russia people regard literature and art as a national enterprise which performs an educational function. We say that the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky display strong realistic tendencies, not only because they are judgmental but also because the attitude of the author is that of a propagandist rather than a scientist. Such an attitude is determined by two factors: the relative small influence of religion and scientific way of thinking. But from the change that Zola made in his old age, we can see that the life of mankind is not a slave of science. Tolstoy in his discussions on literature and art lamented the degradation that the progress of science has brought about. This may be a mistaken idea but to overemphasize science or art and forget its tie with our life is something we should avoid.²⁹

The rise and popularity of realism in the first two decades of this century in China can also be attributed to a domestic factor--the advocacy of the traditional vernacular literature, the short story in particular.

In the very proposal which set off the springs of the New Literature Movement, Hu Shi twice explicitly lauded the virtue of

vernacular literature and asserted that vernacular literature should be regarded as the *Zhengzong* 正宗 [the most prestigious form of literature].

I believe that the only thing in our literature comparable to first rate literature in the world is vernacular fiction.... This kind of fiction does not try to imitate the writings of the past.... The works that imitate classical writings are worthless. Today those who wish to devote themselves to literature should realize this. ³⁰

In the same proposal, Hu Shi again suggested: "From an evolutionary point of view, it is quite predictable that vernacular literature will become the *Zhengzong* of literature." ³¹ This belief was expressed in very strong words by Chen Duxiu:

The demand to reform our literature has already been raised throughout the country. There are many people who support it but there are also many people who are opposed to it. In my opinion we should allow different views to present themselves freely. But on the issue of reforming Chinese literature and regarding vernacular literature as the *Zhengzong* of literature, I see no need to allow any further debate. For it is already very clear as to what is right and wrong. Our position is the only correct one, and therefore no criticism should be tolerated either. The Chinese language has entered a stage when what is spoken corresponds to what is written. It serves well our need to express ourselves and describe objects. Its place is therefore wholly justified. Why discuss any more? Those who reject vernacular literature and regard classical literature as the *Zhengzong* are just like those who repudiated the Western calendar at the early years of the Qing dynasty and those who ridiculed the assertion that the earth is a planet of the sun. We do not have time to reason with such ignorant people. ³²

Hu Shi was well aware that the mere advocacy and assertion of the superiority of vernacular literature was not enough. What

needed to be done further was to create literary works written in the vernacular.³³ His experiment with a new kind of poetry written in vernacular was exactly guided by such an awareness. The call for the employment of the vernacular for a new fiction is clearly embodied in Zhi Xi's 志希 (pseudonym of Luo Jialun 罗家伦) "Jinri zhongguo zhi xiaoshuo" 今日中国之小说 [Contemporary Chinese fiction] which maintained that not only translations of foreign stories should be rendered in the vernacular, newly created works should also employ that language. He argued: All recent European fictions employ the vernacular which possesses many good qualities. It is the most effective in promoting communication among human beings. Suppose somebody in Russia were to translate the fictional works of Tolstoy into a Russian language similar to our classical language, who will want to read them? Should this happen it is even questionable if anyone in Russia would acknowledge him as the "No.1 artist". We must understand that Tolstoy was no less erudite than we are. He was surely versed in classical learning and languages.³⁴

I suppose that by now a question must have arisen in the minds of readers of this paper. What is the relationship between the advocacy of the vernacular fiction and the rise of realism? There seems to be a missing link between them.

The missing link can be provided if we realize that the vernacular was the language in which a quantity of realistic Chinese fiction was written in the past hundreds of years. Thus the advocacy of the vernacular for fiction, especially the short story, would inevitably lead to a renewed interest in traditional

vernacular stories for reference and inspirations. It can also be understood as an implied endorsement of its realistic tendency.

Both in China and overseas, many scholars have used the word "realism", notwithstanding considerable opposition,³⁵ to describe traditional vernacular fiction, the *hua-pen* 话本 in particular, as Idema reports: "Comparisons between the *hua-pen* and Western fiction have been many. Most of them focus on the problem of 'realism'. Everyone is struck by the fact that the *hua-pen* have many passages that give a minute description of everyday life, being just as 'realistic' as Western fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth century."³⁶

Lee Yun Phin thus recounted some major efforts in this respect:

In the West, J. L. Bishop, using the *hua-pen* and the Italian Novella as examples (both of which arose as a genre around 1300) is among the first to draw parallels in the development of early "realistic" fiction at both ends of the Eurasian land mass and to generalize on the conditions that produced literary realism. In a detailed study comparing the *San-Yen* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Jaroslav Prusek arrives at the conclusion that, with his "remarkable facility of precise and apt description", the *hua-pen* writer surpassed his Italian contemporary in creating a sensory immediacy of human vicissitudes. In his view Chinese vernacular story writers "seem to have foreshadowed the principles of European literary realism evolved by the nineteenth century". Undoubtedly, what George Becker perceives as the primary impulse of Western realism, "its insistence on the sensuous texture of every day", has since the inception of the *hua-pen* genre remained an intrinsic and ever-developing quality of Chinese narrative art.³⁷

Another important scholar not mentioned in Lee's account is Patrick Hanan. In his "The Early Chinese Short Story: a Theory in Outline", by using Ian Watt's concept of "formal realism" as a

yardstick, he examines vernacular fiction and finds that it conforms to this Western concept to a considerable degree.

Admittedly, Chinese vernacular short stories originated in late Tang dynasty, matured in the Song dynasty and blossomed in the Ming dynasty. Owing to its origin as an oral form of entertainment catering to an audience which is mostly composed of the lower social spectrum, it developed two features: the employment of the vernacular and the portrayal of contemporary life familiar to its audience. He Manzhi 何满子 thus pointed out:

Unlike traditional *shi* 诗, *ci* 词, *wen* 文, *fu* 赋 and stories 小说, in the classical language that are intended for the intelligentsia, texts of story tellers which later evolve into written short stories belong to an art form which entertains an urban and lower class audience. Because of this, its subject matter is chosen from things with which its audience are familiar and in which they are interested. With stories that do depict the life of the upper classes, the angle from which the story is related and commented on is still that of the urban lower classes. One remarkable fact is: the story texts from the Song Dynasty which are currently in circulation are all based on the contemporary life of the Dynasty. Only very few of them are historical stories.... Not only do these stories mirror contemporary life, their settings are usually either in Bianliang 汴梁 or Linan 临安. This is yet another most striking characteristic of the Song texts.³⁸

The realistic trend became a defining quality of the vernacular story. So when *Ni-hua-pen* 拟话本 (pseudo *hua-pen*) flourished in the Ming dynasty, much of its subject matter is still contemporary social life despite the change in their authorship and intended audience. As a written variety, *Ni-hua-pen* are no longer stories transmitted by word of mouth to a lower class audience; they were to be enjoyed among the literati as

well as the urban population.

It is important to note that, in the Ming dynasty, the realistic trend in the vernacular short story became visible not only in *Ni-hua-pen*, but also in novels. *Jin pin mei* 金瓶梅, for example, is in more than one respect a microcosmic picture of the contemporary society. In the Qing dynasty, especially towards the end of the Manchu reign, realism seemed to have taken strong hold of the novel. Despite controversies centred on *Honglou meng* 红楼梦 [Dream of the red chamber], its portrayal of the disintegration of an aristocratic family in Qing China is undoubtedly realistic. The late Qing *Qianze xiaoshuo* 谴责小说 [fiction of exposure], also contains many realistic pictures of the contemporary society which can be understood as the manifestation of a tradition originating in the vernacular short story.

To sum up, we are inclined to say that the renaissance of this realistic trend in traditional Chinese literature in the modern era, besides partially being the product of the influence of a Western literary trend, can also be construed as a rediscovery of a tradition which has been there for hundreds of years, though for the most time it remained neglected and despised.

"ROMANTICISM" ADVOCATED BY THE CREATION SOCIETY

To trace the advocacy and propagation of Western Romanticism, the most profitable way is to review the statements made by the Creationists since they are generally considered to be

the most devoted proponents of this particular Western literary trend.

Unlike realism, Western romanticism was less schematically introduced to the Chinese reading public. Rather, it is mainly manifested in the fictional and poetic works of those who subscribe to it. One of the earliest theoretical treatments which openly exalts romantic traits is Cheng Fangwu's 成仿吾 "Xinwenxue zhi shiming" 新文学之使命 [The mission of new literature] in which he maintained that literary creation should follow the impulse of the heart. He also believed that it was possible and worthwhile to reject all utilitarian considerations while seeking perfection and beauty in art.³⁹ This view is echoed in one of Yu Dafu's 郁达夫 articles:

What art pursues is beauty of form and spirit. Although I would not go to the same extreme as that of aestheticists, I do believe that the essence of art is the pursuit of beauty. The beauty of nature, of the human body, of human integrity, of human emotions, or abstract beauty, tragic beauty, beauty of sheer magnitude and all other forms of beauty, are the very components of art. The Germans define aestheticism as "the science of beauty and art". From this definition we can see the relationship of beauty and art. That art is important to us is because we can derive pleasure from beauty. It can also deliver us from the misery of this world and help us enter a heavenly world, thus enabling us to enjoy our present life.⁴⁰

Another key figure of the Creation Society, Guo Moruo made the following speech at the Shanghai University on May 2, 1923:

Art is like the flowers of spring. It is the expression of the wisdom of an artist who creates it. The works of poets, musicians and painters are all spontaneous expressions of their talent. Art is like ripples stirred up by a breeze, it has no objectives of its own. I can give you some other examples to illustrate this point. The games of children are the origin of the art of

adults. The urge to display its talent on the part of intellect can be seen from the singing and dancing of children. It is also embodied in their construction of houses with little pebbles. They are entirely lost in their games. They would not stop when they fall and bleed. They do not have a definite purpose in mind. Babies suck sweet milk from the breasts of their mothers. They live in contentment, lying in their warm beds and feeling no hunger and cold. Still they utter from their pinkish little mouths indistinguishable sounds. Do they have any purpose?
So art is aimless. ⁴¹

It is noteworthy that in the above quotation, Guo repeated the idea that art should serve no utilitarian ends. It is probably because of such a belief, coupled with the pursuit of perfection and beauty in art, that the members of the Creation Society earned themselves the label "*L'art pour l'art*". About the "*L'art pour l'art*" school, Cheng Fangwu has this to say in the above mentioned article: "The so-called *L'art pour l'art* school believes that literature has its intrinsic value. It therefore cannot be considered from an utilitarian point of view. Whatever objective it pursues, beauty or indulgence, we should follow it."⁴² In the same article, Cheng admitted: "The doctrines of the *L'art pour l'art* need not be all sound, but," he went on to say,

they must have something in them. Those who are not interested in art will not understand why a painter is willing to work in extreme cold or heat and why a poet can be so engrossed in meditation that he forgets his meals and relinquishes sleep. Just as we are unable to comprehend the voluntary sacrifice of artists, we are sometimes unable to understand the *L'art pour l'art* school. ⁴³

To some people, it is quite perplexing indeed as to why the Creationists wanted to raise the banner of romanticism or rather *L'art pour l'art* in opposition to a then very strong and influential literary organization, the Association for Literary

Study. Zheng Boqi once pointed out the following possible reasons:

First they had all lived overseas for a long time. They thus suffer a double disappointment and anguish, being clearly aware of the evils of foreign countries (capitalist) as well as of their motherland (semi-colonial). They are disgusted with and tired of such a society. The oppressions they experience both at home and abroad strengthen their determination to rebel. Second, because they have lived for a long time in a foreign country, they become increasingly home-sick. But their repeated frustration upon returning home make them feel lost. Prior to their return, they are filled with nostalgia. This explains why once in their own country they become even more radical and resentful. Third, because they have lived for a long time abroad, they become naturally susceptible to popular ideas there. The failure of rationalism in philosophy and naturalism in literature leads them along the road of romanticism characterized by anti-rationalism. 43

This is a very penetrating observation. As we know, the major spokesmen of romanticism of the Creation Society are all Chinese students who had been studying in Japan for quite some time. Being the citizens of a much weaker nation which had suffered both military and diplomatic setbacks to the country in which they had to live and study, these people had gone through all kinds of humiliation. The slight experienced by the protagonist of Yu Dafu's "Che lun" could very well be the experience of the author himself. No wonder the protagonist lamented at the end of the story:

Oh motherland, motherland,
My death is your doing,
Prosper and thrive;
many of your sons and daughters
are still suffering like me. 44

In his "Diyitang ke" 第一堂课 [The first lesson],

Zheng Boqi also relates how China and Chinese students are insulted by Japanese teachers and fellow Japanese students who regard China as a big fat pig only fit to be slaughtered. The contempt for China on the part of the Japanese thus became the first lesson of a Chinese student in Japan. Given the widespread prejudice against them and being far outnumbered, Chinese students in Japan could not really stage any effective struggle against Japan. So the protagonist of this story could only remonstrate by way of reminding those in the classroom that the first celestial globe was invented in China.

Since these Chinese students could not openly defy Japan while in Japan, the hostile and rebellious spirit suppressed naturally found expression in their writings, which were circulated among Chinese students and published in China. The fact that Cheng Fangwu, together with many other Chinese students, made a special trip to China to protest to the government against a concession to Japan reveals such a sentiment. If we accept the view that all literature is in one way or another self-expression, serving as a release mechanism which can restore psychological equilibrium, we can surely regard this rebellious posture of the Creationists as a volcanic eruption of emotions and resentments pent up by the harsh reality experienced in both Japan and China.

In "Niao Luo Xing" 鸟箩行, a story by Yu Dafu, the protagonist comes home from Japan after his graduation, only to find himself beset by the problem of making a decent living. Sometimes he even loses his job. He thus explains the reason he loses his teaching position at a school: "Some iron-hearted generals and high officials have drained the national treasury so

that the state can no longer feed its humble people like us who do not know the art of bootlicking."⁴⁶

The double disappointment suggested by Zheng Boqi thus added fuel to the fire of discontent and reinforced the determination to re-create the world, a sentiment best captured by the poem below:

God, if this is the world you created,
You have indeed created a mankind too imperfect.
Your last creation is your worst work,
Fit only to be in the rank of beasts.
Mankind's selfishness, cruelty, obstinacy and
laziness
Are the result of your negligence and laziness.
On the seventh day, why did you stop working so
early,
Without adding fine touches to your creation?
God, we are not content with a mankind like this,
We want to re-create ourselves.
Our project of re-creation begins
Right on the seventh day when you became lazy.
Composed on May 1⁴⁷

In this poem the dissatisfaction with social reality is so strong that the poet even challenged God for his wrongdoing. Such a rebellious attitude led the creationists to believe that only action, creation, or rather, re-creation could rectify the injustice in the world. But of course, to do so is not easy. Repeated frustration was to become a way of life. Their class affiliation sometimes made it impossible for them to persevere in what they had started doing. So sometimes they resorted to a less socially committed attitude and withdrew into themselves. They eulogized the self, expressed its bewilderment and voiced its demand for individual freedom. On other occasions they turned their eyes away from society and seek solace in nature.

This reminds us of a common practice of our traditional intelligentsia. When they are dissatisfied with officialdom, they

would disengage themselves from worldly affairs and choose to live at a remote location where they could thoroughly enjoy the beauty and bounty of mother nature. Thus a particular sub-genre of poetry--the pastoral and landscape poetry--usually became the favorite medium of expression for those disgruntled poets.

So when we try to understand the romantic tendency of the May Fourth writers, we must not overlook the possible influence of traditional literature. There is no question about the fact that German Romanticism and English decadence appealed to Yu Dafu.⁴⁸ On the other hand, we must also realize that Yu was versed in traditional poetry. Before his serious attempt with the short story, he had written and published many poems in the old style both in China and Japan. In the case of Guo Moruo his education in traditional literature is no less solid. According to himself, he was already able to learn Tang quartrains by heart at the age of three, thanks to his mother's tutelage.⁴⁹ When he grew older, he was charmed by the poems of Tao Yuanming 陶渊明, Wang Wei 王维, Meng Haoran 孟浩然 and Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元. The nature depicted in those poems kindled his imagination and left indelible impressions on him. Thus when Guo later came to write short stories, his description of the setting often reminds us of pastoral landscapes these ancient poets depicted.

Having documented the propagation of realism and romanticism in the first decade of modern Chinese literature, a question may have arisen for those familiar with the history of European literature: Since in the West realism is often considered to be

a revolt against romanticism and emerged much later than the latter, why then did realism and romanticism appear in China almost simultaneously? Li Helin 李何林 explained that it was due to the fact that they were all bourgeois literature. While the historical development of the bourgeoisie in the Western hemisphere allowed it to progress through several stages, thus making it possible for different stages to manifest themselves in an orderly way, the history of the Chinese bourgeoisie spans too short a time for the same thing to happen. It was during the First World War while imperialist powers were elsewhere committed that the bourgeoisie in China suddenly prospered. The rise of this class demanded a commensurate literature and hence the appearance of realism and romanticism--two literary schools of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁰

While Li's employment of a Marxist method of class analysis in interpreting a literary phenomenon does contain some truth in it, it fails to explain why other bourgeois literary school such as symbolism, aestheticism, imagism, expressionism and so on did not seem to be as palatable to Chinese writers at that time.

In my opinion, the enthusiastic and simultaneous endorsement of realism and romanticism rather than any other isms that flooded China is largely dictated by one factor--the unpleasant reality of Chinese society and the dissatisfaction with it on the part of modern Chinese writers. The reality in China called for a literature that satisfies the need to expose social evils and urge to voice individual sentiments and create a just society. The rejection of other Western literary schools may also have

something to do with the level of sophistication of the Chinese bourgeoisie and of the general reading public.

In the West, symbolism as a literary movement appeared later than both romanticism and realism. In this sense we say that it is a more sophisticated form of bourgeois literature. As is mentioned earlier, many Chinese intellectuals who undoubtedly belong to the petty bourgeois, if not the bourgeois, believed that China then was more similar to pre-imperialist Russia than any other country. Thus the kind of literature produced in such a country is what China needed and could appreciate. To be able to enjoy works that reflect the experiences, metaphysical or physical, that one has not really gone through is certainly much more difficult to the majority of readers. That explains why many readers of *Xiaoshuo yuebao* complained to the editor saying that they were not able to understand some of the works published in the magazine. Mao Dun explained that their inability to appreciate such works resulted from their unfamiliarity with the literary school of symbolism. 51

In short the unpopularity of literary schools other than realism and romanticism indicates that not only the general reading public was not yet ready for such stuff, the writers themselves may also have found it less palatable. There might have been those (Mao Dun, for example) who could appreciate such art, but the overriding concern of educating and arousing the masses by means of literature may have led them to play down the importance and desirability of these literary schools.

Some scholars seem to think that what Mao Dun really wanted to introduce to China was 'the romanticism' (a term covering

literary schools which emerged after naturalism in the West and synonymous with modernism in its broad reference at that time). This view bears a re-consideration. While this is certainly not the place to make a detailed study of Mao Dun's literary thinking in the first decade of modern Chinese literature, it would be illuminating for us to mention a few articles and incidents.

It is true that for a brief period Mao Dun objected to realism or naturalism, thinking that works in this style tended to leave readers in despair on account of its relentless portrayal of the dark side of society. In 1922, while answering a reader's criticism of naturalism, he, however, remarked:

We must now deal with the issue of whether we should expose the misery of life without pointing out the door of hope. You said in your letter that "naturalists depict the woe of living in this world without giving us the consolation of a possible way out". This idea is also conveyed by much of what you said in your letter. This is actually an objection raised by some people before. For a brief period of time I was also influenced by this objection. But we must ask ourselves why the romantic literature that celebrates heroism became so unpopular in the second half of the nineteenth century. Wasn't it because Mr. Naturalism had opened the door of reality and thus awakened mankind from his dream world slumber?..... The reason that naturalism could take the place of romanticism lies in that it is impossible to maintain an idealized mask for long. In China we have a saying that an embroidered pillow cannot cover up the weeds inside it. Such is the law of things. It is futile for us not to acknowledge it.⁵³

In Mao Dun's view, an optimism which is derived from the concealment of horror and injustice in contemporary society did not help young people to mature. Only a courage to face such horror and injustice will guide them through setbacks to enter

into a new world. ⁵⁴ Although Mao Dun regarded the introduction and popularization of realism and naturalism as a preparation for more recent Western literary trends, ⁵⁵ it is important for us to realize that during the entire May Fourth era he committed himself to the propagation of realism and naturalism. Judging from the fictional works he turned out later, we cannot but admit that his subscription to and belief in realism and naturalism was indeed sincere and persistent. His *Ziye* 子夜 [Midnight] is nowadays generally hailed as a masterpiece of realistic literature.

In this connection, I would like to relate a symbolic episode which bespeaks convincingly of Mao Dun's rejection of romanticism or neo-romanticism. In the editor's note of Vol.14, No.7 of *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, Mao Dun announced that an article by Zheng Zhenduo on romanticism would be carried in the next issue. When the next issue came out, however, the article was nowhere to be found. Mao Dun explained that it would be published in the following issue since there was no space for it in this issue. But this promise was again broken and this time Mao Dun made it clear that the article had given place to one which introduced Georg Brandes.

In the above account, I have documented the propagation of two literary isms, which I have designated as "realism" and "romanticism" for the sake of convenience. As is obvious now, the dissatisfaction with social conditions and the influence of the literal tradition were what made these two concepts so attractive to Chinese intellectuals. As we can also see, the tenor of the "realism" and "romanticism" includes Chinese elements.

Notes

¹ Cai Yuanbei 蔡元培 ed., *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi daolunji* 中国新文学导论集 [Collection of introductions to an anthology of modern Chinese literature] (Shanghai: Liangyou fuxing tushu gongsi 良友复兴图书公司, 1940), 155.

² *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 11. 12.

³ *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 11. 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 11. 2.

⁷ Ibid., 11. 8.

⁸ Although these two terms in the West usually denote two distinct literary movements, they had more or less the same meaning for most Chinese writers in the 1920s. Therefore they often used these two terms interchangeably and regarded them as referring to one literary phenomenon.

⁹ *Xiaoshuo yuebao*, 11. 11.

¹⁰ Zheng zhenduo 郑振铎, ed., *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 vol. 1. (Shanghai: Liangyou fuxin tushu gongsi 良友复兴图书公司, 1936), 44.

¹¹ *Xinwenxue yundong shiliao xuan* 新文学运动史料选 [Historical documents of modern Chinese literature], vol. 1. (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe 上海教育, 1978) 12

¹² *Meizhou pinglun* 每周评论 [The Weekly Review], No.5,

1919.1.19.

13 Xiaoshuo yuebao 12. 1.

14 Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi daolunji 中国新文学大系导论集
1940 (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian 上海书店, 1982), 87.

15 This table is based on *Minguo shiqi zongshumu* 民国时期
总书目 [A general catalogue of books published in the
Republican Era] (Beijing: Shumu chubanshe 书目出版社, 1987)

16 Zhao Cong 赵聰, *Wushi wentan nizhua* 五四文坛泥瓜
[Vignettes of the May Fourth Movement] (Taipei: Shibao chuban
gongsi 时报出版公司, 1980), 38-39.

17 Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 ed., *Eluosi mingjia duanpianxiaoshuoji*
俄罗斯名家短篇小说集 [Short stories by famous Russian writers]
(Shanghai: Shangwu yingshuguan 商务印书馆, 1920), 1.

18 Cf. Paul G. Pickowicz, *Marxist Literary Thought in
China: The Influence of Ch'u Ch'iu-pai.* (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1981), 28.

19 Ibid., 30.

20 Ibid., 31.

21 Liang Qichao regarded fiction as an extremely useful
means of educating the people and implanting in them revolutionary
ideas that would help facilitate social reform.

22 Li Helin 李何林, *Jin ershinian zhongguo wenyi
sicaolun: 1917-1937* 近二十年文艺思潮论 [On the
intellectual waves in the last twenty years: 1917-1937] (Xian:
Shaanxi renmin chubanshe 陕西人民出版社, 1981), 79.

23 Preface to "Shuqin" 竖琴 in *Nanqiang beidiaoji* 南腔北调集
[Assorted accents] in *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 [Complete Works
of Lu Xun], vol. 19. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学
出版社, 1973), 47

24 H.E. Bates, *The Modern Short Story* (Boston: The Writer, Inc., 1972), 76-77.

25 *Shijie wenxue zhong de xianshi zhuyi wenti* 世界文学中的现实主义问题 [On realism in world literature] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1959), 198.

26 Zheng Cichuan 郑次川 *Oumei jindai xiaoshuoshi* 欧美近代小说史 [History of modern European and American literature] (Shanghai: Shangwu yingshuguan 商务印书馆, 1927), 46.

27 Ibid., 77.

28 Ibid., 27.

29 Ibid., 78.

30 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, I, 36.

31 Ibid., 43.

32 Ibid., 56.

33 His original words in translation read: "I propose that the vernacular literature be regarded as the legitimate proper of literature in this age. But of course, this is only a proposal supported by considerable historical evidence. Whether the future literature will evolve out of this form is a question which remains to be answered by the works of our literary practitioners. If they should fail to produce such a literature, then our present laborious efforts will be in vain. We will not be able to persuade writers who favour the classical language to subscribe to our view." *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.1, 57-58.

34 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.1, 355.

35 Lee Yun-phin, for example, in his doctoral dissertation "Art and World in the Chinese Short Story: San-yen Collections in the Light of Western Critical Method." (Ph.D. dissertation. Seattle: Washington University, 1982) opposes to the employment of the term. In my opinion whether we may use the term to describe Chinese vernacular fiction depends on how we define it. I see no reason why it could not serve as a convenient term, for want of a better one, as long as it refers to literary works that portray the contemporary life of the commoner without the philosophical and periodical connotations associated with it.

36 E. L. Idema. *Chinese Vernacular Fiction: The Formative Years* (Netherland: E.J. Brill, 1974), 50.

37 Lee Yun-phin, 131-312.

38 He Manzhi 何满子 *Gudai baihua duanpian xiaoshuoji 古代白话短篇小说集* [Collected ancient short stories in the vernacular] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1983) 5.

39 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.1, 175-181.

40 Li Helin 李何林, *Jin ershinian zhongguo wen yi sicao lun: 1917-1937*, 102.

41 Chen Shouli 陈寿立 ed., *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue yundong shiliao zhaibian 中国现代文学运动史料摘编* [Selected historical documents of modern Chinese literary movements] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe 北京出版社, 1985) 339-340.

42 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.1, 179.

43 *Ibid.*, 179-180.

44 Cai Yuanpei, *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi daolunji*, 158-159.

45 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.5, 71.

46 *Ibid.*, 92.

47 *Chuangzhao zhoukan 创造周刊* [Creation weekly], No.1

(1923.5.23):

48 Cf. Xu Zidong 许子东, *Yu Dafu xinlun 郁达夫新论*

[A re-evaluation of Yu Dafu] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺, 1984).

49 *Moruo zuopin xuanji 沫若作品选集* [Collected

works of Moruo], vol.13. (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe 四川文艺, 1986), 131.

50 Li Helin, *Jin ershinian zhongguo wenyi sicaolun:1917-1937*, 77-78.

51 Cf. *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 13.9, 13.11.

52 *Ibid.*, 13.5.

53 *Ibid.*

54 Cf. "Xiaoshuo yuebao gaige xuanyan" in *Xiaoshuo yuebao* Vol.12, No.1 and Mao Dun's *Wo suo zouguode daolu* [The road I have taken] Part I, (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian 1981), 135.

Chapter Three: Three Thematic Features

As a reminder, the reader is prompted to note that this chapter only attempts to document three recurrent features (mostly thematic) manifested in the Chinese short story of 1917-1927. The question whether these features can be regarded as the result of the influence of the two "isms" being advocated in the same period will not be tackled until the next chapter.

A: The subjective/autobiographical trend

In his *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Leo Ou-fan Lee observed and documented a "subjective trend" in the literary works of early modern Chinese literature.¹ The short stories in the three volumes of the *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* also seem to bear out the point, though the content of the subjective trend in them may be different. The so-called subjective trend in this paper primarily refers to a tendency on the part of short story writers in the first decade of modern Chinese literature of making their characters, especially the heroes and heroines, the mouthpieces of their own values and emotions and, of incorporating autobiographical details, no matter how repulsive they may be, into their stories. The presence of such a trend thus makes the shadow of the author loom exceptionally large in many of their stories.

The best representatives of this trend are the members of the Creation Society. Yu Dafu once declared unequivocally that he

entirely subscribed to the belief that all literary works are the autobiographies of their authors.² If we read Yu's stories, we constantly have the feeling that he could be writing about his own life. This explains why Yu Dafu came under severe attack when *Chenlun* was published in 1921. People condemned Yu Dafu not so much because he openly portrayed a bohemian way life but because they believed what he depicted was his own life. For reasons perplexing to some people, Yu sometimes even offered testimonies supporting such a belief. Once he confessed in his "Wuliu nianlai chuanguo shenghuo de huigu" 五、六年来创作生活的回顾 [Memoirs of my writing career in the past five or six years]:

When I was writing the stories collected in *Chenlun*, I had already transferred to the Economics Department of the Tokyo Imperial University. At that time costs of living were low and work at school was slack. Apart from the time spent on reading, I often went to pubs where girls were available.³

The protagonist of the title story "*Chenlun*" is an overseas Chinese student in Tokyo. He is sentimental by nature and is suffering from a severe case of hypochondria which results, most probably, from his ethnic background which prevents him from fitting into the main stream of Japanese life. He therefore finds solace and sanctuary in reading the works of Wordsworth, Emerson and Thoreau. Although this alleviates his suffering to a certain extent, he is sometimes assailed by strong sexual desires and an irresistible emotional need which can only be satisfied by an "Eve":

Oh Heaven! I do not need knowledge, nor fame and useless money.

If you should bless me with an Eve from the Garden of Eden and make her exclusively mine, body and soul, I will be content beyond all measure.⁴

Obviously, given his disposition and the national status of his mother country, such a Japanese "Eve" for him is anything but an unattainable dream. He therefore finds release in such acts as peeping into a bathroom when the daughter of his landlord is taking a bath and eavesdropping on a love-making scene in the countryside. His dire need for emotional reassurance and sexual release eventually leads him to a brothel where he finds himself slighted owing to his ethnic background.

Although we cannot say that all this is definitely autobiographical, the psychological and physical need for a woman, and the melancholy disposition of the character are clearly attributes of its author. At the time of the composition of the story, the author was a young man of a little over twenty. He was experiencing a tense relationship with his domineering mother who had arranged a matrimony for him. After a losing battle with his mother, Yu acquiesced and travelled back from Japan to his hometown to marry a barely literate girl from his native place. Although the marriage was always nominally maintained, Yu certainly cherished no emotions other than sympathy for this girl. After a perfunctory marriage ceremony Yu returned to Japan. A sense of love and to be loved now preoccupied him. As a married man he wanted to make love to a woman. But as a sensitive and sentimental person, he also needed the psychological assurance that can only be obtained in sexual acts springing from genuine love. The argument that the protagonist, in "Chenlun" could very well have been the author himself is further supported by

descriptions of the hometown of the protagonist:

His birthplace was a little town on the Fu Chun River, eighty to ninety li from Hangzhou by water. The River originates in Anhui province and flowed across the entire Zhejiang province, meandering through a picturesque country; a poet from the Tang dynasty described it as a "picturesque river." When he was fourteen he asked one of his teachers to write those words for him. He then hung the scroll up in his study, the little window of which opened on to the river. Though the study was small, nevertheless, the beauty of the surrounding, the changing winds and rains, darkness and light, springs and autumns, nights and dawns, enabled it to surpass even Prince Teng's Council Hall. There he spent more than ten springs and autumns before leaving for Japan with his elder brother.⁵

Descriptions of the same river occur more than once in Yu Dafu's stories. The following passage depicts the scenery of Qian Tang River, the lower reaches of the Fu Chun River.

The ripe spring with its mellow warmth, is reflected in the green waters of the Qian Tang River. The boroughs of trees on the banks of the river and the earth under them are covered with a fluffy green, sending forth a fresh fragrance. The afternoon sun in early April, like a windstorm, penetrates the whole atmosphere in the villages along the river. The crystal air vibrates with the humming of distant bees, like the lullaby mothers sing to their children. This is a time when villagers relax themselves and young lovers are willing to die for their passion.⁶

The repeated reference to his hometown, besides serving the function of providing a locale for his stories, attests to Yu Dafu's love for idyllic natural landscape, which informs many of his stories. It also reflects the autobiographical nature of many of his stories. Anna Dolezalova once pointed out: "Very often he [Yu Dafu] localizes the home of his hero in sites near his place of birth, Che-j' . . . , thus further emphasizing the

autobiographical nature of his work."⁷

Another practice of Yu Dafu may also testify to the autobiographical nature of his works. Often he gave his characters and settings names that could easily be associated with people and locations Yu Dafu were familiar with. In "Chenlun", the abbreviations "H" stands for Hangzhou 杭州, "K" for Kiaxing 嘉兴 (Jiaying), the two places where Yu attended middle schools. The "N" city most likely refers to Nagaya in Japan. In "Weibing" 胃病 [Stomach Trouble], the three major characters can all be identified with Yu's friends at the time, as the author himself acknowledges:

This piece was originally conceived to be a discursive essay on illness, but in the process of composition, it gradually evolved into a story which is what it is now. When I was sent to hospital, my schoolmates Mr. W, Mr. S and Mr. M did me a great favour. Mr. K came all the way from Kyushu and stayed with me for two days, I dedicate this work to the four of them as a token of my memory of the event.

Yu Dafu's image can be detected not only in stories collected in *Chenlun*, but also in other stories. Critics seem to agree that the character by the name of Zhifu 质夫 and Wenpu 文朴 are highly autobiographical. If we follow Yu Dafu's activities in 1922 and compare them with what is recorded in the story "Mangmang Yie" 茫茫夜 [Enveloping night] we cannot but admit that Zhifu bears much resemblance to the author who created him. The story begins with a financially broke Zhifu going to "A" city ("A" stands for Anqing 安庆 in all probability). This episode reminds the reader of the fact that upon returning from Japan in 1921, Yu immediately found himself in a rather difficult financial

situation. He needed money to support himself, so he had to accept a teaching position at the School of Law and Politics in Anqing despite the fact that he wanted to devote all his time to literary creation.

So far I have been drawing examples from the works of Yu Dafu. This, however, does not mean that the autobiographical trend in early modern Chinese literature is limited to one Creationist only. The works of Guo Moruo, likewise, is also highly autobiographical, though perhaps to a lesser extent in his fiction than in his poetry. "Qilu" 歧路 [Astray], a story collected in the *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* is very much in the same vein as Yu Dafu's "Niao Luo Xing" 鸞篋行. Both stories depict the strong emotional currents and the bitter resentment toward the unjust society experienced by the husbands (that is, Guo and Yu respectively), who are obliged to send their wives and children home for economic reasons. The husbands in both stories were unable to support their own families with the meager earning they could make from their unprofitable and yet chosen calling-- literature. This, as we know, actually happened to both Guo and Yu.

The writers of the Association for Literary Study are reputedly influenced by Western realism. To be realistic often means, among other things, to be objective in one's mode of presentation. Curiously, when we read works of the members of the Association for Literary Study, we constantly feel the upsurge of strong subjective undercurrents beneath scenes seemingly presented in an objective manner. A story by Bing Xin is a case in point.

In "Siren du giaocui" 斯人独憔悴 [He pines away], the tender, cultured and yet rebellious girl Yin Zhen 颖贞 is obviously the image of the authoress herself. He Bin 何彬 in "Chaoren" 超人 [Superman] by his conversion from a Nietzschean pessimist to a lover of mankind also betrays the ideological oscillation, albeit short, of its authoress in the May Fourth period.

Love, or rather, maternal love, is perhaps the most important and consistent theme of all the works of Bing Xin. No matter how disillusioned and stone-hearted the "superman" is, he eventually accepts that such love is universal whether we are willing to acknowledge it or not. He thus repents to the child who has catalyzed his change:

Your groans in the night made me recall many things in the past. The first was my mother. The thought of her love for me again stirred up my emotions which had been dead as still water. In the past decades, I erroneously believed that the world was a vain place, life was meaningless and love and sympathy were vicious virtues. The money which I gave you to cover your medical expenses carried no love and sympathy of any measure. It was given as a refusal to hear your groans. It is a symbol of my rejection of my mother, of life, of the universe, of love and sympathy. Oh, God, what a horrible idea!⁹

Such a profound confession and such an affirmation of universal love are surely beyond the comprehension of the child character in the story. It is more a declaration of the authoress' own convictions than a message written to an innocent child.

In the 1920s while commenting on the works of Bing Xin, Mao Dun

remarked:

Of all the May Fourth writers, only Bing Xin belongs to herself. Her works do not really mirror the society. What is reflected is herself and she does it most thoroughly. In this respect, I would say that her essays are more valuable than her fiction; and her longer poems more valuable than her shorter ones.¹⁰

"Do you aspire to true literature?" Bing Xin once asked, "try to give expression to your personality, to your true self. True literature," she went on to explain, "is to write down whatever is in your heart. At the time of composition, there should exist only the 'self', or maybe even the self should be non-existent--no ancestry nor posterity; no universe nor beautiful objects. Reject anything, may it be present, past or future. Embrace only the impressions that coalesce in the mind at this fraction of time, allow them to surge and put them down on paper."¹¹

Lu Yin 卢隐 shared such a view of literature. "The only testament is individuality--the essence of art is subjectivism--and individualistic emotions."¹² "After reading all of Lu Yin's works, we can not help feeling that the scope of her subject-matter is somewhat too narrow. What she presents before us is none other than herself, her friends and those she loves--her work is therefore strongly autobiographical."¹³ Lu Yin's close friends also claim that the character Lusha 露莎 in "Haibing guren" [Old timers at beach], the story collected in the *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, is also quite autobiographical.¹⁴

The most important writer in the *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* is unquestionably Lu Xun. Although none of his stories in this anthology can be legitimately described as autobiographical. Such a tendency can surely be seen in many of his other stories written

in this period. "Guxiang" 故乡 [Hometown], "Zhufu" 祝福 [Benediction] and other well-known stories, as is well-known, evolved out of his reminiscences of his hometown and childhood. They are many other stories that could be included in this category. But here I will only suggest a few appearing in Vol.4 of *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*: Yu Pingbo's "Huajiang" 花匠 [Gardener], Luo Jialun's "Shi aiqing haishi tongku" 是爱情还是痛苦 [Is it love or suffering], Hu Shanyuan's "Shui" 睡 [Sleep] and Chen Xianghe's 陈翔鹤 "Xifeng chuidaoliao zenbian" 西风吹到了枕边 [Westwind blowing against the pillow], etc.

One of the common practices of these writers who incorporated their own biographical details into their fiction is to turn their inside out, no matter how ghastly or repulsive it may be. For Yu Dafu, this is manifested in his unabashed confession of sexual desires. The protagonist of "Chenlun", being unable to suppress his own desires, resorts to masturbation before he eventually goes to a whorehouse. The following lines describe most poignantly an aggravated state of sexual frustration.

A warm breeze blew day and night. Grass began to turn green. The wheat in the surrounding fields began to grow taller and taller. Along with the amorous awakening of nature, his primordial desire also became unsuppressible with each passing day. The frequency of his sin which he committed in his bed every morning increased.

He was by nature a man who loathed physical pleasure, but when he was possessed by such desires, his intellect nullified and his conscience would no longer serve as a deterrent. The ancient teaching that "one should not harm one's own body, hair and skin" which he had abided by was now breached. Every time after he had committed the sin, he would be filled with repulsion for himself and vowed that

he would not do it again. However, when the next morning came, all the fantasies would again dance before his eyes. The "Eves" he saw every day would be naked, alluring him to sin. In his mind, the bodies of women after their middle age were even more tantalizing than virgin girls. He tried hard to suppress such desires, but each time he failed. Thus once became twice, and twice became habit. He then went to the library to read medical books. These books all maintained that the worst harm one could do to one's health was this kind of sin. He was seized by a dread which intensified day by day. One day he learned from where he could not remember, perhaps in a book, that the vanguard of modern Russian literature, Gogol, also suffered from the same symptoms from which he never recovered until his death. The idea of Gogol somehow alleviated his sense of guilt, because the author of "Dead Souls" was just like him. But of course this was only a self consolation. He could not rid himself of a constant fear.¹⁵

Other writers also exposed their despicable acts. The "I" in Zhao Jingshen's "Hongzhong de shou" 红肿的手 [Swollen hands] confessed that he in his childhood had bullied and tortured a child servant so that the child's hands became swollen with frostbite and bruises:

Dear friends, I must tell you a story, which I can never forget. When outside the moon is crystal as water and when old thoughts and bygone events revisit me, I seem to see a pair of swollen hands right in front of me.... I must tell you, though it pains me to do so, that these hands are those of Xiao Quan, my beloved former child servant. Needless to say that the swelling in his hands was caused by overwork in severe weather. But I must confess it was largely due to my wrong-doing. I often ordered him to run errands for me in such weather.¹⁶

The protagonist of Li Liewen's 黎列文 "Zhouzhong" 舟中 [On board a ship] confesses how he seduced a young woman while making a boat journey from Hankou to Shanghai and got away with it.

When the story begins, the protagonist has just got on board a

ship for Shanghai. In his cabin, there are two other passengers, a gentleman in his forties and a woman in her twenties. It turns out that the man is the woman's brother-in-law. He is escorting the woman to her native place at the request of his brother, the woman's husband. The gentleman is fond of playing cards and is therefore often absent from the cabin. So the protagonist has a lot of time with the woman who confides in him her pitiable past: she has been the concubine of an officer. As she has lost favour with her husband as a result of the sedition of his wife, her husband has asked his brother to send her home, to visit her parents in name but to abandon her in reality. The story of the woman's pitiable past arouses in the protagonist a strong sympathy and protective feelings. The woman is surprised that he should be so compassionate. The two of them develop an intimate relationship. Once, while he is trying to console her by helping her wipe away her tears, he is suddenly seized by an irresistible sexual desire.... When he calms down, he realizes the monstrosity of his act. Is he willing to take to be his wife a woman who has been abandoned by her husband and older than he is? He is appalled by such a prospect. When the ship arrives in Nanking to allow some passengers to disembark, he makes an excuse and flees.

If the reader is made to know at the end of this story that the protagonist truly repents what he has done and is prepared to face the mental cross he is to bear throughout his life, then the reader of the following two confessions are left with a vicarious experience of nostalgia. The protagonist of "Piaomiao de meng"

飘渺的梦 [Lingering dream] by Xiang Peiliang 向培良 confesses

how he becomes emotionally dependent on his sister-in-law as a result of spending a summer vacation with her at home. The protagonist of "Mao" 猫 [Cats] by Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 relates his remorse at losing several cats because of his negligence.

From the above examples, we can see that confession among works of the May Fourth Era was indeed a national vogue, ranging from such serious subject matters as sexual desires to inconsequential trivialities such as nostalgia over losing cats. No wonder Chen Sihe 陈思和, a promising critic active in present China, considers confession or repentance as a major feature of modern Chinese literature.¹⁷

I am aware in the absence of standard biographies on writers other than a few major ones in modern Chinese literature, such as Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo, I am taking the risk of confusing fiction with reality when I presume that the stories related by Zhao Jingshen, Li Liewen and Xiang Peiliang correspond to life events. But on the other hand, such a hypothesis is justifiable if we realize that these lesser known writers were all from social and economic backgrounds similar to the "villainous" characters in their stories. So even if the deeds are not highly autobiographical, the moods and thoughts could very well have been those of their authors.

B: The social/humanitarian concern

One of the most salient features of the 1917-1927 Chinese short stories is their overwhelming social concern and the portrayal of the life of the oppressed or the miserable. Many

stories vehemently criticize the inhumanity of the traditional order by attacking some of its age-old practices. Most stories written by Lu Xun and those of the Association for Literary Study fall into this category.

The four short stories by Lu Xun collected in Vol.4 of the *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* are "Kuangren riji" 狂人日记 [Madman's diary], "Yao" 药 [Medicine], "Feizao" 肥皂 [Soap] and "Lihun" 离婚 [Divorce]. The first story was published in *Xingqingnian* 新青年 [New youth] in 1918, along with Hu Shi's epoch-making treatise "Lun duanpian xiaoshuo" 论短篇小说 [On the short story], probably as an illustration of Hu's concept of a modern Chinese short story. Since the plot and theme of this story is well-known to all students of Chinese literature, here we will only examine the other three stories collected in this anthology. "Yao" is a haunting story depicting a most primitive practice among the lower and uneducated classes of the Chinese people: the moon has just set, all is quiet except creatures that hunt by night. Lao Shuan suddenly gets up and goes out into the dark night with a small packet of money which he carefully places in his pocket. He comes to a T-shaped road junction and waits. Presently, the junction begins to surge with people who press forward to witness the execution of a prisoner. As soon as the doomed man is beheaded, Lao Shuan runs home with a bun soaked with the blood of the beheaded.

When he reaches home, which is actually a tea house catering to the less well-off locals, preparations have already been made. The bun is promptly baked and Xiao Shuan, his tuberculosis son, is

given it to eat.

Customers in the tea house soon learn the news that Xiao Shuan has eaten such a bun. They congratulate his parents, and predict all so devoutly that the child is going to recover from his illness, thanks to the wondrous effect of such a bun. From their conversation, it dawns upon the reader that the executed is actually a revolutionary who urge people to rebel against the unjust Manchu rule. He is from the same social background as the people in the tea house and it is in their interest that he dauntlessly sacrifices himself. But these people are so indifferent to his death that some of them even ridicule him for his courage to rise and rebel.

"Shuizang" 水葬 [River burial], a similar story by Jian Xian'ai 蹇先艾, records an equally barbaric practice in a small village in Hunan Province. A man has committed a theft. He is to be drowned in accordance with the local custom. The villagers, men and women, old or young, excited by such an event, follow the man to the river. The thought that such a practice is most inhumane never enters the mind of any of the villagers. For them, to witness the actual drowning is both entertaining and edifying.

Another story by Lu Xun named "Soap" is centred around a piece of soap which the hero of the story buys after he has witnessed an event in the street. On his way home, the protagonist of the story sees a teen-age girl begging in the street. Whenever she is given any food, she saves it for her blind grandmother who is standing under the eaves of a shop nearby. Though she is so filial and reduced to such miserable circumstances, the lookers-on seem to show no sympathy. Some rascals even openly insult her.

One of them says to another: "She is dirty all right, but if you buy two cakes of soap and wash her up, she could be great fun." 18

On hearing this, the hero is naturally filled with indignation, being a member of the educated class enjoying the respect of society. But upon leaving the scene without giving a single penny, he goes to a grocery, and after much deliberation over price and quality, buys a cake of soap which he asks his wife to use when he gets home. No reader would miss the scathing satire against those hypocrites whose outrage at social injustice and inequality is nothing but lip service to the masses.

"Lihun" 离婚 [Divorce] is not about a hypocrite but a separated woman who is made to bow before the crushing power of feudal forces. The woman is called Ai Gu 爱姑, she has been separated for three years already. When the story begins, she and her father, a much respected personage among the fish farmers in the vicinity, are on their way to Pang Village to appeal to a local dignitary for his arbitration over her divorce case. Ai Gu is determined that she will fearlessly voice her grievances to that man and demand compensation. However, as soon as she enters the house, she becomes nervous. The man commands such authority and demands so much submission and obedience that Ai Gu stops short of her tirade against her husband as soon as the man merely shows a sign of impatience. Her determination vanishes and she meekly accepts the terms suggested by this symbol of Confucian order and values. The acquiescence of a spirited woman in this case can thus be read not only as a sympathetic account of the misfortune of an individual woman but also as an indictment of

the oppressive nature of a social system which is sustained by the subjugation of women to men.

The concern about the old institution of arranged marriages finds expression in a great many stories published in this period. As many writers were young people who poignantly felt the need to abolish the old practice of parental arrangement, the outcry for freedom of love and marriage became a universal theme.

Ni Yi-de's 仙貽德, "Huaying" 花影 [Flower shadow] tells how the fond dreams of a young man becomes totally shattered upon learning that his beloved cousin, with whom he has spent many a tender moment in his childhood and adolescence is arranged by her parents to marry a man she has never seen. Although the heroine in this story is reluctant, she dares not to violate the will of her parents. In a letter to her lover, she writes:

My marriage was decided last spring. As I dreaded that this news would hurt you, I did not dare to tell you then. Now that you seem to know it, there is no point in concealing it from you any more. But I know nothing about that family, nor do I know anything about that man. I had thought of remonstrance. But given a woman like me, what chances do I stand? I can only resign myself to fate. Don't blame me, such is our lot!

If the love in this story smacks of the traditional story about love between cousins and about passive submission to parental marriage arrangements, then there are also characters who choose to die and take revenge on those preventing them from achieving marital happiness. Yan Liangcai's 严良才 "Zuihuo de anwei" 最后的安慰 [The last consolation] is just such a story.

Mr. L is a school teacher in a town, which boasts a history of over one thousand years. This is a place where people all

abide by conventions and practices that have been institutionalized by its ancient history. Nothing sensational, therefore, has ever taken place. But then the very town is rocked by the shocking news that Mr. L has murdered Mrs. M. The townsfolk are all appalled by such an event, but Mr. P, L's colleague, seems to be less agitated. He knows the inside story.

Mr. L, a young man argumentative by nature, has suddenly become silent several months earlier. One day he comes to Mr. P at an unusually late hour and tells the latter in an expressionless tone that his fiancée has committed suicide as she can no longer bear the torture her mother inflicts upon her disobedience in insisting on her marrying Mr. L. The death of his fiancée changes Mr. L completely. He shuns others and his eloquent voice can scarcely be heard. He seems to be absent-minded all the time. Inside him, it is not so tranquil and peaceful. He is brewing up a hatred for Mrs. M and making preparations to murder the person who has been the direct cause of his total disillusionment with life. His careful scheme pays off and he surrenders himself to the police. He is duly sentenced to death, a punishment he willingly accepts, for he believes that he can now join his beloved in a realm other than this one.

The portrayal of the down-trodden and their miserable plight is yet another manifestation of the social concern of the writings of the May Fourth era. Yu Dafu's "Chunfeng chenzui de wanshang" 春风沉醉的晚上 [An intoxicating spring evening] and "Bodian" 薄奠 [A meager sacrifice] have often been hailed as masterpieces of proletarian literature. The latter is a story about the friendship between the narrator and a rick-shaw coolie. The

narrator, obviously the author himself, befriends the coolie on a windy and dusty day when he wants to hire a rick-shaw. Initially he is surprised by the coolie's honesty. Unlike other coolies, this man does not try to rob his customers by taking advantage of the bad weather. With the development of this friendship, the narrator comes to know what a miserable life of the coolie and his family lived.

Some time later, the narrator happens to learn about the death of the coolie when he is taking a walk. A crowd has gathered at the door of the coolie's home. His wife is sobbing inside. One of the on-lookers tells the narrator that the coolie has been drowned in a flooding. When the narrator offers to help the coolie's wife, she begs him to buy a paper rick-shaw for her dead husband as he has wished all his life to own a rick-shaw of his own. The narrator accompanies the coolie's wife to pay tribute to the dead soul of the coolie on the day when the paper rick-shaw is ready. When their procession passes alleys and streets, the narrator is infuriated by the curious and yet indifferent stare of those who look on. He mutters: "Pigs! Beasts! What are you looking at? My friend, this poor rick-shaw coolie, died in your hands. You have the cheek to look on!"²¹ Here, the narrator is prompted to coarse language not because he has a habit of using such words (he is a cultured man of letters) but because he is outraged by the on-lookers who have become so accustomed to such events that they are not even capable of a sympathy for the suffering of their fellow countrymen.

"Ah Mei" 阿美 is a story about how a servant girl is

maltreated by the young master and her mistress. Ah Mei is a girl of twelve years old. As a servant, her major job is to serve the young master who has been so spoilt by his mother that he has become exceptionally cruel. He often orders Ah Mei to play the part of a horse so that he can ride on her. When Ah Mei crawls slowly on her hands and knees, the young master will pull her hair and slap her face. When she crawls faster, he will complain to his mother saying that Ah Mei intends to throw him down.

One day, Mrs. Zhang, the young master's auntie, comes to stay for a few days. On the fourth day when she is ready to leave, she suddenly discovers that her gold hairpin is missing. Suspecting that Ah Mei has stolen it, the mistress beats Ah Mei with a wooden stick. What is even more cruel is that Ah Mei is not allowed to cry for pain. The refusal to admit a theft she does not commit further infuriates her mistress. She does not stop beating Ah Mei until she herself becomes exhausted. Now Ah Mei is so seriously beaten up that she can neither get up or eat. But when the young master learns it, he says: "Dying, so what? I will ask my mum to buy another servant girl."²² This casual remark reveals how a small child has been molded by the environment that he takes a servant girl as nothing more than a toy which can be bought and disposed of at will.

Wang Sizhan's "Pianku" 偏枯 [Hemiplegia] is a most pathetic story about the forced breaking up of a family in the rural area. Liu Si 刘四, the head of the family is now run down with hemiplegia. The livelihood of the family becomes a pressing problem. If all three children are to be kept home, obviously they will have to put up with starvation. Although they are

unwilling to part with their children, the parents have to send one of them to a monastery and give away another to a neighbour. The woman of the family, in order to earn money to feed her husband, has to be a wet nurse although one of her own children is still breast feeding.

Very often the direct cause of suffering of these people is feuding warlords clamouring for power. Therefore, there are also a number of stories that expose the atrocities of unruly soldiers and their warlords. Ye Shaojun's 叶绍钧 "Panxiansheng zai nanzhong" 潘先生在难中 [Mr. Pan in crisis], Wang Sizhan's 王思诤 "Wenyi" 瘟疫 [Plague], "S shumin de xin" S 署名的信 [Letters signed with S], Xu Yunuo's 徐玉诺 "Poxie" 破鞋 [A worn shoe], Xu Zhimo's 徐志摩 "Lao Li de cansi" 老李的惨死 [Old Li's tragic death], Li Jiren's 李劫人 "Bianjishi de fengbo" 编辑室的风波 [Storming the editor's room], Wang Jingxi's 汪敬熙 "Pozi wanger de maolu" 跛子王二的毛驴 [Cripple Wanger's donkey] and Yang Zhengsheng's 杨震声 "Yujia" 渔家 [Fish farmer] all fall into this category. The power of warlords even reached into the sphere of school life as Yu Dafu reported in the story "Qiuliu" 秋柳 [Autumn willow]. The principal of the college has to resign from his post as he is opposed by an influential local warlord.

C: The sentimental/lyrical trend

For reasons now perplexing to modern readers who have become increasingly stoic with the disenchanting experience of alienation

and disillusionment that the on-set of modern civilization has brought about, many heroes of the 1917-1927 Chinese short stories seem to be strangely oversentimental and emotionally vulnerable. Yu Dafu's protagonists have been designated as "weeping heroes".²³ This is indeed a befitting designation for the protagonist of "Chenlun" who cries nine times in the story.

He cries for the first time when he is touched by a morning gossamer. Another time he cries after he has been slighted by two Japanese girls who, he thinks, are showing contempt for a Chinese national like him. Although there are times when he seems to have cried for no apparent reason at all, it seems that most of his tears and laments are occasioned by a sense of solitude aggravated by natural scenery and by surges of self-pity in an alien and hostile environment.

In another story "Cai Shi Ji" 采石矶 the protagonist is portrayed at the very beginning in this way:

Although Huang Zhongze is now twenty-three, he still cannot rid himself of a hypersensitiveness which he developed in his early childhood. He was by nature a man of emotion. Every time when he is excited, he will speak out in a big voice anything on his mind, no matter how unpleasant it may be to the listener. If the listener voices opposition to his opinion by way of facial expression, he would vehemently defend his position. He would get so excited that his eyes would be wide open emitting fiery sparkles. If at this juncture, somebody is willing to put in a word for him, he would jump up with joy and tears would begin to swell in his wide open eyes and then stream down his skinny cheeks.²⁴

Generally speaking, Guo Moruo's characters are more resolute and belligerent than those portrayed by Yu Dafu. They

nevertheless also frequently shed tears. The protagonist of "Qilu" nearly bursts into tears after he has seen his wife and children off to Japan: "Ah! They must be looking at me through the hole in the starboard. So saying to himself, he felt his eyes moistening and tears almost poured out." 25

People cry for different reasons. For Zhang Ziping, the master of triangle love stories, his protagonists weep at their unrequited love. In a story completely composed of a monologue, the narrator (protagonist) admits:

Liانشan, my love for you is deepening with each passing day. My agonies have multiplied and would not leave me alone. I do not know how much you loved me then, but I often cry for you. Since my return to school I have been neglecting my study, seeking solace in works of literature. Sometimes I emulate some writers and compose such lines as "weep at wind, sigh at the moon". The most strange thing is that I will find myself submerged in depression for no cause at all. Whenever such a mood befalls on me, I feel like crying so I go to the deserted sports-ground to let loose my uncontrollable torrents of tears.²⁵

The psychological need for a sentimental person to seek consolation from others is also clearly reflected in Bing Xin's "Wu" 悟 [Enlightenment]. The plot of the story cannot be simpler: Xin Ru 星如, the protagonist, receives a letter from a friend. This letter puts him in a mental turmoil. He rushes into a stormy night in an effort to comb and curb his thoughts, thereby getting a severe cold. He is sent to a hospital where he succeeds in reaffirming his values--the idea of universal love and compassion--after spending seven days meditating on this issue.

There is virtually no drama, no intrigue and no drastic turn of events throughout the story. What holds it together is the

state of mind, the emotional surges of the protagonist. Although he preaches the "philosophy of love" to others, he himself does not try to appear emotionally more stable and self-sufficient than Zhongwu 钟梧. He cannot hide his deeply felt sense of loneliness. In his letters to his family he becomes so sentimental that his sister is obliged to write back to say:

Dear Brother, I must forbid you to write such sentimental letters. You are too soft-hearted. Why do you always pity yourself? Your suffering is your own doing. I do not pity you. But when mother reads your letter, her heart breaks. I do not permit you to make mother so miserable, for she is also mine as well as yours.²⁷

Truly, the sentimentalists in the above mentioned instances weep most often over personal matters. But there are occasions, albeit few, when the cause is profound. There are two places where weeping is involved in the story "Banhuo" 搬后 [In the wake of moving]. At the beginning of the story, the narrator confesses:

I myself do not know why others call me "dreamer". I think I am. When somebody says that I am pitiable, I will shed tears. I often compose solitary poems, but when others say something about them I will immediately burn them, thinking that those poems are manifestations of the mentality of a child and blaming myself for composing them.²⁸

Toward the end of the story, the narrator/protagonist tells us he weeps again on his way to the open mine where several miners he knows have been killed. Despite the fact the narrator says that he does not know why he is crying, the reader knows clearly that he is crying over the misfortune of those miners.

A careful reader would probably recall that the first instance

of weeping of Yu Dafu's hero in "Chenlun" arises as an emotional reaction to a serene and pathetic village scene in the morning. Nature, especially when it is serene and picturesque, is often the cause of emotional disturbances to the heroes of many of the short stories collected in Vols. 3 and 5 in the *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*. Ironically and interestingly, it is also the pacifier of such emotional agitation, having a miraculous healing power.

Readers of Yu Dafu's stories will not fail to see the abundant descriptions of the beauty of nature and the consolation the characters receive from it. In the opening scene of "Chenlun" we see the protagonist wandering in the fields, holding a collection of Wordsworth's poems. It is early morning, a gentle mellow breeze is blowing and a serene gossamer hovers in the air.

Gazing at such a view he suddenly felt that his back was caressed by the passing wind which stirred up the blades of grass by the roadside. His dream world vanished. He turned and little grass blades were still fluttering in the wind. A spell of wind carrying the fragrance of violet flowers entered his nostrils. In such a clear and warm early autumn world, amid such crystal air, his body relaxed as if intoxicated. He felt that he was in a dreamy world, lying in the knees of his lover on the beach of Southern Europe, taking a nap.²⁹

Such a landscape is quite suggestive of a Wordsworthian one. We seem to see a solitary Wordsworth rambling among daffodils in the lake district. Nature to Yu's characters, just as to Wordsworth, has a special appeal. In such a landscape, one cannot but be enchanted by the wonder and beauty of nature and forget worldly worries. "His hypersensitive temperament, was now comforted by the refreshing air, the earth, the bushes and

unspoilt waters in the surroundings. Within half a year, he had become the son of nature, unable to tear himself away from the unique pleasure nature has to offer." 30

Like the heroes in Yu Dafu's stories, the protagonists in the story "Wu" 悟 by Bing Xin is also a lover of nature. When he wakes up after having dozed in a pavilion on a stormy night, he is entranced by the miraculous scene confronting his eyes. There is no vestige of the storm. The whole lake shines with moonlight.

He was transfixed. He had visited the lake for hundreds of times, but it was the first time he had seen such a scene. The waves were like unfolding brocade, with the moon reflected in it. The skies had been washed crystal clean by the storm. The leaves of the trees along the lake sparkled with rain drops, like a silver tree. On the ground there were wet spots which lay dispersed here and there. The rocks in the lake showed their faces....

Now all his anxieties disappeared. He took off his raincoat and walked out of the pavilion surrounded by pine trees and came to the edge of the lake with a blanket in hand. He stood there, looking into the intoxicating lake water. Everything was so soft and quiet in moonlight. He felt as if he were submerged in nature. In heaven and on earth only he and this moment existed. Suddenly a new thought dawned on him, he smiled and slowly took off his coat and, climbing onto a short wall, he dove into the lake like a swallow, uttering a sound of joy.³¹

Clear water and moonlight can drive away anxieties. So can morning breeze as Wang Tongzhao reports:

One morning, it was just past seven thirty. I rushed out of my residence and immediately felt that I had entered a different world as soon as I walked out of the lane. A warm and soft breeze carried the fragrance of flowers which grew opposite the street. It was so mellow and sweet that all the entangled thoughts which I gathered the night before were all swept away. At the moment I could only perceive the comfort of

sunlight and the luxury of the fragrance of flowers, and the happiness and pleasure of being human.³²

Characteristic of this type of description of a beautiful scene is the elegance of diction and syntax normally associated with poetry. The following passage is selected from one of Yu Dafu's stories.

The sun was shining so brightly. No cloud is visible in the vast expanse of sky, across which the sun, in its usual fashion, was making its journey to the west. The breeze from the south caressed his face, like a refreshing tonic. In the paddy fields where the rice plant was beginning to ripen, and on the winding thread of a country path, he strolled slowly all alone, with a six-inch book of poems by Wordsworth. On this vast plain, not even one person can be seen. Now the soft sound of dogs barking in the distance echoed in his ears. He eyes drifted away from his book to the direction the barking came from. A patch of wood and some interspersed homesteads blocked his vision. A thin veil of mist was floating over the tiles which looked like the scales of fish.

Oh, you serene gossamer! You beautiful gossamer!³³

By contemporary standards, the diction and syntax of this passage in Chinese appears a little strange. But it does not hamper a modern reader from appreciating its musical cadence. If it falls short of the rhythmical pattern of traditional regulated verse (Gelu shi 格律诗), it then fulfills the requirement of what was later to be called Sanwen shi (prose poems). It could even be so arranged typographically that it may appear as a piece of free verse:

Bright sunlit sky
No cloud visible
The ever journeying sun, is still
running

晴天一碧，
万里无云，
终古常新的皎日，
依旧一程程的在那里行走

its due course.

The breeze from the south

like refreshing tonic

with its fragrance

caressed his face.

在她的轨道上，

从南方吹来的微风，

同醒酒的琼浆一般

带着一种香气，

一阵阵拂上面来。

Although my translation can hardly do any justice to the poeticalness of the original, it would be hard for anyone to deny that the above could be regarded as a poem by contemporary standards, especially the Chinese version I have placed along side with the English one. It is probably worth noting that although traditional stories are not totally bereft of occasional poems, their function, as I will later discuss in Chapter 4, is different from what we observe here. The poetic and lyrical element in the fictional works of Yu Dafu and his contemporaries is probably what gives rise to the complaint that structurally speaking many May Fourth short stories lack unity and coherence. The plot is not tightly-knit, but loosely-strung together with fragments of emotional outbursts.

Traditional Chinese short stories are, by general consensus, plot-oriented. But in many 1917-1927 short stories, the role of the plot has been minimized. With some of them, it is even impossible to figure out a plot line with sufficient narrative interest. The reader of those stories are offered a series of emotions or some sort of stream of consciousness instead. Nothing ever happens, that is, there is no dramatic turn of events, nor dynamic action.

Xia Mianzun's 夏丏尊 "Changxian" 常闲 [Leisure], for

example, relates the leisurely life of a school teacher who has quit his teaching position in order to devote all his time to creative writing. Three months has elapsed, but not one complete story has been written. His days have been spent on sawing off willow boroughs and decorating his study. What comes across from the narration of such insignificant details is the boring and monotonous life and his leisurely mood.

"Wuliao" 无聊 [Boredom] is the title of another story written by Luo Heizang 罗黑芷. On an early July morning, a man who has been teaching primary school leaves the hustle and bustle of town life behind and comes to a small village tea house in the countryside. He sits down by a table and begins to smoke. People, mostly peasants, come and go. They talk about their crop and the cost of irrigation. But these are only external stimuli which fail to register on his mind preoccupied with the recollection of a dinner he had with his friends. When he wakes up from this recollection, he realizes that other customers have all left. He lazily picks up his parcel and goes on his journey.

Obviously, the above stories deviate conspicuously from traditional plot-oriented stories. With the emergence of stories such as these, a new era of modern Chinese literature phased in. In the next chapter, I will try to illustrate what the factors that gave rise to this change were.

Notes:

¹ Cf. Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973).

² Wang Zili 王自立 and Chen zishan 陈子善 eds., *Yu Dafu yanjiu ziliao 郁达夫研究资料* [Materials for the study of Yu Dafu] (Tianjin: Tianin renmin chubanshe 天津人民出版社, 1982). 203.

³ Ibid., 201.

⁴ *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 5, 46.

⁵ Ibid., 47.

⁶ Yu Dafu 郁达夫, *Yu Dafu xiaoshuoji 郁达夫小说集* [Yu Dafu's short stories] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺出版社, 1982) 191.

⁷ Cf. Anna Dolezalova's *Yu Dafu: Special Traits of His Literary Creations*

⁸ *Yu Dafu xiaoshuoji*, 51.

⁹ *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.3, 12-13.

¹⁰ Mao Dun 茅盾 ed., *Zuojia lun 作家论* [On writers] (Shanghai: Shanghai shenghuo shudian 上海生活书店, 1936), 207.

¹¹ *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 12.4:

¹² Ibid., 12.7:

¹³ *Zuojia lun*, 77.

¹⁴ Xiao Feng 肖凤, *Lu Yin zhuan 卢隐传* [Biography of Lu Yin] (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe 北京师范大学, 1986), 31.

- 15 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 5, 53.
- 16 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 3, 500.
- 17 Chen Sihe 陈思和 *Zhongguo xinwenxue zhengtiguan* 中国
 新文学整体观 [An organic view of modern Chinese literature]
 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe 上海文艺, 1987) 195-231.
- 18 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol.4, 35.
- 19 *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 345.
- 20 *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 51.
- 21 *Yu Dafu xiaoshuoji*, 295.
- 22 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 4, 79.
- 23 Randall Oliver Chang, "Yu Dafu: The Alienated Artist
 in Modern Chinese Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate
 School, 1974) 50-67.
- 24 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 5, 72.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 210.
- 27 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 3, 29.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 327.
- 29 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 5, 39-40.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 52.
- 31 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 3, 27.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 153.
- 33 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 5, 39.

Chapter Four: Patterns of Influence

So far in this thesis, the reader has only been presented seemingly unrelated facts: the propagation of two literary "isms" in the first decade of modern Chinese literature and three thematic features characteristic of the short stories of the same period. What can we make of these two facts? Can the features described in the previous chapter be construed as a product of the intellectual ferment documented in chapter two? If so, in what ways? These are the questions that this chapter will attempt to answer either directly or indirectly.

Considering the fact that the advocates of the two literary isms in question were either editors of well-known national literary journals (Mao Dun, Chen Duxiu) or influential members, spokesmen would be better designation, of the two largest organizations of writers active at that time, it is almost predictable that the answer to the above question would be given in the affirmative. For writers who wish to have works published in certain magazines, it is surely advisable for them to take heed to, if not abide by, the policies announced by their editors; as members of either the Association or the Society, it is natural to have turned out works that conform to the espoused belief of their organization. Although it may be oversimplistic to say that the works of the Association for Literary Study are all realistic and those of the Creation Society romantic, it does, however, conveniently sum up their dominant inclinations. If we compare the

features in Chapter Three with the "realism" and "romanticism" in Chapter two, it becomes obvious that the former are but manifestations of the influence of the latter. While the social/humanitarian trend partly results from the realist literature being advocated, the subjective/autobiographical and the sentimental/lyrical trends embody the essence of the romantic spirit celebrated by the Creationists.

As is demonstrated in Chapter Two, what "realism" meant at that time was a literature which emphasizes its social function. In the eyes of its advocates, the best representative of this type of literature is Russian populist writings which was then considered realist. The portrayal of the plight of the down-trodden, and the "superfluous" in Russian literature turned into one depicting the suffering of peasants and poor intellectuals in modern Chinese short stories. This change in the category of characters in no way invalidates our argument about the relationship between Russian realist literature and modern Chinese short stories. The social system of Czarist Russia provided Russian writers with serfs, petty civil functionaries and superfluous intellectuals. China in that period, however, was composed of a different stratum of social classes. It would indeed be silly to assume that to learn from Russian literature means to create characters unique to Russian society in stories reflecting the social reality of China. If there is a difference in the category of characters between Russian literature and modern Chinese short stories, then the attitude with which these two casts of characters are portrayed is the same. Such an

attitude could only be construed as the influence of the realist literature being propagated. Admittedly, in traditional Chinese short stories, especially in those in the vernacular, realistic presentation of the life of peasants and urban masses is not wanting. But we must remember that these portrayals are characterized by a different attitude. In Yu Dafu's "Bodian", the rickshaw coolie undoubtedly stood taller than anyone else in the story in his image as an honest and hardworking man. The celebration of a laborer at the expense of a man of letters is hardly compatible to traditional teaching. Even when we do find instances of this sort in traditional vernacular short stories, the laborer is either at the end reported to have become a learned man or his glory fades away as he later commits follies. Thus the attack on the privileged class and the existing society is all the more poignant: those who want to make a living by honesty and industry are doomed to perish and the world looks on without the slightest sense of injustice being meted out to the good and the conscientious. Although such stories may have led to, for better or worse, a whole trend of revolutionary or proletarian literature celebrating workers, peasants and soldiers, they certainly played a positive role at that time in arousing a humanitarian concern for the plight of the low in society.

This brings us to another similarity between Russian realist literature and modern Chinese short stories--the shared the humanitarian concern. Our assumption that modern Chinese short stories have been influenced by Russian literature is based on the fact that a humanitarian concern such as the one we witness in Russian literature is also identifiable in modern Chinese short

stories. True, some traditional short stories are also socially committed. But the social concern in those stories are more Confucian than humanitarian. Some people argue that Confucianism is humanitarian. This is certainly not the place to discuss whether such a claim is valid. Suffice it for me to point out here that even if Confucianism is humanitarian, its concept of humanitarianism is different from what is preached in Russian populist or realist literature. While both emphasizing the right of the people, Confucian humanitarianism affirms the right of the people on the premises that the rulers are superior to the people. Provided that their reign is unchallenged, a certain measure of benevolence is to be bestowed on the people by the reigning class. Thus Confucian humanitarianism never intends to overthrow the existing society, while Russian humanitarianism is targeted at the throne. Because of this difference, traditional Chinese short stories preached obedience and resignation, while Russian populist literature advocated subversion and rebellion. Often in a traditional Chinese short story if one behaves in accordance with Confucian doctrine, one is assured salvation in one's after-life. Sometimes parental arrangement of matrimony does seem to be brutal and inhumane, but revolt against such practice is more melodramatic and subversive. It performs the function of the Aristotelian "catharsis" rather than subversion. Once sympathetic tears are shed and union is achieved in the afterlife, the reader is prepared to accept the cruel reality he confronts in this life again. Needless to say that such is not the spirit of Russian realist literature, neither is it the lesson of Yan

Liangcai's "Zuihou de anwei" the plot and theme of which we discussed in the previous chapter. In this story, the heroine chooses to commit suicide as a protest to her mother's stubborn will; and the hero chooses to murder his would-be mother-in-law to avenge the death of his fiancée. This, of course, is a horrendous crime in the eyes of the guardian of Confucian morality. To kill one's elder for such a reason is tantamount to open rebellion to the very system! And to be openly ambivalent, if not sympathetic, to such a crime (as the author obviously was) is surely without precedence in traditional Chinese short stories. If this story attacks the society indirectly, then there are many stories in which the existing society come under undisguised attack. Lu Xun's "Kuangren riji", for example, openly puts an accusing finger on the society which comes through as cannibalistic, only fit to be overthrown.

To claim that modern Chinese short stories have been influenced to a considerable degree by the "realism" and more specifically by Russian realist literature entirely on the basis of similarities is surely insufficient. Cases that bear witness to concrete text to text influence must be provided to support such a claim. Fortunately, in both China and overseas, essays and monographs on this subject are plentifully available. In view of this, here I will only try to add to this body of literature by producing a few evidences I have observed in the stories collected in *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*. Since to establish the influence of one text on another in the fashion of some comparativists would in itself require a full length paper, I will simply point out some potential cases for more thorough going study.

The influence of Gogol's namesake story on Lu Xun's "Kuangren riji" is now a familiar tale to all students of Chinese literature. In the lesser known story "Yao" whose plot has been narrated in the previous chapter, Russian influence is also discernible. This story exposes a most primitive and inhumane practice among the lower and uneducated classes in China--the eating of a bun dipped in human blood as a cure for tuberculosis. The indifference of the local people toward the death of a young man who dies in their interest in "Yao" certainly reminds us of a similar attitude displayed by the merchant toward the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in "Ben Tobit" by Andreev. This story depicts a merchant who is so concerned about his own toothache that the crucifixion of Christ seems but a matter of trivial importance. When children come to tell him that Christ is about to be nailed to the cross, he even scolds them for disturbing him with such a minor matter. When his wife advises him to go and watch the event, he becomes irritated, saying "Leave me alone. Don't you see I am suffering from a toothache." When he does go to watch the crucifixion the next day, his toothache is miraculously cured. Clearly, there is a striking similarity in the theme of this story with that of Lu Xun, that is, the stupid indifference to a meaningful death.

The cemetery scene in "Yao" is also suggestive of Andreev's "silence", a story which Lu Xun himself translated and was collected in *Yuwai xiacshuoji*. "Silence" is about a clergyman's daughter who commits suicide in protest against the hypocrisy and inhumanity represented by the religion her father preaches. The description of the tomb of the girl is very similar to that of the

martyr in "Yao":

THE GIRL'S TOMB:

Viller(?)'s tomb is further inside. It is covered with withered grass which gives out a yellowish colour. Surrounding it, however, is green growth. Small pear trees and maple trees tangle with each other. A rambling hazel tree arches its fluffy boroughs over the tomb.¹

THE MARTYR'S TOMB

The newly planted grass has not managed to cover up the whole tomb, thus exposing patches of yellow earth making it rather unpleasant to the eye. But if you look up from there, you will be surprised to find that circles of white-reddish flower appear on the top of the tomb.²

A careful reader may have already noticed two similar images in both descriptions--the yellowish covering of the tombs and the wreath-like pattern of the growth on top. In both cases, the former, I think, symbolizes death and the latter homage or even resurrection. Other significant details include the shift from a bleak mood to a more optimistic one, and the way the reader's eyes are directed. He is first looking at the base of the tombs before moving onto the top. It would indeed be too much of a coincidence for Lu Xun to have produce a description similar to something he has read and translated. We might reasonably assume that Lu Xun chose to translate this particular story because it had impressed him a great deal.

Another possible influence of Russian literature on Lu Xun's "Yao" is Turgeneve's *The Worker and the Pale-handed Man*. In this novel, a revolutionary is hanged because he has defied authorities for the benefit of the workers who, however, in their turn follow him to the gallows not to pay their last tributes but to obtain a

piece of the noose which is believed to have a recuperative effect. If this episode in Turgenev's novel was not the direct inspiration of Lu Xun's "Yao", then at least we can claim that it prompted him to describe a similarly barbaric and ignorant practice in rural China in the hope of instigating social change. This claim would not seem to be far-fetched if we remember the translation of this particular novel by Lu Xun and the composition of "Yao" took place in roughly the same period.

Like the social/humanitarian trend, the subjective/autobiographical and the sentimental/lyrical trends can also be attributed to the propagation of one of the two isms. In this case, they can be related to the propagation of Western romanticism. A question may then ensue: since in traditional Chinese literature we also find strong subjective and lyrical tendencies, why do we not attribute them to this tradition? Although it is true that in traditional Chinese literature such tendencies are present, they are usually found in the poetry rather than fiction. Poetry, not fiction, was the proper medium for a man of letters to express his subjective and often "lofty" ambition. There is no denying that in "Biji xiaoshuo" ^{笔记小说} [stories in the classical language], readers are told the deeds and words of their authors, but such must not be taken too seriously, especially when the authors confess that they have done something unorthodox (having an affair with a sing-song girl, for instance). This kind of confession is seldom accompanied by sincere remorse and a troubled conscience. It is more like a tale of growing up, told by an established man with nostalgic relish over the "follies" of his youthhood. The masochistic kind of

mental agony over one's detestable thoughts and deeds of the kind we find in Yu Dafu's stories is certainly novel to the tradition. If we may entertain some doubt about the sincerity about Yu's confessions, then the self-condemnation in Zhao Jingshen's "Hongzhong de shou" 红肿的手 and Li Liewen's "Zhouzhong" 舟中 is earnest beyond doubt. Thus we witness a Roussauian type of confession in modern Chinese short stories. In fact, Roussau's influence is openly acknowledged by Yu Dafu. In his lifetime, Yu wrote several essays in celebration of this French romanticist.³ His appreciation of Roussau's exposure of his own weaknesses is candidly expressed in the following passage: "It is indeed an unprecedented practice, as Roussau himself remarked in the first chapter of his book, to unashamedly disclose one's own evil traits and acts in such eloquent words and such a unique style."⁴

Indeed, the above words may very well be used to describe "Chenlun" by those who had reservations about the legitimacy of this particular story. This explains why Yu Dafu himself did not seem to be receptive to their criticism, for they were criticizing something, though unprecedented in Chinese literature, well presented by Rousseau. Apart from Rousseau, Yu also acknowledged other sources of romantic influence on his writings. When "Yinhui se de si" was first published in *Shishi xinbao* 时事新报 [Current events daily] in 1921, it was thus footnoted:

The reader must bear in mind that this is an imaginary tale after all. The author cannot be held responsible for its reality. One word, however, must be mentioned here that he owes much to R. L. Stevenson's "A Lodging for the Night" and the life of Ernest Dowson for the plan of this unambitious story.⁵

A close look at the sources of influence reveals that Yu's indebtedness to R. L. Stevenson lies in more technical than thematic aspects. I do not intend to digress into a full-length account about in what ways Yu seemed to have been technically influenced by Stevenson's story since the concern of this thesis is mainly thematic. Perhaps more relevant here is for us to point out how Dowson's life has affected the plan of Yu's story.

As a poet who practices the cult of the French *quartier*, Dowson lived a bohemian life. But throughout his life, he cherished a lasting affection for the daughter of a Polish Soho restaurant-keeper. The girl was not very responsive to his advances but she allowed him to worship her for several years before she finally married one of the waiters working in her father's restaurant.⁶ Yu's story relates a similar story. It is centred round the love affair between a Chinese student in Japan and the daughter of a Japanese bar-tender. In this story, however, the girl is said to be quite receptive to the student's attachment. But for reasons unexplained in the story, the girl has to marry a man in the neighbourhood. According to a Japanese scholar, this story could be highly autobiographical.⁷ This assertion is further supported by the fact that prior to the composition of the story, Yu had developed intimate relationships with at least two hotel waitresses in addition to two other women he had met in Nagoya and Kyoto respectively.⁸ Yu's success with these women may explain why in his story, the hero is not suffering from a unrequited love.

In comparison with the subjective/autobiographical tendency, the sentimental/lyrical tendency is probably more marked in

traditional Chinese stories. We often come across sentimental and love-sick characters who are there to demand tears. The extensive use of poems is another hallmark. All too often, a story may begin with a five or seven syllable quatrain and end with a poem of the same format. At crucial points of development poems may also crop up. These poems generally play a functional role such as teaching a lesson, making a transition, summing up the episode or describing a setting. Seldom do they serve to convey the mood of the main characters. In modern Chinese short stories, the occurrence of poems has decreased, but the use of poetic language has increased. Besides, whenever such language is employed, its function is more limited and concentrated. Often it comes in a passage describing natural scenery. Such a description, in addition to providing a locale for the story, is aimed at conveying a mood or a mental state of the main characters. I am not saying that in traditional Chinese stories poems performing the above mentioned function are absolutely absent. But it is pertinent to ask why this particular function has become the primary one in modern Chinese short stories and what has facilitated this shift in focus. Considering the fact that most romantic writers in the first decade of modern Chinese literature were drawn to Western romantic literature, it is hard to resist the temptation to believe that the facilitator of this shift is Western romanticism being advocated then. Guo Moruo has provided us a quite revealing illustration in this respect. In his "Muyang aihua" 牧羊哀话, he quoted a poem by Goethe! Speaking from the fact that Guo gave his story the same title as the one Goethe's

poem carries, it is probable that this very story may have been inspired by the poem.

So far in this paper I have devoted equal attention to realism and romanticism. This may have created an illusion that these two literary trends were comparable in both their scope and duration of influence with neither winning an upper-hand throughout the period. This is of course not the case. The true picture of the first decade of modern Chinese literature reveals that the realistic school constituted the dominant trend. It claimed more writers and produced more short stories. As a matter of fact, realism dominated not only the first decade of modern Chinese literature, but also the late twenties and early thirties. As C.T. Hsia observed: "Modern Chinese fiction, though vibrating with lament and indignation, is characterized by a realistic tendency. Many writers in the late twenties and early thirties stuck to a realistic method of presentation."⁹ The limitation of the scope and duration of influence of the romantic trend can be attributed to three factors. First, the advocates of the school were mainly students returning from Japan. Prior to its founding, the members of the Creation Society were virtually unknown in the home literary scene. Hence the complaint in an article by Cheng Fangwu in which he resented the monopoly of the Association for Literary Study.¹⁰

Second, in comparison with the members of the Association for Literary Study the Creationists' effort at propagating romanticism does not seem to be so systematic and persevering. This is quite understandable. The Creationists were handicapped by man-power. Besides they were probably more concerned with the

creation of literary works rather than the study of literary theories. Wang Zhefu 王哲甫 pointed out in the thirties that the names of the two literary groups chose for themselves were indicative of their nature as an organization and their paramount literary concern.¹¹

Third, the pressing social reality which in the first place led the members of the Creation Society to *L'art pour l'art* did not permit such a school to exist for long. As we know, the *L'art pour l'art* literature is characterized by sentimentality, self-centredness, which, though having its own values in helping to shatter the traditional order, is not in the best interest of the cause of revolutionizing China. This explains why the members of the Creation Society later readily made the transition from "literary revolution" to "revolutionary literature".

Here I seem to be contradicting a belief held by Leo Ou-fan Lee in his *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*. The title of the book suggests that Lee believes that the whole May Fourth generation of modern Chinese writers is romantic in their literary inclinations. Lee comes to this conclusion after he has investigated into the life and works of seven writers, namely, Lin Shu (1852-1920), Su Manshu (1884-), Yu Dafu (1896-1945), Xu Zhimo (1896-1936), Guo Moruo (1892-1978), Jiang Guangzu (1901-1931), and Xiao Jun (1908-). These seven writers, Lee confesses: "have been chosen to illustrate not only the development of a subjective trend in modern Chinese literature, but also the impact of Western romanticism, which, I am convinced on the basis of extensive evidence, provided the prevalent ethos

and dominated at least a decade of literary development in China."¹²

Given the list of writers, Lee's assertion is well-supported. But Lee is also aware that a realistic trend existed side by side with the romantic trend. He earlier acknowledged: "In general, it may be said that two major trends in nineteenth century Western literature held sway in China: realism and romanticism."¹³ Of the seven authors Lee mentioned, at least four of them are known for their poetry. They are more poets than novelists or short story writers. If we read the poems produced in the first decade of modern Chinese literature, we will surely come to the same conclusion which Lee arrives at. I have earlier noted that the romantic trend exemplified by the sentimental, pastoral and subjective sentiments in the short story of the decade is very much akin to a tradition in Chinese poetry. In a way the spirit of traditional Chinese poetry made both poetry and fiction in modern Chinese literature susceptible to Western romanticism. In the light of this understanding we can see why Lee observes that "the trend of subjective sentiment in Modern Chinese literature is partially of Chinese origin; the inspiration for its modern quality, however, is derived from the West."¹⁴

Insofar as the genre of the short story is concerned, realism seems to have prevailed. Most short stories translated from other languages, as the table in chapter two indicates, are realistic ones. The number of realistic short stories written by modern Chinese writers is also greater than that of romantic ones. Besides, the majority of stories by Ye Shaojun, Bing Xin, Wang Tongzhao, Lu Yin, the members of the Association for Literary

Study, and by Lu Xun, the greatest writer of short stories among modern Chinese writers, those written by Zhang Ziping, a major member of the Creation Society, are also realistic in both their subject matter and style.

The relatively small influence of the romantic trend can be seen from the fact that the advocates themselves soon abandoned the course they had pursued and shifted to a slogan of "Revolutionary Literature".

This seemingly drastic change of position may appear to be bewildering at first. But if we follow more analytically the steps the Creationists took, we realize that in many ways, this was a logical and even inevitable change. At the same time they enthusiastically eulogize of *L'art pour l'art* doctrine, they did not turn a blind eye to the ills of the society in which they lived. Cheng Fangwu's "Xinwenxue zhi shiming", 新文学之使命 regarded as the theoretical manifesto of the Society by general consensus, specified three commitments of the New Literature campaign: commitment to the age, to the adoption of the vernacular and to art. He further maintained that "Since literature is the conscience of the time, artists should be the guardians of this conscience. In a time when the conscience is ill, the task of literary artists is even heavier."¹⁵

The time in which we live, he said elsewhere, is one in which laws of the jungle prevail. Power not justice decides everything. Conscience has withered and the sense of honour is lost. People fight for material benefits and they can be extremely cruel. The existing social institutions seem to be

functioning well and the so-called education is but a coax. In such a society the responsibility of us literary artists to the society is not only heavy but also exclusive. We must light up a fire in this freezing cold and numbed consciences and shake it with utmost strength.¹⁶

In another essay which attempts to answer the attack on the *L'art pour l'art* school, Cheng concluded by saying:

In this debate, those who study art in particular should be especially clear minded. At present, it is of course difficult for ordinary people to understand the nature of art thoroughly. But we must adopt a receptive attitude to the criticism targeted at us. We know that we are members of this world. We also know that we love mankind no matter how ugly it may be. We need not dwell on whether in the past we neglected it. In the days to come we should strive to tell the world how much we love mankind. Let us forget the conflicts raging in our hearts right now! Let us open our eyes wide to the bloody disturbances occurring around us! We are not cowards who are afraid to see blood. Neither are we weak women who weep over their inability. Come, let us restore our social responsibilities!¹⁷

The same social concern is also manifested in Guo Moruo's "Women de xinwenxue yundong" 我们的新文学运动 [Our new literature movement]:

The politics of this country is on the brink of bankruptcy. The atrocities of beastly warlords, the shameless behavior of politicians and the oppression and greed of foreign capitalists have caused the tears and blood of this nation to flow like the currents of the Yellow and Yangtze rivers..... The reality of China has left only two roads for us to take. We can either choose to live a spotless life by embracing nature and by hiding in its mountains and forests. Or we can be fighters who brave the evils of this society. Our heart dictates that we choose the latter and not be a coward who retreats in anticipation of battle. We should roar like a tempest, and erupt like a volcano. Burn up every manifestation of corruption, shine forth our lofty souls and, above all, strive with all our might.¹⁸

In comparison with the temperament of Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu often appears to be more concerned about the self than the public. But in his "Wenxue shangde jieji douzheng" 文学上的阶级斗争 [Class struggle in literature], which was published in 1923, he even endorsed a Marxist position and called upon the oppressed proletariat in the world to unite in their fight for an ideal world. In this article Yu also praised Russian literature for its overwhelming social concern.¹⁹

From the above quotations we can see that at the same time when the Creationists advocated the *L'art pour l'art* school, they also admitted the social responsibility of literature. Judging from the often contradictory nature of their theoretical ramblings and from the grave social concern their fictional works display, I am even inclined to say that the *L'art pour l'art* motto was not always adhered to even in the early stages of the Creation Society.

It is helpful to review the circumstances under which the society was formed. The proposal of forming a literary society devoted to pure literature was first put forward in Japan. It was intended as a revolt against the dominant trend back in China. Being expatriates, the Creationists were yet to experience personal dissatisfactions with the social reality in their own country. It is therefore quite possible that, as a group of ambitious young men interested in literature, they wanted to be different in order to catch attention. This is not to say that a sincere belief in the intrinsic demand of art was absent. But once they returned to China, it gradually dawned upon them that the reality did not allow them to pursue an art which is concerned

with its own business only.

Zheng Boqi thus commented on three major Creationists:

To believe that the Creation Society is composed of a group of people who cared for art only is quite mistaken. It is undeniable that Yu Dafu in his "My Views on Literature" once remarked that "art is the product of a genius and thus should not be measured by conventionality." Guo Moruo and Cheng Fangwu sometimes employed such terms as "angel of art." But we must realize that these are but ordinary words. They should not be regarded as the justification for our labeling them as self-styled genius or favourites of the "angel of art." A true devotee to *L'art pour l'art* is one who totally ignores the events in society and confines himself in the ivory tower of art. None of the members of the Creation Society was ever like that. The poems of Guo Moruo, the stories of Yu Dafu, the critical essays of Cheng Fangwu and the works of other Creationists displayed an enthusiastic concern for the age and society in which they lived. There was no ivory tower for them. Like others they belonged to those groaning under the shackles of an unjust society.²⁰

To summarize what has been said in the foregoing pages, we may come to the conclusion that the *L'art pour l'art* label for the Creation Society is not appropriate. If we want to emphasize its difference from the Association for Literary Study, such a label may be helpful. But we must always bear in mind that the label could be misleading and it fails to recognize the other side of the literary organization.

In Chapter Three I have documented the concern for the oppressed shown by the members of the Creation Society. In that chapter I have also noted the subjective trend exhibited by those who were, admittedly, believers of the realist/naturalist literature in the hope to convey this message: the popular designation of romanticism and realism as applied to the Creation Society and Association for Literary Study is not necessarily

altogether accurate. The demarcation cannot, in fact, be so neat and clear-cut. A mutual crossing-over constitutes a unique feature of modern Chinese literature which can best be explained by the upbringing of modern Chinese writers and the social reality they confronted.

Yang Yi 楊义 also noticed this phenomenon and said in his *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuoshi* 中国现代小说史 [History of modern Chinese fiction]:

Among the peripheral members of the major literary organizations at that time, the sense of belonging or affiliation was not that strong. They often tended to be rather open in their attitude and adopted a mixed style. They made explorations in all directions. This situation is particularly true of the largest literary institution--the Association for Literary Study²¹

With such an understanding, Yang thus commented on Lu Yin:

Among the writers of the Association for Literary Studies, Lu Yin's view of literature and art is closest to that of the Creation Society. She upheld a subjective romanticism.... therefore, in the debate over whether art is for art or for life she adopted a middle position.... Her fictional works may be summed up with three words: I, emotion and sentimentality.²²

Throughout this paper it might seem that I have been talking about romantic and realistic trends in modern Chinese literature as if these two Western concepts could best represent the artistic inclinations embodied in the short stories of the first decade of modern Chinese literature. This is not the case. To clear up any lingering confusion, it is helpful for us to make a brief comparison between the Chinese brand of romanticism and realism and their Western counterparts.

Prof. F. W. J. Hemmings once made a comparative inventory of traits belonging to Western realism and romanticism:

It has been urged often enough that the terms romanticism and realism are not susceptible to precise and comprehensive definition; however, a simple inventory of their commonest connotations is sufficient to show how completely opposed the two concepts are. The realist is supposed to deal with contemporary life and commonplace scenes; the romantic succumbs to the lure of the past and delights in dreaming of far-off places. The realist fixes his gaze on the world of men, the streets where they jostle and rooms where they meet and converse; the romantic seeks solitude and finds it in nature, in the woods, the fields, the lonely seashore and lonelier mountain crag. The realist is drawn into the social vortex.... The romantic exalts the creative spirit and puts his faith in intuition; the realist's approach to his material is detached and analytic. On a strictly literary plane, the value the realist sets on stylistic sobriety contrasts with the romantic's cultivation of exuberance and emotive imagery; the former, in short, sticks to prose, while poetry remains the authentic, if not the exclusive, medium for the expression of the romantic mood and their romantic world-view.²³

If we compare this inventory with the features documented in Chapter Three, we cannot but be struck by the numerous points of similarity which, as I have demonstrated in Chapter Two, are partially of Western origin and partially of Chinese origin. But this does not mean that the realism and romanticism manifested in the short stories of 1917-1927 were entirely the same as their counterparts in the West. For a comparative study of this nature it is perhaps even more important for us to know what changes have taken place as a result of the play of a combination of two sources of influence.

Let me now try to enumerate the changes or differences which I find in the realism and romanticism prevalent in the first decade

of modern Chinese literature. Historically, romanticism as a movement in the West and modern China arose in different social and philosophical backgrounds. According to James E. Creighton, the romantic movement in the West should be "regarded as a part of the general intellectual Revolution of the 19th century" characterized by a new consciousness of infinite possibilities and boundless aspirations.²⁴ Philosophically, it is "an attempt to comprehend in more adequate terms God, nature and place and the significance of men in universe."²⁵ If we view the romanticism manifested in the short stories being examined, we realize that it did not share a similar optimistic world-view characteristic of the bourgeoisie in the stage of ascend. Although God is challenged by Guo Moruo for his neglect of duty, this challenge is simply an urge to change the reality of society and embodies no fundamental philosophical assumptions which call for a readjustment of the relationship between God, nature and men.

Chinese romanticism as exemplified by Yu Dafu tends to be rather pessimistic in its vision of the world. Some of the tears shed by the protagonists of his stories are induced by the failure to come to terms with a world which promises no future. The retreat into nature on the part of these characters can thus be interpreted not so much as a recognition of its intrinsic value as a pragmatic and self-protective measure to cut off their unhappy association with this world. This attitude is in line with a tradition pioneered by Qu Yuan 屈原, Tao Yuanming 陶渊明 and Li Bo 李白. Whether we are willing or not, we must realize that the celebration of nature in traditional Chinese poetry is a means, rather than an end, to express the poet's sentiments, whose

origin lies in a world he is trying to forget. It is my belief that only very few of our ancient poets' interest in nature derives from a genuine appreciation of its inherent values. The dominant Confucian heritage makes it impossible for them to lose themselves totally in nature. Whenever there is an opportunity for them to practise their ideas and policies in a world they have apparently abandoned, fewer of them have displayed a reluctance stemming from a resolve not to be separated from nature.

While romanticism in the West endeavours to express what is strange and mysterious by seeking its material in the past,²⁶ its Chinese counterpart showed no such inclinations. Western romantic literature displays a nostalgia which is a result of a discontent with a bourgeois society geared toward the mechanics of mass production, competition, and the increment of material wealth at the cost of some leisurely pursuits and sentiments, such a nostalgia is certainly non-existent in the short stories of the May Fourth era. The vanguards of the May Fourth Movement were determined that anything in the past and from the past was necessarily objectionable and should therefore be discarded unhesitatingly. The unanimous refusal to accept anything from the past, however, is accompanied by an embrace of the exotic and distant, though not of the mysterious and gothic. Descriptions of foreign landscape abounds not only in the stories of Yu Dafu and Guo Moruo, but also in those of many writers of the Association for Literary Study. Xu Dishan 许地山 is an indisputable example. The christening of characters with a Western name even though they live in China and have never been

abroad was a vogue which testifies to this practice. Speaking from what material is available to me, readers were quite comfortable with such a practice. There is no vehement objection to it. This phenomenon, if we are willing to place ourselves in the historical setting of the May Fourth Movement, is actually a natural by-product of the enthusiastic endorsement of foreign literature. It may also have to do with the fact that by the time the May Fourth writers began to produce short stories, readers had already become accustomed to encountering foreign landscape and names through their exposure to translations of Western fiction which had been there in large quantities for quite some years.

Although romanticism and lyrical diction are characteristics more of the genres of the novel and poetry in the West, they are present in the genre of the short story, in addition to poetry, in the first decade of modern Chinese literature. This, as I have explained in Chapter Three, is a logical outcome in view of the Chinese tradition of regarding poetry as the only medium for emotional output and of the fact that the majority of those writers who were drawn to such tendencies had solid knowledge of classical Chinese literature. In this respect we may say that they are the vestiges of a transition made by a generation of Chinese literary men who used to rely on poetry as a major mode of expression. This, of course, is but a general observation. In the case of certain practitioners of the short story, such as Yu Dafu, these tendencies can partially be traced to rather specific influences from Western writers--Ernest Dowson and Oscar Wilde whose "studies in sentiment in prose treated subjects usually associated with poetry".²⁷ In one of Yu Dafu's stories,

"Silvergray Death", the protagonist is portrayed to have died with a collection of Ernest Dowson's poems and prose.

The lyrical element is probably what gives rise to a criticism of the "loose structure" of modern Chinese short stories. Traditionally, a well-knit and climatic plot is an essential component of a (short) story. But in the short stories I have examined many of them lack such a plot. They are really composed of a string of emotions rather than a series of incidents or episodes. In many ways the structure of the story resembles more "the form of emotion rather than the form of a short story", an expression which Forrest Read used to describe the works of James Joyce.²⁸ From this perspective we may say that lyrical short stories in the first decade of modern Chinese short stories parallel, if not anticipate, a "free form" story in the West, a phrase coined by Elizabeth Bowen in the 1920s.²⁹

Some people have noted that the romanticism of the Creation Society embodies a number of literary schools popular at the end of the last century.³⁰ Such a fact makes the Chinese romantic trend at that time somehow different from romanticism in the West. According to Zheng Boqi, the members of the Creation Society had at one time or another tried to introduce to Chinese readers such schools as symbolism, expressionism and futurism.³¹ The reason that the Creationists should have been interested in these literary trends can be understood, like the endorsement of romanticism, as a result of their residence in Japan. Although the politics and military ambition of Japan was most repellent to the Creationists, Japanese literature has exerted considerable

influence on their short stories on account of their extended exposure, self-willed or otherwise, to it. Nowadays, it is generally agreed that Yu Dafu's fiction owes much to the Watashiwa fiction in Japanese literature. Since the Meiji period, Japanese literature has been much influenced by Western literature. As a result, almost every literary school originating in the West soon reached Japan.³² Zhou Zuoren in his "Ribei jin sanshinian xiaoshuo zhi fada" 日本近三十年小说之发达 [The latest developments in Japanese Fiction in the last thirty years], a public lecture delivered at Beijing University on April 19, 1918 observed that despite the fact that Japanese literature was very much a product of Chinese and indigenous elements in its early stages, the literature produced after the Reform Movement was the product of Western influences. In the forty-five years since Meiji nearly all Western ideas since the Renaissance had been introduced. By now it was marching abreast with currents in the world.³³ The currents being referred to, I believe, were aestheticism, decadence, and many other modernistic literary schools some of which found expressions in the theories and fictional works of the Creationists.

By comparing with romanticism, the Chinese realism described in this paper differs from its Western counterpart to a lesser degree. Historically, it did not rise, as it did in the case of French realism, as a revolt against romanticism, neither was it a product of a dissatisfaction with the evils brought about by a bourgeois society. Rather, it was imported through the concerted efforts of the forerunner of the New Literature Movement. Because of this, it does not reflect a philosophical "interest of a

progressively positivist and scientific age in material fact". Chinese writers at that time were not concerned with capturing a "history that might have happened" (the the words of the Goncourt brothers). Their works are not intended as records of a society that might be phasing out. Like Russian realism, modern Chinese realism is characterized by a more pragmatic or humanitarian concern--the relentless exposure of a dark and traditional society with the ultimate aim of introducing social change or revolution.

The contents of realistic literature in China as reflected in the short stories of 1917-1927 differ from those of either Russian or French counterparts. There is extensive description and vehement attack on the old marriage institution--parental arrangement--and on one of the most detestable remnants of feudal parasites--greedy and cold-blooded warlords. This difference should not be construed as a rejection of the contents of Western or Russian realism so much as a necessary adaptation necessitated by the social circumstances in China.

A striking feature of Chinese realism is: while some writers endorse realism without any reservation and seem to be opposed to romanticism, their works sometimes betray their belief and display romantic tendencies. This is most convincingly manifested in their celebration of nature in the manner of romanticists, a fact documented in Chapter Three. Besides it is also revealed in the tendency to give vent to subjective feelings and sentiments. This tendency, apart from the influence of traditional poetry and social reality suggested in the previous chapter, is also traceable to the influence of Russian realistic

literature. A Russian scholar once remarked: "The realistic presentation of a panoramic picture of reality in the manner of an epic in the realistic works in Russian literature does not mean that it is impossible to find in many works a tendency to give full expression to subjective sentiments--a tradition lay down by Pushkin."³⁴ Zheng Cichuan thus explained the unique appeal Russian realism held for Chinese writers at the time of the May Fourth period: Russian realism does not leave one in despair by depicting the undesirable side of the society. It leaves the window of hope open and admits light to come in.³⁵ To me these words suggest an optimism which is usually associated with a certain type of romanticism. In the light of this unique trait of Russian realism, we can understand why those who whole-heartedly endorsed the doctrines of Russian realism did not find it hard for them to welcome a position in the 1930s which advocated a literature combining both realism and romanticism.

Notes

¹ Wu Guoqing 伍国庆 ed., *Yuwai xiaoshuoji* 域外小说集 [Stories from foreign lands] (Changsha: Yulu shushe 岳麓书社, 1986), 226.

² Lu Xun 鲁迅, *Lu Xun xiaoshuoxuan* 鲁迅小说选 [Short stories by Lu Xun] (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian 三联书店, 1956), 43.

³ "Biography of Rousseau" and "Rousseau's thoughts and works" are exclusively about Rousseau. There are several other essays in which a defense of Rousseau is also made. They include "An Explanation about my translation as defense" and "About Rousseau". Yu's translation of Rousseau's *the Promenade of a Solitary Walker* was published in 1931-1932.

⁴ *Yu Dafu wenxuan* 郁达夫文选 [Works of Yu Dafu] vol.6. (Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian 三联书店, 1985), 34.

⁵ *Yu Dafu xiaoshuoji* 郁达夫小说集 [Yu Dafu's short stories] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺, 1984), 23.

⁶ Bernard B. N. Grebanier, *Essentials of English Literature*, vol.2 (New York: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1948), 720-21.

⁷ Li Ping & Yan Zhengyu 李平, 阎振宇, *Yu Dafu Zhuanji Lianzhong* 郁达夫传记两种 [Two biographies of Yu Dafu] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺, 1984), 40-41.

⁸ Xu Zidong 许子东, *Yu Dafu xinlun* 郁达夫新论 [A re-evaluation of Yu Dafu] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe 浙江文艺,

1984), 23-24.

9 Liu Shaoming 刘绍铭, *Tilei jiaoling de xiandai zhongguo wenxue* 涕泪交零的现代中国文学 [Modern Chinese literature: a literature full of tears] (Taipei: Yuanjing chubanshe 远景出版社, 1979), 11.

10 *Chuangzhao jikan* 创造季刊 [Creation quarterly] 1.1.

11 Wang Zhefu 王哲甫 *Zhongguo xinwenxue yundongshi* 中国新文学运动史 [History of modern Chinese literature] (1937 Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian 上海书店, 1986), 61.

12 Leo Ou-fan Lee. *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 279.

13 Ibid., 276.

14 Ibid., 275.

15 *Chuangzhao zhoukan* 创造周刊 [Creation weekly], 2 (20 May 1922).

16 Ibid.

17 Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎 ed., *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* [An anthology of modern Chinese literature] (Shanghai: Liangyou fuxing tushu gongsi 良友复兴图书公司, 1935), 191-192.

18 Ibid., 186-187.

19 *Chuangzhao zhoukan*, 3 (27 May 1923).

20 Cai Yuanbei 蔡元培 ed., *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*

daolunji 中国新文学大系导论集 [Collection of introductions to an anthology of modern Chinese literature] (Shanghai: Liangyou fuxing tushu gongsi 良友复兴图书公司, 1940), 154.

21 Yang Yi 杨义, *Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuoshi* 中国现代小说史 [A history of modern Chinese fiction] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1986), 642.

22 Yang Yi 杨义, "Lun Lu Yin de shuqing yu langman tezheng" 沈尹的抒情与浪漫特征 [On Lu Yin's lyrical and romantic tendency] *Xinwenxue luncong* 新文学论丛 [Essays on New Literature] 1 (1983): 147.

23 F. W. J. Hemmings, ed., *The Age of Realism* (Penguin Books, 1974). 36.

24 *Encyclopaedia Americana*, vol. 23 (Danbury, Connecticut: Grolier Incorporated, 1981), 294.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longman, 1983), 232.

28 Eva Hesse, ed., *Pound, Joyce and Flaubert: The Odysseans: A New Approach to Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1969) 31.

29 Elizabeth Bowen, *A Day in the Dark* (London: J. Cape, 1965), 8.

30 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi daolunji*, 159.

31 Ibid., 158.

32 *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi*, vol. 2, 282.

33 Ibid.

34 *Shijie wenxue zhongde xianshi zhuyi wenti* 世界
文学中的现实主义问题 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学,
1959), 204.

35 Zheng Cichuan 郑次川, *Qumei jindai xiaoshoushi*
欧美近代小说史 [History of modern European literature] (Shanghai:
Shangwu yingshuguan 商务印书馆, 1927), 68.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

By way of conclusion I would like to recapitulate two points.

1. In the first decade of modern Chinese literature, two Western literary schools were the most influential--realism and romanticism. This is because they were not only enthusiastically celebrated by many vanguards of the New Literature movement in theory, but also manifested in the short stories produced by contemporary writers. The popularity of these two Western literary schools lies mainly in that they represented what Chinese writers then were earnestly in search for. The so-called realism mainly refers to pre-revolutionary Russian literature which was characterized by a strong social commitment. It depicted the life of the down-trodden in order to promote a determination to change the existing society. Under the influence of this school, a whole host of short stories were published in China which, like their Russian precepts, were directly targeted at the evils of the day. The influence of romanticism is mainly manifested in short stories that display a masochist tendency characteristic of the writings of Rousseau. In these stories, the individual as well as the society became the object of ridicule.

2. The customary practice of labeling the Association for Literary Study realistic and the Creation Society romantic in their respective literary tendency, though correct to a certain degree, can give rise to unnecessary confusion when we come to

discuss the short stories of the members of these two groups. It tends to overlook the fact that the two literary organizations were not as opposed to each other as it may appear. The Creation Society, it is true, raised the banner of *l'art pour l'art*. But in practice this espoused belief was not strictly adhered to. Judging from the works they have turned out, it is almost impossible to find one whose concern has been exclusively aesthetic. Like the members of the Association for Literary Study, their primary concern which is not vociferously stated was life not art. This explains why the Creationists did not seem to have experienced much difficulty in making the shift to "revolutionary literature". Not only were the Creationists undogmatic about their espoused literary belief which in a way originated from a desire to attract attention in the presence of an already well-established rival--the Association for Literary Study, they have also exhibited a tendency to embrace romantic sentiments which could be rooted in their appreciation of traditional poetry.

How do we account for this non-observance of one's professed artistic belief? To answer this question in detail would certainly require a full inquiry. Here I will be content with a tentative suggestion that the advocacy of Western realism and romanticism was motivated by a social concern, a sense of urgency in promoting social change. It did not evolve out a genuine and persistent faith in the intrinsic virtue of these two Western literary schools.

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