



East
Asian
History

NUMBER 7 · JUNE 1994 THE CONTINUATION OF *Papers on Far Eastern History*



Institute of Advanced Studies
Australian National University

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This is the seventh issue of *East Asian History* in the series previously entitled *Papers on Far Eastern History*. The journal is published twice a year.

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Subscription Enquiries Subscription Manager, *East Asian History*, at the above address
Annual Subscription Australia A\$45 Overseas US\$45 (for two issues)

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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover photograph Dolmen in Hwanghae-do Unyul-gun (Chōsen Sōtokufu, *Chōsen koseki zufu* [Album of ancient Korean sites and monuments], vol.2 [Keijō, 1915])

LU XUN, LEON TROTSKY, AND THE CHINESE TROTSKYISTS

 Gregor Benton

Probably the first and certainly the finest Chinese writer to be strongly influenced by Leon Trotsky's theory of art and literature was Lu Xun 鲁迅, the universally acknowledged giant of modern Chinese writing.¹ Yet literary historians have paid scant attention to this intellectual bond between Lu Xun and Trotsky;² and in China, where for many years the safely dead Lu Xun has served as an icon of political orthodoxy, knowledge of his link to one of the Communist International's hairiest bugbears has been systematically suppressed. Lu Xun has even been portrayed by the Chinese authorities as an implacable opponent of the Trotskyists, whom he allegedly held in deepest political contempt. In 1993, however, new evidence emerged that would seem to discredit this view of him, and at the same time to right a great wrong committed against the Trotskyists more than half a century ago by their enemies in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

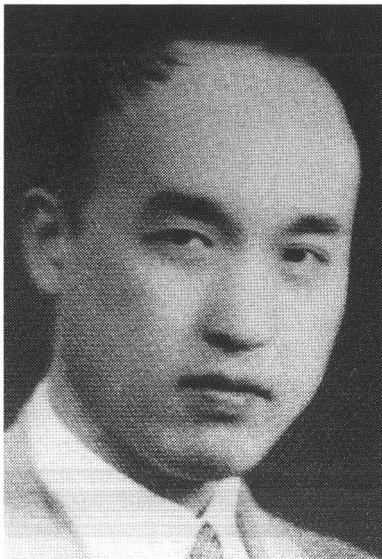
Lu Xun read *Literature and Revolution*, a key text that contains the essence of Trotsky's thought on literature,³ in Japanese translation; he sponsored its translation into Chinese by Wei Shuyuan 韦漱园 (from Russian) and Li Qiye 李弃野 (from English), but Wei died of tuberculosis, so the translation was done by Li alone, and published in 1926. Lu Xun himself translated (from Japanese) Trotsky's long speech delivered at the meeting on literary policy organised by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on May 9, 1924,⁴ and in 1926 he translated (also from Japanese) the third chapter, on Alexander Blok, of *Literature and Revolution* for an appendix to a translation published by Weiming Congshu 未名丛书 (Unnamed Library), under Lu Xun's editorship, of Blok's famous poem "The twelve."⁵ In April 1927 Lu Xun, echoing Trotsky, said of 'people's literature' that it "is nothing of the sort, for the people have not yet opened their mouths. These works voice the sentiments of onlookers."⁶

¹ For an analysis of Trotsky's views on literature, see Baruch Knei-Paz, *The social and political thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp.289–301.

² A connection between the two thinkers is briefly noted in Paul G. Pickowicz, "Qu Qiubai's critique of the May Fourth generation: early Chinese Marxist literary criticism," in *Modern Chinese literature in the May Fourth era*, ed. Merle Goldman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 351–84, at 368.

³ This book was published in Moscow in 1923 as *Literatura i revolyutsiya*. For an English translation see Leon Trotsky, *Literature and revolution*, tr. Rose Strunsky (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1960).

⁴ I have this information about the translation into Chinese of Trotsky's writings on literature from Wang Fanxi, in a personal communication. See also Hui Quan 惠泉 (Wang Fanxi 王凡西), "Zhongyiben chubansha xiaoxu" [Translator's preface to the Chinese edition], Tuoluociji (Trotsky), *Wenxue yu geming* [Literature and revolution], tr. Hui Quan (Hong Kong: Xinda Chubanshe, 1971), pp.1–3. According to a Western study, "Lu Xun and other members of the Unnamed Society translated Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*." (See Pickowicz, "Qu Qiubai's critique," p.367.) The most recent Chinese translation, in this case from the Russian, of *Literature and revolution*, is Tuoluociji, *Wenxue* / OVER

Figure 1*Leon Trotsky (photo courtesy of Alex Buchman)***Figure 2***Hu Feng, Shanghai, 1934*

/yu geming, tr. Liu Wenfei et al. (Beijing: Waiguo Wenxue Chubanshe, 1992).

⁵ Yi Ding (Lou Guohua), *Lu Xun: qi ren, qi shi, jiqi shidai* [Lu Xun: the man, his life, and

It is interesting to note that Lu Xun's sponsorship in 1926 of the translation of Trotsky's writings clearly postdated Trotsky's break with Stalin. On May 22, 1929, three months after Trotsky's final deportation from the Soviet Union, Lu Xun (in a talk to Yanjing University's Chinese Literature Society) was still openly expressing the same point of view as Trotsky on the relationship between politics and literature.⁷ He stopped referring to Trotsky's theory after 1929, probably for diplomatic reasons, but its rejection as vulgar and ignorant of the idea that culture merely mirrors economic interest continued to inform his lifetime's work.⁸ Like Trotsky, Lu Xun believed that the arts must be a sphere unto themselves rather than some artificial product of official decrees.

Lu Xun's propagation of Trotsky's libertarian and pluralist theory of art and literature directly or indirectly inspired the left-wing writers Wang Shiwei 王实味, Ding Ling 丁玲, Luo Feng 罗峰, Xiao Jun 萧军, and Ai Qing 艾青, persecuted by the Maoists in Yan'an in 1942. It also appears to have swayed the literary thinking of Hu Feng 胡风, a poet and maverick literary theorist who—though himself a Stalinist—was rarely out of trouble with the Party and in 1955 became the object of a

nationwide ideological campaign because of his opposition to literary dictation by the leadership.⁹

The overt Trotskyist connections of Wang Shiwei, the principal figure in Yan'an's literary opposition, are well known,¹⁰ but the apparent origin of what we might call Hu Feng's literary Trotskyism, implied but never plainly stated, has only now come to light, in his posthumous papers published in

[his age] (Paris: Centre de publication Asie Orientale, 1978), p.307. See also Mabel Lee, "Suicide of the creative self: the case of Lu Hsün," in *Austrina: essays in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the founding of the Oriental Society of Australia*, ed. A. R. Davis and A. D. Stefanowska (Sydney: Oriental Society of Australia, 1982), pp.140–67, at 166–7.

⁶ Lu Xun, "Literature of a revolutionary period," *Selected works*, transl. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang, 4 vols (1956; third ed., Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980), 2: 334–41, at 340.

⁷ See "Some thoughts on our new literature," in Lu Xun, *Selected works*, vol.3, pp.51–6, particularly the last paragraph on p.52.

⁸ Yi Ding, *Lu Xun*, pp.284–7.

⁹ See the relevant chapters of Merle Goldman, *Literary dissent in communist China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967).

¹⁰ See Gregor Benton, "Writers and the Party:

/the ordeal of Wang Shiwei, Yan'an, 1942," in *Wildlilies, poisonous weeds*, ed. Gregor Benton (London: Pluto, 1982), pp.168–75.

¹¹ Wang Fanxi (1907–) joined the CCP together with Wang Shiwei in 1925 while in Beijing. He became a Trotskyist in Moscow in 1928. He returned to China in 1929 and worked for a while as an aide to Zhou Enlai. Active as a Trotskyist with Chen Duxiu in 1930–1931, after being expelled from the Party, he was arrested for the first time in 1931 and again in 1937. He spent most of the intervening years in gaol. He has lived in exile since 1949. His memoirs were pirated in Beijing in 1981.

¹² See Wang Fan-hsi, *Memoirs of a Chinese revolutionary*, transl. with an introduction by Gregor Benton, second revised edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p.16. Also among Wang Fanxi's friends in Beijing's 'Montmartre' of the 1920s was Feng Xuefeng, who together with Hu Feng became a main

Beijing in 1993. Hu Feng's acquaintance with future Trotskyist thinkers began as early as the summer of 1925, when (as Zhang Guangren 张光人) he studied for a year in the same class as Wang Shiwei and the future Trotskyist leader Wang Fanxi¹¹ at Beijing University's Department of Letters. Though this coincidence had no immediate political issue, it is interesting to note that one small class in 1925 thus harboured the two men who would become Chinese Communism's best-known literary dissidents and martyrs, and another who would be among its fiercest left-wing critics.¹²

In an article written in Beijing in 1984, but not published until 1993, after his death, Hu Feng recalled some of the writings that had influenced his thinking about literature in the 1920s, and, in so doing, incidentally revealed what was probably the primary source of the dissidence that stubbornly informed his view on literature for the rest of his life.¹³ In an extremely condensed passage at the beginning of his article, he mentioned the translation made under Lu Xun's direction of Blok's poem "The Twelve" and went on to praise Lu Xun's postscript to the publication, which he said had helped him to understand the relationship between literature and revolution and "further freed him from a vulgar sociological [understanding] of the creative process." He added that the postscript had even allowed him to appreciate (Lu Xun's translation of) the theoretical work *Kumon nosbōchō* 苦悶的象徵 (Symbols of Agony) by Kuriyagawa Hakuson 厨川白村, an 'idealist' Japanese literary critic who put forward the quite un-Marxist view (which Hu Feng would otherwise have felt duty-bound to condemn) that "agony or frustration arising from the suppression of human vitality is the foundation of literature and art, and the way to express it is symbolism in its broadest sense."¹⁴

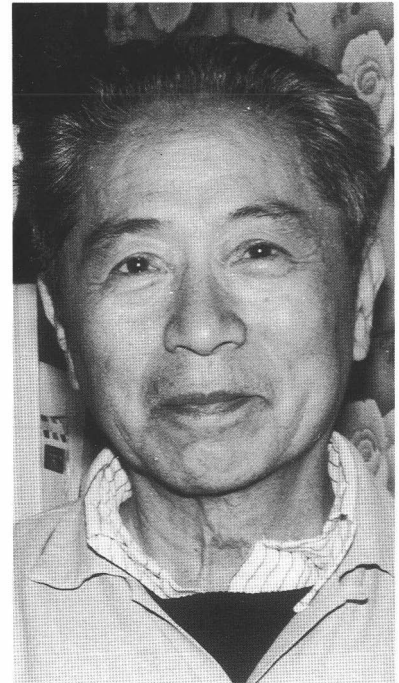
Hu Feng, like many young left-wing Chinese scholars and writers in 1926, had fallen under the spell of *Symbols of Agony*, but had been puzzled by how an 'idealist' like Kuriyagawa Hakuson could explain so convincingly the process of artistic creation, which according to 'sociologists' only materialists could grasp. After reading Lu Xun's publication of "The Twelve," however, Hu Feng realised that not all Marxists believed that everything in the creative process has a 'material' or 'economic' base that can be discerned only by those schooled in the so-called 'laws of sociology'.¹⁵

Though, for obvious reasons, Hu Feng did not explicitly mention the chapter from Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* that Lu Xun had used to illuminate the literary genius of the 'bourgeois' Blok, it is quite clear that this chapter (together with Lu Xun's brief postscript, which is deeply imbued with the spirit of Trotsky's style of literary appreciation and with a profound respect for Trotsky's theory of literary creation) was the early mainspring of his later opposition to Party-decreed "mechanicalism" and Mao's "cultural desert."¹⁶

In 1936, about a year before China went to war against Japan, Lu Xun criticised calls by some pro-Communist writers for a "literature of national defense," which in his view smacked of class collaboration. Instead, he proposed a "literature of the masses for national revolutionary

Figure 3

Wang Fanxi



/actor in the story of Lu Xun and the Trotskyists; but according to Wang Fanxi, Feng was probably unacquainted at the time with either Hu Feng or Wang Shiwei (personal communication).

¹³ See Hu Feng, "Lu Xun xiansheng" [Mr Lu Xun], *Xin wenxue shiliao* [New materials on the history of the new (modern Chinese) literature] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1993), 1: 4-36.

¹⁴ Lu Xun's postscript to "The twelve" is published in Lu Xun, *Quanjil* [Collected works] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1963), vol.7, pp.397-401. On the little-known Kuriyagawa Hakuson (1880-1923) see Ching-mao Cheng, "The impact of Japanese literary trends on modern Chinese writers," in Goldman, *Modern Chinese literature*, pp.63-88, at 84-6.

¹⁵ For an elaboration of this point and a detailed analysis of the relevant passage in Hu Feng's article, see Wang Fanxi, "Hu Feng yizhu duhou gan" [A reaction to reading Hu Feng's posthumous writings], *Sbiyue pinglun* [October review] 169 (March 1994): 36-42.

¹⁶ Hu Feng, "Mr Lu Xun," p.5.

Figure 4*Lu Xun, March 23, 1936, Shanghai*

war.”¹⁷ (Though this slogan is usually attributed to Lu Xun, his disciple and associate Hu Feng claimed in a recently published article to have been the person who actually coined it;¹⁸ at the time, however, Lu Xun publicly took responsibility for its appearance.¹⁹) The rival slogans can be seen in retrospect to have roughly mirrored two positions in the CCP: Mao’s position, which advocated struggle as well as unity in the common front with the Guomindang against Japan; and Wang Ming’s, which advocated unity without friction.

But Lu Xun’s favoured slogan also had some points in common with the Trotskyist position on the war, i.e., support for the resistance but class-based criticism of the Chinese government.²⁰ After the publication of the slogan, the Trotskyist Chen Qichang 陈其昌,²¹ impressed by its radical content and persuaded of the “unbending morality” of Lu Xun (whom he idolised), sent the writer some Trotskyist literature. In an accompanying letter, Chen told Lu Xun that the only result of the new united front ordered by the “Moscow bureaucrats” would be “to deliver the revolutionary masses into the hands of the [Guomindang] executioners for further slaughter.”²² Chen Qichang was not alone in sensing a Trotskyist dimension to the slogan promoted by Lu Xun, whose Party critics did their best to slap a ‘Trotskyist’ hat on him on account of it. Hu Feng’s posthumous papers revealed that even Communist leaders in Yan’an had suspected him of Trotskyist sympathies for authoring it;²³ Tian Han 田汉 and Zhou Yang 周扬, two leading supporters of the “literature of national defense” slogan, even tried to convince Lu Xun that Hu Feng “was a traitor sent by the authorities.”²⁴

Shortly before Lu Xun’s death, in 1936, a document appeared that was purportedly his reply to the “Letter from the Trotskyites.” This document, which created quite a stir at the time of its publication, defended Stalin against Chen Qichang’s criticism. It went on to imply that the Trotskyists were in the pay of the Japanese and drew a clear political line between Lu Xun and his Trotskyist correspondent:

¹⁷ On Lu Xun’s resistance to the new line, see Tsi-an Hsia, “Lu Hsün [Lu Xun] and the League of Leftist Writers,” in Tsi-an Hsia, *The gate of darkness: studies on the leftist literary movement in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), pp.101-45.

¹⁸ See Hu Feng, “Guanyu sanshi niandai qianqi he Lu Xun youguande ershiertiao tiwen” [Twenty-two questions regarding Lu Xun in the early 1930s], *Xinhua wenzhai*, no.3 (1993): 135-46, at 143.

¹⁹ See Lu Xun, “Reply to Xu Maoyong and on the question of the united front against Japanese aggression,” in Lu Xun, *Selected works*, vol.4, pp.283-300, at 291.

²⁰ See Wang Fan-hsi, *Memoirs*, p.228.

²¹ Chen Qichang (1901-43) was a Beijing student leader, and a member of the middle-ranking cadre of the CCP after 1925. He turned to Trotskyism in 1929, and became a leader of the Chinese Trotskyist movement. He was arrested and executed by the Japanese gendarmerie.

²² Chen Qichang’s letter is reprinted as Chen [Zhongshan] 陈[中山], “The letter,” in Lu Xun, *Selected works*, vol.4, pp.279-80; the citation is from p.280. See also Wang Fan-hsi, *Memoirs*, pp.183-4, where Wang points out that Chen had not discussed the contents of his letter with any other of the Trotskyists before sending it; as a result, they criticised him for his action.

²³ Hu Feng, “Twenty-two questions,” p.143.

²⁴ Tsi-an Hsia, “Lu Hsün and the League of Leftist Writers,” p.132, also noted that Lu Xun’s policy in this period amounted to “an eclecticism of Trotskyism and the current line of the Communist Party. This was perhaps the only compromise he could make to satisfy the demands of Mao Tse-tung and Stalin without sacrificing the principle of class struggle.” But Hsia wrongly characterised the Trotskyist policy as one of “proletarian revolution as against the national interest.” As Chen Qichang made clear in his letter to Lu Xun, the Trotskyists had been calling since the late 1920s for a “revolutionary democratic struggle” (Chen Zhongshan, “The letter,” p.280).

²⁴ Lu Xun, “Reply to Xu Maoyong,” p.294.

Your “theory” [that the anti-Japanese united front is a betrayal of the revolution] is certainly much loftier than that of Mao Zedong: yours is high in the sky, while his is simply on the ground. But admirable as such loftiness is, it will unfortunately be just the thing welcomed by the Japanese aggressors Since the Japanese welcome your lofty theories, I cannot help feeling concern for you when I see your well-printed publications. If someone deliberately spreads a malicious rumour to discredit you, accusing you of accepting money for these publications from the Japanese, how are you to clear yourselves? I say this not to retaliate because some of you formerly joined certain others to accuse me of accepting Russian roubles.²⁵ No, I would not stoop so low, and I do not believe that you could stoop so low as to take money from the Japanese But I want to warn you that your lofty theory will not be welcomed by the Chinese people, and that your behaviour runs counter to present-day Chinese people’s standards of morality. This is all I have to say about your views.

In conclusion, this sudden receipt of a letter and periodicals from you has made me rather uncomfortable It must be because some of my ‘comrades-in-arms’ have been accusing me of certain faults. But whatever my faults, I am convinced that my views are quite different from yours.²⁶

Ironically, the letter’s implication that the Trotskyists were traitors was later made explicit by Wang Ming 王明, whose policies Lu Xun had—knowingly or unknowingly—been attacking.²⁷ Also ironically, and tragically, Chen Qichang, the man smeared in the letter as Japan’s hireling, was seized by Japanese gendarmes while working for the anti-Japanese resistance in Shanghai in 1942, and was tortured and killed.²⁸

The Shanghai Trotskyists responded to Lu Xun’s letter with a brief “Special Declaration” written in the name of the “Communist League of China (Bolshevik-Leninists)” by Wang Fanxi and published in *Huobua* 火花 (Spark), the League’s theoretical journal. The declaration pointed out that

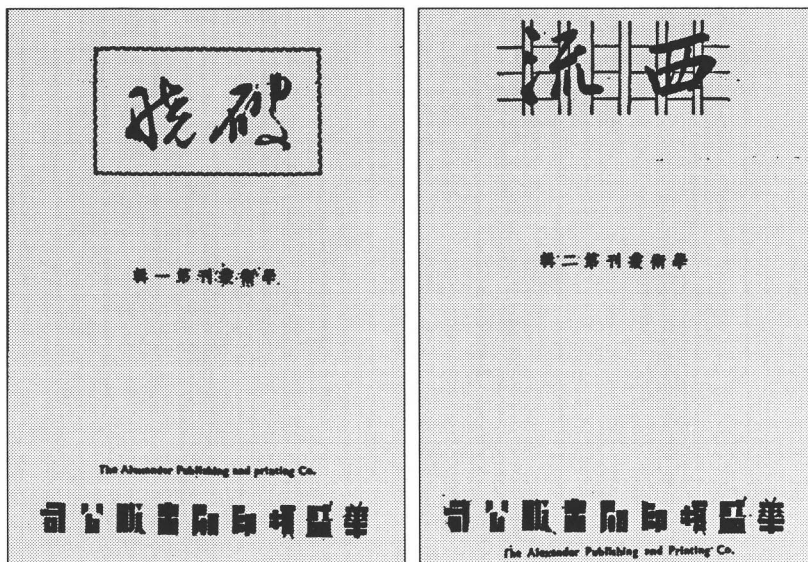
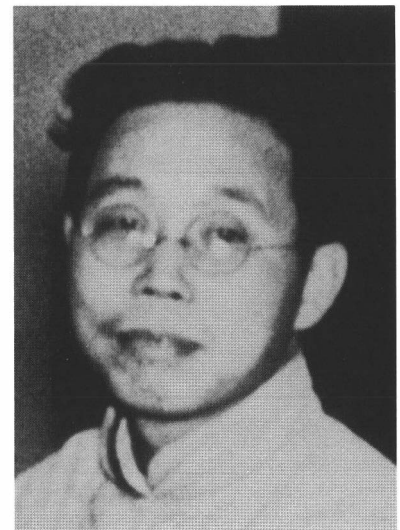


Figure 5

Chen Qichang, Shanghai, 1936
(photo courtesy Alex Buchman)



²⁵ I questioned Wang Fanxi about this claim; Wang flatly denies that any Trotskyist ever made such an allegation, and though he accepts that people associated with the Guomindang may have included Lu Xun on their list of recipients of ‘Kremlin gold’, he personally doubts that even they would have been so stupid. He interprets the charge as an instance of the familiar tactic of pretending to have been attacked first when you yourself go onto the attack.

²⁶ The purported reply by Lu Xun is translated in Lu Xun, *Selected works*, vol.4, pp.281–2; the passage cited is on p.282.

²⁷ See Yi Ding, *Lu Xun*, pp.353–6, for a statement of the case that Lu Xun knew that his target was Wang Ming.

²⁸ Wang Fan-hsi, *Memoirs*, pp.159–61.

Figure 6

Poxiao and Xiliu, journals published by the Chinese Trotskyists in wartime Shanghai, under Japanese occupation

Figure 7

The Provisional Central Committee of the (Trotskyist) Communist League of China, Shanghai, winter 1936, in Frank Glass' (Li Fu-jen's 李福仁) flat in the former French Concession. Clockwise from left: Wang Fanxi, Frank Glass, Hua Zhenbin 华振斌 (not a CC member, responsible for printing work), Han Jun 寒君, Chen Qichang, Jiang Zhenlong 蒋振东 (Photo courtesy of Alex Buchman)



²⁹ "Tebie shengming" [Special declaration], *Huobua*, vol.3, no.3 (Sept. 25, 1936). The text of this declaration can also be found in Yi Ding, "Lu Xun yu Tuopai wentide yixie xin ziliao" [Some new materials regarding the question of Lu Xun and the Trotskyists], *Xin guancha* [New observer] (Hong Kong), pp.24–6, at 24. (I do not know the number of the *New Observer* in which this article appeared, but the year was 1976 or 1977.)

³⁰ Chen Qichang's second letter to Lu Xun, dated July 4, 1936, was republished as an appendix to Yi Ding, "Some new materials," on pp.25–6.

Figure 8

Lou Guobua 楼国华



although Lu Xun had entitled his letter "Reply to a letter from the Chinese Trotskyists," in fact Chen Qichang had been the sole author of the initial correspondence, for which he bore the complete responsibility. The declaration linked Lu Xun's letter to Stalin's general campaign against Trotsky, and concluded:

We disdain to expend valuable time and energy on profitless disputation with Lu Xun. We simply call on all proletarian fighters and all revolutionaries to protest at the Stalinist Party's campaign to unite the enemy classes of the entire world against us, and in particular at the shameless vilification of Comrade Trotsky. For Lu Xun's slanders are merely one slender thread floating in a great torrent of venom.²⁹

Chen Qichang, in contrast, was clearly wounded by Lu Xun's insinuations, and wrote him a second private letter even longer than the first. In this second letter, he returned to the theme of the united front and bitterly reproached Lu Xun for having replied to his political arguments with cheap mudslinging. "You sneakily spread rumours that the Japanese pay us to produce our journals, etc.," he wrote.

You really have a nerve to twist things so utterly! The Bolshevik-Leninists' [i.e., Trotskyists'] *Douzbeng*. 斗争 [Struggle] and *Huobua* only exist because comrades who skimp on food and clothes and live in tiny garret rooms are prepared to drip sweat in order to bring them to the light of day. Precisely because we have no financial resources, *Douzbeng*, previously a weekly, has already gone fortnightly, and according to reports will soon have to go monthly. If the Bolshevik-Leninists really were paid by the Japanese to produce their publications, then no doubt they would be in the same position as you people, who openly bring out book after book and journal after journal, and have them displayed for sale along the main roads ... instead of printing and distributing them yourselves.

Chen Qichang waited in vain for a reply to this second letter. The letter remained hidden in Lu Xun's archive for more than forty years, until January

1976 or 1977, when it was published in Beijing in the series *Lu Xun Yanjiu Ziliao* 鲁迅研究资料 (Research materials on Lu Xun), no.4.³⁰

Today, evidence has finally emerged to show that the hostile and sarcastic reply to Chen Qichang's first letter was written not by Lu Xun but by the Communist Feng Xuefeng 冯雪峰, using his friend's name but not necessarily with his conscious consent (Lu Xun at the time being bed-ridden and soon to die). As early as 1978, in his book about Lu Xun published in Paris by the Centre de publication Asie Orientale, the Trotskyist writer Lou Guohua³¹ (then living in Hong Kong) had named several arguments to back his suspicion that the letter strongly reflected Feng's influence. Its slanderous tone was inconsonant with Lu Xun's high standards of moral integrity; in particular, Lu Xun detested the 'rouble theory', and would hardly have used a new variant of it against his political opponents.³² What's more, during the brief recovery from his illness that preceded his eventual death (on October 19, 1936), Lu Xun never once returned to the question of Chen's letter. He did, however, say something in a subsequent letter to Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸 (his Communist opponent in the battle of the slogans, and administrative secretary at the time of the League of Left-Wing Writers) that sharply called into question the intended shaming of Chen Qichang. "[J]udging by my own experience," he wrote, "those who pose as 'revolutionaries' are prone to slander others as 'renegades', 'counter-revolutionaries', 'Trotskyites' or even 'traitors', and are usually up to no good." He went on: "What we should first get rid of are those despots who use a great banner as a tiger-skin to disguise themselves and intimidate others; when they feel the least offended they use their 'authority' (!) to pass sentence on others, and the charges are fearfully heavy."³³

During his recovery, in some "Jottings" published in *Zuojia* 作家 (The writer) in October 1936, Lu Xun reiterated the need for left-wingers to retain their independence in the projected anti-Japanese united front; his arguments, though elliptic, were similar in spirit to those in the letter sent him by Chen Qichang. The second and third "Jottings" were:

Naturally it is good to proclaim by the written and spoken word the sufferings of those who are slaves under a foreign yoke. But we must take great care lest people reach this conclusion: "Then it is better after all to be slaves to our own patriots."

Figure 9

Lu Xun, Feng Xuefeng, and Feng's family, Shanghai, 1931



³¹ Lou Guohua (1906–) joined the CCP in 1925 and became a Trotskyist in 1928. He is one of the few survivors of the first generation of Chinese Trotskyists, and has been the chief publisher of Trotskyist literature in Chinese in Hong Kong.

³² Though famous for his scathing polemics, Lu Xun clearly distinguished between sarcasm and calumny, slander, or rumour-mongering. For example, in "Abuse and threats are not fighting" (Lu Xun, *Selected works*, vol.3, pp.197–9), he said (see p.199) that "slander, rumour, threats and abuse ... should be made over to the lap-dog writers ... [M]ilitant writers ... must stop at ridicule or at heated denunciation."

³³ Lu Xun, "Reply to Xu Maoyong," pp.287–8, 298.

³⁴ Lu Xun, “Banxia xiaoji” [Mid-summer jottings], in Lu Xun, *Collected works*, vol.6, pp.480–3, at 480–1.

³⁵ A minor error in the English translation (by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang) of Lu Xun’s “Mid-summer jottings” may, unintentionally, have added credence to the belief that Lu Xun readily attributed venal motives to his political opponents; for those who read Lu Xun in English, the mistake seemed to legitimise (by making commonplace) the implication in the letter to Chen Qichang that the Chinese Trotskyists were paid agents of the Japanese. In the article, Lu Xun criticised “revolutionary writers” who practised *nakuan* 纳款, an unfamiliar archaism that literally seems to mean ‘receiving sums of money’ or, in the Yangs’ rendering, ‘the acceptance of bribes’ (Lu Xun, “Mid-summer jottings,” in Lu Xun, *Selected works*, vol.4, pp.301–4, at 302). However, *nakuan* means not ‘to take bribes’ but ‘to submit’ (and, in the original sense, ‘pay tribute’). In using it, Lu Xun was therefore criticising those leftists who had surrendered to the Guomindang authorities after 1927, and were now posing as precursors of the newly-hatched united front.

³⁶ Zheng Chaolin (1901–), a writer and translator, joined the CCP in Paris in 1922. He returned to China in 1924 to edit the Party organ *Xiangdao* 向导 [Guide weekly]. He was a member of the Party’s Hubei Provincial Committee during the Revolution of 1925–27, and a participant in the Emergency Conference of August 7, 1927. He became a Trotskyist in 1929, and was a founder and leader of the Chinese Trotskyist organisation. He served seven years in prison under Chiang Kai-shek. Arrested by the Maoists in 1952, he was kept in prison without trial until 1979. His memoirs were published in China in 1986.

Since a ‘united front’ was proposed, those ‘revolutionary writers’ who went over to the enemy have reappeared, posing as pioneers of the ‘united front’. Their contemptible surrender to and collusion with the enemy is now made out to be ‘progressive’ and glorious.³⁴

“Jotting” number two, which apparently referred to the Japanese occupation of ‘Manchuria’, warned against those who would prefer the rule of Chiang Kai-shek to that of the Mikado. “Jotting” number three referred to leftists like the playwright Tian Han and the novelist Mu Mutian 穆木天, who in Lu Xun’s opinion had made their ‘peace’ with the Nationalists too early, either by recanting or by involuntary submission.³⁵

As for the stout defence of Stalin made in the letter to Chen Qichang, Lou Guohua pointed out that Lu Xun had by no means unconditionally supported the dictator, and quoted as evidence a story told him by his cousin Lou Shiyi 楼适夷, a senior editor in Beijing under the Communists. Lou Shiyi’s story concerned the publication of André Gide’s *Retour de l’URSS*, which had earned Gide the label in Stalinist circles of ‘fascist running-dog’ because of its criticism of the Stalin cult and its defence of the Trotskyists; Gide’s book had gone straight onto the Chinese Communists’ blacklist after Zheng Chaolin 郑超麟³⁶ translated it in 1936.³⁷ According to Lou Shiyi, Lu Xun, who thought extremely highly of Gide, had opposed the denunciation of him, and had even said that if he had seen what Gide had seen in the Soviet Union, he would probably have written the same thing. Here, said Lou Guohua, was the real Lu Xun, a man quite different from the author of the infamous letter.³⁸

Lou Guohua also knew that in his personal relations, even with political unpersons routinely coldshouldered by his Party friends, Lu Xun was completely lacking in the sectarian spite that the letter to Chen Qichang epitomised. An example of Lu Xun’s principled refusal to live by political proscriptions was his friendship with the US Trotskyist Harold Isaacs, in



Figure 10

Agnes Smedley, George Bernard Shaw, Soong Ch'ing-ling (Song Qingling) 宋庆龄, Harold Isaacs, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, Lin Yutang 林语堂, and Lu Xun, Shanghai, 1933

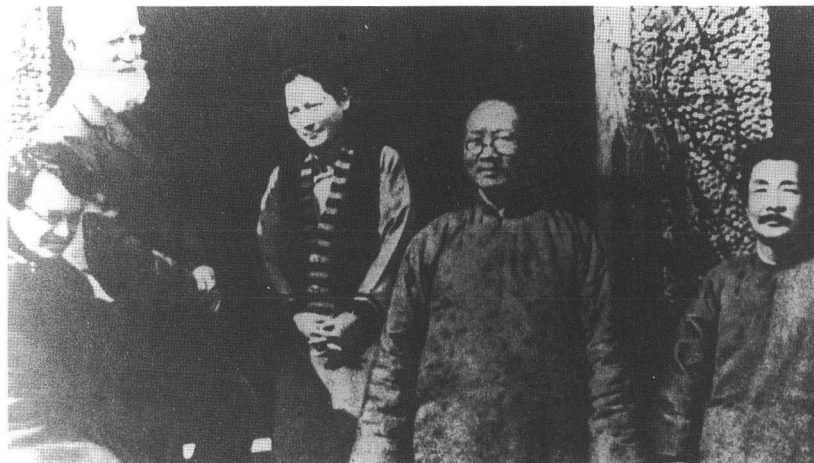
whose honour he gave a farewell dinner on the eve of Isaacs' departure from Shanghai in 1934.³⁹

In his recently published 1984 article, Hu Feng told the whole story behind the "Lu Xun letter," and in so doing bore out Lou Guohua's early hunches.⁴⁰ Hu Feng's account revealed that Lu Xun had been in no position to discuss the reply to Chen Qichang's letter, or even to sit up or speak. It also showed that part of Feng Xuefeng's motivation for smearing the Trotskyists was to defend himself, Lu Xun, and other supporters of the radical slogan against the charge of Trotskyism that their opponents in the Party were levelling at them; and that Feng did not scruple at subjecting Lu Xun to the most cynical manipulation. Hu Feng's complete lack of Trotskyist sympathies would seem to put beyond dispute the sincerity of his story about the letter.

"[*Xianshi wenxue* 现实文学 (Realistic Literature)] published Lu Xun's 'Letter to the Trotskyites' and 'On our current literary movement'," wrote Hu Feng.

The two articles both made it appear that they had been dictated by him [Lu Xun] and transcribed by O. V. Actually, both were drafted by Feng Xuefeng. O. V. was an attempt at rendering my name,⁴¹ so that no one would guess that it was actually he [Feng Xuefeng]. He was a Party leader, so I felt it was my duty to do all I could to shield him.

After the question of the slogans had arisen, the "literature of national defence" faction went on an all-out offensive. Feng Xuefeng flew into something of a panic, and wanted to take steps to stem the offensive. At the time, Lu Xun was seriously ill and could neither sit up nor speak; it was not possible even to discuss it with him. Just then the foolish Trotskyists, believing the rumours, thought that they might be able to profit from the situation, and wrote a letter hoping to 'draw' Lu Xun over to their side. Lu Xun was angry when he read the letter, and Feng Xuefeng drafted this reply after he himself had read it. The 'literature of national defence' faction were spreading rumours to the effect that



³⁷ Lou Shiyi, "Xu" [Preface], in Zheng Chaolin, *Yu Yin canji* [Surviving poems by Yu Yin (Zheng Chaolin)], ed. Zhu Zheng (Changsha: Hunan Renmin Chubanshe, 1989), pp.1-9, at 5. Zheng's was one of three translations of *Retour de l'URSS* that appeared in Shanghai.

³⁸ Yi Ding, *Lu Xun*, pp.246-9.

³⁹ See Harold R. Isaacs, *Re-encounters in China: notes of a journey in a time capsule* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1985), pp.111-17; and Yi Ding, *Lu Xun*, pp.310-12. According to Wang Fanxi, Lu Xun did not necessarily know that Isaacs had become a Trotskyist; though Isaacs had fallen out with the CCP's underground workers, he remained a friend of Soong Ch'ing-ling and was, like Lu Xun, a member of Soong's China League for Civil Rights. (In 1976, Xinhua News Agency published a group photograph of Soong Ch'ing-ling, Lu Xun, and others from which Isaacs had been painted out.) Isaacs, however, was convinced that the dinner had a special meaning: "what looked like a simple friendly act was in fact a political and personal act of considerable weight" (*Re-encounters in China*, p.115).

⁴⁰ See Hu Feng, "Mr Lu Xun." Lou Guohua responded (under the pseudonym Yi Ding) to the publication of this article with an as yet unpublished essay entitled "Changda ban shijide yijian lishi gongan" [An historical case unsettled for as long as half a century] (September 30, 1993); Zheng Chaolin also responded, with an essay (also as yet unpublished) entitled "Tan Hu Feng 'Lu Xun xiansheng' yougan" [A reaction to Hu Feng's "Mr Lu Xun"] (Aug. 23, 1993).

⁴¹ According to both Tsi-an Hsia, "Lu Hsün and the League of Leftist Writers," p.132, fn.81, and Yi Ding, *Lu Xun*, pp.246-8, O. V. stood for Feng Xuefeng, but as Hu Feng himself pointed out, actually it stood for Hu Feng (probably written something like Oo Vung, an approximation of the Shanghai-dialect pronunciation of his name). The mistake probably derived from the annotation to vol.6 of the Chinese edition of Lu Xun's *Collected works* (p.616, fn.16).

Figure 11

The same photo, published in Chinese Literature, after doctoring, with Isaacs and Lin Yutang deleted

⁴² “Lun xianzai womende wenxue yundong: Bingzhong da fangwenzhe, O. V. bilu” [On our current literary movement: answers given while ill to a visitor, recorded in writing by O. V.] is in Lu Xun, *Collected works*, vol.6, pp.475–7; it is dated June 6, 1936.

⁴³ Hu Feng, “Mr Lu Xun,” p.28.

⁴⁴ This point is made in Zheng Chaolin, “Reaction.” In his “Reply to Xu Maoyong” (p.295), Lu Xun seemed to take responsibility for the document (i.e., “On our current literary movement”) (“dictated to O. V.”; but in a letter that was central to his campaign against literary and political dictation by his opponents in the League of Left-Wing Writers, he could hardly have dissociated himself from his two young supporters by revealing the document’s true origin.

⁴⁵ Hu Feng, “Mr Lu Xun,” p.29.

Figure 12

Chen Duxiu, 1937, after leaving prison



“literature of the masses for national revolutionary war” was a Trotskyist slogan. Feng Xuefeng’s reply was intended as a rebuttal of this slander. He arranged for us to go together with his draft [letter] to see Lu Xun and read it out to him. Lu Xun listened with his eyes closed and said nothing, but simply nodded to indicate agreement.

After Feng Xuefeng left, he felt that he ought to provide some theoretical basis for the slogan [of “literature for the masses”], so he drafted “On our current literary movement,” and again arranged to go with me to read it to Lu Xun.⁴² Lu Xun was clearly weaker than the previous evening and was even less capable of speaking; all he did was nod to indicate agreement, but he also showed some slight signs of impatience. After we had left, Xuefeng suddenly said to me: I hadn’t expected Lu Xun to be so difficult, he’s not as good as Gorki; Gorki’s political comments are all written by the secretary assigned to him by the Party, all Gorki does is sign them.⁴³

This passage shows that Lu Xun did not initiate the letter to Chen Qichang; and Hu Feng’s comment that Lu Xun betrayed “slight signs of impatience” at the end of the second meeting, when the article was read to him, suggests that the ailing writer was by no means wholly convinced of the political point that either the letter or the article embodied (for the two documents were of a piece, and cannot be considered separately).⁴⁴ In his article, Hu Feng went on to say that “where ideological questions were concerned, Lu Xun was exceptionally serious and principled; if you expected him to take responsibility for ideological viewpoints that he had not deeply reflected upon (and in that period he was incapable of doing so), he would feel extremely uneasy.”⁴⁵

Lu Xun’s failure to distance himself from Feng Xuefeng’s letter after recovering from his illness is no evidence that he approved of its insinuations. Lu Xun, like Romain Rolland, Bernard Shaw, and other so-called ‘friends of the Soviet Union’, was a man of letters, not a politician, and belonged to a political type quite common in the 1930s. He would not and could not openly break with Stalinism and the CCP, which, in the political circumstances of the mid 1930s, seemed to him to represent the only progressive force in the world. If he had disowned the letter, he would certainly have had to break with the CCP’s front groups. And why did he not reply to Chen Qichang’s second letter? Probably because he preferred the whole affair to end rather than go further, for if he had decided to pursue it, he would have had to voice his own opinion, which might have constituted a refutation, or partial refutation, of the letter drafted by Feng Xuefeng. Several months later, however, in his elliptical “Mid-summer jottings,” he made the same criticism of the CCP’s new policy as had Chen Qichang in his two letters.

After 1949, the “Lu Xun letter” was used as a powerful weapon in the Maoist regime’s campaign to brand the Trotskyists as quislings and class traitors, and (more generally) to warn young Chinese against dabbling in dissidence of any sort. For decades the letter was included in a Chinese-language textbook used in senior-middle schools throughout the country,

both because it allegedly exemplified Lu Xun's superior writing and because of the political message that it carried. Ironically, its style was no less pinchbeck than its message. During Lu Xun's brief recovery from his illness, Hu Feng remarked to him that Feng Xuefeng had aped his tone well, whereupon Lu Xun "laughed drily and said, 'in my opinion there's no similarity whatsoever'."⁴⁶

For years the Party had been proud to publish the "Lu Xun letter," but after the Third Plenum of its Eleventh Central Committee, when Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 was partly rehabilitated and historians were finally free to rebut the charge (levelled by Kang Sheng 康生 on behalf of Wang Ming in 1938) that Chen Duxiu had taken a monthly subsidy from the Japanese, the letter suddenly became a grave embarrassment.⁴⁷ (The abashment no doubt grew when the description of the Trotskyists as "Japanese agents" was excised from the notes to the 1991 edition of Mao's *Selected Works*.⁴⁸) In his unpublished essay on the Hu Feng article, Zheng Chaolin analysed the attempts by various apologists to defend the "Lu Xun letter" in the new, more truthful climate of the 1980s. Their principal defence had been that the letter did not actually call the Trotskyists traitors but simply warned them that they were in danger of becoming traitors unless they mended their ways. Zheng Chaolin dismissed this defence as untenable, for Mao Zedong himself had used the letter as 'proof' that the Trotskyists were indeed traitors; in any case, the Trotskyists had brushed aside the warning in it and refused to 'mend their ways'. Today, however, the intellectual acrobats of the regime's literary establishment have tumbled into a clownish heap, "for the implication that

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ For a rebuttal of the charge against Chen Duxiu see Sun Qiming, "Chen Duxiu shifou Hanjian wentide tantao" [On whether or not Chen Duxiu was a traitor], *Anhui daxue xuebao* no.2 (1980). For the original charge see Kang Sheng, "Chanchu Rikou zhentan minzu gongdide Tuoluociji feibang" [Root out the Trotskyist criminals, who are spies for Japan and public enemies of the nation], *Jiefang zhoukan*, nos. 29 and 30 (January 28 and February 8, 1938).

⁴⁸ Zheng Chaolin, "Xinban Maoxuan yu Tuopai yuan'an" [The new edition of Mao's *Selected works* and the injustice done to the Trotskyists], *Kaifang zazhi* (Hongkong), September 1991: 47–9.



Figure 13

Zheng Chaolin, Shanghai, 1989

⁴⁹ Zheng Chaolin, "Reaction."

³⁰ Chen Shengchang, "Tuoluocijide wenyi lilun dui Lu Xunde yingxiang" [The influence on Lu Xun of Trotsky's literary theory], *Xianggang Zhongwen Daxue Zhongguo Wenhua Yanjiusuo xuebao*, vol.21 (1990): 285–311.

³¹ Hu Qiuyuan was among the Chinese students who returned to China some time in the early to mid-1930s, after studying in Japan. The majority of these returned students supported the Chinese Communist Party, but a few (notably Hu and Zheng Xuejia 郑学稼) showed some sympathy for Trotskyism and borrowed weapons from the Trotskyist armoury to attack the Chinese Stalinists. The leaders of the Communist Party were extremely hostile to Hu, Zheng, and the other members of their group, and attacked them in an effort to discredit Chen Duxiu and the real Trotskyists. Hu and his friends very quickly became associated with the Guomindang. Hu earned his living by writing for the Shenzhou Publishing Company.

³² Chen had been gaoled and Deng had been shot, both by Chiang Kai-shek.

³³ Lu Xun, "Wo zenmo zuoqi xiaoshuo lai" [How I started writing novels], in Lu Xun, *Collected works*, vol.4, pp.392–5, at 393.

³⁴ Lu Xun, "Zhege yu nege" [This and that], in Lu Xun, *Collected works*, vol.3, pp.102–9, at 107.

³⁵ Chen Shengchang, "Influence," p.311.

the Trotskyists were traitors was not Lu Xun's own idea; there is no evidence that if Lu Xun had been able to ponder the matter deeply, he would have agreed with an insinuation, made on his behalf by Feng Xuefeng, that violated his own principles."⁴⁹

Postscript

After I had finished this article, my attention was drawn (by Alexandre Vadimovich Pantsov) to a recent study by Chen Shengchang 陈胜侗 (of Hong Kong Chinese University's Department of Chinese) on Trotsky's literary influence on Lu Xun.³⁰ Chen Shengchang's article was written before Hu Feng's disclosures, and so takes at face value the 1936 attack on Trotskyism attributed to Lu Xun. However, it presents an interesting theory about Lu Xun's attitude in early 1933 to the Trotskyist leader Chen Duxiu. In February 1933, Lu Xun's Communist or fellow-travelling literary opponents attacked the 'realist' writer Hu Qiuyuan 胡秋原³¹ for indiscriminately "'admiring' Stalin, 'sympathising' with Trotsky, 'greatly respecting' Kropotkin, and even 'regretting the fate of Chen Duxiu and Deng Yanda 鄧演達'."³² According to Chen Shengchang, Lu Xun interpreted this criticism as an oblique attack on his own politics, and answered it (also obliquely) on March 5, 1933, in an essay entitled "How I started writing novels." This essay contained the sentence: "Here I must commemorate Mr Chen Duxiu, who was among those who put most effort into encouraging me to write fiction."³³ Chen Shengchang explains this statement by recalling Lu Xun's words on another occasion: "In China there are very few who show sympathy to a defeated hero, ... and very few who weep over a defeated rebel's cause."³⁴ Chen Shengchang concludes: "In my opinion, when the League of Left-Wing Writers recklessly attacked the so-called Trotskyists in the literary world, Lu Xun used the chance to commemorate Chen Duxiu and at the same time to show sympathy to [the defeated] Trotsky."³⁵

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EAST ASIAN HISTORY 7 (1994)