

## Nationalism and internationalism in 20th century Chinese literature

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### Introduction

The question of how to engage with the literary currents of the Western tradition is not a new preoccupation for cultures outside this tradition. Yet it is particularly in the 20th century, with the growth of a "world arena" for war and international politics, that the perception of a world stage for cultural endeavour also evolved. In an era which saw the establishment of both the League of Nations and the Nobel Prize, questions of national identity acquired both political and cultural significance, especially for peoples who perceived themselves as disempowered within the world arena.

This paper shows how, in the case of Chinese literature, the overriding motivation to legitimize its place on the world stage had the effect of conjoining aspirations towards nation-building with literary and artistic practice. The Chinese quest for artistic legitimation found expression in currents of thought which so contradicted each other that their coexistence endangered the quest itself. The paper goes on to discuss how the dominant critical discourse which emerged from this conflict has since shaped and undermined this quest.

### Encounters between unequal consciousnesses

Fredric Jameson expresses his concept of the relationship of Western literature and culture to minority literature and culture in terms of the Hegelian master-slave relationship.<sup>1</sup> Two conscious beings struggle as equals for recognition by the other. Each needs recognition by the other to establish his own awareness of himself and each is willing to sacrifice life for this supreme affirmation. However, the death of the other would destroy

the source of recognition essential to the victor, so he spares his adversary.<sup>2</sup> Now in this new unequal relationship the master proceeds to enjoy the recognition and subservience of the slave. Ironically, recognition by this subhuman form of life, which is not an independent consciousness, evaporates at the moment of attainment and offers no true recognition at all. Nor is the situation of the slave as it first appears. Although he lacks adequate acknowledgement, through his labour he is in direct contact with the material world. Through this process, the slave becomes aware of his own consciousness, for he sees it objectified before him in the results of his labour. Meanwhile, there is no coherence to the being of the master, who becomes increasingly cut off from the material world, a state described by Jameson as "a placeless freedom in which any consciousness of his own concrete situation flies like a dream".<sup>3</sup>

This is where Jameson leaves the minority literature - in a subservient relationship with the Western literary and critical mainstream, yet with its own situational consciousness.

In the case of China, the initial diplomatic contacts between the emissaries of several European royal courts and the dragon throne might well be construed according to the Hegelian analogy. The loose paraphrasing and sinecization of the story lines of many popular novels by authors such as Charles Dickens, Dumas *films*, Walter Scott *et al.* at the end of the imperial era by the prolific "translators" Lin Shu and Su Manshu may also be understood in terms of the unquestioned and innate assumptions of cultural superiority by the Chinese, which are now commonly ascribed to Western culture. However, in the post-imperial era the encounters between the youthful aspiring modernizers of Chinese literature and culture and the Western mainstream was not one between equals seeking recognition from one another. The dominant culture of the imperialists hardly needed the affirmation of a generation in China whose iconoclasm towards the old order had left them culturally insecure. Yet faced with the economic, political and cultural encroachment of the Western powers, this generation was all the more determined that China should take its place as an equal on the world stage. In cultural terms this meant building a New Chinese Literature and Art. Ironically, this generation, known as the May Fourth generation,<sup>4</sup> was not only seeking recognition from this dominant Other, but sought to build a new literary/cultural consciousness by emulating this Other. The process of self-affirmation was to be carried out in terms of the same entity whose very encroachment had been the catalyst for this process in the first place.

This was a conscious project, trumpeted by various allegiances of modern-educated intellectuals, to create a new national literature by means of translation and critical introduction. It had the express purpose of providing models for emulation in order that China might "catch up with West". The medium of expression for this passionate debate was the rapidly burgeoning journal culture, a central feature of post-imperial Chinese

intellectual life and the main vehicle for the dissemination of new learning and debate.

Within these circles there was remarkable consensus over the need for such a project but, predictably, far less about how it should be realized. Various literary societies were established, each promoting a different ideological approach. The two most prominent were the Creation Society, champions of romanticism in the early years of the literary debate, when they were associated with the slogan "art for art's sake" (*yishu wei yishu*), and the Society for Literary Research, promoters of realism, under the banner "art for life's sake" (*yishu wei rensheng*).<sup>5</sup> An examination of the professed aims and objectives of the latter society provides a useful focus to consider the way in which the contradictory aspirations of nationalism and universalism in literature could coexist in the minds of China's literary reformers at that time. Indeed, both are contained within the "Announcement of Reform" which announced the Society's assumption of control:

In our attempt to reform literature today, we will not only work at the imitation of Western literature but will in fact create a New Chinese Literature and Art and fulfil our duty of making a contribution to the world.<sup>6</sup>

A major consideration in examining this phenomenon is the intellectual climate of the times, the mood of which, by the early 1920s, had been considerably influenced by ground-breaking articles on literature and culture carried by the journal *New Youth*, founded in 1915. Of particular relevance to this discussion is an article by Chen Duxiu entitled "Discussion of the History of Modern European Literature".<sup>7</sup> Based on French sources,<sup>8</sup> this article put forward an evolutionary interpretation of literary development which had universal applicability. Chen attempted to apply to Chinese literature the schema enunciated by his sources, whereby in European literature romanticism had developed from classicism and realism from romanticism. He placed Chinese literature within the same schema, identifying its current stage of development as being that of classicism and romanticism and predicting the development of realism in the new literature. The question of whether such an analysis was appropriate for the Chinese case does not concern us here. The significance of this article is precisely that it suggested both that Chinese literature had a place on the wider literary stage and that it was subject to the same forces of development. It also became the standard interpretation of China's literary predicament and the means of its salvation for the rest of the decade.

The tenor of the ensuing debate fostered the conviction among the May Fourth generation that they were heirs to world literature and that Western literary models were the key to Chinese literary development. Precisely which models and the way that they were to be introduced were at issue. The line taken by individuals and literary societies depended both on

personal literary preferences and on the extent of their faith in the evolutionary path. On its founding the Society for Literary Research adopted a clear evolutionary stance through its publishing organ, the *Fiction Monthly*, in the clear belief that the future development of Chinese literature was mapped out within the universal framework of literary evolution.

Recently realistic literature has already gone into decline, so it seems that from a world perspective it ought not to be promoted so much. However, as far as the situation of the country's internal literary scene is concerned, we have not yet experienced even a minuscule amount of the true spirit of realism and the true masterpieces of realistic literature, so members feel that there is still a definite need for the introduction of realism today. At the same time we must also fulfil our quota of literature which is not realistic, in order that a further level of preparation can be reached.<sup>9</sup>

It was precisely the all-embracing nature of a universal approach to literary development which allowed this new generation of Chinese intellectuals to see themselves as heirs to world literature and thereby to contextualize and legitimize their own efforts in world terms. Writing in 1918, Zhou Zuoren had coined the phrase "human literature" (*ren de wenxue*) to express the values that the new literature should embody.<sup>10</sup> He was an early advocate of realism which he presented as the most appropriate means of placing the real drama of human life at the centre of literary endeavour. These ideas soon became common currency and were developed by other commentators. One such was Mao Dun, who took up Zhou's lead on how to define the relationship between particularism and universalism:

I feel that the mission of literature is to voice the melancholy of modern man and help men rid themselves of the tendencies and weaknesses all inherit from thousands of years of history; to enable the mutual communication of feelings [and] to cause the imperceptible barriers between men to be gradually extinguished. The background of literature should be the background of all mankind, the feelings expressed should be those of all humanity. Only, because men in the world today cannot purely be men of the world but still retain a certain amount of their national character, creative literary works inevitably retain the appeal of that nation, and the background reflected also inevitably tends more towards that nation. The feelings expressed must always be universal, however: this is what today's creative writers should pay attention to.<sup>11</sup>

Ultimate faith was placed in the evolutionary process to effect the perpetual advancement of literary philosophy and technique. It was for this reason that many were drawn to the latest literary trends from the West despite the logic of the particular need to promote realism. From this grew the idea that China could "advance simultaneously along several paths",<sup>12</sup> which is reflected in the abovementioned "Announcement of Reform". Rather than undermining the evolutionary project, this simply constituted a pragmatic response to the impossibility of evolutionary purism and did not threaten the ideal of universal humanism which, it was held, could be transmitted via a variety of modern literary schools. Far more problematic was the study and introduction of realism itself.

Underpinning the Chinese espousal of literary evolution was the privileging of the universal at the expense of particular identity. Indeed, initially this was interpreted as a positive attraction. However, once literature was discussed in terms of the scientific observation and objective depiction of reality, and as being the product of environment or socio-political background, the focus of debate rapidly focussed on the national context and the importance of the expression of national character. That a strongly nationalistic literature should be created, in order that its depiction of life and the feelings of all mankind would lead to the extinguishing of the barriers between peoples, is clearly unsatisfactory. While directly linked to the aim of engaging universal sympathy, emphasis on the reflection of social background is equally unsatisfactory; whilst concentration on the mutual communication of feelings expressly at the expense of national characteristics is not acceptable to an emerging nation and national literature.

The translation of the literature of the so-called "small nations and oppressed peoples" provided something of a key to these contradictions.<sup>13</sup> In an era which saw the founding of the League of Nations and the institution of the Nobel Prize, countries like Norway, Hungary and Poland and peoples such as the Jews were producing literature which had been accorded recognition on the world stage. These nations and peoples were able to assert their position as an equal member of the world community by expressing their national identity in literature. At the same time, because of the nature of their specific milieu, the depth of the sentiments expressed represented a genuineness of human feelings which was able to transcend the confines of a national literature to inspire all mankind. For all these reasons such literature was a particular example to China and special attention was given to the translation and introduction of carefully chosen models from "small and oppressed" literature.

Consideration of social background and political circumstances rivalled aesthetic considerations in the selection of models.<sup>14</sup> Examples were chosen whose concerns harmonized with the those of the intellectual climate of May Fourth China. These included nationalism and revolution, national identity, foreign oppression, the ravages of war, the suffering and exploitation of the poor and so on.<sup>15</sup> Poland provides an example of a people with whose plight the Chinese were readily able to identify. The tripartite division of Poland by the three great empires of Russia, Prussia and Austria meant that until the resolution of the First World War, Poland as an entity did not technically exist. The extraterritorial rights of the imperial powers on China's eastern seaboard made Chinese identification with Polish literature all the more poignant. Particularly inspiring was the reassertion of cultural identity through literature in their own language by a people whose political and linguistic identity had been denied by their imperial masters.<sup>16</sup>

To the Chinese intellectuals, by entering the literary mainstream these small nations and oppressed peoples seemed to have squared the circle. In their literature they were able both to maintain their national character and identity and to follow the evolutionary developments in world literature, a prerequisite for making a viable contribution to it. The successful formula which appeared to be able to mediate between the conflicting forces of nationalism and universalism was one of inter-nationalism - "particularism within universalism".<sup>17</sup>

This was no struggle to the death between equal consciousnesses. From the outset the May Fourth generation of Chinese put itself in a subordinate position *vis à vis* the Western mainstream, and also *vis à vis* the small nations and oppressed peoples. The Chinese already had an acute situational consciousness, being painfully aware of the perceived backwardness and inferiority of their literature. Unfortunately, the generation also placed its hope for overcoming the conflicting forces of nationalism and universalism in an accident of history. May Fourth China overplayed the relationship between the emphatic expressions of national identity in 19th century "oppressed literature" with the emergence of independent states as the century progressed; whereas more significant in the emergence of such states was the crumbling of the great European empires, which were previously the organs of oppression of these peoples, and the machinations of their successors. Poland well illustrates this, emerging as an independent state at the end of the First World War almost by default. The changed milieu engendered new literary trends within Poland, which now the Chinese found less concordant with their needs. Writing in 1929, Mao Dun expresses regret at the reorientation of Polish literature:

In terms of the thought tide of the literary background, before the war it was nationalism\* [*minzu zhuyi*], after the war it is universalism [*shijie zhuyi*]. The structure of a new independent Polish state - even if it is a flimsy structure - has, it seems, already caused young writers to lose the ardent nationalistic sentiment of the previous generation; indeed, they feel they ought to study the broad vision of the world and now do not deserve to be called people of a "free" country... After the blood bath of the First World War, under the diplomatic manoeuvres of the great powers, Poland became an independent state with self respect ... But because Poland has already become an "independent state" its younger writers feel the pre-war poets' esteem of nationalism to be no longer in tune with the times... Polish people, who are already free, ought to broaden their horizons and better fulfil their contribution to world culture.<sup>18</sup>

The irony of these sentiments is that, by rights, Poland had been too exemplary in its role as model, achieving both statehood and integration into the literary mainstream. The issue of national identity was seen to have been downplayed in literature as a result of Poland's changed political fortunes, although the latter could not justifiably be interpreted as a result of the former.

A further accident of history also complicates the situation still further. In the West, post-realistic literary and artistic trends reacted against the positivism of the 19th century and notions of the social responsibility of art at precisely the time when these values were being affirmed in China. This was a significant factor in the gradual loss of faith in evolution as a positive force for change in China. Although in the article quoted above Mao Dun blames a new generation of Polish writers for failing China as a model, the real object of disaffection was the direction in which the newest trends in literature were moving. The evolutionary process, which previously had been perceived as one of continual advancement, was now seen as unreliable. As the Chinese equation of a national literary profile with a national political profile gradually became more entrenched with the Leftist radicalization of the literary scene, it necessarily undermined the naive idealism from which the new culture movement had grown.

### The analogy of enslavement

If Jameson's analogy has an application in the relationship of modern Chinese literature to the Western literary mainstream, it might arguably be applied to the question of derivativeness.

Since the builders of the new Chinese literature sought to define their endeavours in Western terms and to appropriate Western forms and techniques as the tools of their trade, the results of their labours inevitably attracted the charge of being derivative. So labelled, they were not accorded the affirmation which was sought in order to join the literary mainstream.

The problem lies in the dominance of the "view from the top", in Jameson's phrase.<sup>19</sup> Any appropriation from "the top" is seen as emulation and little recognition is given for independent creativity. This attitude is often perpetuated in scholarship. In sinology there are numerous examples of the "reception and influence study" whereby the standards set, as it were, by a prominent figure from the Western literary mainstream are used as a yardstick against which to evaluate what are construed as Chinese efforts at emulation. Often such "Western" elements as do exist are taken as evidence of a wholesale adoption of Western assumptions and ways of thought. In the investigation of Western influence there is a lurking tendency to impute to the Chinese writer in question a Western interpretation or understanding of the figure whose influence is being investigated. Yet the project in early 20th century China to create a new national literature shows that Chinese writers and critics were not passive recipients of Western influence. Their "influences" were chosen with care, reflecting their own perceived needs. Their interpretation of Western works and ideologies were not necessarily

"orthodox" but often involved adaptation, selectivity and splicing in response to local requirements.<sup>20</sup>

This leads to the main problematic contained within the enslavement analogy, namely that of the dependence of the minority literature on the mainstream for acceptance. In the project to create a new national literature for China, examples from the literature of small nations and oppressed peoples were appealing precisely because the mainstream had taken them to its breast. They were perceived to have transcended their cultural particularity and thereby to have universal relevance as speaking to the human condition of the age.

What mechanisms were at work in the Chinese case which denied modern Chinese literature the same acceptance? An important factor was the self-consciousness of the Chinese endeavour. This led to a projection of the circumstances of its formulation onto its "small and oppressed" models. In particular, the relationship between socio-political and artistic motivations was inverted: non-literary criteria were used to define an ostensibly literary project. The telescoping of two centuries of political and literary developments in Europe also made the Chinese project a victim of time lag, in that national literary preferences and expectations diverged from those of the mainstream. Moreover, most of the "small and oppressed" literatures emerged from within the Western tradition and were able to build on inherited techniques and modes of expression whilst drawing on the particularity of their own experience. In China, the appropriation by selection and adaptation of an alien tradition and the conscious denial of the native tradition in the quest for a means of expression of national identity is obviously problematic.

C.T. Hsia has described this self-consciousness in terms of an "obsession with China".<sup>21</sup> A dominant preoccupation with national crisis and national destiny and the conviction that literature and art can and should play a role in alleviating crisis and shaping destiny prevented Chinese literature from transcending its "patriotic provinciality".<sup>22</sup> Realism provided an effective tool for the modern Chinese writer to lay bare the ailing and corrupt state of his country but, Hsia argues, he failed to equate this on a broader plane with the condition of man in the modern world, presenting the condition of China as a purely Chinese phenomenon.

This raises the question whether literature which responds to the requirements of a local or "national" audience might be deemed a successful national literature even if it lacks recognition and status on the world stage. Because of their persistent quest for literary solutions to what was at once both an artistic and a socio-political dilemma, May Fourth Chinese writers possibly doomed their project to failure by insisting on the achievement of a national literature by means of universal recognition, while focussing ever more intensively on the national crisis.

Attempts at defining a national literature turn on the divergence of expectations in the local or national arena and the wider international arena. Whereas Hsia addresses this problem from within, Jameson, writing 14 years later, writes from without but comes to similar conclusions. Jameson argues that there is a mechanism at work in the process of writing from within a minority culture which militates against universal affirmation; he identifies it as autoreferentiality. This takes the form of social or national allegory where the story of private individual destiny is an allegory of the public situation of society or culture engendered by circumstances of cultural revolution. Indeed, he identifies this conscious and overt intertwining of individual private destiny and the public sphere as the main point of divergence between expectations of literature without and within the literary mainstream.<sup>23</sup> In the West "[w]e have been trained in a deep cultural conviction that the lived experience of our private existences is somehow incommensurable with the abstractions of economic science and political dynamics."<sup>24</sup>

Jameson cites the pioneer Chinese writer Lu Xun, and in particular his "Diary of a Madman", the first modern Chinese story in the vernacular, published in 1918. This describes an individual's paranoid delusions about the cannibalism practised by all those around him, but also has allegorical resonance which surpasses the personal destiny of the protagonist, presenting a nightmare vision of Chinese history where the cannibalism the madman envisions is attributed to Chinese society as a whole.

This story is generally recognized as a distinguished example of national literature. It successfully draws on Western models. The title itself is an overt acknowledgement of the debt to Gogol's story of similar title with which it shares the basic diary form, general satirical tone and tragi-comic obsession with the grotesque, but there is no symbolism in the Gogol story and satire remains unfocussed. As Patrick Hanan has suggested, much clearer parallels can be drawn with Andreev's symbolistic story *The Red Laugh*, a story about the horrors of war in the form of a fragmented diary which presents the speaker's attempts to retain his sanity in a world which has come to accept war and killing as natural.<sup>25</sup> Lu Xun's offers a sophisticated development of these two models, particularly in terms of structure. In *The Red Laugh* an individual fights to remain sane while the mass of men have gone mad and his perceptions are indeed to be taken as sane. In Lu Xun's "Diary" the insights of a madman are to be taken symbolically as the truth even as the nightmarish vision is ironically annulled before it is recounted by reassurances from the madman's brother, providing a second narrative voice, that the madman recovered some time ago and has taken up an official post elsewhere. Thus Lu Xun reworks the opaque symbolism of Andreev<sup>26</sup> into clearly referential allegory, the full import of which requires the presence of the second narrator. It is arguable that a story such as this escapes the charge of derivativeness by the

sophistication with which the original sources are reworked to produce a new work which is able to stand independently of its models. At the same time, however, its intensely Chinese character denies it universal resonance, despite its use of the common conceit of the madman speaking the truth.

Occurrences of national allegory are so widespread in May Fourth literature that the impression is given of an overriding sense of mission. An obsession with identity, a heightened situational consciousness are perhaps to be expected at a time of nation-building and cultural reconstruction. However, this dominant, nation-oriented critical discourse, being instrumental in the creation of a new literary canon, marginalizes literary expression at odds with itself or forces interpretations to accord with itself. Western scholarship often perpetuates the myths of the dominant discourse<sup>27</sup>, thus students of modern Chinese literature are familiar with national allegory as a feature of 20th century Chinese creative expression. Both Fredric Jameson and Benedict Anderson are persuasive in identifying it as a trait of minority cultural expression in general. In his examination of nationalism in terms of imagined communities, Anderson stresses the fundamental importance of the mechanism of social allegory to the growth of national consciousness.<sup>28</sup> Reference is made to individual members of that community or events of significance to it such that the whole of the imagined community, of which the reader is a part, is conjured up and reaffirmed. Yet both critics only engage with the dominant critical discourse of the minority culture, which they uphold in their own. This, it is assumed, offers a single, authentic concept of national identity. Alternative narratives of the self which subvert this are displaced.

An example often cited to show the all-pervasive nature of the "obsession with China" is Yu Dafu's "Sinking". This story recounts ironically the personal humiliation of an introspective young Chinese student living in Japan, the detached stance of the narrative serving to show the absurdity of the protagonist's self-indulgent and sentimental view of himself.<sup>29</sup> In portraying his relationships with the ordinary Japanese people amongst whom he lives, with his fellow students, with women and so on, the narrative view of his behaviour constantly undermines the protagonist's own interpretation of events. At the end of the story, as he contemplates suicide on the beach, the protagonist equates his personal humiliation with the national humiliation of China:

Oh China, my China, you are the cause of my death! ... I wish you could become rich and strong soon! Many, many of your children are still suffering.<sup>30</sup>

The reader is unprepared for this unexpected and forced allegorization of the personal. Throughout the story the protagonist's view of himself as a victim of Japanese prejudice against the Chinese is shown to be suspect. All the Japanese people with whom he comes into contact actually treat him kindly. Yet the common assessment of this final episode is that the otherwise

objective narrative slips awkwardly into sentimentality at this point.<sup>31</sup> It appears that once the solemn issue of national destiny is broached, it cannot be contained within the ironic distance of the narrative. For the first time in the story the protagonist appears to be alluding to a truth that the narrative cannot undermine, namely the plight of China.

The ending of this story can be resolved in two ways, both of which subvert the dominant discourse. The narrative logic of the story demands that the protagonist's perceptions be regarded as unreliable, and therefore the plight of China is ironically re-evaluated in a positive light. The ironic frame of the re-evaluation collapses positive notions of national identity into parody. At the same time, what he is actually saying is that the state of China has brought about his suicidal condition. By taking the intertwining of private and public destiny to its negative extreme, the protagonist's suicide parodies it; and with the action itself being the result of paranoid delusion in the first place, the subversion of the dominant discourse is completed.

Alternative narratives of the self do not have to be gendered but they often are. Lydia H. Liu indicates how the standard critical assessment of the female novelist Xiao Hong marginalized her because of her ambivalent relationship with nationalism.<sup>32</sup> Liu shows how, in her novel *Field of Life and Death*, Xiao Hong offers an alternative narrative of the female peasant self which subverts the nationalist discourse ostensibly endorsed by the novel and which dominant critical practice inevitably privileged:

Nationalism comes across as a profoundly patriarchal ideology that grants subject positions to men who fight over territory, possession and the right to dominate.<sup>33</sup>

Anderson's analysis suggests that the growth of national consciousness contains a dual process of affirmation, both external and internal. In the case of China the former is rendered problematic by the mechanisms of the latter, whereby the dominant critical discourse creates its canon. It was not the case that Chinese creative writing did not explore the domain of private destiny and privilege the libidinal over the political, but the monolithic enterprise, to create a national literature, subsumed the pursuit of the personal, either marginalizing it or seizing on any perceived resonance of the national allegory and appropriating it. The ideological control of literary production simply intensified the process.

In terms of the master-slave relationship, internal recognition, however problematically derived, might be likened to the slave's attainment of a level of self-conscious awareness through his labour. This coming to awareness of his position as slave breaks the relationship which, in Hegelian terms, must proceed to a higher level of *Geist* or spirit. The more autoreferential a minority literature becomes, the less universal affirmation it requires. A different type of recognition is sought which is derived internally, within the imagined community by the establishment of an

alternative set of artistic criteria. Traditional Chinese literature once offered such a framework in what Anderson might call its "unselfconscious coherence".<sup>34</sup>

Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" provide a further example. In this document, which laid down principles later to be adopted as national literary policy, the life of the people was identified as the inspiration for all art. The responsibilities of the writer were defined not only as being to produce works which were welcomed by the masses but to learn from them and be guided by their incipient forms of literature and art. The main concern of the Yan'an conference was to define the relationship between work in literature and art and revolutionary work.<sup>35</sup> By firmly subordinating artistic criteria to political criteria,<sup>36</sup> it laid down the conditions for the persistence of the autoreferential paradigm.

During the extremes of the Cultural Revolution the story of private individual destiny was subsumed by the public sphere. The heroes of the model operas, for example, have no inner conflicts or personal ambitions. Their private aspirations are at one with the public sphere. When literature and art become the embodiment of political discourse no place is allowed for personal expression. Collective sentiment and public aspirations become the only permissible content - there is only allegory. Under these circumstances the pursuit of a private subjectivity is not only rendered subversive but it gains an allegorical resonance of its own. The poet Bei Dao's well-known personal railings against a repressive state which became a voice of the movement for change remain representative:

I don't believe the sky is blue;  
I don't believe in thunder's echoes;  
I don't believe that dreams are false;  
I don't believe that death has no revenge.<sup>37</sup>

Disengagement from the public sphere remains a political act by its eschewing of engagement until engagement is no longer expected.

The difficulty with the Hegelian analogy is that Western cultural consciousness does not require the recognition of the minority literature to affirm its pre-eminence. The need for recognition is unidirectional and the more autoreferential you are, the less universal appeal you have. This quest for legitimation of itself also reinforces the subordinate position of the minority literature. The lifting of the ideological yoke during the 1980s in China provided some cause for optimism as writers began to engage with the current methodological preoccupations of the critical mainstream. At the same time their writing was shaped by their experiences of the previous decades which were both intensely personal and singularly Chinese. The positive international reception of certain dissident writers such as Bei Dao during the 1980s might be construed as a realization of the aims of the May Fourth generation of literary nationalists. To do so would enable the

conclusion that it is, after all, necessary to be disengaged from the public sphere in order to be "nationalist". However, this line of argument ignores forces within the mainstream which brought these writers temporarily to world attention, forcing them into an external construction of the same national allegory.

If integration is deemed desirable, and the quest remains self-affirming, it requires the questioning of the assumptions underlying the conjoining of nation-building with literary practice. However much the dominant critical discourse within the minority culture might be fractured and projections of private subjectivity accorded their own validity, the analogy of enslavement inheres until the dominant discourse of the mainstream is allowed to set the agenda for minority culture.

### Notes

- 1 Fredric Jameson, "Third world literature in the era of multinational capitalism", *Social Text*, 15, Fall 1986, p.85. Jameson's interpretation of Hegel is a little idiosyncratic, notably with reference to the vanquishing of the slave. What follows is a standard recapitulation of Hegel's analysis, see Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp. 153-157.
- 2 For Jameson, the slave is an "heroic coward" who "gives in, in order to continue life"; *ibid.*
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 Named after a spontaneous demonstration of nationalist sentiment in Beijing on 4 May 1919 to protest against the Chinese government's acceptance of the terms of the Versailles treaty after the First World War which assigned former German territorial concessions in China to Japan. The gathering momentum of the series of protests which followed became a rising tide of social ferment and intellectual revolution which rapidly became known as the May Fourth movement. For a thorough examination of the May Fourth phenomenon see Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*, Stanford University Press, 1960.
- 5 For further detail on literary societies see e.g. Bonnie S. McDougall, *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China 1919-1925*, Tokyo: Center for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971, ch. 1.
- 6 "Gaike xuanyan", *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (Fiction Monthly), 1921, 12.1, p. 3.
- 7 "Xiandai Ouzhou wenyi shi tan", *Xin Qingnian* (New Youth), 1.3, 1.4, November and December 1915.
- 8 See Bonnie S. McDougall, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.
- 9 "Gaike xuanyan", p. 3.
- 10 Zhou Zuoren, "Ren de wenxue", *New Youth*, 5.6, December 1918.
- 11 Mao Dun, "Chuangzuo de qiantu" (The way forward for creative writing), *Fiction Monthly*, 1921, 12.7, p. 45.

- 12 Mao Dun, "Women xianzai keyi tichang biaoxiangzhuyi de wenxue me?" (Should we promote symbolistic literature now?) *Fiction Monthly*, 1920, 11.2, p. 6.
- 13 For specialised studies on the translation and dissemination of this literature into China see e.g. Irene Eber, *Voices from Afar: Modern Chinese Writers on Oppressed Peoples and Their Literature*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, 38, 1980, or Hilary Chung, "Mao Dun and the Literature of Small Nations and Oppressed Peoples", MA thesis, University of Durham, 1986.
- 14 Some more experienced critics, e.g. Mao Dun, sought to guard against this. See Chung, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
- 15 See Irene Eber, *Voices from Afar*, p. 45.
- 16 Further detail in Eber, *ibid.* and Chung, *op. cit.* See also Irene Eber, "Poland and Polish author in modern Chinese literature and translation", *Monumenta Serica*, 1974-5, Vol. 31, pp. 407-445.
- 17 Eber, *Voices from Afar*, p. 17.
- 18 *Ershi nian lai de Bolan wenxue* (The last twenty years of Polish literature), *Fiction Monthly*, 1929, 20.7, p. 1097. \*English supplied in original.
- 19 Fredric Jameson, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
- 20 For further discussion see the introductory chapter of Hilary Chung, *The Portrayal of Women in Mao Dun's Early Fiction 1927-1932*, Ph.D thesis, University of Durham, 1992.
- 21 C.T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Literature*, Yale University Press, 1971, Appendix 1, "Obsession with China: The moral burden of modern Chinese literature", pp. 533-554.
- 22 *ibid.*, p. 536.
- 23 *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 76.
- 24 *ibid.*, p. 69.
- 25 Patrick Hanan, "The technique of Lu Hsun's fiction," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 34, 1974, pp. 66-68.
- 26 "The red laugh issues from the earth when the earth itself goes mad, infecting people who participate in war or who are contaminated by it in any way ..." *ibid.*, p. 66.
- 27 For a discussion of this with regard to the representation of women see the introductory chapter of Hilary Chung, *op. cit.*
- 28 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chapter 2.
- 29 See Michael Egan, "Yu Dafu and the transition to modern Chinese literature" in Merle Goldman (ed.), *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, Harvard University Press, 1977, p. 312.
- 30 Yu Dafu, "Sinking", Joseph S.M. Lau and C.T. Hsia (tr.), in Joseph S.M. Lau et al. (eds.), *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas 1919-1949*, Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 141.
- 31 Michael Egan, *op. cit.*
- 32 Lydia H. Liu, "The female body and nationalist discourse: Manchuria in Xiao Hong's *Field of Life and Death*" in Angel Zito and Tani E. Barlow (eds.), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 157-177.

33 *ibid.*, p.174.

34 *ibid.*

35 Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, University of Michigan, 1980, p. 57.

36 *ibid.*, p.78.

37 From "The answer" in Bei Dao, *The August Sleepwalker*, trans. by Bonnie S. McDougall, London: Anvil Press, 1988, p. 33.

## Nation and locality in the writing of Zhou Zuoren

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Chinese literature this century has been virtually inextricable from the project of nation-building, in other words, the construction in discourse of an imagined or desired ideal vision of the nation. Although writers over the last decade have turned their backs on an explicit concern with the nation, cultural anxieties, as displayed in the TV series *Heshang*, run deep and are of course inseparable from questions of national identity.

The Chinese discourse on the nation had its origins in the late Qing with Yan Fu's discovery of the people as the raw material of nationhood.<sup>1</sup> As W.K Cheng has argued, this discovery was predicated on a refusal to believe in the continued viability of the Chinese tradition in solving China's problems. One result of the turn to the people was the reformers' promotion of the idea of a new fiction which would inculcate in the people the requisite qualities and knowledge for modern citizenship. The dominant discourse of the May Fourth New Culture movement built on and enlarged this project, making explicit the inferiority of Chinese civilization, which it rejected with harsh iconoclasm. At the same time it made enlightenment the precondition for national salvation and linked both to the demand for a literary revolution.

The paradigmatic May Fourth intellectual is, of course, Lu Xun, whose fiction and prose brilliantly expressed anger and despair at China's condition. Lu Xun depicted Chinese culture as a cannibal banquet and the Chinese as a nation of Ah Qs devoid of self-knowledge, but bravely implicated himself in his castigations. Lu Xun's Nietzschean insistence on "self-overcoming" gave him his moral authority. In the end, he saw it as his duty to support the possibility for change represented by social revolution and the Soviet Union, winning Mao's accolade as modern China's greatest revolutionary intellectual.<sup>2</sup> In this respect too Lu Xun was paradigmatic, for the logical outcome of the discourse on the nation was to choose whichever