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FROM A MAY FOURTH YOUTH TO LU XUN'S ALLY: HU FENG'S INTELLECTUAL EVOLUTION

As the founder and pacesetter of the *Qiyue* school, Hu Feng provided his followers with general guidelines as well as practical advice in his capacity as a critic and an editor. To understand his consistent standpoint it is necessary for us, as a start, to trace his intellectual growth from a rebellious May Fourth youth to a critic who finally found a direction and the right company for himself after wading through the troubled waters of the Communist movement at home and abroad. Without such a first step, we would not only miss some of the most crucial influences on his eventual position but lose sight of its historical bearing. Hence in what follows I will proceed to outline the development of some of Hu Feng's most important ideas and positions. As we near the end of this chapter, we will see that the fundamental orientation of his future journal *Qiyue*, and by extension the school he was about to lead, was already determined by his alliance with Lu Xun in the well-known debate over the "Two Slogans."

In tracing Hu Feng's intellectual growth, I will focus on the formation of a coherent network of interrelated views that he achieved through his creative assimilation of different schools of thought. In contrast to the position adopted by the leftist orthodoxy of the time, which shifted significantly under the sway of changing political priorities, this ideational network on Hu Feng's part was enduring and capable of withstanding political and ideological pressures. Its para-

digmatic importance, as the works discussed in the later chapters of this study will fully bear out, lay in that it provided Hu Feng and his followers with a critical perceptual scheme, a combative understanding of the function of literature and a nonconformist ethic. It, in other words, was what distinguished the *Qiyue* school from the majority of contemporary leftist writers.

A REBELLIOUS ACTIVIST IN A REVOLUTIONARY ERA

Born in 1902 when Chinese society was undergoing dramatic upheavals, Hu Feng spent his formative years restlessly. Like many young men of his time, he was unhappy with traditional Confucian education, so after he started school at eleven he went through six different tutors in six years before finally enrolling in a modern-style elementary school. Thereafter the restlessness led him to Wuchang in 1921 and then to Nanjing in 1923 in search of a better high school education, a significant part of which consisted of reading May Fourth vernacular literature. The following is his own account of his voracious reading experience at the time:

I read *Experiments* (*Changshiji*, by Hu Shi) as well as *Resurrection of the Goddess* (*Nushen zhi zaisheng*, by Guo Moruo). I read *Guide* (*Xiangdao*) as well as *Effort Weekly* (*Nuli zhoubao*). . . . But what made me really come close to literature as well as human life was two little-known booklets: *Lake Side Poems* (*Hupan shiji*) and Wang Tongzhao's *A Leaf* (*Yiye*). The former gave me the feelings of a young man awakened by the May Fourth movement to his "self" and saved me from being frustrated by my surroundings; the latter, in spite of its sighs after disillusionment, called forth in me a desire for pursuit and made me indescribably sad for a long time.¹

Typifying the romantic ethos of the time, *Lake Side Poems*—a collection of poems by the so-called "Lake Poets" Pan Mohua, Feng Xuefeng, Ying Xiuren, and Wang Jingzhi—consciously followed the lead of the British romantic Lake Poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Leigh Hunt in singing praises of nature and love and *A Leaf*—a novella by a founding member of the Literary Association—

lamented over the endless human suffering and the irreconcilable conflicts between ideals and reality in a tone no less sentimental. Two minor yet representative works of the early 1920s, both displayed a yearning for an idealized, beautified life while implicitly or explicitly criticizing the flaws of the mundane world, echoing the wishes and the discontent of a whole generation of educated youths. In Hu Feng's case, the discontent with society would soon go beyond the interest in the vernacular literature and materialize in his active participation in student movements.²

Growing up amidst tremendous changes in society, the young Hu Feng belonged to a generation that, under the impact of historical circumstances, came to adopt a radically new approach to the cultural heritage of China. As Karl Mannheim points out:

When as a result of an acceleration in the tempo of social and cultural transformation basic attitudes must change so quickly that the latent, continuous adaptation and modification of traditional patterns of experience, thought, and expression is no longer possible, then the various new phases of experience are consolidated somewhere, forming a clearly distinguishable new impulse, and a new centre of configuration. We speak in such cases of the formation of a new generation style, or of a new *generation entelechy*.³

For May Fourth youths like Hu Feng, their generation entelechy was saliently characterized by an iconoclastic attitude toward what they considered China's feudal tradition. Unlike those older May Fourth participants reared on Confucian doctrines, they only had a tenuous relationship with the traditional culture. As a result of their intellectual and emotional distance from the feudal past, they tended to judge it monolithically without bothering themselves too much about sorting out its pros and cons. Theirs was a generation that could carry out the attack on tradition without being haunted by a guilty conscience or a feeling of complicity. In view of this wholly negative conception of tradition, for which more evidence will be adduced later in this study, particularly in chapter 4, we have reason to question Kirk Denton's recent attempt to trace Hu Feng's lineage back to Neo-Confucianism, an attempt not directly supported by Hu Feng's own writings.⁴ We should realize that Hu Feng's generation gave their

allegiance to the New Culture, venerating May Fourth in absolute terms as the nemesis of China's feudal tradition as they rejected the latter in toto. We should further note that the institutionalizations of May Fourth were under way right after it took place,⁵ and the passionate young iconoclasts like Hu Feng, in turn, put a radical spin to its legacy.

That was precisely how Hu Feng regarded Lu Xun, the epitome of May Fourth in his eyes and the most crucial influence on him in his youth. Here is his recollection of his first encounter with Lu Xun's preface to *Call to Arms* (*Nahan*) in his high school days:

Of course, I did not understand it, but I intuitively felt that he [Lu Xun] was writing, with a heavy heart, about the soul of our ancient country. Later *Call to Arms*, in its red cover, was published and I immediately bought a copy. Of course I did not understand the book either, but, once again, I intuitively felt that what he described was the darkness and pain that had surrounded me. Thereafter Lu Xun became the dearest name to me. Like today's young people, I dreamed about light and friendship in my youth. I always wanted to give something to those friends I held respectable and the best gift was of course books, most valuable because I thought they could bring light. I remember I bought four or five copies of *Call to Arms* in its red cover and gave them, with my passion, to friends about to leave or living elsewhere.⁶

Associating Lu Xun with light, the future, and the young generation, Hu Feng's intuitive understanding projected Lu Xun as a dauntless fighter against China's feudal tradition while glossing over his admitted involvement with the past and his self-doubts as its critic. In Hu Feng's youthful view, the image of Lu Xun was already radicalized.

Both Hu Feng's hostility towards tradition and his admiration for Lu Xun had stemmed from a humanist standpoint shared by many May Fourth youths. As an "idealist" pining for love and social justice, to borrow an epithet from the title of one of his autobiographical sketches,⁷ he in turn fell under the spell of Leo Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, Hermann Sudermann's *Frau Sorge* (*Dame Care*), a novel taking as its subject matter the maturation of a sensitive youth, V. Ropshin's *Pale Horse*, a novel about a Russian terrorist that was received by Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s as an insightful delineation of the devel-

opment of a revolutionary soul, and the works of Arishima Takeo, a Japanese novelist known as “the man of love” in his country. The attraction of these works and authors, as Hu Feng tells us, came from what he perceived as their passion for life. Being a young man with the same passion, he also discovered the unembellished truth of human life and life struggle in China’s New Literature.⁸ In that regard he was close in spirit to the members of both the Literary Association (Wenxue yanjiu hui) and the Creation Society (Chuangzao she), who had focused either on the revelation of human and social realities in a “literature for humanity’s sake” or on unrestricted personal expression and individual protest. Given his valuational agreement with these two groups of writers responsible for the literary revolution in the early 1920s, his subsequent endorsement of the New Literature, as we shall see in the following chapters, tended to be sweeping, unproblematic, and unconditional.

With regard to the prevailing mimetic view that had worked hand in glove with the humanitarian concerns in the New Literature, Hu Feng brought along the important addition of voluntarism in his understanding of the function of literature, thanks mainly to the influence of *Symbols of Agony* (*Kumen de xiangzheng*), a book written by the Japanese critic Kuriyagawa Hakuson (1880–1923) in 1921 and translated by Lu Xun in 1924.⁹ Largely a synthesis of Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, *Symbols of Agony* interpreted human life as a struggle of human vitality—or Bergsonian “*élan vital*”—against social restraints, with art and literature as pure expressions of life, freedom, independence, and individuality.¹⁰ As an acolyte of psychoanalysis, Hakuson highly valued the cathartic function of literature, therefore to him there was little functional difference between tragedy, presumably the highest literary genre, and the conversation therapy used by psychoanalysts in the treatment of hysteria, since both could locate hidden mental damage in the unconscious and, through unobstructed expression, relieve the damage by transferring it to the conscious level. Art that did not symbolize the agonies or mental injuries hidden in the depths of the subconscious, in his view, simply was not great art.¹¹ This view, as our subsequent discussions will bear out, would contribute crucially to Hu Feng’s choice of the “spiritual scars” left by the protracted feudal tradition on the Chinese nation as the most important subject matter for literature.

Hakuson’s most important message for the young Hu Feng lay in

his interpretation of literary creativity as a dynamic process in which human subjectivity unabashedly took the initiative. He made the truthful reflection of the external world play second fiddle to the writer's search into the depths of his own mind and prioritized the expressive, affective functions of literature over its cognitive, intellectual functions. In contrast to the mimetic view prevalent at the time, Hakuson's was an alternative approach that emphasized the writer's crucial involvement in the creative process as a conscious agent, a psychological therapist, and a liberator of pent-up psychic energy. On a broader scale, the importance Hakuson placed on human subjectivity reinforced a conception of life as a process of individual experiences rather than a given scheme revealing itself objectively in a rational order, a view held by Chinese romanticists such as Yu Dafu, Xu Zhimo, Guo Moruo, and Jiang Guangci in the 1920s, as Leo Ou-fan Lee notes.¹² Being a radical activist committed to the lofty cause of changing the society, Hu Feng was naturally susceptible to Hakuson's performative emphasis. To him literature was no longer a mere mirror held up to reflect a social reality outside itself. Instead, imbued with willpower and strength of purpose, it became, first and foremost, an important tool for social revolution.

It was this strong will to change society by means of literature that produced the content and the organizing principles of Hu Feng's social knowledge. For the young radical, social knowledge did not arise out of disinterested theoretical cogitation. Rather, it was centrally derived from a volitional and emotional act motivated to transform or destroy a given social condition to such an extent that it only saw the negative attributes of the society in question. In other words, Hu Feng's approach to social knowledge aspired after action, not contemplation, on social issues. Thus from the start of his intellectual journey Hu Feng had adopted an activist view on literature and approached May Fourth literature accordingly. Under the influence of activism, literature became for him a force immanent in history and the writer a conscious agent of change in an incessantly dynamic world. While putting a high premium on being with one's time, the activist view refused to impose a transcendental, predetermined pattern on history. The future, in short, was yet to be created necessarily through human interventions and interactions. Generally irresponsive to Marxism, an increasingly popular belief system among Chinese

leftist intellectuals after the mid-1920s, Hu Feng the activist would eventually take issue on its major pitfall—economic determinism.

COMING TO GRIPS WITH MECHANISTIC MARXISM

After participating in radical peasant movements in his hometown Qichun, Hu Feng had to flee to different cities to escape the white terror in the wake of the traumatic split between the GMD and the CCP in 1927. In September 1929 he went to Tokyo and enrolled in a language school to learn Japanese. Soon he became engrossed in Japanese proletarian literature, which was then in vogue. Especially attractive to him were the short dispatches from workers and peasants carried in the journals associated with Japanese proletarian literature. Standing in contrast to what he considered the programmatic works by members of the Creation Society and the apathetic works by Mao Dun, these dispatches impressed him as sincere, passionate, and down-to-earth.¹³ As he began to cultivate friendship with important Japanese proletarian writers such as Eguchi Kiyoshi (1887–1975) and Kobayashi Takiji (1903–33), he joined their discussion groups, wrote articles on Chinese left-wing literature for their magazines, translated their works and acted as a liaison between them and their Chinese peers.

During Hu Feng's stay there the Communist movement in Japan was still under the sway of Fukumoto Kazuo, a theoretician-turned-Communist Party leader who was the first systematic introducer of Marxist dialectics in Japan in the 1920s. Critical of the parliamentarianist and gradualist position embraced by Yamakawa Hitoshi, a Communist leader influenced by the Second International, Fukumoto emphasized, among other things, the necessity of separating genuine Marxists from fellow travellers before crystallizing the former group into a well-organized party, the self-determining, active role of revolutionary intellectuals in adopting Marxist principles and the importance of theoretical debates in promoting proletarian class consciousness. The impact of Fukumotoism on Chinese leftist writers in the 1920s was significant, especially in the quarrel between the Creation and Sun Societies and their later joint attack on Lu Xun in 1928.¹⁴ As far as Hu Feng was concerned, we can certainly detect the influence of

Fukumotoism in his preoccupation with the purity of the revolutionary ranks, his strong polemic proclivity, and his emphasis on the role of the revolutionary intellectual as a progressive historical agent. Reinforcing the May Fourth cultural-intellectual approach to social issues and Hakuson's voluntarism that Hu Feng came to adopt in his youth, Fukumotoism further strengthened the activist orientation of Hu Feng's thinking while leading it in a Marxist direction.

While talking about Fukumotoism, we should bear in mind that in an important way it was derived from Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1923) and Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), the twin fountainheads of Western Marxism that Fukumoto came to know when he studied Marxism in Europe. Lukács's book was especially significant in that, when published in Japanese translation in 1927, it introduced important notions such as alienation, reification, dialectics, and totality into Japanese Marxists' social understanding. Li Huoren has rightly pointed out that Hu Feng's application of the concepts of totality and dialectics in his articles against the "third-category" writers, written between 1932 and 1933 in Japan, were heavily indebted to Lukács's book, especially its first chapter "What Is Orthodox Marxism?"¹⁵ Later dismissed by Hu Feng himself for their rigid subscription to the Marxist social analysis vulgarized by the RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) and eventually excluded from his collected works compiled in the mid-1980s, these articles, however, only partially bore out Lukács's influence. Compared with the notions of totality and dialectics, a more latent and more lasting influence lay in other views in Lukács's complicated book.

Consisting of essays written between 1919 and 1922 in the light of the success and survival of the Russian Revolution and the gradual dissolution of revolutionary working-class movements in Europe, two historical developments Marx himself had not expected, *History and Class Consciousness* made important revisions of classical Marxism. It represented, in Gareth Stedman Jones's words, "the first major irruption of the romantic anti-scientific tradition of bourgeois thought into Marxist theory."¹⁶ As such, it was strongly opposed to the application of the ideal of natural science to society, for "it turns out to be an ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie. For the latter it is a matter of life and death to understand its own system of production in terms of eternally valid categories: it must think of capitalism as being predestined to eternal survival by the eternal laws of nature and reason."¹⁷

With its implicit emphasis on the importance of human agency, Lukács's book came very close to the voluntarist stance Hu Feng had adopted. Hence it is small wonder that Hu Feng was attracted to some of its crucial ideas.

One of the most crucial theories developed in *History and Class Consciousness* is about "reification," or generalized fetishism that conceals, in all areas, the actual human "content" of social life in capitalism. To Lukács the proletariat is not immune to the harm of reification and, as a result, its actual thoughts, feelings, and desires can be nothing more than a "class-conditioned *unconsciousness*."¹⁸ Political consciousness, in other words, is not a matter of course for the proletariat as Marx had assumed. To a certain extent, the influence of Lukács's line of thought can be detected in Hu Feng's later insistence on the revelation of the spiritual deformities of the working classes. While calling for the disruption of the reified phenomena and categories in capitalist existence by means of mediation or practice, Lukács maintained that "the nature of history is precisely that every definition degenerates into an illusion: *history is the history of unceasing overthrow of the objective forms that shape the life of man*."¹⁹ In the final analysis, the danger of reification can only be offset with an anthropocentric approach to history, an approach that Hu Feng the young voluntarist could readily accept.

In retrospect, Lukács's concept of "reification" served for Hu Feng as something more than a critique of formalistic rationality that pervaded capitalism and obscured its living human substrata. Itself being a theoretical mediation, the Lukácsian concept set out to overcome, among other things, the reification of consciousness from a historicist perspective. We should note that to Lukács reified consciousness included the Marxism dogmatized in the hands of theorists like Bukharin. In order to avoid the trap of dogmatism, Lukács specifically warned that, with capitalist society as the classical terrain for its analysis, Marxist historical materialism should not be applied indiscriminately and mechanically to the analysis of precapitalist societies.²⁰ Lukács's application of the method of ideology critique to orthodox historical materialism, as can be seen in his acknowledgment of Marxism's interpretative limitations, was to be pushed to an extreme by Hu Feng in his tirades against Marxist "formulism."

Interestingly, as it shifted the focus of its discussions by drawing on the early Marx's interest in consciousness, culture, and subjectivity,

aspects underplayed by the Marxist orthodoxy of the time, *History and Class Consciousness* started a trend that would be reinforced by Western Marxism. In that respect Hu Feng's preoccupation with issues of culture, intellectuals, and subjectivity in his career bore a certain resemblance to some of the theoretical concerns of Lukács's heirs in the West, especially the Frankfurt School. Yet we do see a difference between Hu Feng and the Frankfurt School in their common resistance to economic determinism. Whereas the members of the Frankfurt School in their academic analyses of advanced capitalism often exhibited a political powerlessness, which eventually resulted in the shifting of their attention away from class struggle to the conflict between man and nature, Hu Feng opted for active intervention in dealing with the spiritual maladies of Chinese society. Sharing to a large degree Western Marxists' central concern over the perpetuation of oppression by the oppressed themselves, Hu Feng, with his adoption of the "cultural-intellectualistic" approach of May Fourth, was nonetheless able to locate revolutionary agents in critical intellectuals as independent individuals. On this point he parted company with the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness*, who regarded the Communist Party as a concrete embodiment of true proletarian class consciousness that would make revolution possible. As he departed from Lukács on the issue of revolutionary agent, Hu Feng offered, probably unwittingly, a solution to the problem of bureaucratization, a nascent tendency Lukács himself had noticed in the Communist movement but had no remedy.

We should reiterate here that the influence of the Lukácsian concept of "reification" did not come to full fruition in Hu Feng's thinking until years later. A more direct inspiration for his final farewell to the schematic approach in leftist literature came from a more authoritative source: the aesthetic views of Marx and Engels. In an autobiographical sketch written in 1979 Hu Feng mentioned that in the early 1930s the newly found letters by Marx and Engels on literature, accompanied by the struggle against the dogmatism of the RAPP in the Soviet Union, deepened his understanding of China's New Literature and its problems. He began to realize, he went on to say, that the path of realism could only be blazed with the actual conditions of the working people and the middle classes in view and that realism had to include the whole society in its political content

and be predicated on sensual particularity in its aesthetics. Thereafter he launched his theoretical inquiries to break through the dominance of doctrinairism.²¹

For a proper understanding of Hu Feng's assimilation of the aesthetic views of Marx and Engel, a brief look at his environment is in order at this point. First of all, we should bear in mind that the leftist literary scene worldwide was swayed at the time by the literary activities and official literary policies in the Soviet Union. As far as the Soviet literary scene was concerned, the early 1930s was marked by two important milestones: the formulation of "socialist realism" and the systemization of Marxist aesthetics. In November 1932 the Soviet Communist Party dissolved the clannish RAPP and replaced its "method of dialectic materialism" with "socialist realism" as the guideline for literary production. Soon afterwards the new concept was introduced into Japan and China. In November 1933, in an article titled "On Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism" (*Guanyu shehui zhuyi de xianshi zhuyi yu geming de langman zhuyi*), Zhou Yang interpreted "socialist realism" as a "dynamic" realism aimed at capturing the progress of socialism and imbuing its readers, by means of a simple language, with the spirit that they should fight for the better future of mankind.²² Though conceived as a corrective measure against the RAPP's doctrinaire "method of dialectic materialism," "socialist realism," in Zhou Yang's view, called for the strengthening, not the dismissal, of dialectic materialism on the writer's part.²³ In a nutshell, "socialist realism" still entailed ideological regimentation in the name of Marxist world outlook.

As "socialist realism" was formulated and transmitted, the systemization of Marxist aesthetics got under way in the Soviet Union after the surviving texts of Marx and Engels were collected in the early 1930s, with none other than Lukács as a key player in the project. Like the concept of "socialist realism," Marx and Engels's opinions on literature were soon introduced into China. In 1932 Qu Qiubai, the leading Chinese Marxist literary theoretician, translated Engels's letters on realism. Later, in an article titled "Marx, Engels, and Realism in Literature" (*Makesi, Engesi he wenzue shang de xianshi zhuyi*) that came out in the journal *Xiandai* (*Les contemporaines*) in April 1933, Qu expounded, among other things, Marx and Engels's preference for Shakespeare and Balzac, and their reproach of Schiller. In Qu's opin-

ion, Marx and Engels's recommendation for "Shakespearization" and their disapproval of "Schillerization" indicated their fundamental endorsement of realism and their opposition to romantic idealization.²⁴

While busy with their elaborations of "socialist realism" and exegeses of Marxist aesthetics, Marxist literary critics, in my opinion, had overlooked an inner incompatibility between the former's tendentious approach and the latter's stress on fullness and particularity. Whereas "socialist realism" aimed at a revelation of revolutionary development in reality for the purpose of ideological transformation and education of workers in the spirit of socialism, Marx and Engels, both influenced by Hegel's preference for pictorial representation over conceptual representation, emphasized the importance of immediacy and sensuality in artistic expression and remained highly critical of the overt articulation of political attitude in the work of art. Put it in a different way, the incompatibility could be seen in that, while "socialist realism" was preoccupied with the advocacy of the yet-to-be-realized postulates of a socialist future, Marx and Engels were interested in realism as an accurate portrait of a historically shaped reality.

Hu Feng was one of the few critics, if not the only critic in the world at the time, who recognized the incompatibility and had the courage to take sides. In the mid-1930s, while other leftist critics were busy discussing "socialist realism," he never used the term in his writings. Instead, he resorted to Marx and Engels's criticism of tendentiousness and abstraction as a weapon against the schematic approach to reality he detected in the works of Chinese leftist writers. Eventually he dismissed the guidance of literary production by the correct worldview of Marxism—the quintessence of "socialist realism"—as lifeless "formulism." In so doing he tried to stake out a space for the writer's individual creativity.

In May 1935 Hu Feng started his tireless diatribes against "formulism" with "A Critique of Zhang Tianyi" (Zhang Tianyi lun), one of the first articles he wrote after coming to the Shanghai leftist literary scene. Calling Zhang a "plain materialist" most interested in the social colors of his characters and anxious to delineate their inevitable fates according to foregone conclusions, often simplistically and with exaggeration, Hu Feng faulted Zhang for failing to reach what he considered to be the highest goal of art—to capture the complicated truth of life—a goal reachable only when the writer delved into the depths of life with his mind and heart.²⁵ Hu Feng's emphasis on the

writer's active engagement with reality meant that theoretical propositions should not be applied without regard for actual historical circumstances. More importantly, his prioritization of the writer's personal experience with life over abstract theory ultimately placed the initiative and power of interpretation in the writer's hands. In the face of the constraints of Marxist scientism he apparently adopted a voluntarist stand.

Hu Feng's voluntarist views were soon expanded in his explications of the "typical characters," a key term in the discussions of Marxist aesthetics. In a May 1935 article "What Are 'Typical Characters' and 'Stereotypes'" (Shenme shi 'dianxing' he 'leixing'), he argued that "typical characters," nonexistent in real life, were products of artistic synthesis and generalization. In the process of creating "typical characters," writers needed the recourse to their imagination and intuition to amalgamate their impressions of life as well as the ability to understand and analyze life so that they could extract its essence.²⁶ Significantly, while focusing on writers' interpretive initiative, he did not mention the role of Marxist worldview in the understanding of society. It was precisely on this point that Zhou Yang differed from him in an ensuing debate that would strain their relationship. Half a year later, in an article titled "A Preliminary Discussion on Realism" (Xianshi zhuyi shilun), Zhou Yang, after pointing out the limitations in the worldviews of nineteenth-century European realists, vigorously called on Chinese writers to take the correct worldview, namely, Marxism, as the compass in their observation and analysis of reality.²⁷ Although the debate between Hu Feng and Zhou Yang over "typical characters" was later sidetracked to the issue of universality versus singularity, ideological schematization in the name of Marxist worldview remained the real bone of contention.

Hu Feng's explications of "typical characters" were based on a central idea that, he complained, was ignored by Zhou Yang: literature, as a cognitive enterprise, differs from science in that, whereas science illustrates sensual particularity from a theoretical perspective, literature represents universality through particularity.²⁸ Underlying this central idea is the relationship between theory and practice. It follows from Hu Feng's position that literature is a search for the truths of life rather than a mere reduplication of social reality according to preexisting theoretical postulates. As a result, the social reality reflected (or, more exactly, refracted) in literature is concretized and

inextricably mingled with writers' imagination, feelings, and personal views. No longer a set of self-enclosed phenomena reproducible in a scientific manner, it becomes expandable with the introduction of human agency.

Discussing Hu Feng's opinions on literature as a praxis, and his views on praxis in general, we should not overlook the importance he placed on will. Under the influence of romanticism, conveyed by Hakuson and Lukács in different ways, will in his view becomes an all-powerful force that refuses to be restrained by reason in its striving for existence. Hence its development does not follow any rational purpose or pattern. As far as literary production is concerned, Hu Feng's emphasis on will, most typically seen in his constant promotion of "hand-to-hand combat with reality," set him apart from orthodox Marxist critics, including Marx, Engels, and Lenin, who considered the philosophical category of reflection the essential function of literature and took for granted the correspondence between literature and society. In contrast, literature became for Hu Feng a willed praxis, a kind of life struggle that contends against, among other things, various coercive interpretive schemata, including vulgarized Marxism. In the following section on his alliance with Lu Xun in the debate over the "Two Slogans," we shall see that, as the national situation changed, the question of will would turn into a political issue.

KEEPING STEP WITH LU XUN

Of all the May Fourth writers, Lu Xun made the deepest impression on Hu Feng during his formative years. I mentioned previously that in his high school days Hu Feng was shocked by Lu Xun into an intuitive grasp of the darkness of Chinese society. Once he entered Beijing University in the fall of 1925, out of admiration he audited a course Lu Xun offered in the history of Chinese fiction. In his youth, however, Lu Xun remained by and large a revered yet distant teacher in spite of his intellectual impact.

Things started to change in 1933 after Hu Feng assumed the offices of the head of the propaganda department and then the secretary of the League of Left-Wing Writers and became the liaison between Lu Xun and the League. According to Lu Xun's diary, he wrote fifty-one letters and paid thirty-nine visits to Lu Xun between January

1934 and Lu Xun's death in October 1936. After he gained Lu Xun's trust, they began to edit journals and other publications in collaboration. Meanwhile, his friendship with Lu Xun further aggravated his troubled relationship with Zhou Yang, his opponent in the debate over "typical characters," of whom Lu Xun had always been suspicious.

At this point a brief analysis of the respective positions occupied by Lu Xun, Zhou Yang, and Hu Feng in the League will help us understand their interactions with each other. First of all we should bear in mind that the organization of the League, a radical assemblage constantly in danger of persecution by the Guomindang police, was loose at best. With a changing membership and a porous control over its members' viewpoints, skirmishes, including the debate between Hu Feng and Zhou Yang over the "typical characters," repeatedly broke out in the ranks of the League. Living in semi-seclusion, Lu Xun only served as its titular leader and had little sway over its day-to-day operations. In his place, Zhou Yang and his cohorts, standing for the CCP and its orthodoxy, gathered a large amount of power in their hands, but not to the degree of excluding their adversaries from the power competition. To regain his leadership in the ideological realm, Lu Xun resorted to the strategy of radicalizing himself more than the radicals and, in that vein, he wrote his most caustic essays in the last years of his life. As for Hu Feng, a newcomer to the Shanghai scene of leftist literature with little to his credit and no backing from the CCP, it was understandable for him to side with Lu Xun in order to gain a foothold in the leftist camp. Intertwined with political convictions, factionalism, and personal animus, this three-way relationship eventually gave rise to the heated debate over the "Two Slogans."

First formulated in the Soviet Union in 1930, the slogan "National Defense Literature" (Guofang wenxue) was introduced by Zhou Yang into China in January 1934, but afterwards it received virtually no attention from other writers for more than a year. As the Chinese national crisis intensified and the CCP, prompted by the Comintern, began to focus more on its cooperation with the Guomindang through a new united front, a group of leftist writers, led by Zhou Yang, started a campaign to promote "National Defense Literature" at the end of 1935. With the change in historical circumstances and the tireless propagation of the Zhou Yang group, the slogan soon gained an increasing number of supporters in literary circles.

Meanwhile, Lu Xun took "National Defense Literature" as a be-

trayal to the tradition of revolutionary literature as well as an abdication of the leftist camp's leadership in the literary world. In a letter dated May 4, 1936, Lu Xun told his correspondent that he had decided not to join the Writers' Association, an organization Zhou Yang had set up to implement "National Defense Literature" after he dissolved the League. Lu Xun's move marked his open rift with Zhou Yang. When Feng Xuefeng came from Yan'an, Lu Xun consulted a few associates, including Mao Dun, Hu Feng, and Feng Xuefeng, in the formulation of an alternative slogan that would extend, rather than terminate, as they believed "National Defense Literature" would, the tradition of revolutionary literature. The slogan Lu Xun finally decided upon was "Mass Literature of the National Revolutionary War" (Minzu geming zhanzheng de dazhong wenxue).

Upon Lu Xun's request, Hu Feng wrote an article "What Do the Masses Demand of Literature?" (Renmin dazhong xiang wenxue yaoqiu shenme?) on May 9, 1936, in which the Lu Xun camp's alternative slogan was publicized for the first time. "Mass Literature of the National Revolutionary War," Hu Feng argued in his article, solidified the themes of all social conflicts instead of liquidating them. In this seminal article Hu Feng advocated the following themes for current literature:

The "Asian numbness" kept or even promoted among the masses by feudal ideology and traditionalism.

The obstacles to and the suppression of the working people's desire for life that decrease or even destroy their enthusiasm and power.

The extravagant lifestyle of the privileged and the abuse of power that harm the mobilization and unification of the people.²⁹

These themes, focused on the domestic agenda of antifeudalism, apparently attempted to continue the May Fourth project of cultural criticism and enlightenment at a time when the domestic agenda was increasingly dominated by the agenda of anti-imperialism and national salvation, an agenda that could also find its predecessor in the May Fourth movement, although the link was certainly less direct and more mediated by contemporary factors.

In the ensuing debate over the "Two Slogans," an issue far more palpable than the tension between cultural criticism and national

salvation was the concern over political compromise. We should remember that, after his clashes with the Beijing warlord regime in 1926 and his disillusionment with the Guangzhou Guomindang government in 1927, Lu Xun became increasingly radical in his political viewpoint in the last years of his life. As a staunch supporter of the League of Left-Wing Writers (the term "left-wing" was inserted into the name at his insistence), the militant Lu Xun openly associated himself with the left and with revolutionary literature in the 1930s, despite his reservations about the causes he sponsored and his leftist allies. While calling on his fellow leftists to wage a tenacious war against conservative social forces and setting himself up as their example by copiously writing essays in the manner of "dagger and javelin," he repeatedly warned them against the danger of becoming "salon revolutionaries" and backsliding into rightism. Any united front with nonradical social elements, in his view, had to be built with social revolution as its goal and with its leadership firmly in the hands of leftists. By changing the agenda of revolutionary literature from antifeudalism to anti-imperialism and by adulterating the ranks of leftist writers and relinquishing their leadership, "National Defense Literature" proved to him that his apprehension was not unfounded.

Contrary to the capitulatory "National Defense Literature," "Mass Literature of the National Revolutionary War" was conceived as an attempt to continue the proletarian revolutionary literature promoted thus far by the League, as Lu Xun declared in an article he dictated on his sickbed on June 10, 1936.³⁰ As such, Lu Xun went on to say, its subject matter should break through the confinement of "National Defense Literature" and should include, instead, everything that happened in the contemporary life in China.³¹ Lu Xun's emphasis on a panoramic view of contemporary social reality indicated that to a certain degree the debate over the "Two Slogans" was also a debate between the paradigms of critical realism and socialist realism. Five days before Lu Xun dictated his article, Zhou Yang published an article entitled "On National Defense Literature" (*Guangyu guofang wenxue*) in which he argued that national defense literature must adopt the method of "progressive realism." He defined "progressive realism" as "to portray reality truthfully, concretely and historically in the actual development of revolution for the sake of educating the working masses with the spirit of socialism,"³² an unmistakable echo of the official definition of socialist realism. Keeping in view the postu-

late of revolutionary tendentiousness in "National Defense Literature" and the emphasis on fullness and particularity in "Mass Literature of the National Revolutionary War," we may argue that in a sense the debate over the "Two Slogans" picked up where Hu Feng left off in his earlier veiled criticism of socialist realism as "formulism."

Pregnant with political and paradigmatical significance, the debate over the "Two Slogans" was not a "silly quarrel in itself" as C. T. Hsia once called it.³³ As far as Hu Feng was concerned, in spite of the fact that he, on Lu Xun's and Feng Xuefeng's advice, refrained from embroiling himself any further after writing his only article for the debate, the Lu Xun camp's firm resolution to keep alive the tradition of revolutionary literature and critical realism fundamentally determined the orientation of his future career as a critic and the editor of *Qiyue*. Like his mentor Lu Xun, he would remain focused on the domestic agenda of cultural criticism under all circumstances and devote his attention to the danger of betrayal within the leftist ranks to such an extent that, as a very vocal critic, he would, during the war-time, keep himself away from several major debates concerning writers outside the leftist circles: the debate over Zhang Tianyi's short story "Mr. Huawei;" the debate over Liang Shiqiu's call for a literature including, but not limited to, the theme of resistance; and the debate with the so-called *Zhanguo* (*Warning state*) writers. Necessitated by the mantle of Lu Xun's only genuine successor that he increasingly came to assume after the debate over the "Two Slogans," his unswerving focus demonstrated a typical case of an heir being inherited by a heritage. Ultimately, what Theodore Hutters describes as the claustrophobia in Hu Feng's wartime writings was determined by Hu Feng's position.³⁴

The debate over the two slogans ended with Lu Xun's death in October 1936, but the full ramifications of "Mass Literature of the National Revolutionary War" did not play out until the inception of *Qiyue* in October 1937. From its beginning the journal unabashedly displayed its inheritance of the position held by the Lu Xun camp in the debate. In its inaugural statement "Willing to Grow with Our Readers" (*Yuan he duzhe yitong chengzhang*), Hu Feng defined the cultural tasks of the war against Japan with propositions that harked back to those he made in "What Do the Masses Demand of Literature?" more than a year ago. Instead of uncritically eulogizing the war as an endeavor of national salvation, as the majority of Chinese writers

were doing at the time, he regarded the war as a catharsis that would expose the weaknesses of the Chinese caused by prolonged feudal oppression. The war, in his vision, was not only a military war but also a cultural war that would finally purify and strengthen the Chinese nation.³⁵ His advocacy of unremitting social criticism and social reform obviously followed the direction pointed out by Lu Xun during the debate over the "Two Slogans."

The genealogical relation between the Lu Xun camp and *Qiyue* can also be seen in the makeup of the journal's early contributors and, later, the way Hu Feng supported his young disciples. Major contributors to *Qiyue*, at its early stage, included Lu Xun's protégés Xiao Hong, Xiao Jun, and Duanmu Hongliang. These young but more or less established writers published in *Qiyue* personal, sometimes nostalgic, essays imitative of Lu Xun's prose. In the subsequent stages of *Qiyue*, when most of Lu Xun's associates no longer played important roles in the journal, Hu Feng's promotion of new writers bore a strong resemblance to Lu Xun's sponsorship of his followers.³⁶ From his personal correspondence we can see that, like Lu Xun, Hu Feng devoted much of his energy to training a younger generation of writers who would not hesitate to do battle with their enemies on matters of principle. With himself at the center of *Qiyue*, Hu Feng tried to organize his protégés into a closely knit group, demanding, again in Lu Xun's manner, ideological and political allegiance as well as personal loyalty.

All things considered, *Qiyue* should be viewed as an outgrowth of the Lu Xun camp's uncompromising stand in the debate over the "Two Slogans." Throughout its evolution Hu Feng faithfully kept step with what he understood as the spirit of Lu Xun, a highly critical perception of Chinese society that Lu Xun had achieved after decades of struggles and disappointments. The spirit of Lu Xun, in Hu Feng's interpretation, was characterized by its keen awareness of the tenacity of tradition in all walks of life, including the revolutionary ranks. While insisting on the importance and urgency of cultural criticism, it gave little room for facile optimism and constantly stayed on guard against any compromise on its agenda. Fully displayed in the debate over the "Two Slogans," it was repeatedly evoked afterwards by Hu Feng and his *Qiyue* followers to clarify their program and to castigate their opponents. In that sense it remained the guiding principle throughout the existence of the journal.