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Between Political Tendentiousness and Mass Media:  
Popularizing Propaganda under Party Politics (1927-1937)  
---A Case Study of *Shenbao Free Talk*  
by  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgement</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Part I: Galvanizing the Citizens-Shenbao Free Talk, an Institutional History</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Introduction .....	25
Chapter 1 The Making of “Free Talk:” Its Origin, Function and Position in Shenbao .	34
Chapter 2 Political Galvanization Under Party Politics .....	68
<b>Part II: Between Literature and Combat</b>	
– <b>Literary Reportage and the International Left-Wing Movement</b> .....	<b>95</b>
Chapter 1 Kisch and Literary Reportage .....	97
Chapter 2 The Workers Correspondence Movement and the League of Left-Wing Writers .....	111
Chapter 3 Chinese Reception of Literary Reportage and Kisch.....	133
<b>Part III: Zawen - Signature Genre of Free Talk</b> .....	<b>156</b>
Introduction .....	156
Chapter 1 Zawen in Free Talk and Its Development into a Distinct Genre .....	163
Chapter 2 Cross-Mediational Genre: Zawen and Public Speaking .....	195
Chapter 3 A Militant Genre for the Masses.....	223
- Zawen Co-shaped by Social and Intellectual Forces. ....	223
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>250</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>260</b>

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## Introduction

As part of the grand celebration of the 65<sup>th</sup> birthday of the People's Republic of China in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping held a forum on literature and art on 14 October with over a hundred Chinese writers, film directors, dancers, actors and painters. According to the Xinhua news report,<sup>1</sup> President Xi urged artists to put “the people central” and to create “more excellent works living up to the times,” to “carry forward the Chinese spirit and concentrate Chinese strengths and encourage the people of all ethnicities in the entire country to march toward the future of vigour and vitality.”<sup>2</sup> A huge media campaign in China followed the talk, with a significant number of articles published on various media platforms: editorials were published in almost every major party organ – *People's Daily*, *Guangming Daily*, *China Daily*, *Global Times* and so on – vigorously supporting the talk; major commercial news portals including QQ, Sohu, Sina, and 163 also released news reports, articles and features ranging from celebrities' excitement about the speech<sup>3</sup> to articles showcasing resolution to follow the guide and to more analytical feature articles on Xi's understanding of literature and art. A wave of study activities on “President Xi's spirit on art” were held among party members, state and local officials, state owned work-units' employees, as well as among popular organizations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Xi's full speech was not published until one year later in form of a pamphlet, whereas the speech was reported in summary by the state news agency Xinhua the next day after Xi's talk.

<sup>2</sup> Xinhua News. Oct. 15, 2014. Retrieved at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/14/c\\_1116825558.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/14/c_1116825558.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Represented by the highly popular Chinese comedian Zhao Benshan, who said in an interview that he was “so moved by the talk that he could not sleep.”

<sup>4</sup> See reports on news media outlets, for example, the half state sponsored and half commercial Ifeng at [http://culture.ifeng.com/a/20161208/50384837\\_0.shtml](http://culture.ifeng.com/a/20161208/50384837_0.shtml) Party organ *Renmin* devoted a special column just for reporting on the provincial study activities and analytical essays on the talk. See: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/67481/371956/371962/index2.html>

The talk was reported by major Western media, such as *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Foreign Policy*, with scorn, concern and criticism.<sup>5</sup> Comparisons between Xi's talk and Mao's (in)famous "Yan'an Forum Talks" in 1942 were drawn, strengthening the already popular analogy in Western media between Mao and his admirer Xi.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the analogy is highly visible: both talks stress the social function of art in which artistic works are supposed to shoulder the task of appealing to the people in promoting socialist values and cultivating a consciousness that serves the political agenda. The article in *The New York Times* on 15 October 2014 was able to point further to the writer and journalist Wang Shiwei 王实味, a typical dissident who was condemned, punished and hacked to death for his critical article on Mao and the Party shortly after the Yan'an talks in 1942.<sup>7</sup> The example was mentioned to warn of the danger that Xi's talk might destroy artistic creativity in China and of potential unjust condemnation of talented artists under the arbitrarily political judgment of the value of art – criticisms generally shared among Western reports.

While there is sound ground for worries as well as legitimate reasons to mock the shallow appraisal of Xi's cultural policy, to simply criticize the talk for conflating literature and politics is to oversimplify the CCP's (the Chinese Communist Party) propaganda strategy. Xi's Beijing Forum on Literature and Art came at the high tide of China's active promotion of soft power internationally. The lavish Opening Ceremony of the Beijing Olympics in 2008, using a cast of over 10,000 with a sky-rocketing budget directed by the most influential film director Zhang

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<sup>5</sup> <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/16/xi-jinping-calls-for-artists-to-spread-chinese-values/>;  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/22/opinion/murong-xuecun-china-the-art-of-xi-jinping.html>;  
<http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/22/is-this-the-new-face-of-chinas-silent-majority/>;  
<http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/10/17/xi-jinping-isnt-a-fan-of-weird-architecture-in-china/>;

<sup>6</sup> Bonnie S. McDougall. *Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan'an conference on literature and art! A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1980.

<sup>7</sup> New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/22/opinion/murong-xuecun-china-the-art-of-xi-jinping.html>;

Yimou 张艺谋, had long been cited as the pivotal example of China showcasing to the world its soft power. General conceptions of the term soft power find its origin in the Harvard political science professor Joseph Nye's 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Nye defined soft power as the ability to appeal and attract other nations through culture, in contrast to the general understanding of hard power characterised by military force and coercion. In his speech at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth CCP Central Committee in 2011, the then Chinese President Hu Jintao pointedly called for China "to build a powerful socialist culture" to boost China's soft power internationally.<sup>8</sup> The talk was published in *Qiushi* 求是 (Seeking Truth), a party magazine devoted to political theories, on the first day of the power transition year 2012. Hu's talk was among other things characterized by a sense of urgency the country was said to be facing: "international hostile forces" were seeking to "westernize and divide China." Culture was understood as a site of "fierce international competition" where "China was weak while international culture of the West was so strong."<sup>9</sup> Xi's 2014 talk could be seen as moving a step further from Hu's speech in a way that culture was not simply understood as the tool for building soft power in competition with other nations but defined as "spiritual nourishment of the people" to "organically integrate ideology, artistry and enjoyability."<sup>10</sup> The statement is not against commercialist culture - in fact the nation is undergoing a flourishing market-driven economy – but rather a call for utilizing commercial dimensions for "good art" to "nourish the Socialist core value system."<sup>11</sup> One key term in the talk is "to keep up with the times," a clear indication that the Party had realized it was falling out

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<sup>8</sup> *Qiushi* Magazine. Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012. [http://www.qstheory.cn/zywz/201201/t20120101\\_133218.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/zywz/201201/t20120101_133218.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Xinhua News. Oct. 15, 2014. Retrieved online at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/14/c\\_1116825558.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/14/c_1116825558.htm).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

of step with the times in the making of ideological culture. Xi's talk is hence a call for repackaging socialist ideology via popular art and literature in order to win over the people, whose minds have been liberated from the monolithic state controlled ideological culture before the late 1980s through access to various types of Western popular culture.

### **Research Outlook and Objectives**

As my project will show, the CCP had since its early phase in the 1920s and 1930s actively sought commercial media as a means to strengthen its appeal to the urban audiences. Such propaganda work in cities featured a gradual and indirect infiltration into the literate urban readers and was decidedly different from the straight-forward strategies of propagating didactic messages that were employed towards the rural peasants.<sup>12</sup> My study of *Free Talk* 自由谈, literary column/supplement of the most long-lasting Chinese commercial newspaper *Shenbao* 申报, has demonstrated how an anti-GMD (*Guomindang* 国民党, or the Nationalist Party) public discourse developed and disseminated on mass media as an outcome of left-wing literary debates within and outside of China. The product of literary sarcasm based on news materials constituted a collective resistant discourse against the GMD as the newspaper readers entertained themselves by reading the sharp witty literary scoffing at the government-controlled news, which they encountered on daily basis. The resistant discourse emerged and matured through theoretical discussions and literary practice from the most talented Chinese left-wing writers, who certainly found their talent more fully employed in left-wing propaganda among urban readers than in the Party-directed propaganda to the rural peasants. To paraphrase in the words of Xi Jinping, what *Free Talk* had achieved was to conjure a “spiritual nourishment” to “organically integrate

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<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Perry's study of the cultivation of the Chinese revolutionary tradition through the case of Anyuan has well elaborated on the strategies of cultural propaganda since the 1920s. I will demonstrate this in the following section. In *Anyuan. Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition*. University of California Press. 2012.

ideology, artistry and enjoyability” to the media for urban readers, who, like those in the contemporary age, were not to be easily won over with outright didacticism.

This dissertation project aims to augment existing scholarship in two ways: to divert the heated scholarly attention on rural propaganda to that of the urban underground, and to put studies of urban commercial media into their political context. As I will demonstrate in the next section, scholars have directed much attention to the Party’s propagandistic activities in rural China – how posters, workers’ newspapers, theatres, comic books were used for mass mobilization, particularly in the Yan’an period from 1937 to 1945. However, scarce attention has been paid to the CCP’s propaganda strategies in the cities before Mao’s rise of power when the Party still saw cities, instead of the countryside, as its revolutionary center. This choice of research focus for many scholarly works is based on the fact that final victory in 1949 was gained by the Yan’an leading circle centered around Mao Zedong. Historical and political inquiries were hence carried out to answer the intriguing question once asked by Elizabeth Perry: “why and how the Communists proved so much more adept at the task of cultural mobilization than their competitors [the Nationalists].”<sup>13</sup> As my study of *Free Talk* aims to show, there seems to be two completely different pictures of CCP propaganda in Republican China: in addition to the high-key flamboyant propaganda art that aimed to shape a collective consciousness to enlist peasants into the course of revolution, there had been “low-key” propaganda in the cities with gradual infiltration that had emerged from the lasting Chinese and international left-wing intellectual debates on literature and revolution. Such indirect and softened propaganda had laid an indispensable foundation for the full-fledged development of left-wing anti-imperial discourse

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. P151.

during the resistance war with Japan, and for marching onto CCP's final victory of the civil war afterwards.<sup>14</sup>

Historical and political environments co-shaped the outlook of the low-profile propaganda in the era of party politics. First, the CCP leadership circle centered around Li Lisan 李立三, Wang Ming 王明, Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, Zhang Wentian 张闻天 and Bo Gu 博古 during 1927 to 1937,<sup>15</sup> all of whom were Moscow-trained "returned students." Their blind adherence to Comintern instructions led to failure in urban revolts in Shanghai, Nanchang and Wuhan in 1927,<sup>16</sup> which, according to a study by Tony Saich, resulted in the change of the Party Central's primary task from "urban revolution to the construction of rural bases."<sup>17</sup> Yet despite the failure in military actions, they introduced international left-wing revolutionary literary theories and practices to China and facilitated the Chinese left-wing writers to join the already thriving international union of left-wing writers. International experience on cultural mobilization among urban workers, and on good balance between the tendentiousness and aesthetic quality were quickly picked up by talented Chinese writers to ensure the Chinese left-wing discourse in the urban media was from the beginning characterized as a literary movement instead of a party-orchestrated political campaign (as was the case in rural China). This left-wing discourse with aesthetic qualities and theoretical foundations ensured its way into the major commercial

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<sup>14</sup> Chang-tai Hung was among a number of scholars who argued resistance propaganda through popular art during the anti-Japanese war significantly strengthened the CCP's appeal. See Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture. Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945*. University of California Press. 1994.

<sup>15</sup> Saich, Tony. "The Chinese Communist Party During the Era of the Comintern (1919-1943)." In Juergen Rojahn, *Comintern and National Communist Parties Project*, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

<sup>16</sup> Wang Ming and Li Lisan were severely criticized and dismissed from central leadership for the failed urban revolts; Such blind following of Comintern guide lines was termed as "Opportunism 机会主义" and "left-Putschism 左倾盲动主义" in the temporary enlarged session of the CCP plenum in 1928. In *Collection of Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Center* 中共中央文件选集, volumes for year 1927 -1935. *Central Archives* 中央档案馆, Beijing.

<sup>17</sup> See note 14

newspaper like *Shenbao*, reaching millions of urban readers, instead of remaining in circulation among small number of readers in the left-wing publications.

A second factor that shaped the low-key urban propaganda was the GMD's white terror on Communists starting in 1927. Increasing Communist threat inside the GMD<sup>18</sup> led to Jiang Jieshi's 蒋介石 (GMD party leader and military leader of the Nationalist Revolutionary Army) turn on the Communists on 12 April 1927. While Party membership in Shanghai had been around 8,000 in April 1927, it had fallen to a mere 300 in 1934.<sup>19</sup> Heightened censorship control was strictly enforced, shutting down dissident bookstores and magazines,<sup>20</sup> sometimes resorting to violent means of murdering left-wing writers,<sup>21</sup> and promoting a pacifying "new life"<sup>22</sup> to prevent the masses from being radicalized. The central government had placed significant effort on censorship – an internally circulated document in 1927 suggested the composition of the censorship committee not only included propaganda department or cultural organizations but also the Political Training Department within the military headquarters 总司令部政治训练部,

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<sup>18</sup> From the beginning of the CCP, Communists were advised by the Comintern to join the GMD to a collective anti-imperial battle. Tony Saich's long article indicated the rapid grow of the left-wing power inside the GMD from 1922 to 1927.

<sup>19</sup> see note 14

<sup>20</sup> From 1927 onwards, various legal documents were released by the Nanjing Central government on regulating news publications, the press, and standards for defining propaganda items. A full range of tactics were put to use: newspapers and book stores must obtain permission to do business; they must not sell books or other publications that were blacklisted on the announcements released by the central government as frequently as every week ; detailed punishments from fines to forced shutdown of stores to imprisonment were also given. See "Law on News Publication 新闻出版法," "Censorship on newspaper Office and publishers 报馆, 印刷所审查," "Standards for Censoring Propagandistic products 宣传品审查标准," "Regulation on Bookstore publications 书店印刷品管制" in *Comprehensive Collection of Archival Documents and Materials on the History of the Republic of China*. Vol. 5 issue 1, Culture. 中华民国史档案资料汇编, 第五辑, 第一编. 文化. Edited by second Historical Archive of China 第二历史档案馆, Nanjing. Jiangsu: Jiangsu guji press, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Most famously were the "Five Martyrs of League of Left-Wing Writers 左联五烈士:" Rou Shi 柔石, Yin Fu 殷夫, Hu Yepin 胡也频, Feng Keng 冯铿, Li Weisen 李伟森 who were murdered in 1931.

<sup>22</sup> In general, the social campaign of "New Life Movement 新生活运动" in 1934 was to re-cultivate traditional Confucian values of "loyalty, filial piety, benevolence and love; trustworthiness, righteousness, harmony, and peace 忠孝仁爱, 信义和平." The emphasis on personal spiritual cultivation was intended for the dual purposes of diverting public attention away from contemporary politics (particularly from the GMD's turn on the Communists instead of resisting against Japan) and preventing the public from becoming radicalized.

Staff Section 参谋处, Secret Service Section 特务处 and the Transportation Section 交通处.<sup>23</sup>

These added up to a terror-stricken urban environment in Shanghai from the 1927 onwards, where out-front anti-GMD discourse both meant life-threatening danger for its writers and would scare readers away. Ways had to be found to repackage left-wing messages that could both buffer the danger of censorship and to appeal to the urban readers.

Within the CCP, who had now attached pivotal importance to propaganda work following the three failed urban revolts,<sup>24</sup> plans were made so that different means were used towards different groups of people. For winning the urban masses, the political message was supposed to be toned down to allow it speak through “the voice of public organizations.”<sup>25</sup> The 39<sup>th</sup> announcement of the Party Center entitled “On the Current Political Situation and Party’s Task”<sup>26</sup> particularly stated that the urban petit bourgeois intellectuals had started to vacillate and to distrust the GMD. In reaction, the document proposed to “enlarge propaganda” and “to reveal the crimes of the GMD’s betrayal of the nation through various means of propagandistic strategies.” In announcement No. 45,<sup>27</sup> words like “workers and peasants” were avoided and were substituted with *qunzhong* 群众 (the masses); while “Announcement No.54”<sup>28</sup> referred to the urban masses as a whole and made the strategy to avoid all direct mention of the Party’s name, which could scare away large portions of audience. Instead, political messages should

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<sup>23</sup> *Comprehensive Collection of Archival Documents and Materials on the History of the Republic of China*. Vol. 5 issue 1, Culture. P191

<sup>24</sup> In a letter from the Party Center to the Hunan Committee on 23 August 1927,<sup>24</sup> propaganda was seen as the most important part to a successful urban revolt in Changsha. See *Collection of Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Center*, volumes for year 1927 -1935. *Central Archives*, Beijing.

<sup>25</sup> *Collection of Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Center*, volumes for year 1927 -1935. *Central Archives*, Beijing.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Collection of Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Center* 中共中央文件选集, Vol. for year 1928. *Central Archives* 中央档案馆, Beijing

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

better come out in name of public organizations so that the urban masses could better empathize with them.

The description matched precisely what *Free Talk* had been doing. As the most popular Chinese newspaper of the time, *Shenbao* had become the site of propaganda rivalry between the two parties: political satires in its literary supplement *Free Talk* were so powerful that Jiang Jieshi himself gave the order to force a change of editor; censorship on the press forced the left-wing writers into what the major left-wing writer Mao Dun called “literary indirection 曲笔-” a rhetoric that hides political criticism behind seemingly irrelevant comments, or, in Lu Xun’s words, to package political discussions 风云 through romantic topics 风月; the articles in *Free Talk* testified an escalated wit competition between the state censors and the left-wing writers, where censorship itself had been creatively turned into a source of satire.<sup>29</sup>

Such “indirect” propaganda had proven to be no less effective than the high-pitched cultural mobilization in the countryside. Jiang Jieshi himself ordered ban on *Shenbao*’s outbound mailing and insisted the newspaper accept GMD’s nominee for chief editor. The persistent refusal by *Shenbao*’s owner Shi Liangcai 史量才 to accept Jiang’s choice finally led to Shi’s assassination in 1934. *Shenbao Free Talk* greatly contributed to the ultimate failure of the GMD’s propaganda to its rivalry on urban media site, which was rightfully acknowledged by GMD Party Central itself. Among the reasons given for the failure, three were fatal: that the Central News Agency had not provided accurate news; that the central government stressed suppression and neglected active propaganda; that censorship and bans followed no clear

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<sup>29</sup> Intentional leaving of space and using “XXX” or apostrophe appeared throughout the *Free Talk* writings to make fun of censorship.

standards.<sup>30</sup> The case of *Free Talk* foregrounds the power of sensational agitating left-wing public discourse that sharply contrasted to the impotence of the GMD propaganda.

Besides diverting attention to the urban underground CCP propaganda from existing attention on that in the rural area, the dissertation project also aims to put the study of commercial newspaper *Shenbao* into its complex political context. As the longest lasting Chinese newspaper—established in 1872 with English capital—*Shenbao* was from its beginning preoccupied with ways to sinicize the paper to attract Chinese readers.<sup>31</sup> Scholars have also rightfully situated *Shenbao* in the Chinese modernization project at the turn of the twentieth century – how words and images provided the Chinese with what Rudolf Wagner called “global imagination.”<sup>32</sup> *Shenbao* has also been consistently studied in the context of the Shanghai publishing industry in the 1920s and 1930s as the newspaper was the most widely circulated at the time with daily sales figures of 150 thousand.<sup>33</sup> All these studies have highlighted the point that commercial newspapers like *Shenbao* were not only valuable in the information it recorded about modern China, but was itself a participant in modernizing China and in co-shaping the urban cultural industry. Yet *Shenbao*'s political role is not to be overlooked. Under Shi Liangcai 史量才's leadership, *Shenbao* had not only resisted Jiang Jieshi's pressures of changing editors or selling shares to the GMD,<sup>34</sup> but fully emerged as a foremost anti-GMD advocate. At the

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<sup>30</sup> *Comprehensive Collection of Archival Documents and Materials on the History of the Republic of China*. Vol. 5 issue 1, Culture. P203

<sup>31</sup> As will be demonstrated from the next section, Barbara Mitler has provided comprehensive study of strategies applied by early *Shenbao* to make it into an appealing Chinese newspaper.

<sup>32</sup> Wagner, Rudolf edited. *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870-1910*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2007.

<sup>33</sup> The actual number of readers was estimated as ten times of the sales figure, as per one of the earliest scholar of the Chinese press and writer Lin Yutang 林语堂, *A history of the press and public opinion in China*, Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago Press. 1936.

<sup>34</sup> Jiang was recorded to have invited Shi for dinner a couple of times, trying to bribe, change editors, and take over majority of shares from *Shenbao*. She was recorded to have firmly rejected the requests by suggesting he was not afraid of Jiang's threat with support of millions of readers behind him. In Song Jun 宋军, *Shenbao and xingshuai 申报的兴衰 (The Rising and Fall of Shenbao)*. *Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe*, 1996. Hu Daojing 胡道静,

white terror of assassination of the left-wing writers from 1927 to 1930, *Shenbao* stood firmly with GMD's left-wing leaders like Song Qingling 宋庆龄 (widow of Sun Yatsen) and Yang Xingfo 杨杏佛 (democrat activist) as an active advocate for pressing the government on releasing the jailed dissident writers. As Japan began its aggression on China in 1930, *Shenbao* was a firm advocate for military resistance, offering actual monetary donations for supporting military leaders' own resistance in the northeast. *Shenbao*'s firm stand on military resistance against Japan put it in alliance with the left-wing writers, who quickly brought an anti-GMD discourse<sup>35</sup> to full bloom.

Hence *Shenbao* is a case in point: an influential newspaper, whose discourse has strong potential for mass mobilization, unsurprisingly became the critical site of a propaganda rivalry between the CCP and the GMD in a drawn-out battle between censorship and low-key propaganda in the era of party politics. In its role of leading public discourse and mobilizing the Shanghai urbanites, it fertilized the experimentation in new genres and styles for better mass mobilization especially in its anti-Japanese discourse. By doing so, it joined the international left-wing literary movement in the collective effort to intervene in politics through literary practices in the concurrent rising political turmoil and party politics facing the world in the first half of the 1930s. My study of *Free Talk* in the 1930s is hence a contextualization of the propaganda rivalry between the CCP and the GMD, the left-wing's repackaging of ideologies in winning over Shanghai residents, as well as the making of agitational public discourse in urban Shanghai.

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*Shanghai xinwen shiye zhi shi de fazhan* 上海新闻事业之史的发展 (Development of the History of Shanghai News Business.) *Shanghai Tongzhiguan*, 1935.

<sup>35</sup> The major anti-GMD discourse on *Free Talk* was the critique on the government's non-resistance policy.

It is worth mentioning that I do not use the word “propaganda” in a necessarily negative way. For the CCP, propaganda is without doubt an important weapon in the resistance arsenal. The much-quoted strategy of Mao for CCP’s position in the resistance war against Japan states that the CCP should spend 10 percent effort on resistance, 20 percent on development [of the Party] and 70 percent on propaganda [for the Party].<sup>36</sup> As the CCP documents from the Central Archive have shown, the Chinese word *xuanchuan* 宣传 (propaganda) appears frequently as a basic ingredient of the political process, meaning to inform and to propagate. As Hung Chang-tai puts in his study of the Chinese wartime popular art, propaganda is “in fact not an aberration...contrary to the public perception, ... it does not consist only of lies and falsehood.”<sup>37</sup> It might be more appropriate to associate the manipulation of the public minds – the negative implication the term is often associated in English – with the Yan’an period propaganda from 1937 to 1945, given the fact that art was much reduced to its function of political persuasion for the purpose of coping with political goal of enlisting peasants into the revolution. Though being still a form of advocacy that conveys a particular point of view, the propaganda this dissertation project examines suggests more of the flow of political ideas – from abstract political guidelines to left-wing writers, to literary practices in urban media, and finally to the urban readers. Although propaganda was prioritized as the central task of strengthening the CCP’s appeal among urban readers, the CCP urban leaders, especially Qu Qiubai, meant for such process to unfold through a mass cultural movement instead of outright political didacticism. And this puts the Chinese case in line with the international left-wing society. Therefore this project undertakes the examination of propaganda in Shanghai from a literary point of view –Chinese and

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<sup>36</sup> Tony Saich quoted the saying in “The Chinese Communist Party During the Era of the Comintern (1919-1943)” from a GMD document. Scholars have also questioned the authenticity of the quotation as it has not been included in Mao’s anthology or any CCP documents.

<sup>37</sup> Hung Chang-tai, p10

international intellectual contestation between factual literature and the fictional, news and literature, ways of writings that can enact political action, relationship of literature and revolution. All these boiled down to agitating writing in urban media under party politics. Discussions of political ideas of literature and literary theories had enlarged the propaganda from the narrow sense of tendentious writing to full bloom of left-wing literary experimentation in urban mass media, that in turn helped strengthen the propaganda effect in the cities significantly. It is in this neutral sense that I use the term and examine the propaganda mechanisms throughout the dissertation.

### **Literature Review and Research Methodology**

Relevant scholarship could be categorized into three groups: that on CCP's propaganda and mass mobilization, that on *Shenbao*, and that on left-wing literary debates. As mentioned, many of the studies on CCP's cultural mobilization focus on rural China, sometimes a field study of a particular area. Elizabeth Perry,<sup>38</sup> for instance, investigates the case of Anyuan coal mines – a small town on the Jiangxi-Hunan border, one of the wellsprings of the Red Army, where CCP leaders Liu Shaoqi, Mao Zedong, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi had all devoted early revolutionary careers. Perry examines the CCP's adept use of familiar local rhetoric, provincial organizations and institutional network that had efficiently mobilized the mine workers to to the course of revolutionary revolt organized by the Party. Central to the mobilization process, Perry argues, was the “role of cultural positioning, or the strategic deployment of a range of symbolic resources (religion, ritual, rhetoric, dress, drama, art, and so on) for purposes of political persuasion.”<sup>39</sup> Odoric Y. K. Wou, using extensively archives of provincial Party documents and memoirs from the land reform era that became available in the 1980s, similarly examines the

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<sup>38</sup> Perry, Elizabeth. *Anyuan. Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition*. University of California Press. 2012

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p4.

tactics of the CCP in winning over the peasants in a particular area of China – Henan.<sup>40</sup> In his meticulous step-by-step tracing of how peasants joined and fought for the CCP, he depicted the CCP's victorious march to 1949 as skillful process of adept infiltration for gaining support from variolocal peasants, religious sectors and soldiers. Prasenjit Duara presented the CCP's success in rural China as not so consciously planned and with historical coincidence.<sup>41</sup> In his sophisticated analysis of various strands of force of local bureaucracy, “entrepreneurial brokers,” provincial self-protection organization, tax collectors and so on, Duara made a convincing argument that it was more for the failing “state-strengthening initiatives” instead of collapse of central government since the 1900 that China was opened to the Communists.<sup>42</sup>

These studies provide convincing answers to the question of how the CCP had successfully enlisted forces from rural China to help it win the battles of the civil war. Yet these scholars stop short at answering further how the CCP moved on to winning the entire China, especially major cities like Shanghai. In fact, by 1930, the communist forces in Shanghai had almost been completely crushed by the GMD; economic and social resources were in the hands of the central government, which was conveniently located only 200 miles away. Questions remain unanswered in these studies as to how the CCP could so smoothly “liberate” and take over Shanghai – city that was well controlled in every aspect under the GMD. Furthermore, even with the military victories in the countryside north of Shanghai that made possible the inevitable military march over the city, questions still remain as to how the urban residents, who had gone through the many years of GMD propaganda such as the New Life movement, willingly

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<sup>40</sup> Wou, Odoric Y. K. *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> Duara, Prasenjit. *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942*. Stanford University Press, 1988.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p7

acknowledged and even supported the CCP's sudden seizure of leadership of their city. With Mao Zedong as the victor in history, his general strategy of "encircling cities from the countryside" must have amplified the role peasants played in the Party's later cultivation of revolutionary authority. Yet one must not forget the other battle field in the GMD-controlled Shanghai before the CCP could even imagine a full victory over China. Here, propaganda was less-obtrusively carried out by left-wing intellectuals and was seemingly unrelated to the major military confrontations, yet it contributed significantly to the acceptance and appeal of the CCP in the cities that smoothed Mao's later take-over. Along this line, Hung Chang-tai's study of propaganda art during the anti-Japanese war (1937-1945)<sup>43</sup> could be seen to have provided an answer from different angle. Hung provides a comprehensive look at the wartime popular propaganda art, which could be seen as fledging out of the anti-GMD discourse that preceded it.

A number of studies on *Shenbao* have been published, both in English and in Chinese. Song Jun 宋军 and Hu Daojing 胡道静<sup>44</sup> provided valuable archival materials, which I have quoted extensively in Part I of the dissertation. Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵 compares the discourse of *Free Talk* in the 1930s with that of other newspapers such as *Duli pinglun* 独立评论 (Independent Review) and supplements of *Dagongbao*.<sup>45</sup> Barbara Mittler is the first scholar who examined the newspaper and formed an argument instead of providing historical survey. In her book-length study on pre-1900 *Shenbao*,<sup>46</sup> Mittler analyzes the rhetorical and cultural strategies

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<sup>43</sup> *War and Popular Culture. Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945*. University of California Press. 1994.

<sup>44</sup> Song Jun 宋军, *Shenbao de xingshuai* 申报的兴衰 (The Rise and Fall of *Shenbao*). Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996. Hu Daojing 胡道静, *Shanghai xinwen shiye zhi shi de fazhan* 上海新闻事业之史的发展 (Development of the History of Shanghai News Business.) Shanghai Tongzhiguan, 1935.

<sup>45</sup> Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵, *Gonggong yulun yu quanli wangluo* 公共舆论与权力网络 (Public Opinion and Power Network). Shanghai: Dongfang lishi xueshu wenku. 2012

<sup>46</sup> Mittler, Barbara. *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872-1912*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center. 2004

the foreign capital (initiated by the English businessman Ernest Major) utilized to domesticate the newspaper and broaden its Chinese market. The five essays included in Rudolf Wagner's edited book *Joining the Global Public*<sup>47</sup> puts *Shenbao* along other early Chinese newspapers at the time – e. g., *Dianshizhai huabao* 点石斋画报 (Dianshizhai Pictorial) and *Xunhuan ribao* 循环日报 (Circulation Daily), to examine how these early modern words and images contributed to the development of a Habermasian “public sphere” in Chinese society.<sup>48</sup> In a remotely similar fashion, Joan Judge provides an extensive study<sup>49</sup> on how *Shibao*, initiated by Liang Qichao in 1904, developed a “new middle realm” to negotiate between the central government from “above” and its people from “below.” Weipin Tsai's study on *Shenbao* advertisements,<sup>50</sup> or, to put it more accurately, on how readers responded to the miscellaneous images of Chinese modernity in *Shenbao*, examines “the conflicts, challenges and opportunities generated through encounters between nationalism and commercialism.”<sup>51</sup> Enlightening as these studies are, the increasingly compelling anti-GMD discourse and the desire for advocating for the public since the late 1920s do not fit *Shenbao* comfortably in these theoretical frameworks of social democratization, national modernization, consumerism or publishing industry. The newspaper, however commercially successful it was, had been increasingly associated with the left-wing politics and culture and must be examined together with China's revolutionary literary discourse.

The research methodology of the dissertation project has been inspired by the studies on propaganda mechanisms written by Noam Chomsky, the most prominent among which is

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<sup>47</sup> Wagner, Rudolf edited. *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870-1910*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2007.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, Introduction.

<sup>49</sup> Judge, Joan. *Print and Politics. Shibao and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China*. Stanford University Press. 1996.

<sup>50</sup> Tsai, Weipin. *Reading Shenbao: Nationalism, Consumerism and Individuality in China, 191-1937*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p1

*Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, first published in 1988 with Pantheon Books, and reprinted many times since then. The book is seminal in propaganda study as Chomsky and his collaborator Edward S. Herman; in a truly interdisciplinary manner, it traces how propaganda and systematic biases function in mass media. The book developed an analytical model of propaganda to provide a comprehensive explanation of how ideological messages of the elite (politicians and corporate capitalists) infiltrate through the work of mass media into the minds of the public to “manufacture a [public] consent” in order to pacify anger over social inequality and to protect the elites’ interests. Different sectors - the public, the state and the private - are examined with quantitative analysis of media funding, textual analysis of news, sourcing, framing and perspectives of the news media. All have been examined to explain how the propaganda mechanism work in society.

Although with a totally irrelevant research topic and a different argument from that of Chomsky’s book, I have been inspired by the paradigm of the cross-disciplinary propaganda study developed there, which is based on case studies of several major news media like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and some television news. By focusing on *Shenbao Free Talk*, especially the years between 1927 and 1937, I aim to examine how the CCP’s propaganda mechanism worked in the 1930s Chinese society that served as an important foundation for the Party’s victory in 1949. I have identified three major lines of investigation which led to a successful left-wing propaganda under the era of party politics: the goals of *Shenbao Free Talk* (of leading public discourse and broadening viewership); the international vitality of reportage literature for propaganda towards the urban masses and its quick introduction to China; and Chinese left-wing writers’ debates and developments on political news writings that bloomed in *Free Talk* in the form of *zawen*. These three lines form the three parts of the dissertation.

Hence the main questions I ask remain literary –the position of literature in left-wing politics and left-wing literary practice in mass media. By focusing on the famous supplement *Free Talk* of the commercial newspaper *Shenbao*, the dissertation investigates the multiple inter-related layers of problematique: how political news was popularized through new literary forms to agitate nationalistic and anti-government sentiments; how news materials were recast in literary forms such as satirical poems; how ideologies were repackaged and infiltrated through popular newspapers that not only did not scare away urban readers but won them to the side of the left; how the Chinese case of urban propaganda was in close step with the active agenda of world left-wing cultural movement of the time (i.e., before the Yan'an period when the target of CCP propaganda shifted to rural China). This study of *Shenbao* hence ties together realms of party politics and popular culture, propaganda and commercial media, Chinese left-wing culture with that of the world. As discussed above, CCP's resolutions and documents from 1927 onwards indicate an intentional toning down of political message and repackaging to meet the tastes of different audiences. *Free Talk* unselfconsciously internalized this tactic.

What makes the Chinese propaganda case more complicated than the American case within capitalism (as showcased by Chomsky) is that the former lacked an explicitly conscious agenda. In other words, historical coincidences somehow facilitated the successful propaganda work: though the CCP actively searched for effective means to win over the urban masses by constantly updating and reflecting its cultural policies, *Shenbao*'s own commercial desire to break the suffocating censorship and to make radical catchy discourse to maintain its sales as well as the vigorous international left-wing culture combined to provide rich soil for meeting the CCP's political needs in the era of party politics. The CCP propaganda policy would have

otherwise easily failed if it had ended up being confined to the party organs circulated among a small circle internally.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

I start by introducing *Shenbao* and its supplement *Free Talk*. In Part I, I investigate the development of *Shenbao*'s editorial form and content – i.e. to see how *Shenbao* shifted its editorial focus from the early role of information disseminator and caller for public intervention in local affairs, to becoming a leader in making public discourse on national affairs, and eventually to mass mobilizer after the initial outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese war in 1931. This development underlies the task of engaging the public in national politics, rather than sinicizing the paper to the taste of Chinese audience, as Mittler proved for the paper's early years, as its primary managerial direction. The newspaper's turn to the left after the outbreak of resistance in 1931 was thus not simply explained as sudden and abrupt or by appointing a left-leaning editor for *Free Talk* – a change that often bewildered scholars on the media in Republican China – but coherent with this major underlying line of development.

I analyze the commentary news, articles, satires and even caricatures along with news reports to show how *Shenbao* was not only to report new events, but to actively involve the public, first into local affairs within the international settlement in Shanghai, then into national modernization issues. Along this line, *Free Talk* was launched in 1911 to editorially re-group these political commentaries into an individual column. The way the column works was through re-processing news materials in an entertaining way;<sup>52</sup> the aim it hoped to achieve was for

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<sup>52</sup> *Free Talk*'s first chief editor Wang Dungen 王钝根 explained the task of supplement as to bring entertainment to the otherwise solemn and miserable news. "Entries must be fun so as not to tire the reader. What are recorded in newspapers nowadays are either military calamities or flooding and drought disasters. They only add to grief and misfortune, what fun can come out of them? 记载必有趣味，方能入目而不倦。今日报纸所载，非刀兵之惨祸，即水旱之荒灾，只益悲辛，何有趣味。" *Shenbao*, 11 August 1911

readers not just to digest news better but to relate to national politics that would hopefully lead to action. In the era of party politics, this editorial policy of *Shenbao* was especially evident as it strove to find new ways to advocate for the masses during the increasing political turmoil of the early 1930s, even though it had been almost stifled under tight censorship control. Such a function finds easy convergence with the CCP's strategy of winning the urban citizens by way of softening the political message via infiltration by popular literature. As a natural result, the non-partisan newspaper grew increasingly left-wing during the 1930s and its success in making a sensational anti-Japanese discourse helped the CCP significantly in winning Shanghai urbanites to condemn the GMD's nonresistance against Japan.

Part II investigates the international experiences that were adopted to the making of left-wing discourse in *Shenbao*. Key player in this transculturation was the League of Left-Wing Writers, which, despite of its members' seemingly unbridgeable divergence in aesthetic beliefs, was founded in unity under guidance of the CCP in 1930 in order to concentrate the energy of talented writers to the use of the revolutionary course. The League of Left-Wing Writers became a member of the International Left-Wing Writers Union in 1932 and the CCP had been receiving direct guidance from the Communist International since 1922. It was not long before debates on factual literature, the most prominent discourse on a possible literature that could lead to widened participation among the workers in the international left-wing literary society, came onto the radar of the Chinese league. Debates center around the genre of literary reportage, a genre that ties together many issues at hand: how to cushion political affairs in literary formats, aesthetic quality in workers' correspondence, how to avoid cheap tendentiousness and to effectively agitate and mobilize the reading masses through words.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Secretariat News of the Left-wing writers League 左联秘书处消息." *Literary Guide* 文学导报, Issue 8. 1932. Retrieved from:

Part II of the dissertation traces the process of how literary reportage was first designated as the true and only “proletarian genre” and was incorporated into political campaign of workers’ correspondence movements across Europe and Asia, and then emerged out of deepened intellectual debates around the relationship between literature and politics as a literarily qualified genre that speaks better to the minds and emotion of the urban readers. The central figure of concern is Egon Erwin Kisch, generally considered as the “father of literary reportage.” Not only did Kisch have direct contact with major Chinese intellectuals like Lu Xun 鲁迅, and Song Qingling, his genre of literary reportage was discussed and introduced to China through its Japanese reception through heated intellectual discussions. Major European debates on the Kischean literary reportage on the relationships between aesthetic quality and tendentiousness and between literature and social revolution were introduced (via Japanese) in deepened discussions into China via key left-wing writers like Xia Yan 夏衍, Zhou Libo 周立波, Mao Dun 茅盾, Lu Xun - all of whom contributors of *Shenbao*. Out of such discussions around the genre emerged not only Chinese literary reportage on the model of Kisch, but also a Chinese literary variant – *zawen* 杂文 (literally translated as “miscellaneous essay”) – a genre both resembles and differs from its German prototype. Such writings based on facts and elevated with literary embellishments were soon brought to full bloom in *Free Talk*. Kisch and the genre of literary reportage landed at just the right time when CCP eagerly needed to seize mass media and win the urban masses and when mass media needed the vigorous effective agitating literary texts to break out of the censorship on the press to keep advocating for the public.

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[http://qktg.shnu.edu.cn/skb/ch/reader/create\\_pdf.aspx?file\\_no=3587&year\\_id=1980&quarter\\_id=1&falq=1](http://qktg.shnu.edu.cn/skb/ch/reader/create_pdf.aspx?file_no=3587&year_id=1980&quarter_id=1&falq=1)

Part III of the dissertation examines the Chinese variant *zawen* as means of political mobilization oriented towards the urban masses, along with its contributors, Mao Dun 茅盾, Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸, and, most importantly, Lu Xun. By following the line of the seminal figure of Lu Xun, the investigation touches upon literary history that led to the development of *zawen* (as a militant genre of anti-intellectualism and direct intervention of life), as well as various debates that involved many writers – Lu Xun’s many followers of *zawen* writers in *Free Talk* and those from different camps. Lu Xun was seminal to the propaganda effect of *Free Talk* in the 1930s in the sense that he created the genre of *zawen* and attracted around him on *Free Talk* a group of *zawenists*. In a sense, the ridicule by *Shenbao*’s competitor *Dawan bao* 大晚报 that *Free Talk* of the 1930s had been captured by left-wing culture with Lu Xun and Mao Dun as the camp’s pillar was true.

From January 1933 to August 1934, Lu Xun contributed over 140 *zawen* essays to *Free Talk*, which were quickly published as collections of *Wei ziyou shu* 伪自由书 (False Freedoms, October 1933), *Huabian wenxue* 花边文学 (Fringe literature, June 1936), *Zhun fengyue tan* 准风月谈 (Not Really Talking about “the Wind and the Moon,” December 1934). The Part of the dissertation investigates Lu Xun’s *Free Talk zawen* in its strength in conjuring an agitating anti-authority discourse against the GMD (especially in regard to its censorship and non-resistance policies), which not only significantly increased the sale of *Shenbao*<sup>54</sup> but was canonized as the “Lu Xun Style 鲁迅风” that resurged in the “orphan island” of Shanghai in 1939 as the title of a magazine proclaiming to continue Lu Xunesque “art of invective” against Japanese aggression.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Tang Tao 唐弢. Preface to the photocopy of *Shenbao ziyou tan yingyin ben* 申报自由谈影印本 (*Shenbao Free talk*) Shanghai: Lu Xun Museum 鲁迅博物馆, 1981

<sup>55</sup> Pollard, David “Lu Xun’s *zawen*,” in *Lu Xun and his Legacy*, ed. Leo Ou-Fan Lee. Berkeley: University of

Insights that were consciously incorporated into the development of *zawen* – resisting intellectualism, using colloquial and vivid language of the masses, basing the writing on social reality with left-wing perspective – put the *Shenbao* *zawenists* readily in line with their international left-wing counterparts.

Lu Xun's *Free Talk zawen* had been so successful in agitating the urban public into a left wing discourse that Mao, in a meeting commemorating the first anniversary of the death of Lu Xun in 1937 in Shaanxi, lionized him as the “vanguard of national liberation 民族解放的急先锋” who “gave tremendous help to the revolution 给革命极大的助力.”<sup>56</sup> The image of Lu Xun had since become increasingly politicized and militarized as “the greatest and the most courageous standard-bearer[文化新军]的最伟大和最英勇的旗手” of a new cultural force, and “chief commander of China's cultural revolution 中国文化革命的主将” in Mao's seminal essay *On New Democracy* 新民主主义论, published in 1940.<sup>57</sup> As we will see, Mao Zedong had every reason to thank Lu Xun for his contribution in leading the public to oppose the tactics of the GMD. Yet lauding Lu Xun as the brave vanguard of revolutionary culture was a stretch. Lu Xun had chosen to intervene in politics with his own style of “revolutionary literature;” the powerful public discourse he and his protégés created in *Free Talk* posed an open challenge to the GMD in as much a way of literary and intellectual movement as political. Though not fully acting as following the Party's directives, *zawenists'* writing practice in *Free Talk* certainly satisfied the expectations of CCP's propaganda policies and went beyond.

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California Press, 1985.

<sup>56</sup> Mao Zedong. *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* 毛泽东选集. Vol.6. Translation retrieved at: <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-6/>

<sup>57</sup> Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy.” *Chinese Culture* 中国文化. February 1940. Yan'an. Retrieved at: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64185/66616/4488916.html>

In the following chapters of Part I, I will unfold the development of arguably China's most influential commercial media and investigate the hidden logic for it to become an effective platform for left-wing propaganda in the turbulent era of foreign aggression and internal conflict.

## Part I: Galvanizing the Citizens-*Shenbao* Free Talk, an Institutional History

### Introduction

*Shenbao* was not only the most long lasting newspaper in China from 1872 to 1949, valuable for its wide coverage of news and information from late Qing to Republican China. It was also a site of contention between different political forces. By site of contention, I do not mean the confrontational views and news reports on discursive level were the only reports that made their way into the newspaper, which had insisted on being “nonpartisan and unbiased 不偏不倚” from many published editorials. Instead, the newspaper was an actual proactive participant in the social upheavals and social struggles in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During its initial years, *Shenbao* had manifested its role as a local agitator with numerous successes in mobilizing Chinese citizens in fighting for their rights through lawsuits in the Shanghai international settlement. During the Constitutional movement, starting from political reformists’ proposals in 1895 to the Qing court’s preparatory launching of the Constitution in 1905, *Shenbao* had changed from pungently denouncing Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) and Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) and showing loyalty to the Qing court<sup>1</sup> to becoming the most ardent promoter of Constitutional Monarchy in 1905. *Shenbao* was among the most active, along with the reformist organ *Shibao* 时报 and *Xinwen bao* 新闻报, in organizing the Press Convention for Celebrating Constitutionalism 报界立宪大会, in support of

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<sup>1</sup> As I will show in the body of the chapter, this had been done under the chief-editorship of Huang Xieyun 黄协陨

the reformist efforts for establishing the modern polity.<sup>2</sup> Its uncompromising exposure of Qing officials' corrupt lives in the first half of 1906 had so powerfully mobilized the people towards Constitutional Monarchy that their efforts at least partially prompted the Qing Government to launch a special law in order to regulate the press from "defaming the court and disrespectfully discussing state affairs 诋毁宫廷, 妄议朝政."<sup>3</sup> In 1911, *Shenbao* became the first newspaper to report about the success of the revolution, along with numerous articles promoting Sun Zhongshan's ideas – hence turning it to one of the active players among the list of revolutionary organs, such as *Minhu ribao* 民呼日报, *Minli bao* 民立报, in spreading Sun's political ideas to propagate a collective modern Republic nation. In the massive workers protest to boycott Japanese goods in 1925, *Shenbao*'s relative silence on the authorities' violent suppression of the workers triggered strong objections from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP hereafter), who immediately distributed an article among the public accusing the Shanghai press' compromise to imperialists in anti-Imperialist movements.<sup>4</sup> General anger among students and workers in Shanghai resulted in *Shenbao*'s sequent publication of a public apology on 17 June, acknowledging its previous underestimate of the political severity of the issue, and presented a strong critique of the violence the Japanese factories had resorted to during the movement.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The basic idea of Constitutionalism included, among others, the re-division of bureaucracy by establishing new legal, administrative, and consultative departments of 资政院, 宪政馆, 咨议局.

<sup>3</sup> *Daqing yinshua wu zhuanlv* 大清印刷物专律 (Special Law of Qing on Publication). From Ge Gongzhen 戈公振, *Zhongguo Baoxue Shi* 中国报学史 (The History of Chinese newspapers). Collected in *Minguo Congshu* 民国丛书 (book series on the Republic of China), vol.2. Shanghai shudian, 1998. 论警部颁发应禁报论 (On the Police Department's publication of 'Newspapers should be banned').” *Shenbao*, 14 Oct. 1906.

<sup>4</sup> “*Zhonggong zhongyang wei fankang diguozhuyi yemancanbao de datusha, gao quanguominzhong shu* 中共中央为反抗帝国主义野蛮残暴的大屠杀，告全国民众书 (CCP Central Committee Announcement to the Chinese people against the savage violent massacre of by Imperialists)” 5 June, 1925. *Zhonggong zhongyang wenjia xuanji* 中共中央文件选集 (Collection of Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Center) 中共中央文件选集, Vol. for year 1925. Central Archives 中央档案馆, Beijing.

<sup>5</sup> “Pi ‘Chengyan’ 辟<诚言> (Refute ‘Honest words’)” 17 June, *Shenbao*.

From that point onward *Shenbao* took a firm stance “with the people,” the concept of which had been defined and redefined by the two political parties (the CCP and the GMD, or the Nationalist party) for their own political ends since the official breakdown of the united front following the 12 April purge of the Communists in 1927. The CPC-organized urban workers’ revolts was reported with ardent support from the brave workers; this soon was countered by the post-1927 censorship by the Nanjing government, who banned the press from “disrespectfully discussing state affairs” and required newspapers to be sent in to the censorship committee for screening before sent to print.<sup>6</sup>

*Shenbao*’s continuous reportage on the urban revolts and the Central government’s violent suppression, as well as the CCP’s rural movements such as the Autumn Harvest Uprising led by Mao Zedong, resulted in Jiang’s direct intervention in the plan of Shi Liangcai 史量才 (1880-1934), *Shenbao*’s owner, to purchase the second most widely read newspaper of the time, *Xinwenbao* 新闻报. Jiang bought the majority share of the newspaper before Shi was able to make a deal.<sup>7</sup> In the events subsequent to the assassination of the GMD left-wingers (most prominent event was the murder of Deng Yanda 邓演达), as well as the later arrest of the 1935 students’ anti-GMD movement leaders, the “seven gentlemen 七君子,” *Shenbao* worked closely with leaders of the China Democratic League 中国民主同盟– Song Qingling 宋庆龄, He Xiangning 何香凝, Yang Xingfo 杨杏佛--in mobilizing the public to demand the release of the

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<sup>6</sup> “*Baoguan, yinshuasuo shencha* 报馆，印刷所审查 (Censorship on Newspaper Office and Publishers).” *Minguo shiliao huibian* 民国史料汇编 (Comprehensive Collection of Archival Documents and Materials on the History of the Republic of China). Vol. 5 issue 1, Culture. P55

<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed record about Jiang’s purchase, see Song Jun 宋军, *Shenbao and xingshuai* 申报的兴衰 (The Rising and Fall of Shenbao). Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996. Hu Daojing 胡道静, *Shanghai xinwen shiye zhi shi de fazhan* 上海新闻事业之史的发展 (Development of the History of Shanghai News Business.) Shanghai Tongzhiguan, 1935.

arrested activists. However much Shi Liangcai and the chief editor Chen Leng 陈冷 tried to maintain an unbiased view by aligning with the left-wing GMD members and thereby claiming faith to the orthodox GMD principles, *Shenbao* produced a discourse much in the favor of the CCP, who claimed that a revolution would be for the interest of the people and comply with the “force of history.”

So was *Shenbao*'s nationalistic discourse towards Japanese aggression in 1931: *Shenbao* started with publication of numerous articles in praise of the bravery of the GMD's 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army in resisting Japan,<sup>8</sup> and called for public donations for the soldiers fighting in the front lines, with Shi Liangcai himself setting the example by donating seventy thousand dollars.<sup>9</sup> After seeing Jiang's non-action in deploying defense around Nanjing, and the quick loss of land to Japan inland along the Yangtze river, *Shenbao* swiftly changed to sharp condemnation of the GMD's non-resistance policy and pointed an accusing finger directly at Jiang's hidden intention of avoiding conflict with Japan in order to concentrate on wiping out the Communists.<sup>10</sup>

The original nonpartisan stance with the people had become a de facto propaganda organ for the CCP under the sharply divided party politics by criticizing the GMD for ignoring the will of the people in its failure to resist Japan. The effect of *Shenbao*'s discourse was soon to be confirmed by Jiang Jieshi's reaction: first forcing *Shenbao* to change its chief editor, then placing a ban on its outbound distribution on 16 July 1932,<sup>11</sup> and finally the assassination of Shi Liangcai

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<sup>8</sup> See *Shenbao* between 28 -31 January 1928.

<sup>9</sup> Song Jun 宋军, *Shenbao de xingshuai 申报的兴衰 (The Rise and Fall of Shenbao)*. Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996. P147

<sup>10</sup> Song Jun has pointed to the anecdote that Shi Liangcai and Song Qingling went to see the then Shanghai mayor Wu Tiecheng 吴铁城 in person, persuading him to urge the GMD to deploy defense around Nanjing. Wu was said to have shown Shi Jiang's written command to withdraw troops from Shanghai to fight against the Communists in rural China. The series of articles “Jiaofei yu zaofei 剿匪与造匪 (Suppressing Bandits and Making Bandits)” in *Shenbao* was published hereafter accordingly.

<sup>11</sup> Song Jun, p155

in 1934. After several years of careful balance in political views, *Shenbao*, in following the increasingly radical and nationalistic views of the people at the onset of the outbreak of a comprehensive war in 1937, openly published a series of articles in support of the CCP. Journalists were sent to Yan'an (making *Shenbao* the first Chinese newspaper to access the mysterious revolutionary Mecca); they sent back glowing reports, naming the CCP as the new hope for China. As Japan declared war against the US in 1941, Japanese troops invaded the international settlements in Shanghai. Among the first things Japan did on the same day of marching-in was to take over the *Shenbao* offices in order to stop the influential newspaper's effective anti-Japan agitation.

The above outline illustrates *Shenbao*'s influence in the early twentieth century China: the power of the printed word had certainly exceeded the limits of its representational power; it had manifested its goal in becoming a public mobilizer and had gone beyond in becoming a considerable force in shaping the historical and political landscape of modern China. One important reason with which *Shenbao* was able to achieve such an effect was through its signature supplement *Free Talk*.

*Free Talk*, as I will show in the following pages, had shouldered *Shenbao*'s essential task of mass mobilization, especially during the years of party politics. *Shenbao* had ever since its establishment posited itself as a mass mobilizer – both calling for attention on public affairs and accordingly involving Shanghai residents in political and social affairs that could lead to actual social change. This could be understood as a conscious decision on the part of the newspaper as well as a strategy to increase the number of its readers/buyers by way of providing rich and useful information highly relevant to their social environment.

The early news articles that combined information with the authors' commentary were the standard form. The development and professionalization of the news business gave rise to an explosion of news information, resulting in separation of news and commentary essays already in the editorial reform of *Shenbao* of 1905. Under the concurrent influence of the political novels first proposed by Liang Qichao in 1902, there had been a boom in short fiction published in *Shenbao* in the subsequent years that promoted modern ideas. The trend reached its climax in the 1911 Revolution, in the year of which *Free Talk* was established to carry forth the newspaper's role of agitator through means of literature. In the years under party politics, the literary façade had conveniently saved *Shenbao* the trouble from censorship. With literary reform, the newspaper also efficiently galvanized the people through cultivating nationalist sentiments and sharply criticizing the rule of the GMD. It came at the time when the reading public in Shanghai could not have been more familiar with reading literary works in newspapers after decades of training by various sorts of literary publications from vanguard to entertainment in this publishing capital of China.

Although no evidence has been found that shows any involvement of the CCP in managing *Shenbao*, there is richly abundant evidence indicating the paper's intention to stay out of immediate politics to avoid trouble. Even so, *Free Talk* had most effectively galvanized the public to the favor of the CCP in the ever escalating rivalry between the two parties. Not only did Shi Liangcai consider *Free Talk* as the shopfront of *Shenbao* by substituting the chief editorship of Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鹃 (who had held the post for twelve years) with the French literary student returnee Li Liewen so as to keep up with the increasingly radicalized politics in 1933. The Nanjing government had increased the pressure from censoring article publication in *Free Talk*, to forcing a change of editorship of *Free Talk*, and to assassination of Shi Liangcai,

partially due to his refusal to accept the new editor assigned to *Free Talk*. On the other hand, the CCP had every reason to thank the newspaper for voluntarily cooperating to propagate the CCP, the effect of which was not to be underestimated in helping the CCP win the minds of the urban residents. Its literary recast of political commentaries coincided very nicely with the CCP's realization of the need to repackage political messages when propagating among the urbanites. When the two *Shenbao* journalists asked for an interview with Mao in 1937, Mao must have happily accepted; this meeting provided a valuable opportunity for spreading the underground propaganda in cities like Shanghai he had repeatedly emphasized since 1927. Mao was also said to have sighed over the end of *Shenbao* publication and its takeover by *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报 (Liberation Daily) in 1949: his pity must come from both the end of such a good and long-lasting newspaper. The politically neutral newspaper had more effectively carried the CCP propaganda in literary format among urban readers by such a group of talented writers than the self-asserted party organs could do.

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The remainder of this section is divided into two parts: Chapter 1 examines how *Free Talk* had come into being- how it had defined itself in relation to *Shenbao* from the beginning and how it had seen itself as a new genre, under the influence of the new genre of political novels in the 1900s, to promote the ideas of a modern nation. Chapter 2 examines how a self definition of *Free Talk* evolved under party politics between 1927 and 1937; this is followed by a case study of news and articles on the fall of Rehe in 1933 to show how *Free Talk* achieved political galvanization.

The limited number of scholars who mention *Free Talk* in either articles or books tend to treat the supplement as divided between its early years – characterized by publication of a majority of the so called “Mandarin ducks and butterfly novels” or other entertainment literature- and the years on the left from 1932 to 1935 – characterized by a majority of highly political essays. Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵 from East China Normal University, for instance, refers to *Free Talk* in the 1930s to compare it with other newspapers that also underlined political commentaries, such as *Duli pinglun* 独立评论 (Independent Review) and supplements of *Dagongbao*.<sup>12</sup> The book length studies of *Shenbao* by Song Jun 宋军, who gives a chronological study of *Shenbao* with data on personnel, publication and distribution, also gives a separate section, albeit small, on *Free Talk* of the early 1930s.<sup>13</sup> Leo Oufan Lee’s examination on the *youxi wenzhang* 游戏文章 (“game articles”) in the early decades of *Free Talk* brought him to the conclusion that they had collectively expanded China’s public sphere through a playful tone while the later *zawen* articles in the 1930s *Free Talk* were over-imbued with strong personal views and radical political condemnations that only shrank the space for democratic public debates.

My own research of *Free Talk* reveals a picture of continuity – continuity not only in the editorial policy of *Free Talk* through time but also on the relation between the supplement and *Shenbao*. *Shenbao* had from its beginning defined itself as a medium to galvanize the readers, to mobilize them to participate in political affairs, local or national. *Free Talk* was a conscious and successful attempt to cast the political commentaries in literary forms that drove *Shenbao*’s goal

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<sup>12</sup> Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵, *Gonggong yulun yu quanli wangluo* 公共舆论与权力网络 (Public Opinion and Power Network). Shanghai: Dongfang lishi xueshu wenku. 2012

<sup>13</sup> See note 9

further. The perspective the newspaper undertook was neither purely objective recording of news events, nor analysis and policy-suggestions for the government from the standpoint of an elite intellectual advisor.<sup>14</sup> Rarely did the newspaper analyze politics theoretically. Instead, it intended to present and analyze political affairs from how they related to the people, hence allowing the people to enter national politics, both in way of galvanizing nationalistic sentiments or in mobilizing them to action. *Free Talk* under party politics very well showcased its effectiveness in familiarizing urban residents with a nationalistic discourse that was against the rule of the Nanjing government. And the people that had been galvanized were soon put to use by the CCP for its later competition for power with the GMD. However hard *Free Talk* tried to stay out of party politics by merely maintaining a role as mass agitator, the binary opposition in form of “either / or” that was increasingly underlined in the years of party politics had forced *Free Talk* to take a side, just like Lu Xun had to do in the early 1930s.

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<sup>14</sup> this was one of the major ways that *Shenbao* differed from the elite newspapers like *Independent Review* in Beiping – the latter was contributed from and edited by well educated scholars like Hu Shi, Jiang Tingfu, Ding Wenjiang and others, who offered practical advice for government issues and were later recruited into the cabinet of the Nanjing government.

## Chapter 1 The Making of “Free Talk:” Its Origin, Function and Position in *Shenbao*

### 1. *Shenbao* as Public Mobilizer

As the longest-lasting Chinese newspaper, *Shenbao* was established by the British tea merchant Ernest Major in 1872 in Shanghai. It was designed from the beginning as a venture business to expand the Chinese reading market; there were already a significant number of missionary and Western commercial newspapers in Chinese treaty port cities in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Roswell Britton, Lin Yutang and Ge Gongzhen, the three scholars who wrote the earliest studies on the Chinese press, by the turn of 1900, there had been at least eight foreign newspapers in Hong Kong and thirty-one in Shanghai. These include not only English language newspapers but others in Portuguese, French, German and Japanese. They were either missionary journals with strong religious advocacy or early commercial newspapers aiming for foreign readers and Chinese agents. The first Chinese newspaper was *Shanghai xinbao* 上海新报 (Shanghai Gazette), established in 1861, but it included mainly translated articles from the most influential British newspaper in China at the time- North China Herald (*Beihua jiebao* 北华捷报).<sup>1</sup>

So *Shenbao* was de facto the first continuously printed Chinese newspaper in China. At this initial phase, *Shenbao* was situated in a benign environment in terms of authority regulation: the newspaper was registered in the international settlement in Shanghai, hence did not need to

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<sup>1</sup> Britton, Roswell. *The Chinese Periodical Press, 1800-1912*. Shanghai: The Press of Kelly & Walsh, LTD. 1933.

Ge, Gongzhen 戈公振. *Zhongguo baoxue shi* 中国报学史 (History of Chinese Newspapers). Hong Kong: *Tai ping shu ju* 太平书局, 1964. Lin, Yutang 林语堂. *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China*, Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago Press. 1936;

submit to the control of the Qing court. It was governed by the municipal council, consisting of unpaid members elected by landowners of that area of Shanghai, who were responsible to report to neither the governments of their own countries nor the Chinese government. So the only task for *Shenbao* at this early phase was to strategize to appeal to more Chinese readers. In her book length study of the early period of *Shenbao*, Barbara Mittler, Professor of Sinology at University of Heidelberg, examines the forms and content the newspaper adopted to turn the foreign-owned medium into a Chinese product<sup>2</sup>: Chinese learned men were employed as chief editors, Chinese writing styles such as “in the words of the sages” were used to represent acceptable symbolic power, foreign advertisements were translated into local shop signs; new characters, themes were also introduced. These strategies could be seen to have a two way effect: to both appeal to the Chinese readers and to cultivate a newspaper reading habit among the general public.

On the first page of its initial issue, *Shenbao* listed its structure for the eight pages as below:

Page one:<sup>3</sup> *Shenbao* editorial announcement 本馆告白 Principles of *Shenbao* 本馆条例;

Page two: Principles of *Shenbao*; Horse racing completion;

Page three: Couples rewarded for good deeds; selected news from *Hong Kong Daily News* 选香港新报;

Page four: selected news from *Hong Kong Daily News*; [reprint of] *Jingbao* 京报 (Beijing gazette)

Page five: [reprint of] *Jingbao*

Page six: [reprint of] *Jingbao*; advertisements

Page seven: advertisements

Page eight: Quotation list of goods 各货行情表

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<sup>2</sup> Mittler, Barbara. *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872-1912*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center. 2004

<sup>3</sup> At its initial phase, a page in the newspaper was called *zhang* 章, or chapter. Only after the formal reform in 1905 did the term change into *ban* 版, or column- consistent newspaper format nowadays.

The layout of the initial issue fully bears out the initial editorial, which was published on the first page of the same issue: all issues, be they about politics of the state, transformation of customs, affairs in Sino-foreign diplomacy, the advantages and disadvantages of business and trade, or whatever that surprises, frightens or delights the people as heard by the new people, shall be recorded in their entirety. “凡国家之政治，风俗之变迁，中外交涉之要务，商贾贸易之利弊，与夫一切可惊可鄂可喜之事，是以新人听闻者，靡不毕载。”<sup>4</sup>

So it did in the initial issue. State policies were covered by way of transcribing *Jingbao* 京报, a small newspaper published by the court for the purpose of informing officials about new laws, activities of the court and official promotions/demotions.<sup>5</sup> State affairs were juxtaposed with local news from the entertainment sector and legendary stories seemingly with moral instruction. News from abroad that was translated from Western newspapers in Hong Kong were inserted in between. At the end of the information were advertisements and market information. There were no journalists or correspondents at the starting phase and the chief editor 主笔 was the only person in charge of designing the entire newspaper. So news in the paper either came from other newspapers or from local stories that were passed on by mouth.

Although the initial editorial in 1872 underlined the broad inclusion of information in the newspaper, it similarly pointed to the importance of how the information was deemed valuable because of their ability to “surprise” “frighten” or “delights” its readers. In other words, *Shenbao* saw its role as precisely to be able to relate the news to the readers.

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<sup>4</sup> “*Benguan gaobai* 本馆告白 Editorial announcement” *Shenbao*, 30 April, 1872.

<sup>5</sup> For further information about the early court gazettes starting from at least the Ming dynasty, please refer to *Zhongguo xinwen shiye tongshi* 中国新闻事业通史 (Comprehensive History of Chinese News Business), vol. 1, by Fang Hanqi 方汉奇. *Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe* 中国人民大学出版社, 1992.

With the increasing readership within the first few years after establishment, *Shenbao* published advertisements to employ local correspondents to station at various major cities. By 1887, the number of cities with *Shenbao* correspondents reached thirty-two. In early 1882, *Shenbao* also set up a telegraph line between Tianjin and Shanghai to transmit news almost immediately where it would otherwise take up at least a week if the information were brought by a messenger via horseback and over sea from Tianjin to Shanghai. The most obvious beneficiaries were the imperial examinees – once results of the annual top level imperial exams were released, a *Shenbao* correspondent would take down the notes from Beijing, bring it on horseback over to Tianjin to send to Shanghai via telegraph.<sup>6</sup>

Boom in editorial force and advancement of technology not only enlarged the newspaper's range of coverage, but also reinforced the understanding of the social role of a newspaper. Among the early editorials was the emphasis on how informed people should be mobilized onto participating in local and national politics that could in turn modernize the nation. In the above quoted initial editorial, the term “*xinren* 新人 (new people)” was used to distinguish from the “old -” i.e., the uninformed people before the advent of newspaper, to indicate the role of the newspaper in cultivating well-informed public who could participate in national politics in driving the nation towards a better future.

In the editorial a few days later, the editor recapped the importance of the newspaper's wide inclusion of information, but added in the end of the much longer editorial that such a wide coverage was not only for the purpose of informing the readers but to express the “opinion of the people 民之意” so that those who administered the country 治理者 could hear it and would

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<sup>6</sup> Hu Daojing 胡道静, “Shanghai xinwen shiye zhi shi de fazhan” 上海新闻事业之史的发展 (Development of the History of Shanghai News Business.) Collected in *Minguo Congshu* 民国丛书 (Book Series on the Republic of China), vol.2. Shanghai shudian, 1998.

incorporate it into the process of policy making. *Shenbao* humbly believed itself to be “generous in spending a small amount of money for the sake of wide benefits 无惜小费而惠大益.”<sup>7</sup>

In another editorial within the first few months, the *Shenbao* specifically set itself as a *xinbao* 新报 (new[s]paper) as opposed to the old official court gazette *Dibao* 邸报.<sup>8</sup> It was argued that *Dibao* was merely the record of news related to the court while *xinbao*, like those from foreign countries, included news up to the country’s politics and down to the minutia of local and personal affairs and hence included readers from all walks and social strata; and that *dibao* was made from above whereas *xinbao* was made from below. Here, the function of the new[s]paper was explained as to include the general public of peasants, workers and merchants 农工商贾 in being informed and hence making their voices heard in state affairs.

The emphasis on involving the public in reading news was for the purpose of modernizing the nation. One editorial in 1873 specifically linked the new[s]paper to the widening of “*xinren* 新人:” “once the people are renewed, with the passage of time, the new people will renew other people as well 众人新之而日广之，亦使众人而又新众人也.”<sup>9</sup> In another editorial two years later, in defending itself against its criticism that the newspaper was singing eulogies to the foreign powers while denigrating China’s own, *Shenbao* further clarified its own stance as informing Chinese readers with unbiased news (neither elevating the Western powers nor that of China) in order that they would “participate to advise and discuss state

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<sup>7</sup> “Shenjiang xinbao yuanqi 申江新报缘起 (The Origin of *Shenbao*).” *Shenbao*, 6 May 1872.

<sup>8</sup> “Dibao bieyu xinbao lun 邸报别于新报论 (On How the Official Gazette *Dibao* Differs from the New[s]paper).” *Shenbao*, 13 July, 1872

<sup>9</sup> “*Shenbao* guan fu 申报馆赋 (Prose-poem on *Shenbao* Office).” *Shenbao*, 15 February, 1873.

affairs” so as to “admonish the nation to abolish its shortcomings in anticipation of its prosperity 劝国使其除弊望其振兴.”<sup>10</sup>

In the following years, *Shenbao* editors were devoted to the belief that their informing/involving of the general public into state affairs was critical to the benefits of the nation. In an essay entitled *Lun xinwenzhi zhi youyi* 论新闻纸之有益 (On the benefits of newspapers) published on 11 August 1886, the newspaper was understood as establishing a channel of communication between the top and the bottom of society, between the emperor and his people. The essay further points out that only when the emperor hears the true expression of the people’s views can the country be strengthened and his rule more long-lasting. The essay came out almost ten years earlier than reformist Liang Qichao’s famous political treatise on the press *Lun baoguan youyiyu guoshi* 论报馆之有益国事 (On the Benefits of the Press to the Nation),<sup>11</sup> which was published as the initial editorial of his newspaper *Shibao* and was considered by many as the earliest and most influential view of the press in China.

Similar understandings of the newspaper’s role continued onto the mid 1900s, when they were combined with the increasingly popular Constitutionalist reformist views. In an editorial in 1905, *Shenbao* identified itself as the “pioneer of all newspapers 自顾为各报馆之先路” in *Jisi gailiang, jianqiu jinbu* 亟思改良渐求进步 (Collecting Views from All to Make Gradual Progress).<sup>12</sup> An editorial in 1909 attached further importance of the newspaper to the state with concepts like “*yulun* 舆论 (public opinion)” and “*gongyan* 公言 (public discourse).” The

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<sup>10</sup> “*Lun benguan zuobao benyi* 论本馆作报本意 (On Our Original Intention in Making this Newspaper).” *Shenbao*, 11 October, 1875.

<sup>11</sup> Liang, Qichao. “On the Benefits of the Press to the Nation.” *Shi wu bao*. Vol.1. Aug. 9<sup>th</sup>, 1896

<sup>12</sup> “*Benguan zhengdun baowu juli* 本馆整顿报务举例 (Examples for Rectifying News Business from Our Office).” *Shenbao*, 7 February, 1905.

argument was one similar to our contemporary understanding of the terms: that the public opinion formed by the newspapers was socially powerful, and could form a “*minfeng* 民风 (trend among the people)” and “*xuefeng* 学风 (trend among the scholars)” that would influence state politics. The editorial specifically mentioned the power of a critical opinion of the government.<sup>13</sup> Hence it is clear that though attracting an audience had been *Shenbao*'s primary task since its initial days, this was achieved by its becoming a political advocate – for national modernization and, more importantly, for involving the general public in political affairs through the reading of the newspaper for information.

The theoretical propositions of the newspaper fully bear out in its content articles and reports. I will provide some brief examples here to explain *Shenbao*'s editorial policies. Since its founding in 1872, *Shenbao* had taken the initiative in engaging Shanghai people into local affairs. Starting from as early as the third issue, *Shenbao* picked up on the general dissatisfaction about the unfair treatment of Chinese people in the international settlements. A series of discussion essays were published revealing and condemning the news events such as how foreigners simply drive off after their carriages knock down a Chinese passerby and how some public parks deny entrance to the Chinese.<sup>14</sup> An early issue also published an essay entitled “*Niyi daqiao wei gongqiao yi* 拟易大桥为公桥议 (Discussion on the plan of changing the bridge to public bridge)” discussing the unfairness in charging Chinese a fee to cross the bridge while remaining free for the foreigners.<sup>15</sup> The bridge was built by a British company to meet the increasing traffic demand in crossing the Suzhou river- a major river that flowed across the international settlement marking a natural division between the Japanese controlled area and US

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<sup>13</sup> “Qingtán 清谈 (Pure Deliberation).” *Shenbao*, 19 September 1909.

<sup>14</sup> *Shenbao*, 2 May, 1872.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

and UK controlled area of the international settlement in the later war time era. The essay also went on to propose to the authorities of the settlement to waive the crossing fee for the Chinese. It also mentioned that measures were taken as the Chinese council had protested to the municipal council several times but without success. Five free ferry boats were available but there remained a fee charged to the Chinese crossing the bridge. In the news article published within a month after the essay, the fee was reportedly waived due to the pressure of public opinion, hence linking the waiving of fee to the newspaper's earlier report/discussion of the event.<sup>16</sup>

Not only were there essays discussing about the Chinese readers' own right in their immediate social environment, there were also essays concerning the state. Concurrent with the establishment of *Shenbao* was the building of the first Chinese railroad in Shanghai –the Songhu Railroad - with British capital. The railroad was completed in 1876, but was bought by the Qing government with a huge amount of money only to dismantle it. *Shenbao* published an essay entitled *Yi jian tielu yin* 议建铁路引 (Introduction to the discussion on building railway), criticizing the isolationist thought of Qing government and the local people that resulted in the waste of large sum of money in abandoning the dismantled rail tracks to rot on the island of Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> The essay also compared the current event with the obstruction to British merchants' building a telegraph line in Shanghai in 1856. According to the essay, it was the local people's superstitious belief that the erection of the telegraph pole would disrupt the *fengshui* 风水 (geomancy) that caused them to destroy the new project. A comparison was drawn to criticize the Chinese mentality that held back the state from becoming modernized. The essay on *Shenbao* drew a counter-argumentative writing from the conservative newspapers in Shanghai, such as the

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<sup>16</sup> *Shenbao*, 30 May, 1872.

<sup>17</sup> *Shenbao*, 2 May, 1872.

British owned *Huibao* 汇报. *Huibao* published the essay on the next day entitled *Bian Shenbao da lunlu shi* 辩申报答轮路事 (Refuting *Shenbao*'s answer to railway issues), to refute the argument of the *Shenbao* essay and listing the harm the rail road could do to China.<sup>18</sup>

By doing so, *Shenbao* established itself as defender of benefits of the Shanghai residents as well as an advocate for China's modernization. These early essays in *Shenbao* bore either the word *lun* 论 or *yi* 议 in the title. The word *lun* means an "essay to analyze and illustrate logic of things," as often used in words like *yulun* 舆论 (public discourse) and *shenlun* 社论 (editorial). The early essays with *lun* in the title included: *Kaikuang lun* 开矿论, which discussed how mining was beneficial to the state and its people; *Yi lun* 医论, which gave high praise to Western medicine and surgery and its method of vaccination against smallpox; *Lunchuan lun* 轮船论 that analyzed why China should manufacture steamships to substitute for wooden boats to develop water transportation; *Shanggu lun* 商贾论 and *Shangfengbaisu lun* 伤风败俗论 revealed and criticized respectively the phenomena of official-rank-donation (a way of becoming an official through monetary "donation") and of opening opium smoking halls as well as the harm it could do to social morality. In almost all of the *lun* essays, the event or phenomena were first described, followed by analysis attempting to reach an argument as conclusion. The *lun* essay invites an immediate association with the eight-legged essay adopted in the Imperial examination, which follows certain order and pattern to arrive at an argument on general topics about the rule of the state or cultivation of a gentleman. Given the fact that most of the early editors were learned men with their hearts set on obtaining a degree but had failed the examination, this was not surprising.

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<sup>18</sup> *Huibao*, 3 May, 1872.

The other group of the essays had the word *yi* in the title. The definition for *yi*<sup>19</sup> is also an opinionated essay but with clear association with action, such as words like *tiyi* 提议 (to propose) and *changyi* 倡议 (to advocate). The above-mentioned essays *Ni yi daqiao wei gongqiao yi*<sup>20</sup> and *Yi jian tielu yin*<sup>21</sup> did not stop short at the mere analysis of the phenomena or in forging an argument, but went further to engage the public with the affair and to initiate action. *Ni yi daqiao wei gongqiao yi* adopted an advocative rhetoric to condemn the phenomena of charging Chinese a fee for crossing the bridge and confronted the Municipal Council: “The daily average number of Chinese who crossed the bridge amounted to fifty to sixty thousand, totaling the daily revenue for using the bridge to over sixty *yuan*. Accordingly, annual revenue from this fee amounts to over twenty thousand. This makes a huge profit already, why [are they] still not satisfied and waive the fee now?” The essay continued the agitative tone to ask for public support for its proposal and claimed that *Shenbao* had urged the Chinese Guild in the Settlement to appeal to the municipal Council. The essay, as mentioned, further claimed that if no effect had been drawn, *Shenbao* would place five free ferry boats as a way of protest. In a later reportage of the event, the Municipal Council was said to have accepted the proposal and waived the fee under the pressure of “public opinion.”<sup>22</sup>

Early issues of *Shenbao* suggested its priority was making local news relate to the readers, writings aiming at involvement of the public. The intention of such a move at the early years of *Shenbao* was to attract readers and increase sales. This was in line with the intention of other strategies adopted as well, such as launching the first illustrated news journal *Dianshizhai*

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<sup>19</sup> in *Modern Chinese Dictionary*

<sup>20</sup> *Shenbao*, 4 May, 1872.

<sup>21</sup> *Shenbao*, 2 May, 1872.

<sup>22</sup> Quote after Song Jun. p11

*huabao* 点石斋画报 (Dianshizhai Pictorial), which made its name with the vivid image depiction of the Sino-French War. A first war correspondent, a Russian, was employed and dispatched to the front line in Vietnam to report the war.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, this effort did produce a positive outcome. In reminiscing about the public reaction to early *Shenbao*, Hu Daojing, publisher and editor of World Bookstore, one of the major publishers in the Republican Era, recollected how the number of readers increased by several thousand who came to buy the newspaper after realizing that reading newspapers could benefit their actual lives.<sup>24</sup> From September 1874 onwards, *Shenbao* shifted to use *sailian* 赛连 paper instead of the cheap but limited *maotai* 毛太 paper to meet the increasing market demand.<sup>25</sup>

Towards the turn of the century, China had been increasingly involved in war with imperialist powers like France, Britain and Japan, and there had been from within the state rising voices for reform, not just in technological, military and educational realms but also in the political realm. *Shenbao* accordingly had continued its role of advocate and become increasingly politically active and had evolved into a leader of public opinion. One prominent example was its role in the 1906 Constitutional Movement. Starting from June 1906, when the Qing court announced its preparation for Constitutionalism, *Shenbao*, together with some other newspapers such as the Reformists' organ *Shibao*, launched special columns devoted to the discussion of constitutionalism. Special columns for political advisory and constitutional preparation were launched, modeled after the political organizations proposed by reformists such as Liang Qichao.

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<sup>23</sup> Song, p42-50. See also: Xu Zaiping 徐载平, Xu Ruifang 徐瑞芳. *Qingmo si shi si nian shenbao shiliao* 清末四十年申报史料 (Historical Materials of *Shenbao* in the Forty-four Years in Late Qing.) Xinhua Press. 1988. See also, *Zhongguo jindai chuban shiliao* 中国近代出版史料 (Historical Materials for Publishing in Modern China), edited by Zhang Jinglu 张静庐. Vol.2, p177. *Shanghai shudian*: 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Hu, p898

<sup>25</sup> Song, p278

Topics like the current political crisis and corrupt imperial political entity were discussed and vehemently attacked, along with reportages on students' demonstrations across the country and how and why the expression of the public opinion should be protected.<sup>26</sup>

However, unlike *Shibao*, which devoted its essays solely to political discussion through publication of series of reformists' political treatises, *Shenbao* adopted its usual perspective from the people – i.e. how such political reform could benefit the lives of the readers. The discourse after June 1906 on Constitutionalism had been targeted at the reform of the Qing bureaucracy. Essays were devoted to revealing corruption by detailing how Shanghai, Suzhou and Nanjing, the then most prosperous cities, became the places for these corrupt officials to spend their luxurious lives. The discourse aimed at setting up the Qing government in opposition to the people: natural and human disasters had been escalating, and there had been uprisings and protests across the country, which had been suppressed by troops dispatched by the government; violence had not been able to quench completely the public opinion. After observing the government's act, doubts had arisen that constitution movement by the government was but a deceiving slogan while it maintained the rule of tyranny.<sup>27</sup> Such depiction was the continuation of *Shenbao*'s activist role it had embarked on in early 1906 in advocating for Constitutional Monarchy.<sup>28</sup> Immediately after the court announced preparation for Constitutionalism in June

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<sup>26</sup> in the year 1906, numerous articles were published in *Shenbao* condemning the old imperial political system and advocating for the new. The ones mentioned here include: "Lun jinri guanchang zhanran shihao zhipi 论近日官场沾染嗜好之癖 (On the Recent Trend of Officials' Addictions)." *Shenbao*, 16 March, 1906. "Lun jinri shiju zhiwei 论今日时局之危 (On the Dangers of the Current Political Situation)." 6 December, 1906. "Lun jinri yi tonggai zhuanzhi zhizheng 论今日宜痛改专制之政 (Current Tyranny Should be Changed)." *Shenbao*, 25 December, 1906. "Lun jingbu banfa ying jinbao lun 论警部颁发应禁报论 (on the Police Department's Publication of 'Newspapers Should be Banned')." *Shenbao*, 14 Oct. 1906

<sup>27</sup> "Current tyranny should be changed." *Shenbao*, 25 December, 1906.

<sup>28</sup> It was not until after the major formal reform in early 1906 that *Shenbao* had determined to switch to support of constitutional monarchy. Previously, under the chief editorship of the conservative scholar Huang Xieyun 黄协隄, vehement condemnation essays were published in *Shenbao*, calling Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao traitors and demonstrating loyalty to the Qing court. Song Jun and Hu Daojing both suggested Huang was doing it for the sake of his own political career, where he became official of the Qing after resignation from *Shenbao*.

1906, political, business and academic sectors, led by pro-reform entrepreneurs like Zhang Jian 张謇 and Tang Shouqian 汤寿潜 established a congress for Constitutionalist preparation. *Shenbao* played a prominent role in leading the press along with reformist newspapers like *Shibao*, *Hubao* and *Zhongwai ribao* 中外日报 and in organizing the celebration at Zhang Garden. Thousands were reported to have attended the event.<sup>29</sup> The subsequent articles and discussions in *Shenbao* in condemning the long hated corrupt bureaucracy and ardent support for Constitutionalism was mass mobilization from the actual public gathering to the discursive public space in the newspaper.

*Shenbao*'s advocacy effect is not to be underestimated. According to Song Jun, the *Shenbao* journalist based in Beijing<sup>30</sup> had once noted how the Qing court was scared by the powerful public opinion expression of the press and often dispatched agents to buy *Shenbao* and monitor public discourse.<sup>31</sup> Rudolf Wagner's study of the history of *Shenbao* cited several officials' diaries and mentions that even the highest imperial academic institute – the Hanlin Academy 翰林院 - had subscribed to *Shenbao*.<sup>32</sup> Hu Daojing's study of the press in Shanghai in general similarly pointed to the soaring influence of the newspaper among all sectors of the society at the turn of 1905 and 1906. Newspapers were viewed with contempt among officials as means of spreading rumors for profits in the early days;<sup>33</sup> yet since the mid 1900s, the court, officials and scholars not only realized the power of the press, but had in general acknowledged

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<sup>29</sup> Song Jun. p69

<sup>30</sup> there had been no such concept as journalist at the time. *Fangyuan* 访员(visitor) was the term for the *Shenbao* employee who worked in Beijing.

<sup>31</sup> Song Jun, p71

<sup>32</sup> Wagner, Rudolf. "The *Shenbao* in Crisis: the international environment and the conflict between Guo Songtao and the *Shenbao*." *Late Imperial China*, vol.20, issue 1. June 1999.

<sup>33</sup> An essay by Yao Gonghe 姚公鹤 entitled "Shanghai xianhua 上海闲话(Leisure Talks about Shanghai)," published in *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志(Eastern Miscellany), vol 14, issue 6, recorded a similar view of newspaper among officials. High rank official Zuo Zongtang was quoted to have slandered *Shenbao* as making rumors.

the values of the political commentary articles and started to read newspapers as way of getting informed about public opinion and local, national and foreign news.<sup>34</sup>

It was no surprise *Shenbao*'s dissension immediately raised the eyebrows of the Qing government, who believed that such open discourse was another threat to its already weak rule among other dangers like revolutionary uprisings and foreign aggression. As a response, the Qing government launched *Da Qing yinshua wu zhuanlü* 大清印刷物专律 (Special Law of Qing on Publications) in the same year of 1906, then another legal amendment in 1908, detailing ways of regulating the publication and the punishments for violation. The 1908 amendment specifically required that newspapers should be sent for censorship before publishing. Any discourse or news that was unfavorable to the Qing government should be banned from mailing and distributing. *Shenbao* reacted quickly by publishing essays to criticize the restriction on expression rights. An essay entitled "On the Police Department's Publication of 'Newspapers Should be Banned'" on 14 October, 1906, specifically pointed out the restriction on discourse of "defamation of the court" was actually contradictory to the constitutional idea. It argued further that the saying "discussing disrespectfully state affairs" was the near-sighted view of the press by court officials and emphasized the point that newspapers were to benefit the state instead of harming it and the public opinion should be expressed without being tampered.<sup>35</sup> In the months after the essay, *Shenbao* had published as many as over thirty commentary essays vehemently condemning the court's regulation of newspapers.

So far I have spent much space discussing political essays in *Shenbao*. This is not to say that *Shenbao* was only about politics. It was first of all a newspaper designed to attract broad

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<sup>34</sup> Hu Daojing. P 956-957

<sup>35</sup> *Shenbao*, 14 October, 1906.

reading audiences: not just those who concerned their public lives and political environment around them, but also the learned men and those who enjoyed entertaining and literary writings. The initial editorial encouraged contribution of a wide range of genres from local literati: “If any poet or writer were to benefit us with short and long [literary] pieces, such as bamboo twig-ballads 竹枝词 from famous cultural regions, or narrative long ballads 长歌纪事, [we would] not charge fees 概不取值;<sup>36</sup> This announcement came as highly attractive to the literati, since, as per Natascha Gentz, the paper provided “a free medium for a quick and wide distribution of their work and an avenue to literary fame and social status, even to newcomers.”<sup>37</sup> On the side of *Shenbao*, publishing the very popular bamboo twig-ballads 竹枝词 was *Shenbao*'s strategy to make the paper culturally acceptable among the Jiangnan elites.

There had been for sure other genres that had low political relevance and were designed to attract literati readers. These include poems, travelogue and diaries. The major impression one gets when leafing through the newspaper was: first, the content of literary writings and news or political commentaries was quite separated from each other; second, they were, despite their incompatibility in content, put together with hard core news and political essays in the running sequence by page numbers. As I will show in the next section, news commentaries and literary works were soon to be separated from news columns when the supplement *Free Talk* was finally established in 1911 to house political commentaries and literature.

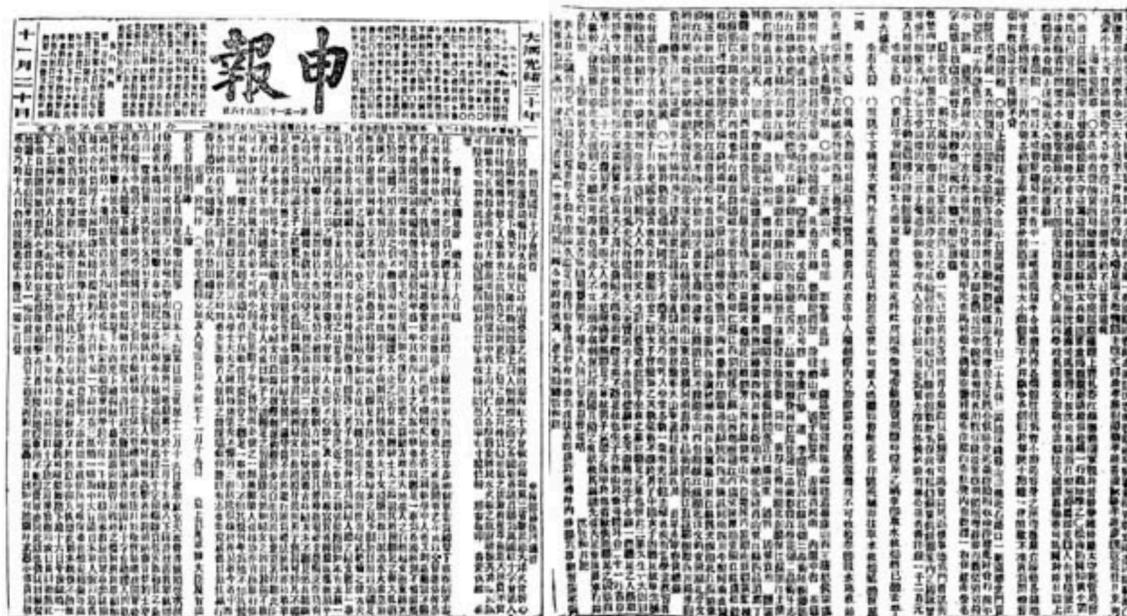
## 2. From News to *Free Talk* – Passing on the Role of Public Advocate

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<sup>36</sup> “*Shenbao Regulations* 本馆条例”*Shenbao*, April 30, 1872.

<sup>37</sup> Natascha Gentz, “Useful Knowledge and Appropriate Communication: The Field Journalistic Production in Late Nineteenth-Century China.” In *Joining the Global Public. Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers 1870- 1910*. Edited by Rudolf Wagner. New York: State University of New York Press. 2007.P73

The explosion of information in *Shenbao* around the turn of the century made the paper barely readable. In 1905, the first major editorial reform was taken. Scholars pinpointed the reason for the downturn in sales of the newspaper.<sup>38</sup> On the first page of *Shenbao* on 7 February 1905, an editorial listed twelve principles detailing the changes it promised its readers. The top three principles probably best illustrated the direction the editorial board was heading: first, to keep tenets updated by closely following the step of the changing world (referring to the reformist political movement at the time); second, to broaden coverage and include as much news as possible; third, change the layout of the newspaper with clear bold titles, upper and bottom parts division so as to clearly distinguish articles from each other. Below is the look of the paper on 27 December 1904 before the reform, and that on 29 April 1905, two months after the editorial format reform.



*Shenbao*, 27 Dec. 1904. Page 1

*Shenbao*, 27 Dec. 1904. Page 3

<sup>38</sup> Song Jun, Xu and Xu, and Hu Daojing all mentioned the drop of sales in 1905 with different explanations- Xu and Xu associated the drop in sales with the newspaper's conservative view in response to the reformist voices; Song also pointed to the increasing competition *Shenbao* was facing with the boom in reformist newspapers.



Shenbao, 29 Apr., 1905. Column 1  
(from Green Apple database, accessed from Washington University library database )



Shenbao, 29 Apr., 1905. Column 9  
(from Green Apple database, accessed from Washington University library database )

The paper before the reform in 1904 had the content laid out as follows:

- Page 1: Commentary essay (“On Forbidding Women to Bind Feet”); telex news; transcription from the court.
- Page 2: fourteen pieces of news related to Japanese-Russian war; one piece international news on other topics; three national news and one local news.
- Page 3: Ten pieces of local news;
- Page 4-8: Advertisements;
- Page 9: Local business notices;
- Page 10: Advertisements.

Except for the much wider range of news coverage, *Shenbao*’s layout before 1905 editorial reform did not bear much change from its early issues when it was first launched over three decades ago. The layout of an issue after the reform on 29 April 1905 was as follows:

- Page 1: Advertisements before the essay; Commentary essay (“On Medicine Should Traverse the Chinese and the Western”).
- Page 2: special dispatches (“Kaifeng Luoyang Railroad Stock Shares for Sale here,” “Uselessness of the British Cannons,” “Naval Mine Placed at Hong Kong Estuary,” “Report from Russian Naval Commander on Ways of Combining Fleets” and so on).
- Page 3: special dispatches (“Russian Ship Secretly Acquiring for Detailed Nautical Chart,” “Traffic Situation in Manchuria,” “Sichuan-Wuhan Railroad Uses Chinese Engineers,” “Changping Provincial Silver Mine Granted” and so on).

Page 4: National news (“Eastern Three Provinces Commander Vacant” “Minister Zhu Requesting Administration of Water Supply and Ships in Beijing”).

Page 5-8: advertisements

Second page 第二张

Page 9: international and national news (“Japanese Fleet Seen Near Lv Song,” “Russia Suppressing Ethnic and Religious Dissents” and so on)

Page 10: regional news (“Steamship Bureau Opens,” “Suzhou-Changzhou Route Opened” and so on)

Page 11: supreme court judgements.

Page 12 to 15: advertisements.

Page 16: Beijing gazette summaries.

Third paper 第三张

Page 17: social news and announcements.

Page 18: municipal council court judgments.

Page 19: announcements in the settlement in Shanghai.

Page 20: business information and shipping schedule.

By comparison, several changes were fundamental and made the newspaper much easier for readers navigate: while the size of the pages remained the same, the number of pages doubled from ten to twenty; advertisements also doubled from four pages to eight; business information and shipping schedule were published on a separate page instead of among the advertisements. News coverage was much richer: both international and national news drastically increased with clearer categorization – “telex news 电传” was changed to “special dispatches 本馆专电” to distinguish the news not only by location where the events took place but also by source, i.e., from *Shenbao*'s own journalists or translated/transcribed from other agencies or newspapers. Style of the newspaper title was another prominent change: the small characters of *Shenbao* that had been buried within the cloud of words was replaced with a separated and much larger space devoted to the title of the newspaper along with the issue's publication details – Chinese calendar date on the left side, total number of pages, price for advertisements, and Western calendar date; below these were the price for the newspaper as well as the paper's issue number. The change stood out the newspaper's title and the article titles, making it much easier for readers to navigate. Whereas one had to read the full pages to know what the articles were about, one could

then conveniently locate the articles they wanted to read by column and by titles. News and essays were categorized into different columns instead of cramming all types of narratives into one paper arbitrarily divided by page. In general, news were divided into sections including “special dispatches 专电-” important but short telegrams of news of the capital or overseas; “Important News -” news on the front page, which was similar to nowadays headlines; the rest of the news was divided into local news, Chinese news, domestic news, international news, correspondences.<sup>39</sup> The news reports and essays were further divided by content into various categories, such as the diplomatic, the political, the military, the industrial, the civil and the miscellaneous.

Along the format reform was the genre change that prepared the launch of the separate supplement *Free Talk* a couple years later. Two lines of changes were noted: first, increasing importance was given to news commentary and a separate section was made for summary of news commentary by a certain Western newspaper, usually on the second, third or fourth page. Before 1905, news reports sometimes included commentary from Western newspapers as part of the news. Starting in 1905, commentary articles with the word “*pinglun* 评论” took a separate place on its own, which used to be placed among news. The news commentaries in 1905 included: “Englishmen commenting on the war 英人评论战事” (9 March 1905), “The European commenting on General Lin 欧人评论林将军” (22 March 1905), “The European commenting on General Ke 欧人评论柯将军” (22 March 1905), “The European commenting on Russian

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<sup>39</sup> Correspondences were reportages mailed back to the office from *Shenbao* correspondents stationed at various places. These were relatively long and detailed reportages of less time-sensitive news events; roughly equal to the nowadays feature articles.

fleet 欧人评论俄舰队” (18 April 1905), “Comments on the peace treaty by American newspapers 美国报章关于议和之评论” (8 September 1905).



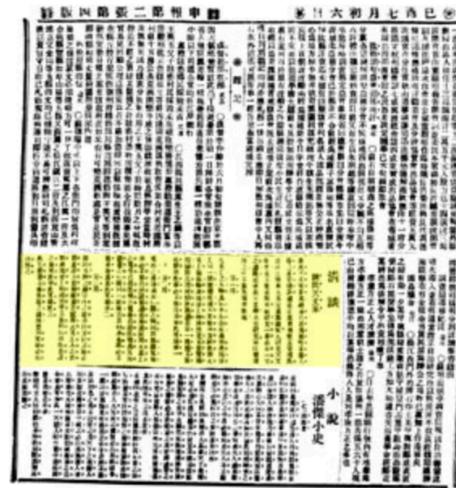
(Shenbao, 9 March 1905. Page three. Highlighted part is the article “Englishmen Commenting on the War,” placed among other news reports on the Russo-Japanese War.)

The second change was the launch of a separate section called “*qingtan* 清谈 (Pure Deliberation)”, usually on page twelve or thirteen after the news pages. Essays in this section were *Shenbao* editors’ views on the current news, which, before 1905, were published at the end of the relevant news as commentaries and annotations. Topics of the essays in *Pure Deliberation* were wide but all relevant to the recent news, and they were written from the standpoint of the readers, i.e., to relate the current news to readers’ immediate social environ, or to raise doubt on behalf of the readers about the news. The *Pure Deliberation* essay on 21 November 1908 described the horror suffused in society after some murderous acts in Beijing that continued for two days. The essay ended by suggesting that the situation had been fixed by then, and there should not be any further fear among the people by the circulation of pure rumors. The essay three months earlier, on 21 August 1908, was written in response to then the recent news report on the invention of wireless communication with the planet Mars by Harvard University

scholars. The essay took the stance with traditional Chinese view that astronomy was unlearned and was based on sheer imagination and raised three questions to challenge the feasibility of such an act.<sup>40</sup>



(*Pure Deliberation*, *Shenbao*, 21 Nov. 1908)



(*Pure Deliberation*, *Shenbao*, 21 Aug. 1908)

Although both were news commentaries, *Pure Deliberation* essays differed from the commentary essays on the news pages in style. News commentaries were summaries of comments by Western newspapers and adopted a formal register; *Pure Deliberation* essays, by comparison, were written with readers' stance in mind – instead of giving objective quotes of views on military and political aspects, they were written as subjective responses to news events in order to make readers relate. This put *Pure Deliberation* along the line with sections such as “*Xiaoping* 小评 (Small Comments)” and “*Ou'tan* 偶谈 (Occasional Talk).” The former section consisted of short reviews on a recent film or theater play and the latter were comments on political situation, usually without immediate association with the recent news. The 28 Dec. 1923 issue included a Small Comment review on the new film “*Gu'er jiuzu ji* 孤儿救祖记 (An

<sup>40</sup> The three questions were: it was doubtful whether Mars had lives just like our earth; it was doubtful whether the Mars had developed communication technologies to function as a receiving end; it was doubtful whether there would be language like we had in the earth.

Orphan Saving His Mother);” while the 7 March 1924 issue included two Small Comment essays, one reviewing a new foreign film “*Zei yinyuan* 贼姻缘,” the other gave review and comments on the differences between storytelling in the north and in the south. For *Occasional Talk* section, the 8 May 1913 issue included a satire essay about the political upheaval during the initial years of the Republic of China. The current situation was characterized as ferocious rivalry for political power between different groups and was depicted in classical verses by six drunken men walking out of the graveyard – a fictional narrative setting imitating traditional novels like *Dream of Red Mansions*, where transcendental truth of the world was pointed out by some drunken wandering monks. The 3 July 1921 issue similarly included the same author (Zhou Shoujuan)’s work which compared sentiments arisen from reading classical novels like *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Dream of Red Mansions* and Pu Songling’s *Liaozhai* collection of ghost stories with the heroic national saving spirits.

Although imbued with political connotations, essays in *Pure Deliberation* and *Occasional Talk* presented political materials in forms of casual or *Free Talk* and with rhetorical embellishments. In other words, political materials were processed with artistic and literary tint. The way they approached the current news was through informal “talk-” a personal response or interpretation of the state or international affairs.

All of these newly emergent sections, *Pure Deliberation*, *Brief Comments* and *Occasional Talk* were grouped to the newspaper’s supplement *Free Talk* once it was established on 24 August 1911. The launch of the supplement was among the second editorial reform of *Shenbao* in 1911, when *Shenbao* published its aim in an announcement on the same day as the launch of *Free Talk*: “our newspaper has since long won our readers by the exhaustive information, yet people have recently had their hearts set on something concise. While it is

exhaustive, it cannot be concise; and while it is concise it cannot be exhaustive – there cannot be both ways. However, our aim of today’s revolution is to achieve both ways.”<sup>41</sup> Being concise must refer to the drastic shortening of news article titles to only less than five characters under the new chief editorship of Zhang Shutong 张叔通.<sup>42</sup> Zhang proposed short and powerful articles that stated the issues and views right front instead of going to lengths for elaboration. As a result, not only the titles but articles and commentaries were largely shortened, so that the pages could carry more news from the increased number of *Shenbao* journalists.

The exhaustive side mentioned in the announcement must refer to the increase of news commentaries and the new supplement of *Free Talk*. *Shenbao*’s then manager Xi Zipei 席子佩 (?-1929) appointed his own townsman Wang Dungen 王钝根 (1888-1951) as the chief editor for *Free Talk*, who foregrounded the importance of the supplement as being “rich in variety and interesting 丰富多彩, 饶有趣味”<sup>43</sup> in front of others. Wang defined the reason for launching *Free Talk* as: “Recordings must be interesting so as to catch the eye without tiring it. What has been recorded in the newspaper recently is either war disasters with fighters and swords or flood and draught disasters. How can they produce fun if not only add to tragic sentiments?”<sup>44</sup> In other words, *Free Talk* was established to elaborate on the news materials that were required to remain as concise recordings of the events starting 1911.

A variety of ways were to be utilized in *Free Talk* to process the news materials in an interesting way to attract readers’ eyes. The various artistic forms to satirize politics during the time of Xinhai Revolution, taking place just a little more than a month after the launch of the

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<sup>41</sup> “Benbao gaige yaoyan 本报改革要言(Brief Words on the Revolution of Our Newspaper).” 24 August 1911.

<sup>42</sup> Song, p76

<sup>43</sup> initial editorial of *Free Talk*. *Shenbao*, 24 August 1911.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

supplement and was a critical event that pronounced the end of the Qing Empire and led to the founding of the Republic of China, supplied ever emerging political materials for a quick growth of the supplement.

*Shenbao* was the first newspaper to report the success of Wuchang Uprising on 11 October 1911, the after the event. The report was among a series of reports about revolutionary acts before and during the uprising. Immediately after the event, the Qing government placed a ban on the press, forbidding it to spread the news of the uprising to other parts of the country. *Shenbao* ignored the ban in praising the Wuchang Uprising as “the most successful act by the revolutionary Party.”<sup>45</sup> In the same issue on 11 October, *Shenbao* devoted half a page to publishing photographs of the revolutionary army marching forward, shouldering guns and cannon. Some of the photos praised self-discipline of the army by showing the undisturbed order of shops in Shanghai even when the army marched by. The issue on 17 November 1911 published the article “*Dangjin renwu ping* 当今人物评 (Comments on Current Figures)” lauding Sun Zhongshan as the revolutionary leader who saved China. A week later, Sun’s speech given in Japan on his way back to China was published in its entirety.<sup>46</sup>

*Free Talk* in October and November of 1911 had accordingly become a major site for ardent promotion of revolutionary ideas and condemnation of the Qing government, especially on its then representative Yuan Shikai 袁世凯.<sup>47</sup> On 25 November, *Free Talk* published “Bada zui’e 八大罪恶 (Eight Great Crimes),” exposing Yuan’s career past as a sinister and crafty

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<sup>45</sup> Scholars like Barbara Mittler argues that taking the risk of disobeying the government ban was *Shenbao*’s strategy to utilize the ban to sell better precisely because the news was forbidden. See Mittler, p34

<sup>46</sup> “Sun Yixian zhiyan 孙逸仙之言 (Words of Sun Yatsen).” *Shenbao*, 23 November 1911.

<sup>47</sup> Yuan was re-employed by the Qing court to negotiate with Sun Zhongshan, who then had accepted Yuan’s condition of conceding the Presidency of the Republic of China to Yuan if he were to successfully persuade the Emperor to abdicate.

politician. Two days later, another essay entitled “*Yuan Shikai de lishi* 袁世凯的历史 (History of Yuan Shikai),” similarly revealed his inglorious past and deemed him as tyrant and unworthy for the presidency of the Republic. The essays were published just a few days after *Shenbao*’s news columns reported about the meeting of Yuan and Sun.

In early 1912, when *Shenbao* was loaded with news reports about Yuan’s refusals on many of Sun’s proposals about the newly founded Republic and its central government, the chief editor of *Free Talk* Wang Dungen wrote the satire “*Suyan kaozheng* 俗彦考证 (Research on an Idiom),” intimating Yuan Shikai as a mouse that jumped into the scale, deceiving buyers by weighing himself instead of the goods. The article was written as a response to the reports in the news columns such as “The northern army jointly signed for the call for abdication of the Qing Emperor” on 31 January 1912, “miscellaneous comments on the new capital” on 12 February, “Reply to president Sun from Yuan Shikai” on 21 February and so on. The literary embellishments such as metaphor, satire and the writing style to express opinionated views highlighted that *Free Talk* was both to declare *Shenbao*’s political stance in current affairs to accompany the increasingly objective news reports and to elaborate the view through literary recast that could better appeal to and motivate its readers.

A concurrent format change of *Shenbao* - use of subtitles – pointed to the same end. The first use of subtitle dated back to June 2 1909<sup>48</sup> - following the main title of “Today’s New Stage 今日之新舞台” was the subtitle “Must go. Cannot miss! 必须去，不可不去!” The news was about a charity Peking Opera performance for famine relief. The subtitle was added to essentialize *Shenbao*’s role discussed above - as an advocator to engage the public in donations for the famine. Another example was a news report listed under “Important News” on 17 April

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<sup>48</sup> Xu and Xu, P107

1911. Under the title “A Treaty Dividing China like a Melon 瓜分中国—租约” was the subtitle “Disaster is upon us, what can be done? Awaken, awaken! 祸亟矣，可若何？猛省，猛省!”

The subtitle again pointed to *Shenbao*'s understanding of its own role – not only to spread information but to stir up a nationalistic sentiment among the public. Since the launching of *Free Talk*, this social function of *Shenbao* was carried over to the new supplement, in its free experimentation with the literary forms and rhetoric to make news “interesting,” and, more importantly, to “catch [more] readers’ eyes.”

### 3. *Free Talk* as a new genre?

*Free Talk* was an assembly of a large variety of texts in terms of topic, style, language, length and many other aspects. Essays with political topics were usually juxtaposed with an installment of a novel or a poem, which could be in turn posited next to caricatures. The immediate question to be raised is: how to treat *Free Talk* texts as a coherent group? In his study of serialized novels in Shanghai, Alexander Des Forges pointed to the recent developments in genre studies as moving away from a universal categories as ideal types or a set of rules.<sup>49</sup> Rather, scholars like Raymond Williams suggest that genres should be seen as social constructions; Frederick Jameson further developed the view by suggesting genres “should be thought concretely as literary institutions...social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify a proper use of a particular cultural artifact.”<sup>50</sup>

*Free Talk* could be seen precisely as a genre in this sense: instead of streamlining the texts according to preset generic rules, *Free Talk* could be seen as a site of literary experimentation to play with up-to-date news materials. It was created in the most politically

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<sup>49</sup> Des Forges, Alexander. *Mediasphere Shanghai: The Aesthetics of Cultural Production*. University of Hawaii Press, 2007. P11-12

<sup>50</sup> Jameson, Frederick. “Magical narratives: Romance as genre.” Quoted in Des Forges, *ibid*.

turbulent time in the republican era, as literary recast of news – “a particular cultural artifact,” as Jameson would call it -- with the aim to relate national news events to the urban readers of Shanghai. The dynamic interaction between literature and news, and between literature and ideological instruction had become a popular literary practice since the turn of 1900. Tang Haijiang 唐海江’s study of late Qing political newspapers, particularly *Qingyibao* 清议报, points to the form of short novel as a favorable form to propagate political ideas and to mobilize the masses.<sup>51</sup> The well known late Qing reformists like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were not only ardent promoters of novel as the means for spreading political ideas but were active translators and writers of political novels. Kang Youwei had started to promote political novels in as early as 1897. In *Riben shumuzhi* 日本书目志 (Japanese Bibliographica), Kang collected and translated Japanese political novels like 花柳春话 (かりゅうしゅんわ, Spring Talks under Willow Blossom), 佳人奇遇记 (かじんのきぐう, Adventures of a Beautiful Woman), 经国美谈 (ケイコクビダン, Much Quoted Talks of Governing a Nation) and 雪中梅 (せつちゅうばい, Plum Blossom in Snow) etc. During his exile in Japan, Liang Qichao had obviously grown so highly interested in Japanese political novels that he continuously translated and introduced political novels to Chinese audiences in the reformist organ *Qingyibao*. Starting from October 1901, Liang started serializing in *Qingyibao* the first piece of *Yinbingshi ziyoushu* 饮冰室自由书 (Notes on Freedom from Ice Drinking Hall), a collection of his own reading notes and commentaries. One commentary in November 1901 lauded the authors of political novels as “influential political commentators,” who “expressed their political views through characters in

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<sup>51</sup> Tang Haijiang. *Qingmo zhenglun baokan yu minzhong dongyuan* 清末政论报刊与民众动员 (Late Qing Political Newspapers and Mass Mobilization). Qinghua daxue chu ban she, 2007

the novels.” He concluded that such works “should not be viewed as merely fiction,” because they were the “most effective [means] to infiltrate people’s minds [with political ideas].”<sup>52</sup> He elaborated the point by referring to the two political novels he deemed as the best – *Adventures of a Beautiful Woman*, *Much Quoted Talks of Governing a Nation*, and called political novel as “the soul of the nation’s people 国民之魂” and “with highest contribution 为功最高.” The two novels were subsequently serialized in *Qingyibao* as a literary model for his peer reformists. The launch of *Shenbao Free Talk*, a mass medium that aimed to agitate and involve the masses with the nation’s political affairs, was a timely product when various literary means and mass media were used to conjure a collective imagination for a modern new polity.

The launch of *Xin xiaoshuo* 新小说 (New fiction) in October 1902 was another reformist attempt along the same line. The initial editorial of the journal published Liang’s well-known treatise “On the relationship between fiction and the government of the people.” Many ground breaking thoughts have been teased out from the short piece for analysis, among which are Liang’s call for “new fiction” and his use of fiction for cultivating the “new people 新民.” In this aspect, he wrote:

If one intends to renew the people of a nation, one must first renew its fiction. Therefore, to renew morality, one must renew fiction; to renew religion, one must renew fiction; to renew politics, one must renew fiction; to renew social customs, one must renew fiction; to renew learning and arts, one must renew fiction and to renew even the human mind and remould its character, one must renew fiction. Why is this so? This is because fiction has a profound power over the way of man.<sup>53</sup>

Fiction was elevated to the utmost position in literature. Under ardent promotion by Liang, *Qingyibao* serialized *Kajin no Kigu* in a total of thirty-four installments, and *Kei koku*

<sup>52</sup> Originally published in *Qingyibao*, quoted from the separate reprint of *Free Book from the Ice Drinking Hall*. Shanghai: Guangzhi shuju, 1903.

<sup>53</sup> Translated by Gek Nai Cheng. In Kirk Denton ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought, 1893-1945*. P74

*bidan* in thirty-one among the publication of numerous other shorter novels. Liang's own political novels, most well-known one being *Xin Zhongguo weilai ji* 新中国未来记 (The Future of New China), were mostly serialized in *Xin xiaoshuo*. Like the Japanese political novels Liang introduced, *The Future of New China* expressed Liang's reformist ideals through the speeches delivered at the imagined national conventions by the erudite and articulated scholar Kong Juemin. The novel had almost no plot and was comprised of mere dialogues, "gripping one particular question, following a straight line, arguing back and forth for as many as forty-four times, adding up to over sixteen thousand words," as Liang himself commented in the novel's introduction.<sup>54</sup>

*Shenbao* was perhaps among the first to answer Liang Qichao's call for instructing readers with political views through literary forms like the novel and short stories. "Xinnian mengyou ji 新年梦游记 (Travel in Dreams at the New Year)" was one of such early attempts in *Shenbao*. The short novel was published on the second day after the lunar new year on 8 February 1907, and described the scenes the narrator encountered in his travel to *Ciguo* 雌国 (female state) in a dream on new year's eve. The story detailed how the narrator sailed across the slave sea and arrived at Ciguo and was struck by the bizarre scenes he saw— all schools in the state taught their students skills to flatter foreigners in courses like "How to Toady 媚外学," "How to be Envious 妒忌学," "How to be Selfish 私学" and "How to Flatter 谄学." The highly satirical criticism was directed at the impotence of the late Qing government in its weak diplomatic handlings of foreign aggression. The author of the novel, Wang Zhongqi 王中麒, the

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<sup>54</sup> Liang Qichao. "The Future of New china. Introduction." Collected Works of Ice Drinking Room 饮冰室合集. Shanghai: Zhong hua shu ju. 1989.

first chief editor of *Shenbao* after the 1905 reform, was identified as *Nanshe* 南社 member, a revolutionary literary society at the time. He was also identified as deeply involved in revolutionary dailies, and had published essays like “*Lun xiaoshuo yu gailiang shehuo zhi guanxi* 论小说与改良社会之关系 (On the Relationship Between Fiction and Social Reform),” where he picked out novel as the most influential literary form in spreading nationalistic sentiments and for saving the nation – an idea clearly influenced by Liang Qichao.<sup>55</sup> The political short novel by Wang Zhongqi had become so popular that he published at least four more stories in *Shenbao* between 1908 and 1909- “*Haishang zhi xindang* 海上之新党 (New Party in Shanghai)” “*Dongying zhi liuxuesheng* 东瀛之留学生 (Overseas Students in Japan),” “*neidi zhi zhishi* 内地之志士 (Virtuous People in the Mainland)” and “*Jiaoyu hui* 教育会 (Education society).” These stories adopted a similar satirical style in their characterization of the opportunist overseas Chinese students, the new Party members and the virtuous patriots who claimed to be revolutionary yet only upheld the banner for their personal benefits. Besides the short satirical stories published in the main column of *Shenbao*, Wang’s full length novel *Xuelei hen chuanqi* 血泪痕传奇 (Romance of the Traces of Tears and Blood) was serialized in the specific novel column in *Shenbao*. The plot of the novel follows a heroic anti-government revolutionary and had become so popular that readers had requested to see the subsequent installments before they came out. In response to these desiring readers, *Shenbao* had published two announcements explaining that the author had “become seriously ill while having his days stuck in writing, and

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<sup>55</sup> “*Lun xiaoshuo yu gailiang shehuo zhi guanxi*.” *Yueyue xiaoshuo* 月月小说 (Fiction Monthly). May 1907. The information about Wang Zhongqi was quoted from “*Shilun 1907 nianhou jindai Shenbao de duanpian xiaoshuo kandeng* 试论 1907 年后申报的短篇小说刊登,” by Wen Juan 文娟. In *Zhongguo xiaoshuo luncong* 中国小说论丛, vol. 29.

hence has still not completed the second volume.”<sup>56</sup> The second announcement reported that “with urging after urging from the readers,” Wang “finally completed the entire draft and had put it to print.”<sup>57</sup>

Although political fiction continued to be a popular genre in *Shenbao* since Liang Qichao’s call, it went explosive in 1911. The column *Free Talk* was launched in August as a site specifically devoted to the publication of political fiction, and the Wuchang Uprising two months afterwards provided rich political materials and ignited the public’s political curiosity. Between 19 October till the end of the year, *Free Talk* published a total of fifteen political short stories related to the uprising to supplement the reportages of the event, sometimes with photographs or paintings, in the news section. Many pieces of political fiction followed the narrative template of the very first political fiction “Travel in Dreams at New Year” through dreams: “Chiren meng 痴人梦 (Dream of an Idiot),” “Yinxing guai 银杏怪 (Gingko Monster),” “Shifei meng 是非梦 (Dream of Right and Wrong),” “Huashan meng 华山梦 (Dream of Huashan Mountain)” and “Pujiang chao 浦江潮 (Tides of the Huangpu River)” either narrated the revolution’s cause and process, or predicted revolution’s development or imagined the post-revolution future of China through the form of fable or dream. Another group of short stories chose to flesh out particular characters and events during the course of the revolution through more realistic narrative, such as “Wuming xia’r 无名侠儿 (Nameless Knight),” “Tongzi jun 童子军 (Boy Scouts),” “Zhang Yi 张乙,” “Fengxue jianer 风雪健儿 (Fighters for Wind and Snow),” “Lingsui ziyou xiaoshuo zhi yi, zhi er, zhi san 零碎自由小说之一，之二，之三 (fragmentary free fiction, first, second and

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<sup>56</sup> “Benguan qishi 本馆启事 (Announcement from *Shenbao* Office)” *Shenbao*, 8 December 1907

<sup>57</sup> “Jisheng qishi 先生启事 (Announcement from Mr. Ji).” 22 February 1908

third pieces).” Some were written in form of political commentary, such as “Kechuang xiantan 客窗闲谈 (Leisure talks by the guest’s window),” “Wulin dier 武林第二 (No.2 in *wulin*),” and “shijiu ri 十九日 (Day Nineteen).” Although these stories’ relation to certain news reports need further research, some stories made the tie more explicit. “Xu Zhonglu 徐仲鲁 (Xu Zhonglu),” serialized in *Free Talk* between 11 to 20 July 1911, was based on the news report “Xu Zhonglu aoxing zhi da benling 徐仲鲁熬刑之大本领 (The Great Abilities of Enduring Torture of Xu Zhonglu),” published on 7 July; while “Xianglong you ailiyuan ji 乡老游爱丽园记 (Fellow Villagers Travelling Aili Garden),” published in *Free Talk* on 26 July was based on the report “Aili yuan chouzhen dahui 爱丽园筹赈大会 (Fund Raising and Disaster Relief Meeting at Aili Garden)” on 20 July in *Shenbao*’s news column. All these led to the final launch of a separate column devoted to promotion of political ideas through literary forms in *Shenbao*.

The development from short stories publication in *Shenbao* to the launch of the separate supplement of *Free Talk* grew out of the era under Liang Qichao’s heavy influence - modern political ideas were believed to be able to effectively reach the people only through modern means of medium. Liang’s initiative in launching several reformist newspapers was the most prominent act. So is political fiction, where political news materials are represented in literary forms, such as the novel or short stories. The major difference distinguishing Liang’s political fiction from those published in *Free Talk* was the tone of the narrator: as a political theorist and activist, Liang’s novels, such as *The Future of New China*, convey the author’s political ideas straightforwardly from the major character (usually an erudite and committed scholar just like Liang)’s mouth. Other narrative elements such as the depiction of the speaking sites, the crowds’ reaction and the depiction of the speaker were devoted to building the background to convey the

political ideas. The political short stories in *Shenbao Free Talk*, whose major purpose was not to propagate political ideas but to attract urban readers, generally took a satirical tone of anti-power from the stance of the people. The guiding principle “rich in variety and interesting,” set forth by the first chief editor Wang Dungen in the initial issue of *Free Talk*, suggested that the satirical pieces were intended not to be serious in propagating political ideas but being fun political readings like “*youxi* 游戏 (games).” The call-for-submissions announcement published on the initial issue of *Free Talk* specifically listed the three types of contributions that the supplement looked for as: poems and songs 诗词歌曲, Forgotten writings and anecdotes 遗文轶事, and game writings 游戏之作.<sup>58</sup> Although the term novel or short story did not appear in the announcement, many short stories were published in *Free Talk* as mere “game writing.” The political satires reprocessed the political news materials into casual readings that befitted the reading tastes of the general *Free Talk* readers; by doing so, the pungent political satire was all the more effectively delivered with literary writing skills for the group of readers who had a taste for it.

The short novel *Zhushen hui* 助娠会 (Society for Aiding with Pregnancy), written by Wang Dungen and published on the initial issue, could be seen as laying the model for the supplement’s future political stories. The story was about a self-claimed doctor, who, “because of the difficulties in getting conceived and of weakness of the nation’s babies, decides to organize this society for pregnancy help, and particularly urges young men and women to join.” A youth joins the society and tries to work out conception with another female member. After a month of no success in getting pregnant, they “travel together to the blisped state of the West 双

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<sup>58</sup> “*Zhengwen gaobai* 征文告白 (Announcements for Submissions).” *Free Talk*, 24 August 1911.

双到西方极乐国游历去了。” The narrative of the nonsensical society that boasts to help young couples get pregnant ending up taking their lives was a sharp criticism on the flamboyant self-claimed modern vanguards that were in fact commercial posters under the guise of modernization discourse. The names for the two characters who joined the society, Bu Yaoming 卜耀明 and Taosi 讨司, were designed to be homophonic with the words “buyaoming 不要命 (not wanting life)” and “taosi 讨死 (seeking death)-” hence another satire on those ignorant people who blindly followed the radical and empty revolutionary slogans. The short stories based on the 1911 revolution in general followed the same satirical style.

During the initial years of *Free Talk*, despite a playful tone in narrative, editors treated these “game” writings seriously. In 1911, there had been several correction announcements for certain short stories. On 18 October, an announcement was made about a typo in the previous story: “The first sentence of yesterday’s novel ‘Mr. Chen first dismounted from the horse 陈生先下骑’ was misprinted as Mr. Chen dismounted from the horse 陈先生下骑;” whereas on 14 November, an announcement pointed to another misprint in “the last sentence from yesterday’s novel.”

From *Free Talk*’s prehistory to its launching, political fiction occupied a central position in the editorial decisions of *Shenbao*: it first appeared in form of political commentary essays before it took a turn towards fiction under Liang Qichao’s influence. *Free Talk* was a timely product in its devotion of separate space for political satires, and this tradition continued well into the years of party politics, where the energy of the satires was put to utmost use in political and social turmoil.

## Chapter 2 Political Galvanization Under Party Politics

The era of party politics started with the April 12 purge in 1927. With increasing membership of Communists in the GMD as well as the increasingly prominent voice from the Party's left-wing clique, Jiang unilaterally broke the united front with the Communist Party by turning on its members. In Shanghai, Communist members were killed and their activities had been since hidden from sight. In this, Jiang was joined by warlord Zhang Zuolin's killing of left-wing youths in the north and murder in Guangzhou. Communist activities then went underground in cities, with internally circulated documents published to guide and orchestrate urban revolts against the GMD regime. Antagonism had then been established between the two political parties, and propaganda had been identified by both as with foremost importance. As elaborated in the introduction, the CCP published numerous documents detailing ways how propaganda should be conducted to different groups of people and emphasized that any revolts and uprisings should be preceded with sufficient propaganda.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the GMD, then the ruling party of China's central government, published legal regulations on publications and news immediately after April. *Shenbao*, as the most widely circulated major newspaper, was inevitably involved in political conflicts as an institution with most potential for public influence.

Like most major Chinese writers at the time, the April 12 purge stimulated *Shenbao* to turn sharply left. Immediately following the events on 13 April, *Shenbao* reported on the government's violent massacre of workers in Shanghai, the forced disarmament of the workers'

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<sup>1</sup> For example, "Inner party Announcement No.45 第 45 号党内通告" specified the different means of propaganda to be used towards different groups of people. The document is reprinted in *Collection of Documents of the Chinese Communist Party Center* 中共中央文件选集, Vol. for year 1927. *Central Archives* 中央档案馆, Beijing.

patrol teams, workers' protests and the violent government suppression. The report also included depiction of some six thousand workers vehemently shouting anti-Jiang Jieshi slogans and detailed the process of military confrontation. An interview with Jiang from a few days before was also published in the same issue, which foregrounded Jiang's talk at the Worker's Union that the patrol would not be disarmed for self defense, to contrast with an earlier *Shenbao* interview, when Jiang emphasized the need to disarm the workers. From late March 1927 to mid-April, some thirty reports were published in *Shenbao* about workers' uprisings in Shanghai, government suppression, coercion and deception in dealing with workers' patrol teams, and workers' vehement counter-fights. The reports had clearly taken the side with the workers – partially upon request of readers from the Shanghai general public.<sup>2</sup>

The political force the newspapers identified with was the left-wing clique of the GMD, as indicated from the number of political advertisements, announcements and declarations published in April. From 1 to 6 April, *Shenbao* devoted half page on first and fourth column to the publication of political slogans announced by the Political Department of the Central Military Committee of GMD. The construction of a revolutionary new Shanghai was called for, together with the call for eradicating warlord powers and defeating Imperialism, and centralizing the power to the Party. The Department was headed by the GMD left-wing leader Deng Yanda 邓演达 (who was assassinated by Jiang less than four years later) and the writer-turned-politician Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978). This political stance was more prominent when the tension between the left-wing GMD and the central government escalated. After the assassination of Deng Yanda

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<sup>2</sup> On the series of workers strikes against Japanese text-mill factories, *Shenbao* initially took side with the government in criticizing the workers for disrupting public security, hoping to appease the strikes soon. Upon various requests from the readers accusing the newspaper for speaking for the imperialist powers, *Shenbao* published a public apology and had since switched to report from the perspective of the workers in the second half of 1925.

in 1931, *Shenbao* courageously accepted the request from Madame Sun (Song Qingling), who had withdrawn from politics and lived a semi-secluded life in Shanghai, to publish her open letter condemning Jiang and his murderous act on the first column of the newspaper.<sup>3</sup> The declaration stated in its opening paragraph that “the GMD has lost its past glory as a revolutionary organization, and this has become an undisguisable fact today. The loss of power of the Party and the State was caused by no other external forces but the Party leader himself.”<sup>4</sup> Song continued the analysis by detailing the decline to Jiang’s lost of tie with people, workers and peasants.

The reports certainly angered Jiang, who used various means to either alter or suppress the discourse. After the publication of GMD left-wing’s advertisements, *Shenbao* was forced to halt the series on 6 April 1927, from which date onwards, the page devoted originally to the left-wing advertisements was now given to slogans from the Nanjing government denouncing it illegal to publish announcements from the Wuhan clique. Announcements were also published to state that any anti-“Three People’s Principles”<sup>5</sup> publications would be illegal. Later in the year, Jiang appointed Chen Bulei 陈布雷, then the chief editor of *Shangbao* 商报 to be his own personal secretary, and attempted to draw Zhang Jiluan 张季鸾, chief editor of *Dagongbao* into his cabinet<sup>6</sup> after shutting down several newspapers in Wuhan as well as the organ of Workers’ Union *Pingmin ribao* 平民日报. The most widely circulated newspapers *Shenbao* and

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<sup>3</sup> Song Qingling wei Deng Yanda Beihai xuanyan 宋庆龄为邓演达被害宣言 (Declaration on the Murder of Deng Yanda from Song Qingling). *Shenbao*, 20 December 1931.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Three Peoples’ Principles, referring to nationality, welfare of the people, and rights of the peoples, was the set of political ideas developed by Sun Yatsen. The left-wing and right-wing cliques of the GMD both claimed to be the heir of Sun’s Three People’s Principles, with different interpretations for different uses. It has been noted by some that Jiang’s launch of the New Life Movement during the high time of Japanese invasion of the mid 1930s was a disguise of the non-resistance policy by the Three People’s Principles.

<sup>6</sup> Song Jun. P123

*Xinwenbao* were no exceptions. While forced shutdown of such influential newspapers would not be possible, various means were used to soften their discourse and bribe their editors. After several forced publications of political announcements from the central government, a political commentary published on 13 April 1927 conveyed the helplessness of the newspaper in the face of power. The satirical commentary writes:

“the outsider 局外人 cannot contain subjective views; it would be prejudiced if it does; it cannot incur speculation, or else would deviate from the fact. The outsider cannot touch upon things other than the event; otherwise it would stray away without returning back to point. So the view of the outsider could only touch upon appearances; as for discussion of the matter, that should only remain at the surface as well.”<sup>7</sup>

At this point, *Shenbao* clearly identified itself as an “outsider” in the continuation of Shi Liangcai’s principle of being “non-partisan and unbiased” developed in 1911. But the chance of really staying “outside” in the political turmoil was slim. The inclusion of the Nanjing government’s political slogans, even if it means a complete contradiction to the political advertisements published just a few days earlier, suggested the helpless compromise the newspaper had to take under high censorship. What was implied in the commentary was also an ironic criticism of Jiang’s censorship and the need for the newspaper to be extremely careful in dealing with political matters.

To maintain the status of political vanguard for the people, *Shenbao* maintained surface compliance to the censorship rules, while employing various means of resistance against government suppression. Since the nominal unification of China under the rule of the central government in 1928,<sup>8</sup> GMD tightened the censorship even more. The Party documents not only

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<sup>7</sup> “Juwai ren zhi yanguang 局外人之眼光 (View of an Outsider)” *Shenbao*, 13 April 1927.

<sup>8</sup> Northern expedition, an anti-warlord campaign starting in 1923, continued after Jiang established central government in Nanjing after the purge within the Party. In 1928, Nationalist army reached Beijing and Tianjin; Zhang Xueliang, the Feng clique warlord was appointed the Commander in Chief of North-east China, and declared loyal to the central government. See e.g., *The Cambridge History of China. Volume 13: Republican China 1912–*

regulated newspapers and journals, but people's personal lives as well – to talk about politics in public sites was not allowed; nor was listening to unreported radios. Despite strong objection from the press, *Shenbao* had to be submitted for censorship before distributing. Yet it resisted by intentionally leaving the space of the cut-out article blank, so that readers were clearly aware there had been articles taken out by censors. From February to October in 1930, such blank spaces had appeared at least nine times in *Shenbao*.

With the Japanese invasion in 1931, the dissatisfaction over government censorship was catalyzed by Jiang's non-resistance policy and *Shenbao* had become not only more outspoken on the anti-government discourse but an activist in mobilizing the public for military resistance. Shi Liangcai, *Shenbao*'s owner, recruited Tao Xingzhi 陶行知 to be consultant for how to make patriotic discourse in newspaper. Tao, a Columbia Ph.D. was committed to the change of Chinese elementary education by launching schools in China's rural areas but was on the government's wanted list.<sup>9</sup> Other editors Shi recruited included Ge Gongzhen 戈公振 - longtime chief editor of *Shibao* and experienced editor for the highly popular *Weekly Pictorial*, and Huang Yanpei 黄炎培.<sup>10</sup> Through these consultants, *Shenbao* was merged into a larger network of nationalistic anti-Japanese discourse making: Ge Gongzhen was at the time heavily involved in the group of patriotic editors like Zou Taofen 邹韬奋 and Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之, who actively promoted modern ideas of democracy in people's daily lives through core journals like *Shenghuo ribao* 生活日报.

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1949, Part 2. Edited by John K. Fairbank. Cambridge University Press. 1986

<sup>9</sup> Tao Xingzhi was well-known for the Xiaozhuang Normal School he established in Nanjing, which was backed by the patriotic warlord Feng Yuxiang. Jiang suspected xiaozhuang school as supported by the communists when the school's teachers and students shouted to the intruding Japanese fleets in Yangtze river "out of China."

<sup>10</sup> Song Jun, pp. 133-135.

When Songhu Battle broke out in Shanghai in 1932, *Shenbao* undertook the active role in mobilizing the nation to fight back. Numerous reports ardently lauded the 19<sup>th</sup> route army's brave fight with the Japanese against Jiang's order of nonresistance. General Cai Tingkai 蔡廷锴 was hailed as a national hero. The commentary in *Shenbao* on the next day after the outbreak of war ardently called for the entire army of the nation to "follow the blood of the 19<sup>th</sup> route army and win back the lost land."<sup>11</sup> A photographer was dispatched to the frontline and reports on the subsequent days were accompanied by the photos of the battlefield. Shi Liangcai went even further in becoming a leader of the Shanghai local support organization, and donated seventy thousand dollars in support of the fight in the frontline. Members of the organization consisted of Shanghai local gangs and business circles and, more importantly, members from the China Democratic League, an organization developed by the left-wing clique of the GMD, such as Song Qingling and Yang Xingfo.<sup>12</sup> The mission of being a vanguard in building a democratic modern China, the stance with people against government suppression, and its activist role in calling for release of left-wing youths made *Shenbao* a close ally with the left-wing clique of the GMD.

Starting from 1930, *Free Talk* had become the site for heated abuse and ardent call for the resistance against Japan. While the main section of *Shenbao* also included political commentaries, *Free Talk* allowed more freedom in processing materials with various styles to better agitate the people. Since early 1930, with the increasing number of newspaper commentaries in the main section, *Free Talk* came up with creative forms to promote the patriotic anti-Japanese sentiments. A small column was launched in *Free Talk*, entitled "painful

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<sup>11</sup> *Shenbao*, 29 January, 1932.

<sup>12</sup> Pang Rongdi 庞荣棣. "Shi Liangcai- Xiandai Baoye de juzi 史量才-现代报业的巨子 (Shi Liangcai- a Giant of Modern Newspapers)." Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999

words 痛心的话,” devoting specifically to the publication of short prose pieces from readers between 200 and 300 words expressing their pain in seeing their land losing to Japan. A sister column entitled “Dailiang yiyu 玳梁忆语 (Memory of Dailiang)” was also launched for publishing historical essays that traced the history of Japan’s ambition on China: “our eastern neighbor has had the ambition of swallowing China since before the first Sino-Japanese War. We record it here to show that the on-going disaster does not start from today.”<sup>13</sup> Li Jinhui 黎锦晖’s anti-Japanese songs were also part of the *Free Talk* publication.

Tao Xingzhi’s essays were mostly published in *Free Talk* at Shi Liangcai’s invitation. Tao was at the time on the wanted list of the central government after his Xiaozhuang Normal School in Nanjing was forced shut down due to students’ radical resistance against Japan despite the government’s warnings. So as to avoid exposing his real identity, Tao had been writing under the penname “Buchu Tingcai Zhaifu 不除庭草斋夫 (The Scholar Who Does Not Weed his Garden).” The essays focused on the central criticism of GMD officials’ corruption and irresponsibility, in the specially column in *Shenbao* “Zhaifu-ziyoutan 斋夫·自由谈 (*Free Talk* from Man in the Studio).” The style the essays undertook was vivid satirical caricature of corrupt officials in catchy colloquial language, except sometimes heated abuse came forth in the outright accusation of Jiang. One essay describes the officials’ lives as:

“there are many government officials and many shops with old brands. The many officials and people will naturally lead to business, which must be yet followed by entertainment. Playing poker, playing mahjong, playing around in the courtesan house, playing in dance halls, playing around the West Lake, playing in Lu mountain, playing in Shanghai. Everything else is forgotten, the Party is forgotten, the state is forgotten and the people are forgotten. 政府官多，长字号也多，官众长多自然忙，忙了还必须玩。扑克玩玩，麻将玩玩，堂子玩玩，

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<sup>13</sup> “Memory of Dailiang” 8 January, 1931 *Free Talk*. The special column was the first essay under the title *Free Talk* and lasted from 8 November to 31 December 1931.

跳舞厅里玩玩，西湖玩玩，庐山玩玩，上海玩玩。什么都忘，党也忘，国也忘，人民也忘。”<sup>14</sup>

As a scholar and practitioner in education and politics, Tao's writing did not involve complex narrative twists as was the case in Lu Xun's political satires; the narrator (in this case, not much detached from the author) gave a direct condemnation of the situation, and the author's anger was barely hidden. The "aesthetic" component lay not so much in the twist in narrative voice than in the lightly catchy tone that read like singing a song. The repeated words "wan 玩 (to play)" and "wang 忘 (to forget)" were deliberate alliteration, and the reduplication of "wan 玩" added to the lightly song like language.

Another essay "Zhanshen qian de duihua 战神前的对话 (Dialogues in Front of the God of War)"<sup>15</sup> similarly gives an outright condemnation by revealing in a satirical way the real reason why Chinese military officials were afraid of death while lower rank soldiers were not. That was because the officials "not only 'had their bodies wrapped with gold 金满身,' but were immersed in tender dreams every night with wives and concubines. When the war with Japan broke out, "some of them would lay down the weapon and became Buddha, while some would deposit the silver and gold into foreign banks and retire in the concessions with their wives and concubines."<sup>16</sup> Tao was writing political commentaries for the main section of *Shenbao* simultaneously while writing for *Free Talk*. His political commentaries in the main section held a style of scholarly discussion, i.e., analysis and argumentation of social and political topics like education in rural China. Some essays published in the special column of *Free Talk* were written in a similar style, with the attempt of balancing the scholarly logical analysis with use of satire.

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<sup>14</sup> 2 November, 1931. *Free Talk*.

<sup>15</sup> November 1931. *Free talk*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

In the essay accusing Jiang of betraying China, Tao called Jiang by name and criticized him for turning logic up-side-down. The essay started outright with the author's disagreement with Jiang and Sun Zhesheng 孙哲生 (son of Sun Yatsen, high legislative official in the early 1930s) on China's current matters. Whereas Jiang believed pacifying China internally should precede the resistance against external aggression, Sun was quoted as believing that saving the party should precede saving the state. Tao put his opinion in blatant opposition to both: that to fight against external aggression must precede the pacification of the internal; and to save the state must precede the saving of the Party.<sup>17</sup>

In another essay, Tao composed a doggerel equating Jiang's government with new warlord, which the government called to wipe out in the northern expedition. In response to *Shenbao's* report on General He Yingqin 何应钦's talk on 11 January 1932, which glorified the GMD's accomplishment in successfully completing the first phase of revolution in having defeated the warlords. Tao questioned, in an essay published on the following day in *Free Talk*, which warlords in specific were defeated, which warlords revived, and which revolutionary armies were turned into new warlords? The essay then provided a definition for warlord in a doggerel: laying down the master and take control himself, squandering military expenditure extravagantly; not resisting intruding bandits and not allowing the master to throw out the bandits. 压到主人自做主，挥霍兵饷如粪土；强盗进门不抵抗，主人赶贼他不许 -”<sup>18</sup>

another blatant condemnation of Jiang's government as a new warlord that was corrupted and passive towards the foreign invasion. The Chinese original followed the form of a seven-word quatrain, and rhymed the first, second and fourth lines.

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<sup>17</sup> “Diandao de luoji 颠倒的逻辑(Reversed logic)” 8 January, 1932. *Free Talk*.

<sup>18</sup> 12 January 1932. *Free talk*.

From November 1931 to January 1932, Tao Xingzhi published a total of 104 essays in *Free Talk*, making him the most productive writer for the newspaper at the time. Most essays were written in the style analyzed above and attacked social ills from a wide range of perspectives – politics, philosophy, economics, military, history, science and education. The early 1930s was a time when the short essay was in fashion – numerous magazines and journals were launched at the time to devote to publication of short essays along with promotion of the genre in newspaper supplements. At the high time of the genre, *Shenbao* compiled Tao Xinzhi's essays and published them as a separate collection doubling the column's title "*Free Talk from the Man in the Studio*" in April 1932.<sup>19</sup> One essay in the collection explained the reason of Tao's choice of his penname. The verb "to weed" in his penname was used as a metaphor to compare to Jiang's mass killing, especially the killing of students in Tao Xingzhi's Xiangzhuang School upon suspicion for its connection with the Communists. The penname thus referred to Tao's protection of the students by "not weeding" while the second part "scholar [in the studio]" was a self mockery that he was no longer the master of the school after its shut-down but a normal man writing in his studio. Tao also explained why he contributed such a large number of essays to *Free Talk* within such a short amount of time as simply because of his love for the word "free." "When seeing the word 'free talk,' I thought of children's freedom, women's freedom, freedom of the suppressed nations, freedom of weak and small nations in the world. I fired the cannon of freedom here, hoping to break the boundaries of slavery, to confiscate arms of the slave-owner and to unshackle the chains of slaves. I hope there would be no longer slaves and everybody would a free man."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The version I referred to is a reprint from April 2010 by Sichuan jiaou chubanshe.

<sup>20</sup> 2 September 1931. *Free Talk*.

The publication of Tao Xingzhi's essays in *Free Talk* suggested *Shenbao* had prioritized mobilizing the people with anti-GMD nationalist discourse, and this meant extreme danger at the time of heightened censorship. Barely a year before the launch of "Free talk from the man in the studio" was the introduction of the stipulation on acts and punishments of harming the Republic of China. "Emergent Principles on Punishing Harm to the Republic 危害民国紧急治罪法原则" was published on 31 January 1931 and announced death sentences for acts if defined as purposefully harming the Republic. Tao Xingzhi had successfully hidden behind his penname until being discovered in late 1932, when Jiang gave the order to ban distribution of *Shenbao* unless it fired Tao. After that, Tao Xingzhi went into exile in Japan with the help from Huang Yanpei. Indeed, Tao Xingzhi was only one of the reasons, albeit an important one, that angered the Nanjing government, as the news column of *Shenbao* took a prominent political stance against Jiang's non-resistance. Talks by Jiang and other high-ranked officials such as He Yingqin and Wang Jingwei on China's inability to resist against Japan were published throughout the year's newspaper in 1932, mostly accompanied with sharply critical commentaries. *Shenbao*'s essays certainly effectively agitated the mass that the mass-scale students, workers and residents protests in major cities like Nanjing, Shanghai and Beijing October 1932 must be related to a large extent to newspaper discourse. On 30 October, *Shenbao* devoted the full page to cover massive protests organized by over 150 workers unions in Shanghai. Subjective depiction of the scene showed brave and determined workers marching in the streets, demanding government to cut trade ties with Japan. Reports were also made about workers' plans to organize nation-saving associations and voluntary armies.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Essays I referred to were those published from 21 October to 5 November, 1932.

Since early November, a large number of reports were written lauding General Ma Zhanshan as a national hero as his army bravely fought against Japan despite the quick loss of land in the Northeast. Upon the exhaustion of ammunition and food of General Ma's army, *Shenbao* published the commentary "Wuren neng zuoshi Ma Zhanshan jiangjun gujunkangbao hu!吾人能坐视马占山将军孤军抗暴乎！(How Can We Sit and Watch General Ma Resisting Aggression Alone!)"<sup>22</sup> calling people in Heilongjiang province to demand their chairman turn over the stolen treasury of the province to support general Ma. The reports certainly ignited public anger in Shanghai, when some two thousand students went to Nanjing on 9 November to demand the central government's support of General Ma. The 9 November news column reported about violence used against the student protesters, as well as demanding immediate release of the two student representative arrested by police. The thorny report in *Shenbao* resulted in the government's ban on its distribution and *Shenbao* published commentary "Zailun ziyou zhi zhenyi 再论自由之真义(Second Discussion on the True Meaning of Freedom)" on 13 December 1932 exposing and condemning the ban. With decades passed since *Shenbao*'s initial years, the newspaper had become an ever more influential mass mobilizer not only by making thorny discourses but by playing the vanguard in organizing and leading anti-Japan and nationalist protests in influencing government policies. *Free Talk*, as has been shown, played a crucial role in mobilizing the public with its free rendering of the situation through artistic means familiar to the readers. With the escalating radical political discourse of *Shenbao* in the early 1930s, Shi Liangcai appointed the young radical Li Liewen as *Free Talk*'s chief editor to replace Zhou Shoujuan, who Shi thought could not catch up with the newspaper's vanguardist nationalistic role.

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<sup>22</sup> November 1932. *Shenbao*.

Although *Free Talk* had experienced various chief editors, and though Zhou Shoujuan, who served as the chief editor of *Free Talk* for the longest time from 1920 till end of 1932 and was generally associated with romance novels, or the “mandarin duck and butterfly” fiction, political satires had never ceased to exist in *Free Talk*. When the French returnee Li Liewen was appointed to reform the supplement in December 1932, *Free Talk* had fully fleshed out the task of mass mobilizing. A long list of writers, both established and yet to become famous from left-wing to the politically neutral, were attracted to the new *Free Talk*.

Scholars have often identified the period of *Free Talk* under Li Liewen’s editorship as the newspaper’s years on the left.<sup>23</sup> The above analysis has problematized such periodization in two ways: on the one hand, political satires on GMD purge of communists and killing of students started in 1927 and continued till the end of the Zhou Shoujuan’s term of editorship at the end of 1932. The long time chief editor of *Shenbao* Chen Jinghan, who had been in the post from 1912, when Shi Liangcai took over *Shenbao* and became the sole owner, to 1929, was an ardent promoter of short sharp and highly powerful news commentaries, a similar style to Lu Xun’s *zawen* – a highly satirical essay usually on contemporary politics. (Lu Xun’s *zawen* will be elaborated in the last two chapters), except in more straightforward tone. The launch of *Free Talk* could be viewed as nothing other than moving the political commentaries to a separate space. What was special about Li Liewen’s editorship was the more vibrant experimentation with literary forms in making the anti-GMD discourse with the full list of literary talents.

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<sup>23</sup> In his historiography of *Shenbao*, Song Jun devoted very limited space to *Free Talk* and has heavily emphasized the period under Li Liewen. Leo Lee’s essay likewise equals Li Liewen’s *Free Talk* with the latter phase *Free Talk*, which he denounced as only abuse and no contribution to the development of the “public sphere.” Tang Xiaobing’s study, in comparing *Free Talk* with Weekly Review and Dagonbao, only dealt with Li Liewen’s *Free Talk*.

On the other hand, *Shenbao* never paid lip service to the CCP – it would have been an unwise decision if it did since this would mean an immediate shut down and arrest under such heightened censorship and scaring away the large readership it had painstakingly built up. The general discourse of *Shenbao* was a nationalistic one opposed to government suppression – a stance Shi Liangcai called the opinion of the people. The personnel of *Shenbao* and its networking circle suggested an alliance with the left-wing clique within the GMD, who were generally considered the true heir to Sun Yatsen’s principles. Tao Xingzhi was part of the leadership in China Democratic League. Under Li Liewen’s editorship, the inclusion of Lu Xun and Mao Dun, more out of reasons of their fame in the literary arena than others, was carefully balanced with inclusion of other writers who were generally considered as right-wing- Lin Yutang, Wu Zihui 吴稚晖 and Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 along with the inclusion of a great number of new writers like Xu Maoyong,<sup>24</sup> Peng Jiahuang, Ke Ling 柯灵. No propaganda works for Communist ideas were published; almost all of *Free Talk* essays under Li was condemnation of the KMT’s non-resistance policy, during his short term of editorship from December 1932 to May 1934, when he resigned out of pressure from the government.

The distinct genre that emerged out of the period was the Lu Xun style “daggers and spears *zawen*.” A literary processing of political materials not only not diminished the advocated message, but, on the contrary, strengthened the effect by igniting sentiments through various rhetorical tactics. Two external political forces contributed to such a boom of *zawen* that highlighted *Free Talk*’s role of carrying further *Shenbao*’s role as public advocate: first, the

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<sup>24</sup> In recollecting how he started to write *zawen*, Xu Maoyong pointed to *Free Talk* and Li Liewen as where he received encouragement for writing. He had subsequently become a frequent contributor of *Free Talk* and earned the name as *zawenist* because of that. “On Shanghai ‘Literary Arena’ 在上海‘文坛’上,” *Selected Works of Xu Maoyong* 徐懋庸选集. Vol.3 Sichuan Renmin chu ban she, 1984.

Japanese invasion and news reports on it in newspapers like *Shenbao* had fermented public anger; second the KMT had tightened its control over speech by resorting to violence. The result was political essays taking a literary digression – to hide the highly politically charged writing behind a façade of literary rhetoric. Or, Lu Xun’s own words, to talk about 风云 politics through 风月 romance.

The initial editorial after Li took editorship declared the aim of the new *Free Talk* as to promote democratic progressive ideas and to modernize Chinese culture: “We firmly believe that everything in the world is progressing. We should stand firm with progress and modernization.” The editorial also equated the supplement with mixed play of ideas like in a theater: “we beat the gongs and sound the drums to accompany our own performance, while we applaud ourselves on the stage.”<sup>25</sup> Another announcement published on 20 January 1933 called for submission from talented writers from all over the world to substantiate the supplement. In doing so, announcement claimed it as both “the fortune of our supplement” as well as “the fortune of the future of Chinese culture.”

The following image of *Free Talk* on 30 January 1933 showed a typical composition of *Free Talk* under Li’s editorship. A highly political *zawen* usually occupied the central space of the page, just below the title of the supplement. This was surrounded by short literary translations, reading notes, prose, installments from serialized novels and advertisements. Although the central *zawen* oftentimes hinged upon the anti-GMD theme, styles and form varied a great deal. Li Liewen’s bold act in publishing political essays against censorship and his determined preference for highly political essays gathered a large group of talented writers, and *Free Talk* hosted several of the most influential literary debates in the 1930s, such as the one on

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<sup>25</sup> “Muqian zhici 幕前致词 (Address from the Front of the Stage)” 1 December, 1932. *Free Talk*.

mass language 大众语 in May 1934. Major participants included not only left-wing writers like Lu Xun and Mao Dun, but also Tao Xingzhi, Wu Zhihui, Lin Yutang, Hu Yuzhi, Ye Shengtao and so on – those less politically opinionated and usually associated with the right-wing.



Political essays in zawen form were certainly the central occupants of *Free Talk*, and Lu Xun was the most prominent and productive contributor. In 1933 and 1934, he published a total of 143 zawen essays, under more than ten pennames, so as to avoid censorship. And he did it with success. Mao Dun had also used pennames like Xuan 玄 and Zhongfang 仲方 in writing. The highly critical discourse soon raised the brows of the central government. In his documentation of censorship on *Shenbao*, Song Jun recorded how the government attempted to soften the discourse by bribing Li Liewen. Chen Lifu 陈立夫, Wu Xingya 吴醒亚, the tsars of the GMD propaganda and censorship, were noted to have invited Li Liewen for dinner but were

turned down by Li. They then urged Shi Liangcai to sack Li and substitute Zhang Yiping 章依萍, a novel writer in the 1920s and 30s well-known for writing politically irrelevant romances. Shi firmly rejected the request, which resulted in the authorities forcefully requesting not only the news section of *Shenbao* submitted for screening but also the supplement *Free Talk*. Under pressure, Li Liewen published an announcement on 25 May 1933, sighing that “it was difficult to speak these days, and more difficult to write.” In a somewhat satirical tone, he urged writers to “talk more about romance and less about politics. Or making complaints.”<sup>26</sup>

The announcement not only did not restrain writers from speaking, but induced a series of satires on GMD censorship. The female contributor Xie Bingying 谢冰莹 (1906-2000) called it “the misfortune of the Chinese,” where they not only were unable to participate in national political matters but also were not allowed to talk about them.<sup>27</sup> Tang Tao, a frequent contributor, explained the reason for tightened censorship on *Free Talk* as the *zawen*, quoting Lu Xun, “more often touch on painful spots than just scratch where it itches 搔着痒处的时候少，碰着痛处的时候多.”<sup>28</sup> The essay ended with the conclusion in a highly satirical tone by suggesting that all writers lauded the situation as “all is peaceful with the Party and the state, to whose eternity we toast 党国升平,万寿无疆.”<sup>29</sup>

The strategy of “talking more about romance and less about politics” had actually turned into a more hidden way of rendering politics. The strength of accusation on the government did not abate, and was even strengthened. Within a year on 9 May 1934, Li Liewen was forced to resign under censorship pressure. Under his resignation announcement, which explained his

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<sup>26</sup> “Li Liewen qishi 黎烈文启事(Announcement from Li Liewen)” 25 May 1933. *Free Talk*.

<sup>27</sup> 26 May 1933. *Free Talk*.

<sup>28</sup> 26 May 1933. *Free Talk*.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

leaving as “being too busy with no time for editorship” was the poem “Nide tao 你的逃 (Your Escape).”<sup>30</sup> The poem depicts a shadowy road and gloomy future, implying the then dark political environment surrounding: the assassination of Yang Xingfo, the arrest of Ding Ling and the harsh censorship on publications like *Free Talk*. Under continuous requests from the government to appoint a designated editor, *Shenbao* announced that it would stop publication of *Free Talk* on 1 November 1935.

### **Case Study of the Fall of Rehe**

Topics and styles varied a great deal among *Free Talk* essays. This section provides a case study of the groups of essays on the topic of the fall of Rehe in early 1933. The aim is to examine the way that *Free Talk* developed analytical commentary referring to the central government from specific news materials on specific events and how the discourse was made through lightly literary forms. *Free Talk* in the 1930s carried further *Shenbao*'s role as social advocate against the GMD's nonresistance policy.

In the Battle of Rehe in February 1933, General Tang Yulin's army was so unable to mount any efficient resistance that Rehe fell to Japan just within three days. Between February and March, there had been in *Shenbao* alone over 30 news reports and articles about the situation in Rehe. The series of reports started with a telegram announcement from Tang Yulin himself on 30 January 1933, claiming that his army had repulsed three attacks from the Japanese, and concluded that “we succeeded in the anti-Japanese war.”<sup>31</sup> Barely three weeks later, on 24 February, *Shenbao* published telegrams from various sources calling for material and emotional

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<sup>30</sup> 9 May 1934. *Free Talk*

<sup>31</sup> Tang Yulindiango kangri shengli 汤玉麟电告抗日胜利 (Telegram Announcement for the Victory of Anti-Japanese war from Tang Yulin). *Shenbao*, 30 Jan. 1933.

support for General Tang in the battle of Rehe, which, far from gaining victory, had deteriorated into a stalemate. Telegrams from the GMD Party committees in Shanghai and Beijing were published, all expressing their people's ardent support for the resistance war on the battle fronts as well as offering material support.<sup>32</sup> This was followed by a short telegram from the Nanjing government published on the next day, praising the brave fight of Tang and his army.<sup>33</sup>

Within a week, on 5 March a series of special dispatches 专电 were published under the title “Chengde jinggao shixian 承德竟告失陷 (Chengde has Unexpectedly Fallen).” (See images below) In contrast to the small space the previous news occupied with no prominently visible titles, the reports of the fall took up half of the third page of the day's issue, with bold characters printed as title. Four lines of subtitles were used to summarize the key facts of the events: Tang Yulin withdrew without fighting to Luanping and Commander Zhang (Xueliang) stationed in Gubeikou to take charge of the situation. The editorial formatting of the report was a result not only of deeming the event important but also of conveying the sense of incredibility – as was evidenced from the word “jing 竟 (actually, unexpectedly)” in the title.

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<sup>32</sup> “*Dianmian pingzhang retang* 电勉平张热汤 (Telegrams to Encourage Deputy Commander Zhang in Beijing and General Tang in Rehe).” 24 February 1933.

<sup>33</sup> [Telegram from] Nanjing. *Shenbao*, 25 February 1933.



(5 March, 1933. *Shenbao*, page 3)



(6 March, 1933. *Shenbao*, Page 3)

The following days saw a number of articles reporting the escape of Tang, Jiang Jieshi's command to counterattack, and a series of telegrams from Hong Kong to request the Central Government to punish Tang and so on.<sup>34</sup> All of the reports continued the layout of the first report on Chengde's fall on 5 March in using highly prominent bold characters for titles, with a couple lines of subtitles in slightly smaller characters. There were also reports on the huge sums of money that were found during the search of Tang Yulin's home. The fact that reports on the Rehe situation took up large space in the news section with big title characters, and that *Shenbao* even printed extra editions on 5 and 6 March to follow the development of the situation suggested the high demand of readers' curiosity. The close follow-up of the event is *Shenbao's*

<sup>34</sup> These include "Beiping fenhui jueyi-chengchu shizhi jiangling 北平分会决议-惩处失职将领 Resolution from Beiping military committee- requesting punishment for the delinquent General" 5 March, 1933, Extra edition of *Shenbao*. "Rehe kangri budui-tuiji kouwai jixu dikang 热河抗日部队-退集口外继续抵抗 Rehe anti Japanese troops recollected outside Beigukou to continue resistance." 6 March, 1933. "Tang Yulin xingzong buming 汤玉麟行踪不明(Tang Yulin's Whereabouts Unclear)" 7 March. In addition, a number of telegrams from local governments and Party committees appealing for punishments for Tang in the following days.

self-positioning as leader in making the nationalistic discourse. (Given *Shenbao*'s large readership - a sales figure of over 150,000 with estimated actual readers over ten times of the figure since clerks, workers and other residents tended to circulate the newspaper that was usually subscribed by shops and factories- *Shenbao*'s social impact was huge).<sup>35</sup> What *Shenbao* did in this period was to try keep its readers updated about the development of the situation in the north. Telegrams from the Northeast and from the Nanjing government were adopted as well as its own reports – such a conglomerate of sources were used that facts sometimes contradicted each other due to different perspectives. The Nanjing government would want positive images about China's military resistance in the North as part of the positive image for the government.<sup>36</sup> It would also want to cover up its efforts for diverting forces to attack the Jiangxi Soviet at the same time, which was strictly forbidden to be reported in the press. The articles from *Shenbao* held a general attitude of the public – surprise and disbelief in the fall within such a short amount of time. The appeals and announcements it chose to publish, such as the above-mentioned ones from Shanghai and Beiping governments, as well as that from Hong Kong<sup>37</sup> - indicated a general trust in the central government since they were written to appeal to the government for punishment for the loss.

It is no surprise that the Rehe event, which should be by then known to every reader of in cities with headline coverage in newspapers, became the topic for *Free Talk* essays. Starting to pick on the topic about a week after the initial report, essays in *Free Talk* not only could better grasp the comprehensive picture but also could arrive at deeper political analysis in linking the

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<sup>35</sup> The estimation of the readership is quoted from Lin Yutang, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China*, Chicago, Ill., The University of Chicago Press. 1936

<sup>36</sup> On 8 and 9 March, Nanjing government published formal decrees to arrest Tang Yulin. The order particularly included the government's "painful regrets" to have missed the fight-back opportunity and assured its people that brave counter battles were on in the fronts by newly appointed generals.

<sup>37</sup> "Xinan dangju taolun rehe shijian 西南当局讨论热河事件 (Southwestern Authority Discussing Rehe Event)." *Shenbao*. 7 March, 1933.

event to the general political situation of China. The *Free Talk* essays on Rehe topic showcased how the supplement augmented and developed the objective and straightforward news reports, which were generally fragmented and focused on the specific events themselves. The series of events happened so fast and one after another that only to keep track of the information about the events became an uneasy task. Hence, the task of making sense of the different perspectives, analysis of the deeper reason for the loss, and developing a more fundamental critique to re-orient the public and to agitate a public sentiment were to fall on *Free Talk*.

Mao Dun was the first to react in *Free Talk* on the event, after the announcement that Jiang and the military commander He Yingqin were appointed to substitute General Zhang Xueliang and Tang Yulin to take charge of Northwestern military affairs. In his satirical tone, Mao Dun wrote in the essay “Ai Tang Yulin 哀汤玉麟 (Lamenting Tang Yulin)” that it would be applauded if Tang was punished for trading drugs, misappropriating public funds and placing heavy tax on the people before he lost Rehe. Yet his being punished for losing Rehe and abandoning the city would be a wrong accusation. In an ironic lament for Tang Yulin, he not only revealed Tang’s corruption (hence referring to a news report in *Shenbao* previously about the luxury items, gold, antiques found in Tang’s house) but, more importantly, redirected the public critique to the Nanjing government’s non-resistance attitude (which the government was implied to have painstakingly hidden by diverting public attention to the fault of Tang and Zhang.) Mao Dun was able to link the fall of Rehe to the loss of other three provinces in Northeastern China and concluded that “his crime does not lie in ‘non-resistance’ and ‘abandoning the city and running away,’ but in not being able to skillfully employ the ‘resistance policy’. 他的罪不在 ‘不抵抗’ 和 ‘弃城潜逃,’ 而在于不善于运用 ‘抵抗的策略’ -” the latter a clear accusation of those who made the non-resistance policy-namely, Jiang Jieshi.

He further elaborated on the nonresistance policy by juxtaposing the news reports in sequence, which amounted to satirical reading: first announcing to the entire nation in open telegram on the determination to resist and protesting to Japan; Third step was to appeal to Washington for help; as Japanese troops drew near, telegrams were dispatched asking for support; and the final fifth step was to withdraw to the defense line No. X to avoid major casualties, then further back to Beiping and to ask the nation to prepare for longterm resistance. Such was Mao Dun’s ironic interpretation of the situation, foregrounding the underlined long-determined non-resistance policy with a pre-set panoply of rhetoric to cover the government’s intention. The title “Lamenting Tang Yulin” was hence the ironic twist in meaning that Jiang should be the real target for being accused, not Tang, whose delinquency was only an execution of the perfect “plan of non-resistance policy.”

On the next day, the initial interpretation of the event from Mao Dun was further developed by Qu Qiubai and Lao She into satirical literary forms. In “Qude jiefang 曲的解放 (Liberation of Theater),”<sup>38</sup> written by Qu Qiubai but published under Lu Xun’s penname He Jiagan 何家干 to avoid censorship,<sup>39</sup> Qu transformed the political situation into a traditional Yuan drama fitted to the tune “Tian Jing Sha 天净沙 (Heavenly Pure Sand):

(*Sheng* enters): how unusual it is with incessant performances on stage: people are busy with pacifying the inside while resisting foreign aggression. It has been such a pity that Tang from Rehe has stepped down from the stage too fast without beating the gongs before the performance ended.

(Singing): [Short version of “heavenly pure sand”]:  
Tang the scoundrel of Rehe – run away!  
Putting on an air of resistance—why not?

<sup>38</sup> 12 March 1933. *Free Talk*.

<sup>39</sup> According to the recollection by Xu Guangping, a total of twelve essays published in *Free Talk* under Lu Xun’s penname were written by Qu Qiubai while the latter took refuge in their apartment in Shanghai. More in chapter three and four.

(*Dan* enters and sings): imitating the model of the central – tidying the suits and looking to the West, [let's] discuss marching off to Xianyang.

(生上) 连台好戏不寻常：攘外期间安内忙。只恨热汤滚得快，未敲锣鼓已收场。

(唱)：〔短柱天净纱〕热汤混账——逃亡！  
装腔抵抗——何妨？

(旦上唱)：模仿中央榜样：——整装西望，商量奔向咸阳。

Qu Qiubai developed the news materials into a theatrical script, with lyrics assigned to the different characters – *sheng*, the male lead, and *dan*, the female lead. A colloquial style was used to present the political drama and to deliver the same effect as it were to be actually performed on stage. Rhyming couplets were used to make it catchy: the last two words “*taowang* 逃亡 (run away)” and “*hefang* 何妨 (why not) rhymed well, so did the last character of the phrase before - “*hunzhang* 混账 (scoundrel)” and “*dikang* 抵抗 (resist).” Given the current role of Qu Qiubai as an ardent promoter of the mass language since the early 1930s, the two lines were designed in a colloquially catchy way that common people could easily remember and sing.

The male lead introduces the general situation – an unmistakable reference to the central government’s deceptive non-resistance of foreign aggression and a focus on fighting the Communists. Tang Yulin was then characterized under the general picture as a clown – an unimportant role in traditional drama with function of making fun through slapstick comedies. The male character then sings the rhyming couplets that summarized Tang’s acts in strongly abusive and colloquial language. The script also provided the stage directions for the way the female lead is to appear onto stage - an evident parody of a typical central government official. The lyrics she sang - we tidy up our clothing and discuss rushing to Xianyang – were again an irony on Central Government’s empty sloganeering without substance.

On the next day, 13 March 1933, Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966), a Beijing novelist and satirist, published a poem “Kongcheng ji 空城计 (The Empty City Strategy)” dramatizing the fall of Rehe, in particular the scene how Tang’s troops fled.

Japanese imps were startled, how can the city be so quiet!  
Can it be the “empty city strategy” without even playing the music while the  
ambushed troops will arise and our heads will fall?  
By ascending a height [they] laughed out loud,  
The truth is generals and soldiers compete in running away.  
Cars big and small all drive to the south,  
Raising clouds of dust with rolling yellow sands;  
Chests in hundreds and thousands are on the move;  
How solemn and exciting is the filling of private pockets.  
Who cares about losing the land and city,  
No one has bullied our own elders anyhow!

日本小鬼吓了一跳，怎么城里静悄悄！  
莫非空城计连琴也不弹，伏兵四起脑袋纷纷掉？  
登高一望笑哈哈，  
原来老将精勤练赛跑。  
大车小车齐向南，  
黄沙滚滚风浩浩；  
千箱万箱行李多，  
悲壮激昂私囊饱。  
失城丧地谁管它，  
反正没人把咱老子怎样了！

In the poem, Lao She contrasted the empty quiet city that was left to the Japanese with the busy fleeing of the army together with transportation of the hundreds of chests full of gold and treasure. The poem juxtaposes lines of depiction of the scene with verses that apparently parodied the mind of Tang Yulin: in a solemn and exciting manner [I] fill my own pocket, and who cares about the lost of a city and the land? The sarcasm was all the more effective with the reference to the “empty city” ruse of Zhuge Liang in *Sanguo zhi yanyi*—a favorite play on traditional stages, a reference that virtually all readers would catch.

Although these *Free Talk* essays intentionally took a lightly entertaining appearance through satire, use of colloquial catchy language and vivid caricaturing of the situation, the message they conveyed collectively was no less serious than that of an in-depth political analysis. Tang was condemned and mocked at, but he was generally represented as a clown unsuccessfully carrying out the central government's deceptive policy. The first rate intellectuals/writers contributing to *Free Talk* were able to make use of the supplement to help the public arrive at a deeper political analysis, which the quick turn-out of news reports had not been able to achieve. The entertaining and literary quality of the essays not only did not dilute their serious political analysis, but better agitated the readers to the anti-GMD discourse through familiar entertainment forms. (Of course, such a literary processing of political materials was also an expediency of avoiding censorship. The literary façade could potentially not escape danger if it were to convey the political message in a blatant form.)

Although not all *Free talk* writers were from the League of the Left-wing Writers, even fewer were Communist Party members, the essays in *Free Talk* involuntarily aligned with the concurrent CCP propaganda strategy. Inner Party proposals and resolutions suggested the CCP's heavy emphasis on tailoring propaganda means to different target audiences. "Resolution on the Workers' Movement 关于工人运动的决议," a document with detailed guidelines released in June 1929, specified the division of target groups and particular means to be used. Local theater was to be used to propagate to the peasants, while Shanghai's open or half open daily newspapers should be used towards urban workers. What was emphasized was the ability to "speak the voices of the masses," where the case in Shanghai was named as model for other cities in its successful making of popular dailies to its workers.<sup>40</sup> For the urban readers,

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<sup>40</sup> "Resolution for Workers' Movement 关于工人运动的决议" *Collection of Documents of the Chinese*

aesthetically qualified and catchy/fun literary products were certainly the appropriate means to mobilize them and win them to the anti-GMD camp. The CCP's strategy perfectly coincided with the role that *Shenbao* had identified for itself: as public advocate and the vanguard in arousing patriotism.

## Part II: Between Literature and Combat

### – Literary Reportage and the International Left-Wing Movement

The Chinese situation from 1928 to 1937, where left-wing writers transformed news materials into politically tendentious essays in mass media was not unique. The late 1920s and 1930s, with the spreading influence of the October Revolution in 1917, witnessed a period of massive left-wing cultural movements throughout the world. This does not merely mean the surging number of literary and political practices by increasing number of left-wing artists/writers in different countries, but also the actual contact of writers across geographical spaces that had been made possible under the organization of the Communist International and the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. Along with the latter was the communication of literary and political ideas that gave rise to cultural practice at a real international level.

This part of the dissertation traces the Chinese case of *Shenbao Free Talk* to the burgeoning international left-wing movement through examining the transculturation of the genre of literary reportage. The genre generally came to be taken seriously after the success of the German speaking Czech journalist Egon Erwin Kisch (1885-1948), and was quickly introduced to China through debates about the genre in Japan. By constant comparison with reports coming out of the party-launched workers' correspondence movement, literary reportage became the password for those who opted for higher literary quality in discussions of current events; the genre was also situated at the center of discussions on creative forms to report a fast-

changing world that included objective and subjective writing, tendentious literature and political demagoguery.

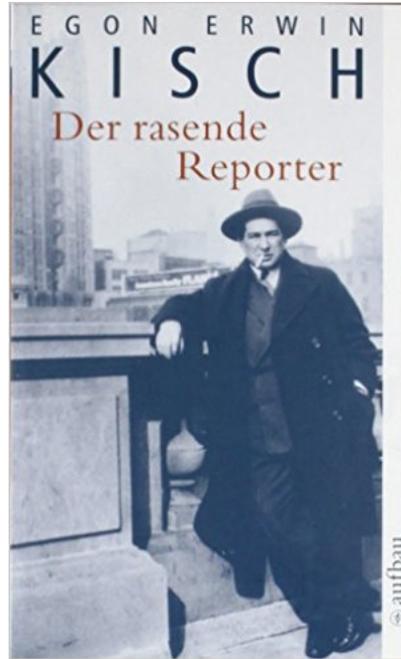
Many of the Chinese writers who had written about Kisch and literary reportage, including Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981), Cao Juren 曹聚仁 (1900-1972), Zhou Libo 周立波 (1908-1979), et al., had published in *Free Talk*. Like their Japanese counterpart Kawaguchi Hiroshi 川口浩 (1905-1984), by whom many of the debates on reportage in western Europe were introduced to Japan and through whose works these debates were later transculturated into China, they saw Kisch as a model to report reality and agitate the urban masses and to distinguish these more polished and artistic works from the large quantity of reports from the workers. This part of the dissertation starts with introduction of Kisch and his genre of literary reportage, and moves onto talking about the workers' correspondence movements led by the Communist Party in different nations, during which news writing and reporting real factory lives was charged with high political energy. The last section looks at the spread of the genre of literary reportage—how debates kindled in Germany traveled to Japan and China concerning how to (re)present reality in ways that would agitate readers and how to oppose literature's subjection to political demagoguery as in workers' correspondence movement.

## Chapter 1 Kisch and Literary Reportage

Egon Erwin Kisch, like his most well-known countryman Kafka, was a Prague-born German speaking journalist and writer of Jewish origin. He was known to the world as "the raging reporter," which is also the title of his best selling collection of reportages which appeared in German as *Der Rasende Reporter*. The title implied the identity of a daring, investigative journalist who travels deeply into many parts of the world and dares to expose the hidden truths and speaks up, like Zola in nineteenth century France, for the injustice in many societies. The title not only suggests the daring reportages he wrote but had also become a signature namecard for Kisch as a daring scout-like journalist travelling illegally to many parts of the world. His journalistic career started with war reports while he had access to the battle front of World War I as a soldier. His diary entries consist of war impressions and many accounts of ordinary soldiers in the trenches. The photograph below, taken with Hungarian anarchist Leo Rothziegel during WWI and included in many publications of Kisch studies, set the image of Kisch as a defiant Bohemian contemptuous of power. This posture had quickly consolidated into an iconic prototype image for Kisch – it had become the cover image photo for many printings of his book: a youth with defiant look on his face, with hat drawn to the side and a cigarette in his mouth.



(photo with Leo Rothziegel)



(Cover image of Der Rasende Reporter with Aufbau Press, 1993)

Keen to have his war diary reach the public, Kisch sent the manuscript to his mother in case something happened to him during the war. Parts of the diary were published in newspapers in Prague at the end of the war and the entire collection was published as a book after the war ended. This gave rise to his fame as a war correspondent.<sup>1</sup> By dwelling on ordinary soldiers' lives, petty matters of game playing, food sharing and juxtaposing these ordinary activities with the sudden onslaught of bombing, the diary embodied Kisch's journalistic sense of fair play and justice in depicting the war between Empires as one built upon the sacrifice of ordinary people's happiness and lives. This sense of justice was well carried over to his many reportorial writings for the Czech newspapers as he roamed through Prague's back allies, revealing stories about crimes, prostitutes, and pubs. His focus was fixed particularly on the socially overlooked and marginalized as the author observed them with sympathy. It was not until he published his investigations in 1924 about the espionage/treason behind the suicide of a high-ranking officer in

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<sup>1</sup> Schlenstedt, Dieter. *Egon Erwin Kisch. Leben und Werk.* (Egon Erwin Kisch. Life and work). Westberlin: Verlag Das Europäische Buch 1985. Pp102-123

military intelligence Colonel Redl<sup>2</sup> that Kisch emerged as a social celebrity.<sup>3</sup> The accidental findings of the discarded documents and the piecing together of these forgotten documents and handwritten notes, along with speculation based on matching the time and details of a rushed suicide of the Chief General, allowed Kisch to reveal a huge political scandal for the new nation (Czechoslovakia). This scoop added another layer to the Kischean reportage – the characteristics of a detective novel.

Subsequently Kisch published "Der Rasende Reporter (The Raging Reporter),"<sup>4</sup> first book form collection of his early newspaper reports/sketches, his war diaries and the Redl case expose. Some of his reports, like those of the Redl case, were first published in newspapers anonymously to avoid the danger of censorship. The later concentrated republication of his most famous reportages helped to significantly enhance Kisch's own fame, as the book was soon at least translated into English and French. But the more important purpose of the book publication was perhaps the declaration of the genre of literary reportage and setting Kisch himself as the much admired daring journalist, and the master and initiator of literary journalism.

This was clearly done in Kisch's introduction to his book. Here, Kisch boldly declared the death of the novel, which he called outright as a fictional "lies," and celebrated it with the birth of the new genre of literary reportage. Choosing the socially marginalized people as his topic was explained as a way to essentialize the political nature of the genre. The factual nature of literary reportage was considered as both a form to challenge the novel and a tactical collision with the novel's very principles – fictional creation and intellectual introspection, which Kisch considered to be intimately related to the Bourgeoisie.

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<sup>2</sup> Kisch, Egon Erwin. *Der Fall des Generalstabschefs Redl* (The Fall of Chief General Redl). Berlin: Verlag die Schiede, 1924

<sup>3</sup> see note 1, pp162-170

<sup>4</sup> Kisch, E.E., *Der Rasende Reporter*. Berlin: E. Reiss, 1925

Novel? No. Reportage!

What to think about the reportage? I think it is the literary substance of the future. To be sure, only the reportage of the highest quality. The novel has no future. I say there will be no novels produced; meaning no books with imagined plots. The novel is the literature of the last century... Thus, there is a special kind of reportage work that has appeared; I would call it the pure reportage, the reportage itself.

I believe there will be a time when people will want to read nothing about the world but the truth! ...What's more, after the war [World War I] this reportage became the general, important mode... Psychological novel? No! Reportages! The future belongs to the really true and courageous far-seeing reportage.<sup>5</sup>

The vehement condemnation of the novel and the feverish call for the factual genre of literary reportage only resonated with the similarly feverish reception of Kisch and his genre across Europe and the ardent embrace of the genre in international proletarian cultural movements. Both paved the way for the genre's reception in China in just a couple years' time.

The point of particular concern to the dissertation project is the task Kisch had assigned to the genre of literary reportage, namely to present reality and for reports to quickly reach the broad masses and create immediate social impact. For this, Kisch called for a new kind of socially responsible, critical reporters with keen observation of reality, and a new type of journalism. As early as 1918, his war correspondence experience had landed him at the theorization of a true reporter:

The results of research are first hand, and are from life. The fact is of course the compass of his journey, but he also needs a telescope: the "logical fantasy." Because the autopsy of the site of an act, the snapped statements of the participants or eyewitnesses, and the assumption provided will never provide a complete picture of what happened. He must sort out by himself the pragmatics of the events and the transitions to the results of the inquiries so that the line of his representation came from the facts that were known to him (from the given points along the route). The ideal is that that probability curve drawn by the reporter incorporated all phases of the events through real connecting lines (Wahrscheinlichkeitskurve mit der wirklichen Verbindungslinie aller Phasen des Ereignisses zusammenfällt). It should be accessible and attempts to reach a

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<sup>5</sup> Translated and included in Harold B. Segel, *Egon Erwin Kisch: The Raging Reporter- A Bio-Anthology*. Purdue University Press, 1997.

harmonious process with the greatest possible number of passing points. Here the reporter differs from his other peers; here is shown the degree of a reporter's talent precisely by how he can present the smooth line [of events] with given points of facts and by the tendency to present the art of political editors and of critics, etc. The journalist is the prose writer of the ballade.

[Die Ergebnisse der Recherche sind aus erster Hand, sind aus dem Leben. Natürlich ist die Tatsache bloß die Bussole seiner Fahrt, er bedarf aber auch eines Fernrohrs: der „logischen Phantasie“. Denn niemals bietet sich aus der Autopsie eines Tatorts oder Schauplatzes, aus den aufgeschnappten Äußerungen der Beteiligten und Zeugen und aus den ihm dargelegten Vermutungen ein lückenloses Bild der Sachlage. Er muß die Pragmatik des Vorfalls, die Übergänge zu den Ergebnissen der Erhebungen selbst schaffen und nur darauf achten, daß die Linie seiner Darstellung haarscharf durch die ihm bekannten Tatsachen (die gegebenen Punkte der Strecke) führt. Das Ideal ist nun, daß diese vom Reporter gezogene Wahrscheinlichkeitskurve mit der wirklichen Verbindungslinie aller Phasen des Ereignisses zusammenfällt; erreichbar und anzustreben ist ihr harmonischer Verlauf und die Bestimmung der größtmöglichen Zahl der Durchlaufpunkte. Hier differenziert sich der Reporter von jedem anderen seiner Gattung, hier zeigt sich der Grad seiner Begabung, genauso wie sich an dem Linienzug durch die gegebenen Punkte der Tatsachen und der Tendenz die Kunst des politischen Redakteurs, des Kritikers usw. zeigt. Der Berichtstatter ist der Prosaist der Ballade.]<sup>6</sup>

I believe this passage contains the kernel of the Kischean literary reportage. The writer of reportage is not a mere chronicler of event, like the author of a report. He must base his report on facts and let facts guide his writing like a “compass.” But he must not be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of unselected facts. Subjective judgment from the sense of the trained detective and researchers, or, in Kisch's own words, the "logical fantasy" allows the reporter to zoom out from the ground of fragmented points of the fact like a “telescope.” Here, the subjective mind of a journalist helps sort out the chronological order, and causal relationships, the hidden logic between different facts that are not immediately visible. The "logical fantasy" of the writer of reportage determines the most effective arrangement of the constituent parts of the reportage, that is, the order in which facts and circumstances are presented so that it reads just like smooth

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<sup>6</sup> Kisch, *Wesen des Reporters* (Nature of the Reporter, 1918). In Kisch, Egon Erwin: *Mein Leben für die Zeitung, 1906-1925* (My Life for the Newspaper, 1906-1925). Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag, 1983. Pp205-206

artwork. In the order and style that facts were arranged, the reporter directs its readers into the hidden “roots of the society and calls for action upon resolving the problems.”

In many of his later theoretical articles about the genre, Kisch kept coming back to the point of the subjective element instead of simply recording facts. One favorite example of Kisch was writings about the tropical island Ceylon which he included in his speech at the 1935 international conference on defending culture against rising Fascism held in Paris. Whereas the travel advertisements described the place with impressions including sunshine, beaches, exotic lifestyle, and authentic tropical food - hence turning it to a much desired paradise - a newspaper report Kisch encountered later provided a sharply contrasting story: that a large number of children in Ceylon died of malaria and over 80 percent of the island’s children could not receive education because of malnutrition. Although both of the descriptions were based on facts, they were similarly “without fantasy (phantasielos), banal and demagogic,”<sup>7</sup> leaving readers completely at a loss over these contradictory images of the same place. A true reporter, according to Kisch, must avoid such listing of facts and should not abandon “the consciousness of artistry (Besinnung der Künstlerschaft).” He then listed what he meant with this “logical fantasy” of artistry: as fashioning the gruesome model into artwork with selection of color and perspective, as creating an artwork of conflicting forces, and as putting the past and the future in relation to the present. Only with that can a reportage avoid falling into banality and demagogy.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the repertoire of theoretical writings about literary reportage, Kisch identified a true reportage writer, a journalist as an artist and a poet, hence defending the genre as literary against the attacks from intellectuals as being naïve and superficial sketches. True reportage, according

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<sup>7</sup> Kisch, “*Reportage als Kunstform und Kampfform* (Reportage as Art Form and Combat Form).” In Kisch, Egon Erwin: *Mein Leben für die Zeitung, 1926-1947* (My Life for the Newspaper, 1926-1947). Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag. 1983. P399

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

to Kisch, was an artwork precisely because it makes visible the way of life – the raw materials of art – without a reference of pre-existing form to borrow.<sup>9</sup> Such qualities were especially valued by Chinese writers like Mao Dun, Zhou Libo and Xia Yan when the genre was introduced to China and kindled debates in the early 1930s. (This will be the content of the third section in this Part.)

Kisch made sure he was not inventing a genre but instead was merely making it explicit from the hidden line of a huge tradition. In 1923, one year before the publication of *The Raging Reporter*, Kisch compiled a grandiose collection *Klassischer Journalismus* (Classical Journalism), exemplifying what he considered as the masterworks of the newspaper from ancient times to his present day.<sup>10</sup> The authors he included range from Martin Luther, Karl Marx, and Henrik Ibsen to Dowstojewski, Emile Zola, E. T. A. Hoffmann, and to Richard Wagner, J. W. Goethe and Heinrich Heine, with topics ranging from translation, to social and political analysis, to news reports, theater critique and music and art theories. The compilation of a wide range of topics and genres served as a grandiloquent preface to the collection of his own reportage coming out the next year, and put himself right at the critical continuation of a grand tradition where the many critical newspaper writings throughout history have led to social or cultural revolutions. The compilation also served to establish a role model for how true reportage should be written. By doing that, Kisch also foregrounded the emergence of literary reportage as a call of the times.

An essay Kisch published in 1926 and included in his own collected writings reflected the changing role of the newspaper in relation to social upheavals in the post-war period.<sup>11</sup> Kisch

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p400.

<sup>10</sup> Kisch, *Klassischer Journalismus. Die Meisterwerke der Zeitung*. (Classical Journalism. The Masterpieces of the Newspaper). Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1982.

<sup>11</sup> “*Der Menschenfeind als Lebensretter* (The Misanthropist as Lifesaver).” In Egon Erwin Kisch: *Mein Leben*

particularly mentioned the Yellow Press in north America at the beginning of the century – a time when reports in newspapers merged with sensational popular literature. The reports from either telegrams or from local reporters go into the most minute details that fulfill the space of the news column where no place was reserved for political or cultural problems. Many efforts were spent on rhetorical adornments of sentimental love scenes and suspenseful detective plots that facts got buried behind the prosaic and novelistic talks (*feuilletonistische und novellistische Plaudereien*).<sup>12</sup> Kisch's essay continued by claiming that readers, facing the fast changing postwar social situation, would want from the newspapers not “diversion from reality” but reality itself. Here again is the idea of real journalism/literary reportage as a direct encountering and analysis of the real world whereas the novel was seen as diversion from reality - a “fictional lie.”

For the new task of a new time, a new kind of journalist is called for. The model journalist for Kisch was without doubt John Reed (1887-1920) – a daring middle class writer/journalist with communist world view, just like himself. Kisch had written articles particularly on John Reed and had mentioned him on various occasions in speech. Other role models along the line include Henri Barbusse (1873-1935, French Communist writer, famous for his collection “Under Fire”), Upton Sinclair (American journalist, 1878-1968), and F. W. Gladkow (Russian writer and correspondent, 1883-1958).<sup>13</sup> What Kisch valued most about Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World* was his ability to weave passion into the recording of the lives of ordinary people during the revolution, and to sort out relations between different voices and proclamations, which add up to restore through vivid recordings of sensory data the very

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*für die Zeitung, 1926-1947* (My Life for the Newspaper, 1926-1947). Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag. 1983. Pp210-211

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p211

<sup>13</sup> Kisch, “John Reed, Ein Reporter auf der Barrikade (John Reed, a Reporter of the Barricade).” In Kisch, Egon Erwin: *Mein Leben für die Zeitung, 1926-1947* (My Life for the Newspaper, 1926-1947). Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag. 1983. P92

sight of how the revolution took place. These were believed to be effective in arousing the interest of various people, “to lend them the glamour of taking part in the battle.” This effect makes sure the reportages belong to the line of classical journalism.<sup>14</sup> The essay also continues to endow Reed’s reports with a militant role. Lenin was quoted who had famously lauded Reed’s book as the role model to have vividly captured the October Revolution and through his configuration of facts to have spread to the world the great meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Kisch pointed out that Lenin’s comments were not simply to acknowledge Reed, but to envision reportage becoming a weapon of workers’ movement.<sup>15</sup>

Elsewhere, Kisch called this role as reportage’s “social task (*Soziale Aufgabe*).” Every journalist should have the curiosity and ability to deduce from the various loose fragments of visible facts their common social base through intelligence and journalistic instinct. Only in this way can the reportage speak to the widest possible mass audience and hence arouse common interest to join the revolution.<sup>16</sup> Reportages are not about recording events, nor historical and philosophical articles, but the “research of the present (*Erforschungen der Gegenwart*)” that aims at direct intervention in reality.<sup>17</sup>

As it emerged in the early 1920s, the genre of literary reportage landed in a cultural-political environment that was extremely welcoming of a literature of fact. The European left-wing circle, upon waking to the devastation of the war, was actively searching for new expressions in art and literature to raise readers’ social consciousness, to intervene in social life, and even to resolve cultural and social problems. Reportage was considered as the most timely of

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p91

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p94.

<sup>16</sup> Kisch, “*Soziale Aufgaben der Reportage* (The Social Tasks of Reportage).” In Kisch, Egon Erwin: *Mein Leben für die Zeitung, 1926-1947* (My Life for the Newspaper, 1926-1947). Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Verlag. 1983. p9

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

literary forms with Kisch being regarded as its contemporary master. Among the same current was New Objectivity in radical aesthetic theory and philosophy and the Russian "literature of fact" in terms of political praxis of collectivity.

In the literary sense, the devastation of World War I understandably diminished the appeal of literary make-believe. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) famously visualized the appalled figure under war destruction on men as someone who "stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds."<sup>18</sup> Doubt of literature arose: How could a work of imagination vie with/represent reality when reality was more powerful, more terrifying than what the human mind could imagine? In the mid 1920s, interest arose for a literature of fact, of reality, a literature dealing with the concrete issues of the here and now. Kisch had in 1924 made a specific link between the genre of reportage and coping with the fast changing reality.<sup>19</sup> After denouncing imaginative fiction-writing, Kisch famously stated: "Nothing is more amazing than the simple truth, nothing is more exotic than our own surroundings, nothing is more fantastic in effect than objective description, and nothing is more remarkable than the time in which we live."<sup>20</sup> Theodor Balk (1900-1974), critic and writer of the time, made the point unequivocally in his essay on Kisch: "Reality became more fantastic than any artistic fantasy, the novels of Jules Verne have fallen into oblivion - overtaken by reality. The time had come to bring the naked sober report into a consciously planned and stirring form, the time for writers who report swiftly about a world where the today and the tomorrow change the face of the world with the speed of a film."<sup>21</sup> The view on the new literary form's ability to cope with changing

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<sup>18</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "The Storyteller." From *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

<sup>19</sup> Segel. *Egon Erwin Kisch: the Raging Reporter- A Bio-Anthology*. Purdue University Press, 1997. Pp2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Translated and included in Segel.

<sup>21</sup> Theodore Balk, "Egon Erwin Kisch und die Reportage," in *Internationale Literatur* 3 (1935). Quoted after Harold b. Segel, *Egon Erwin Kisch: the Raging Reporter- A Bio-Anthology*. Purdue University Press, 1997.

reality had been later incorporated into many Chinese discussions of the genre; Balk's long article was translated and published in the journal *Qiyue* by Hu Feng 胡风 (1902-1985), a prominent CCP cultural leader at the time. Hu was an ardent supporter of the genre in China who had written an extensive essay on how to write successful reportage during wartime.<sup>22</sup>

The calling for new form of literature was of wide concern to writers, artists, critics, and theorists. Most famously were the points made by Walter Benjamin. In his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility," Benjamin brings up the concept of "aura" to refer to a cult value like traditions, tastes and so on that surrounds the bourgeois work of art and literature, such as the novel. It is "aura" that denies the masses' access to the bourgeois work of art and, optimistically, as per Benjamin, the current course of the 1920s – with rise of mechanical reproducibility - would see a decline of such cult value.

Timewise, Kisch seemed to have shaped a tidal wave of literary and artistic practices focusing on the here and now and substituting a romanticist ideal to which the radical New Objectivity Movement belonged. Hence the enthusiasm for the "factual" coincided with the "New Objectivity" in the post-war Weimar Germany – an avant-garde movement that is generally considered as denying intellectual introspection and psychological depth by addicting to the objective surface. Scholars from Kisch's contemporary age up to the present have associated Kisch with the avant-garde movement. "Reportage, with the capital R, and New Objectivity constituted the focal point of literary discussions from the mid 1920s," so commented Leo Lania (1896-1961), who was himself a well-known reporter of the time. "Kisch

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<sup>22</sup> Hu Feng, "Lun zhanzheng qide yige zhandou de wenyi xingshi 论战争期的一个战斗的文艺形式 (On a Literary Form of Combat in Time of War)." Originally appeared in *Qiyue* 七月, August 1938. Quoted from its reappearance in *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 (Compendium of Chinese New Literature), Vol. 1. Pp 462-469

was one of those subservient to the represented object, to not play out his personality [in writing], but to contribute to the fanaticism of objectivity, in a time when ‘objective creations’ in all kinds of art radically diverted from Romanticism and the artistic.”<sup>23</sup> Elsewhere, and more recently, scholars have seen literary reportage as part of the “frenzy of the documentary that was rubricated as New Objectivity,” and as “the genre of the fact in opposing the powerful opponent of the fiction.”<sup>24</sup> The cover image of one of the versions of the book *Der Rasende Reporter* transformed Kisch into a robot standing above metropolitan landscape broadcasting with the typing machines implanted as his body. The intimation of the reporter as an avant-garde image showcases the general conception of the publishing industry to identify Kisch as one of the avant-garde circle.



But Kisch made clear from the beginning that literary reportage differed from the avant-garde movement, which many critics in the 1920s criticized as a radical attachment to superficial reality. The radical gesture to deny anything reflective, in Robert Neuman's words, only “over

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<sup>23</sup> Leo Lania. “*Reportage als soziale Funktion* (Reportage as Social Function).” in *Die literarische Welt 2* (1926). Quoted after Schlenstedt, Dieter. *Egon Erwin Kisch. Leben und Werk*. Westberlin: Verlag Das Europäische Buch. 1985. Pp216-17.

<sup>24</sup> Christian E. Siegel, *Reportage und Politischer Journalismus*. Bremen: Studien zur Publizistik, Bremer Reihe. Deutsche Pressforschung.

shoot the target”<sup>25</sup> and it denied communication. For Kisch, a good reporter must be able to communicate facts smoothly through a subjective and evoking lens - for him, this is a leftist worldview that speaks for and with the masses.

The left-wing world view of Kisch, and the social/political function he associated with the genre indeed distinguished him from the radical young artists of New Objectivity, and drew him closer to the Communist cultural praxis. Kisch had been early on associated with Red Guard coups in Vienna, when he joined the Communist party, and was a great admirer of the Russian Revolution.<sup>26</sup> His 1925/26 trip to Soviet Russia allowed him to establish contact with the Russian communist cultural circle, only resulted in being invited back as a delegate to the congress of the International Association of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers held in Charkov in 1930. It was in this truly inclusive congress that Chinese delegate *Xiao San* 萧三 (1896-1983, perhaps better known by penname Emi Siao) proposed the establishment of the Chinese branch of League of Left-wing Writers. Kisch was also one of the leaders and founders of the German League of Left-wing Writers. The genre of reportage was quickly appropriated by Communist leaders, and ardently promoted as the true proletarian genre. It was put into massive scale political praxis through the workers correspondence movement that started in Soviet Russia and was quickly disseminated to various parts of the world. In the heyday of the genre in political praxis, Kisch came to defend literary reportage as not falling into pure political demagoguery.

Before dwelling into the genre’s reception in China via Japan, it will be worthwhile to introduce briefly the left-wing writers branches and the international workers correspondence movement which brought huge fame to the genre. The later discussion in China and Japan about

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Neuman, "Zum Problem der Reportage (To the Problem of Reportage)," in *Die Literatur*. Jg. 30 (1927/28), p4

<sup>26</sup> Schlenstedt, Dieter. *Egon Erwin Kisch. Leben und Werk*. Westberlin: Verlag Das Europäische Buch. 1985.

literary reportage and Kisch, while giving full credit to the genre's proletarian nature, acknowledged the need to incorporate aesthetic qualities instead of leaving it at surface sketches of reality. The transformation of the genre in Japan and China had then become left-wing writers' active search for better ways to write and to fully exert the influence of proletarian literature to agitate the masses to move beyond the phase of using literature as a mere political tool, just like in the workers' correspondence movement. Reportage had become the Communist genre of party-literature, but discussions on literary reportage was a conscious search for a kind of literature, not just to capture reality but to mobilize its readers.

## Chapter 2 The Workers Correspondence Movement and the League of Left-Wing Writers

Even though the German League of Proletarian Revolutionary Writers (Der Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller, BPRS hereafter) was founded in 1928 under the leadership of the International Union of Revolutionary Writers (hereafter IURW), headquartered then in Moscow, there had been quite a long tradition of left-wing literature in Germany before this time. Scholars have traced it back to at least the late 1910s, with slow progression under the pressure of censorship and material difficulties but with visible growth from the year 1924 onwards.<sup>27</sup> A notable characteristic of the early development was the coexistence of writers of two different backgrounds – on the one side were writers of the proletarian class who soon went onto becoming the main force of the workers' correspondence movement; on the other side were anti-imperialist writers from the bourgeoisie, who had been converted to the course of socialism.<sup>28</sup> Kisch's early works, especially his reportage about the socially marginalized in his Prague days and the reportage collection of his trip in Soviet Russia *Zaren, Popen, Bolschewiken* (Tsars, Popes and Bolsheviks) established him to be one of the latter. Other famous writers in the latter group include the political satirist Kurt Tucholski (1890-1935), playwright Ernst Toller (1893-1939), Nobel Prize laureate Carl von Ossietzky (1889-1938) and others. In the rising tide of proletarian cultural movements since the late 1920s, they were considered by their contemporary peers such as O. Biha, who saw themselves as authentic proletarian writers, as

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<sup>27</sup> Albrecht, Friedrich and Klaus Kändler, *Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller Deutschlands 1928-1935*. (League of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers of Germany 1928-1935) Leipzig: Veb bibliographisches Institut Leipzig. 1978. P12-15. Similar views were also found in Walter Fähnders, "Revolutionäre und politische Literaturentwicklung im ersten Jahrzehnt der Weimarer Republik (Revolutionary and Political Literary Development in the First Decade of the Weimar Republic)." *Utopie Kreativ*, issue 102, April 1999. Pp40-46

<sup>28</sup> Albrecht, p14.

“petit-bourgeois revolutionary and anarchistic” writers that had diverted from the central focus on class characters.<sup>29</sup>

The clear watershed, according to historians Friedrich Albrecht and Klaus Kändler, was pinned down to the fourth world congress of the Communist International in late 1929. Ideas had been circulated in the conference about distancing themselves from the “sympathizers,” who were then considered as dangerous to solidarity. It had also been suggested that the cultural task should be carried out by the proletariat themselves.<sup>30</sup> As the idea was endorsed by the BPRS leader Johannes R. Becher (1891-1958), *Linkskurve* – central organ of the BPRS, launched successive attacks in the latter half of 1929 and first half of 1930 against Ernst Toller (who was denounced as literary agent of the bourgeoisie), Kurt Tucholsky, Alfred Döblin (1878-1957) and so on.<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, writing talents from proletarian background were elevated to the utmost position.

The debates about “sympathizers” in Soviet Russia and Germany were quickly introduced by Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899-1935) and Feng Xuefeng 冯雪峰 (1903-1976), two Chinese Communist cultural leaders who were then the most learned scholars of Russian and European literature in the Party. In the high tide of the Chinese proletarian cultural movement in the mid 1930s, similar debates were going on in Chinese literary arena about *tongluren* 同路人 (fellow traveler) and *disanzhong ren* 第三种人 (third type of person). Writers like Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 (1905-2003) and Dai Wangshu 戴望舒 (1905-1950), whose works were hallmarked by formal experiments with Western techniques, were considered at the beginning of the left-wing

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<sup>29</sup> Biha, O. “Die proletarische Literatur in Deutschland (The Proletarian Literature in Deutschland).” *Literatur der Weltrevolution* (Literature of World Revolution). August 1931.

<sup>30</sup> Albrecht, p40-43

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

literary movement as sympathizers with the proletariat – *tongluren* – as they wrote about the working class people; they were soon excluded from the dominant left-wing circle and considered as splitter and betrayer of the revolutionary course – *disanzhong ren* – as the League of Left-wing Writers deemed the indulgence in formalistic experiment in literature was unhelpful and even dangerous to the development of a true proletarian culture.

It was not before long that the IURW and BPRS came to the decision of launching the correspondence movement among the workers, and reportage – as the most easily accessible means to record workers’ daily lives in the factory in the ordinary language of the workers – became the central genre at work. The movement was first conceived as early as in 1924; the fact that its resolution did not come out in a left-wing journal but directly from the German Communist Party’s political organ *Rote Fahne* (Red Flag) determined the movement’s nature as political and not literary. The December 1924 issue of *Red Flag* published “The resolution of the first conference of the workers correspondents,” foregrounding the meaning of the movement as opening up publication opportunities for the workers who had only been silenced and denied access to publication in the bourgeois press.<sup>32</sup>

As the proletarian literary movement progressed, especially with the exclusion of the bourgeois left-wing writers (these were understandably the most talented writers), immediate guidance on how to write was in critical need. One article in the March issue of *Linkskurve* by N. Kraus, leader of the German Communist Party’s Propaganda Department, suggested the standpoint of a true “proletarian writer:” it should not be the standpoint of an unsatisfied worker, but from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, to understand the cause of the deteriorated situation and the mechanism of the current society.<sup>33</sup> Extensive discussion on the true proletarian literature in

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<sup>32</sup> Quote after Albrecht, p18

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p49

1930 and 1931 in the German left-wing cultural realm also made another notable principle for good literature, namely, not as “poems of the poor (keine Armeleute-Dichtung)” or literature of sympathy (Mitleidsliteratur), but showing the revolutionary path to overcome the human misery.<sup>34</sup> The first point on incorporating into writing the social mechanism and political cause well resonated Kisch’s envision for reportage; but whether any reportage from the workers correspondent lived up to Kisch’s standard is highly doubtful. The large amount of correspondence from the workers with coarse grasp of the surface life without analysis deeply worried Georg Lukacs, the seminal Eastern European left-wing literary theorist and cultural critic. In 1932, Lukacs launched a campaign in *Linkskurve* against the movement. Although he lauded Kisch as the master of literary reportage, he vehemently denounced the genre of reportage in general as an operative genre as only following the Party’s order. The two seminal essays “Reportage oder Gestaltung (Reportage or [literary] composition)” and “Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit (Tendency or partisanship)”<sup>35</sup> set the derogative tone for reportage, which Lukacs believed only stopped short at political daily actuality and did not reach the specifics of art and literature.

Indeed, the debate around reportage literature is but among the extensive discussion on literature’s relation to reality and the different levels of reality in literary philosophical realm that starts with theoreticization of a left-wing Realism in the early 1930s and climaxes in the 1937/38 debates on Expressionism. The debate, in the study of Hans-Jürgen Schmitt,<sup>36</sup> splits the German speaking intellectuals to two camps – on the one end is the Hungarian philosopher Georg

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p66.

<sup>35</sup> *Linkskurve* 4.7/8, 1932

<sup>36</sup> Schmitt, Hans-Jürgen. *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption*. Suhrkamp (The Expressionism Debate. Materials to a Marxist Realism concept), Frankfurt/Main 1973

Lukasc, who is the main contributor to the literary theories throughout the 1930s, and leader of the German Leftwing League and a cultural leader of ComIntern in Moscow, together with Alfred Kurella - leading cultural politician of the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) in Moscow next to Becher, initiator of the Expressionism debate in which he polarized Lukacs's theoretical position into vehement denunciation of Expressionism; on the other end, the Marxist literary theorist Ernst Bloch, and Bertold Brecht, who was away from the left-wing cultural center of Moscow by thousand miles in Sweden, but was increasingly committed to the Communist course and was determined to incorporate an explicit revolutionary message in his extremely popular epic theater.<sup>37</sup> The polemics against Expressionism, which was believed to present an all-too abstract opposition against bourgeois culture, hysterical subjective pathos, conceptual escape from reality, and the subsequent distraction ideology, could easily apply to the avant-garde movement in general. Yet the debates between expressionism and realism could be boiled down to the core concepts of totality of reality in the Bloch- Lukacs line and cultural heritage in the Brecht- Lukacs line.

In his discussion on Expressionism,<sup>38</sup> Bloch attempts to set "Marxism" and "poetry" in dialectic relation to create a realist poetry that would move beyond facticity of reality. He uses Marx's phrase "*Traum von einer Sache* (dream of a thing)" to explain his conception of the poetic correlate of truth (*Wahrheit*) as to exist above surface reality (*Wirklichkeit*) – a critique on the 1920s fashion in literary and artistic trends of attaching closely to reality. Without a reality-bounded humanly and subjective idealism, states Bloch, no representation (*Abbilden*) and artistic

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<sup>37</sup> Brecht hit a huge success with *Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Three Penny Opera) among bourgeois audience in non-left-wing commercial theaters like the Das Berliner Ensemble. The plays he wrote during exile, such as *Mutter Courage und Ihre Kinder* (Mother Courage and Her Children, 1939) and *Leben des Galilei* (Life of Galileo, 1939) were attempted with more overt didactic messages.

<sup>38</sup> Bloch, Ernst. "Diskussionen über Expressionismus (Discussions about Expressionism)" in Schmitt, Hans-Jürgen. *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption*. Suhrkamp (The Expressionism Debate. Materials to a Marxist Realism Concept), Frankfurt/Main 1973, pp180-192

creation are possible. What Bloch proposes is an active moving subject matter based on reality that contains a reality in formation as opposed to reality by itself (*Wirklichkeit an sich*) that is believed to only confine the work of phantasy:

Die Wahrheit ist nicht Abbildung von Fakten, sondern von Prozessen, sie ist letztthin die Aufzeichnung der Tendenz und Latenz dessen, was noch nicht geworden ist und seinen Täter braucht.  
[Truth is not a representation of facts, but of processes; it is ultimately the recording of tendency and latency, which have not yet become and still need their doer.]<sup>39</sup>

Bloch's envisioning of realist literature well resonates with that of Kisch, whose literary reportage also emphasizes the arrangement of facts in causal relation to highlight the social and political mechanism of events, or in Kisch's own term, fact-based reports with "logical phantasy." Bloch believes that only in such a dynamic way can reality and the subject be prevented from falling into alienation (*Entfremdung*) and reification (*Verdinglichung*). Hence goes the implication of Bloch's piece: to shed light into the negative experience with Bourgeois literary development to give birth to a possible Marxist poetry of the future. Yet it is precisely at this view of reality and his hostile attitude towards the bourgeois past that the Marxist Lukacs threw his opposition. For Lukacs, the self-enclosed coherent reality is only mediated and spontaneous that cannot live up to Totality (*Totalität*). For Lukacs, all of the so-called avant-garde arts of the early twentieth century, including, he particularly lists, Naturalism, Surrealism, Expressionism, are but the different ways of broadening the means of representation (montage as perhaps the most prominent). They are the same in nature in their common fundamental tendency: i.e., increasingly stronger distancing from Realism (*Entfernung vom Realismus*) and increasingly energetic liquidation of Realism (*Liquidierung des Realismus*).<sup>40</sup> What these young

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Lukacs, Georg. "Es geht um den Realismus (On Realism)." In Schmitt, Hans-Jürgen. *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption*. Suhrkamp (The Expressionism

artists did was to capture and represent what *really* was/happened, and therefore put themselves in an impossible task of representing the entirety of reality by capturing only a side of it. Lukacs quoted Lenin's request for literature's "Allseitigkeit (all-sidedness)-" not only all sides of reality but also its nexus (Zusammenhänge) and mediation (Vermittlungen).<sup>41</sup> Lukacs continued along Lenin's line of thought on reality and called for a unity of *Erscheinung* – the reality that exists on the surface, does not root densely and disappeared often and an equivalent of *Wirklichkeit*, with the *Wesen* – a German philosophical term usually translated as being or essence of things. The task of writers is to show the unity of *Erscheinung* and *Wesen* in literary creation. Lukacs identified such achievements in the "true Realists" – Thomas Mann, Maxim Gorki and Balzac. In analyzing Mann's *Tonio Kröger*<sup>42</sup> for instance, Lukacs stated that Mann not only described the character as a strayed citizen, but also creatively showed how and why he was a strayed citizen despite of his "immediate opposition to Bourgeoisie," despite of his landlessness in bourgeois life, despite of his exclusion from the Bourgeois life. By doing so, Mann's novella exemplifies a true Realist work: the artistic dialectics of *Wesen* and *Erscheinung*.<sup>43</sup> That is to say, Realist writers should substitute the capturing of immediate reality with the showing of the process of social development; and combine the objective with the subjective, according to the need for illustrated objective forms of *Erscheinung* to be exchanged with a capitalist reality, and according to how, in a strictly Marxist philosophical sense, the different narrative styles of the surface reality could bear out class struggle.<sup>44</sup>

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Debate. Materials to a Marxist Realism Concept), Frankfurt/Main 1973, pp193

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p198.

<sup>42</sup> Protagonist of Thomas Mann's 1901 novella *Tonio Kröger*.

<sup>43</sup> Lukacs, Georg. "Es geht um den Realismus (On Realism)." Schmitt. p205

<sup>44</sup> Lukacs, Georg. "Es geht um den Realismus (On Realism)." Schmitt. pp201-202

Kisch and his literary reportage are an interesting case that must be singled out from the overgeneralization of the Avant-Garde. So did Lukacs. While Lukacs expressed his uncompromising denunciation of Reportage in general as a genre that superficially attached to a surface reality by focusing on a reporter's experience with it, he did single out Kisch as a "master of reportage" in his 1935 congratulatory essay to Kisch's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Lukacs elevated him above the rest of the journalists of the time as one who represented the "culmination of capitalistic reification."<sup>45</sup> This might not come as complete surprise as Kisch, despite of determined experimentation with new forms of reportage and despite of becoming a celebrity in addition to a writer, was earnest in finding ways to incorporate the exposure of the ill mechanism of the capitalist society into the factual description of detailed people and events. By all means, Kisch's literary reportage, as explained in his theoretical essays, showcased the purposeful distancing from mere faithful recording of a superficial reality – which Lukacs harshly condemned.

The polemics between Brecht and Lukacs revolved around the question of cultural heritage. The young Brecht was without doubt the most successful dramatist in Weimar Germany who had proved the fact that Weimar proletarian audiences would respond ardently to and would participate in vanguard forms on stage. In his correspondences with Walter Benjamin, Brecht complained about being solitary in Sweden while "someone from over there" (referring to Lukacs with power over culture in Moscow) trying to prescribe a form for socialist art. In his theoretical essays on the Expressionism debate and on Georg Lukacs,<sup>46</sup> the complaint

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<sup>45</sup> Lukacs, Georg. "Meister der Reportage (Master of Reportage, 1935)." In Erhard H. Schütz, *Reporter + Reportagen*. Achenbach, 1974. P48

<sup>46</sup> Brecht, Bertolt. "Die Expressionismusdebatte (The Expressionism Debate)" and "Die Essays von Georg Lukacs (The essays from Georg Lukacs)." In Schmitt, Hans-Jürgen. *Die Expressionismusdebatte. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption*. Suhrkamp (The Expressionism Debate. Materials to a Marxist Realism Concept), Frankfurt/Main 1973, pp302-309

he made to his friend Walter Benjamin in private grew into the somewhat aggressive challenge to almost all aspects of Lukacs's theories. The fundamental opposition was first of all Lukacs's use of the 19<sup>th</sup> century realists like Balzac and Tolstoi - writers of bourgeois background and were writing for a bourgeois audience, as role models for Socialist and proletarian Realism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and secondly the fact that Lukacs denounced his contemporary proletarian realist artists who dwelled in experimentation with new forms to involve proletarian audience just like Brecht himself. Lukacs's efforts to promote Realist literature among other art forms like theater and poetry was also a source of Brecht's anger – in fact, it was theater that first and most ardently responded to the call for proletarian art in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Brecht was certainly one of its most important contributor. After demonstrating through numerous full passages of why proletarian art should be free from any preset forms and theories,<sup>47</sup> Brecht finished the essay with a paragraph that culminated his antagonism to Lukacs's Realism. He requested abolition of theory that prescribed ways to write and interpret an artwork and called for continuous renewal of art form: “Für die noch zu schaffenden Werke. Wir verhüten einen Formalismus der Kritik. Es geht um den Realismus (For the works still to be created. We [should] prevent a formalism of critique. It is about Realism.)”<sup>48</sup>

On the side of Lukacs, the central concept of his opposition to Brecht - “Volkstümlichkeit (popularity)” was not primarily about a piece of literature being popular among readers, but a theoretical proposition along the Leninist line of how to create a true literature of the people. He defined a Realist work's relation to heritage (*Erbe*) as “a real participation, elevation, preservation, higher development (*ein wirkliches Mitnehmen, Aufheben, Aufbewahren, höherentwickeln*)” of the lively creative forces in the traditions of people's lives and their

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<sup>47</sup> Brecht. “Die Expressionismusdebatte (The Expressionism Debate).” Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p307

passion and pleasures.<sup>49</sup> Hence, according to Lukacs, “history is but the lively dialectical unity of continuity and discontinuity, and of evolution and revolution.”<sup>50</sup> He hence amounted to a critique on avant-garde arts in general as impatient experiment with radical new forms that cut off from tradition. This adds another layer of meaning to what Lukacs meant by “total art-” the central feature for a Realist masterpiece: a cohesion of the past with the present. Brecht had purposely bent Lukacs’s point on continuation and evolution to mean sticking to the good old past of Bourgeois culture in order to launch his denunciation of his theory. However, as the most popular dramatist in the 1930s Germany, Brecht had all the right to challenge Lukacs’s position as being primarily a literary theorist and not an art practitioner.

The discussion about literature’s relation to reality is not only a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena. The Marxist-Leninist conception of reality and that of Lukacs were development out of the rich German philosophical and aesthetic tradition. Matthias Uecke positions the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist arts along the philosophical tradition of the communication between the enclosed literary system and the socio-political realm - discussion that dated back at least to early idealist aesthetics.<sup>51</sup> Uecke depicts such line of development as from literary mimesis in Idealist literature, which features with imitation of the reality outside of literature to the degree that the line between the two must be carefully hidden, to the Classicist art period of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when art, with the differentiation between Reality (*Wirklichkeit*) and Truth (*Wahrheit*) in the philosophical realm, for the first time functions to form a perception of the Truth however the fictional narrative depends on the recording of factual reality.<sup>52</sup> Then at long awaited last, the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp223-224

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p225

<sup>51</sup> Uecke, Matthias. *Wirklichkeit und Literatur. Strategien dokumentarischen Schreibens in der Weimarer Republik*. Peter Lang, 2007.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, P35-36

freedom of art unconfined to mimesis of a coherent reality was systematically theorized by Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) in his writings on aesthetics. In his interpretation of the historical development of aesthetics in the seminal essay “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry” (*Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung*), Schiller defined the task for contemporary poets as to strive for “the elevation of Reality to Ideal (*die Erhebung der Wirklichkeit zum Ideal*)” or “the representation of Ideal,” as he saw the harmonic collaboration (*harmonische Zusammenwirken*) of the whole nature is purely an Idea (*Idee*).<sup>53</sup> Aesthetic effects could only be reached by man who was ready to move from Reality onto the realm of Idea.<sup>54</sup> Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel made a step further along the line in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* (*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*). Hegel investigated art from the role of mediator and the function of mediating between a Reality, which was seen as the embodiment of the “pure external, sensual and fading (*äußerlich, sinnlich und vergänglich*)” and the “endless freedom of comprehending reasoning (*die unendliche Freiheit des begreifenden Denkens*)” that articulated itself in philosophy.<sup>55</sup> That means, art is no longer about imitation of reality, but attempts to articulate the “comprehending reasoning,” whose insights endow the appearance of reality its materiality. It is with Hegel, according to Uecke, that aesthetics is liberated from being attached to claims of the empirical Reality, and starts to gain its independent social function. According to Uecke, the entire Modernist movement, once art departed from the confinement to beauty (*Schönheit*), can be seen as the purposefully boundary-crossing between the autonomy of art and its social function. Along this line, Naturalism launched its polemics against the “poetic Realism,” which was believed to still adhere to art’s “beauty” principle, by claiming to represent a wholesome and neglected Reality,

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<sup>53</sup> Schiller. “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry.” Quoted after Uecke, *ibid*, p37

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> Hegel. “Lectures on Aesthetics.” Quoted after Uecke, p37-42

which, according to Naturalist writers like Konrad Alberti, is an attempt for higher cognition of Being (*Wesen*) of the world. Art's communication utility between Reality and Truth was seen by Uecke to underlie the entire Modernist movement in the early 20th century, with the difference between each specific art movement lying upon its specific technique to concretize the Truth.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly the later New Objectivity and factual literature are seen as more daring efforts to depart from the autonomy of literature and its reality-imitation function to march into winning functionality in other social systems. It is against this line of development that Lukacs launched his above-mentioned denunciation of Modernist arts as an impatient radical denial of the institution of art, which can only overshoot the target. With literary reportage, Kisch likewise defends for art in the wild whirlwind of negativist art movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by calling his genre as "art form (Kunstform)" and "combat form (Kampfform)," purposefully prioritizing reportage literature's link to art and aesthetic tradition than its modern role of clarion caller for battle.

Despite of the intensive verbal debates of attacks and counter-attacks on art's aesthetic meaning and social function, literature had been metamorphosed to various forms to be involved in modern left-wing politics under the "anti-art social production conditions."<sup>57</sup> In the other half of the globe, in the new Soviet state in the immediate post- revolutionary period, "writers and artists mounted a vigorous campaign to legitimize a new art that would be more appropriate to the projected socialist transformation and proletarianization of Russia."<sup>58</sup> What Lukacs critiqued of reportage did not seem to arouse a hint of concern as the newly arisen authors eagerly sought for ways to dissolve bourgeois art as a whole. "Art was now expected to deal with real life

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp44-45

<sup>58</sup> Segel, p13

directly, to confront it head on, even to shape it.”<sup>59</sup> A new complex of forms generated by a merger of literature and journalism, celebrated with the aggressive proponents of a fact-based literature, emerged in Soviet Union since the early 1920s with the ultimate goal of cancelling literature as an independent institution. To the propagators of factography, the highest form of literary activity was factual reporting, by which they meant topical sketches, biographies, travel accounts, and documentations of one sort or another.<sup>60</sup>

Tretiakov was the group's representative. His work "Bio Interview" of Deng Shi-hua,<sup>61</sup> allows the subject of the sketch, an old woman who has changed with the times, to tell her life story, even if in broken Russian. Along the same line, he launched factory wall posts, which, just like programmatic workers correspondence movement in China a couple years later, invited workers to write about events in their lives. Tretiakov soon drew admiration from Walter Benjamin. The latter, in his famous essay "Author as Producer," uses Tretiakov as an example of the blurring of the boundaries between literature and journalism, and between literary genres. He calls Tretiakov the "operating" writer, and spoke highly of his challenge to literature as an institution: "I did intentionally quote the example of Tretiakov in order to point out how comprehensive is the horizon within which we have to rethink our conceptions of literary forms or genres, in view of the technical factors affecting our present situation, if we are to identify the forms of expression that channel the literary energies of the present. ... We are in the midst of a mighty recasting of literary forms, a melting down in which many of the opposites in which we have been used to think may lose their force."<sup>62</sup> Benjamin sees in Tretiakov's works the potential

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<sup>59</sup> Segel, p73

<sup>60</sup> Segel, p74

<sup>61</sup> Tretiakov, Sergei. *A Chinese testament; the autobiography of Tan Shih-hua*, as told to S. Tretiakov. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1934

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "Author as Producer." From *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969. Quoted after Segel, p72

to dissolve literature as a whole by overthrowing the production relationship and training a critical public with historical consciousness. He hence made the radical proposal that writing itself should not be veiled through layers of representation but become praxis - hence turning the author into the producer.

Kisch should be seen as taking precisely the same role of the "mighty recasting of literary forms" as Tretiakov. Not only did he blend journalism with literature, but the "logical fantasy" freed him from conforming to any particular style of narration. Sometimes Kisch employs the omniscient narrator, with himself completely buried behind the surface of texts- just as in a traditional journalistic piece; on many other occasions in his writing he is very much in view, either acting as the principal protagonist of the piece, or as the curious, ironic urban observer of phenomena. Like Tretiakov, he wanted his writing to have immediate social effect. To quickly reach out to the large audience, and create great social impact is the aim of Kisch's reportage. And he achieved the goal with much success. The large scale protests in Prague and the public effort to have him released from the Nazi concentration camp were strong evidence. In a sense, he might have surpassed Tretiakov in his social influence. Tretiakov was quoted to be an admirer of Kisch as he put it with his characteristic militancy: "each boy with his camera is a soldier in the war against the easel painters, and each little reporter [referring to Kisch] is objectively stabbing belles lettres to death with the point of his pen."<sup>63</sup>

No matter with critique of aesthetic deficiency or with the passionate celebration of the rise of proletarian literature, the workers' correspondence movement quickly spread to other parts of the world. Reportage had deviated from its original genesis in aesthetics and was celebrated as the workers' genre in the mass-scale movement to proletarianize the institution of

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<sup>63</sup> Sergei Tretiakov quoted in John Willett, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety, 1917-1933*, p107

literature and the press. The starting point for spreading the workers' correspondence to the world from the central node of Soviet Russia and Germany – two leading participants in IURW - was the second international conference of proletarian and revolutionary writers, held in Charkov, Ukraine in November 1930. Altogether, over one hundred delegates from over 23 countries attended. Before the conference, there had been writers' associations in five European countries (Germany, Hungary, Austria, Poland, Czechoslovakia), United States and Japan – the only member branch in Asia. The conference described the German branch as the most important center for proletarian culture alongside Soviet Russia.<sup>64</sup> Germany dispatched a delegation of fourteen members, among whom were the well-known left-wing writers at home: Becher, Biha, Ernst Glaeser, Kisch, Renn, Anna Seghers and F. C. Weiskopf.<sup>65</sup> In the article published in the October issue of *Linkskurve*, Becher called the Charkov conference as “our turning point,” since “the proletarian and revolutionary literature trenched all the way from fighting for existence to its expansion.”<sup>66</sup>

As one of the early branches of the IURW, Japan had promoted correspondence from workers and peasants from at least in July 1930. An article published in the Japanese Writers' League *Senki* (Battle Flag) at the time put forth the task to develop from peasant and workers the writing of reports, though, at this early stage, the word correspondent did not carry the sense of popularization as massive scale political movement but as information sharing of activities among fellows.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Murphy, James F. *The Proletarian Moment: The Controversy over Leftism in Literature*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 1991. Pp35-39

<sup>65</sup> Albrecht, p60

<sup>66</sup> Quote after Albrecht, p60

<sup>67</sup> Karlsson, Mats. “United Front from Below: the Proletarian Cultural Movement's Last Stand, 1931-1934.” *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol.37 no,1, Winter 2011. PP34-37

According to the historian Kalsson, the movement took the form of cultural popularization only after the Charkov conference. A resolution of the Writers' League published in late 1931 emphasized the importance of workers and peasant correspondents to carry out the strategy of popularizing art. The proposal section of the document also adopted the belief that reinforcement of the movement should be rooted in the expansion of the network of correspondents.<sup>68</sup> Karlsson listed steps and measures the Writers' League undertook starting from mid 1930 to disseminate the proletarian art movement, in particular, the correspondence movement. These include breaking the masses of peasants and workers into small reading circles, giving away names of "proletarian" and making the presence of loyal left-wing fellows only at mature stage of the reading circle to ensure the correct ideological direction. The impression one gets about the correspondence movement in Japan is a controlled rational political orchestration under leadership of the Japanese Communist Party. This was believed to lead to a number of historians' pity and critique that the movement with once drastically growing circulation of the cultural organs ended in failure because it had followed too closely the Communist Party's doctrines, and hence raising the Emperor's offensive against and suppression of it once the small circle moved to united formation with association with the eyebrow-raising identity of the proletariat.<sup>69</sup>

That the Chinese League gained a later membership in the IURW did not mean the former introduced the workers' correspondence movement with less heat and intensity. In 1930, following the establishment of the Chinese League of Left-Wing writers, members were eagerly seeking for effective literary forms to proletarianize literature. With no small number of writers capable of following the latest political and cultural trends in Russia and western Europe,

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

reportage was located as the genre in fashion in the world in the on-going proletarian art movement. On 4 August 1930, the League of Left-Wing Writers published a resolution explicitly promoting reportage as the proletarian form of literature. It summons League members “From the midst of intense class struggle, from militant strikes, and smoldering village struggles, through community night schools, through factory newsletters, wall newspapers, through all kinds of inflammatory propaganda work, let us create our reportage! 从猛烈的阶级斗争当中，自兵战的罢工斗争当中，如火如荼的乡村斗争当中，经过平民夜校，经过工厂小报，壁报，经过种种煽动宣传的工作，创造我们的报告文学 (Reportage)吧。”<sup>70</sup> The English word reportage was included in the original document, suggesting the movement’s clear foreign influence. The document made explicit that the correspondence movement was not about delivering correspondence or reporting about workers’ lives, but as a way of “organizing lives of peasants, workers and soldiers, elevating their cultural level and political education, arousing them to fight for the Soviet regime.”<sup>71</sup>

The resolution also suggested the movement’s implication in a Tretiakovean way: only mobilizing the mass-scale grass-root proletariat into writing correspondence can literature be liberated from the hands of the few privileged and be owned by the masses. Other implications of the movement mentioned in the resolution include stripping off the “petit-bourgeois consciousness” of some of the left-wing writers and cultivating talented writers from the peasants.<sup>72</sup> This suggests that the League was up-to-date about literary debates within the Soviet

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<sup>70</sup> “*Wuchan jieji wenxue yundong de xing qingshi ji women de renwu* 无产阶级文学运动的新情势及我们的任务 (New Situation of Proletarian-Revolutionary Literary Movement and Our Tasks).” *Wenhua douzheng* 文化斗争 (Cultural Struggle), Vol.1 Issue 1. Quoted in Chen Shouzhu 陈瘦竹, *Zuoyi wenyi yundong shiliao* 左翼文艺运动史料 (Historical Archives of Left-Wing Cultural and Literary Movements). *Nanjing daxue xuebao bianji bu*, 1980. P61

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

and western European left-wing writers. In the same issue of *Cultural Struggle*- organ of the League – was another short editorial notice called for submission of correspondences in an equally ardent tone.<sup>73</sup>

This quickly led to China's being absorbed into the international proletarian writers' union. The Chinese representative to the Charkov conference Xiao San, resident representative of the Chinese League of left-wing Writers in Moscow, ensured that the Chinese writers were kept up-to-date about cultural trends and debates in Russia and the Communist world in general. He was also the source from whom the Communist cultural leaders in Moscow knew about the development of a proletarian cultural movement in China. The conference's resolution to admit the Chinese League as a formal branch of IURW, as had been detailed in Xiao San's post-conference letter to the League dated January 1931,<sup>74</sup> was inseparable from contribution of Xiao San's report. Xiao San reported that in the course of the conference, delegates "welcomed the League to join the IURW" and described the excitement and praise of the committee after hearing the "unbelievably fast development of cultural movements in China."<sup>75</sup> Agenda and participants of the conference was introduced in detail and named the successful organs – *Senki* in Japan, *Linkskurve* in Germany and *New Masses* in the United States. The letter also carried a dictating tone for the Chinese left-wing writers as he detailed the conference's in-depth discussion of proletarian literature and requested the Chinese writers to strictly follow the call:

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<sup>73</sup> "Zuolian zhongxin jiguan zazhi zhengqiu zhijie dinghu 左联中心机关杂志征求直接订户 (Solicitation of direct subscription of the central organ magazine of the League of the left-wing Writers)" Quoted in Chen Shouzhong 陈瘦竹, *Zuoyi wenyi yundong shiliao* 左翼文艺运动史料 (Historical Archives of Left-Wing Cultural and Literary Movements). Nanjing daxue xuebao bianji bu, 1980. P64

<sup>74</sup> Xiao San. "Chuxi Haer kefu shijie geming wenxue dahui zhongguo daibiao de baogao 出席哈尔可夫世界革命文学大会中国代表的报告 (Report from Chinese representative on attending the Charkov World Revolutionary Literature Conference)." Originally published in *Wenxue daobao* 文学导报, 20 August, 1931. Quoted from Chen's collection, see above note.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

the conference reinforced the importance of the workers' correspondence movement and critiqued Barbusse's idea of associating revolutionary literature with works by intellectual professional writers.<sup>76</sup> This assured the League's further ardent promotion of workers' correspondences as a militant task of mobilizing the grass-root masses to the revolution instead of landing it in a petit-bourgeois literary experiment. On 17 August 1931, the League's organ *Wenyi xinwen* announced to its readers the establishment of China branch of the IURW.<sup>77</sup> Two months later, the same journal published the IURW's resolution on developing proletarian literature in China. The top task of the list was to develop further the number of worker-correspondents and to deepen the proletarian literary movement among the masses.<sup>78</sup> A resolution published in March 1932 by the League further prioritized the task of creating revolutionary mass literature as the utmost important task of all committees within the League. The content of such literature was particularly listed as wall posters literature 壁报文学, reportage literature 报告文学, local theatrical plays 唱本 and historical romances 演义.<sup>79</sup>

These publications meant both that the Chinese League was under direct leadership from Moscow and that the establishment of the branch had drawn international attention to China's political and cultural situation. Physical contact between Chinese and international left-wing writers became possible – Kisch's trip to China in 1932 was a good example. The League's anti-

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “*Daibiao ershier guo geming wenxue guojiju zai zhongguo jiangyou zhibu jianli* 代表二十二国革命文学国际局在中国将有支部 (The International Bureau Representing Revolutionary Literature in Twenty Two Countries will Launch a China Branch soon).” Originally published in *Wenyi Xinwen*, no.23. Quote from Chen's collection, see note 47.

<sup>78</sup> “*Guoji geming zuojia lianmeng duiyu zhongguo wuchan wenxuede jueyi'an* 国际革命作家联盟对于中国无产阶级文学的决议案 (Resolution from International Revolutionary Writers' Union on Chinese Proletarian Literature).” Originally published in *Wenyi Xinwen*, on 25 November 1931. Quotation from Chen's collection, see note 47.

<sup>79</sup> “*Ge weihui de gongzuo fangzhen* 各委员会的工作方针 (Working Principles of Each Committee)” Originally published in *Mishuchu xiaoxi* 秘书处消息 (Announcements from the Secretariat), 15 March 1932. Quote from Chen's collection, see note 68.

authority (anti-Nanjing administration) movement was endowed with international attention and could solicit international support even when real Communist acts had to remain underground within China. Reports via telegrams were sent to the IURW from China, calling for international support for condemning the GMD's violence against revolutionary writers. Just a couple days after *Wenxue Daobao* 文学导报 advertised the founding of the China branch, the journal published a Declaration by the Secretariat of the IURW 秘书处消息, with a long list of signatures from the world's leading left-wing writers, Kisch being one of them, denouncing the GMD's murder of revolutionary writers in China.<sup>80</sup> Well before the arrival of international left-wing writers in China, such as Agnes Smedley, Edgar Snow, and Egon Erwin Kisch, the Chinese communist movement had already become known to the international left-wing world.

When the workers' correspondence movement was still at its burgeoning stage, Xia Yan had envisioned a fundamentally new literary form to emerge out of the proletarian literature movement. What he called *jituan yishu* 集团艺术 (collectivist art) was precisely in the sense of Tretiakov – an art form with collective participation of the masses and that would arouse their enthusiasm for the revolution. Here, mass participation takes precedence to intellectual and aesthetic quality. Workers' correspondence was at the kernel of the task. In the essay "En Route to a Collectivist Art 到集团艺术的路" that Xia Yan published in *Tuohuang zhe* 拓荒者 (Pioneer) in April 1930, the term "*baogao* 报告 (report/reportage)" was used for the first time, and was often interchanged with "*baogao wenxue* 报告文学 (reportage literature)."<sup>81</sup> The

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<sup>80</sup> "*Geming zuojia guoji lianmeng wei guomindang tusha zhongguo geming zuojia xuanyan* 革命作家联盟为国民党屠杀中国革命作家宣言 (Declaration from Revolutionary Writers' Union on GMD's Murder of Chinese Revolutionary Writers)." Originally published in *Wenyi Xinwen*, 20 August, 1931. Quote from Chen's collection, see note 68.

<sup>81</sup> Shen Duanxian. "*Dao yishu jituan de lu* 到艺术集团的路 (En Route to Collective Art)." *Tuo huang zhe* 拓荒者 (Pioneer), Vol. 1 issue 4.

definition was, in Xia Yan's words, "reports and records produced by correspondents of special collectivist groups like factories, villages, barracks - these include all correct, instant, frequent correspondences that convey the situation of wars and lives of all battlefronts 由工场，农村，兵营等等特殊群体集团通信员所产生的报告，记录，——包含一切正确，机敏，频繁地传达各种战线的战争和生活状态的通信。” The essay further suggests the new form's intimate involvement with mass production: "These correspondences and reportages are certainly not the creation of one certain correspondence genius, but the cooperative production of every battling troop members 每个斗争部队构成员协力的产生。”<sup>82</sup>

Despite the general excited tone of seeing the new form emerge, Xia Yan's attitude towards the new art form was ambivalent. He did not tap into the polemics of aesthetic quality, but only excused himself from further analysis by acknowledging his and the world's lack of knowledge of the newly arisen collectivist art. His subsequent translation of Kawaguchi Hiroshi's essay on the discussions of the genre literary reportage and Kisch in western Europe suggested aesthetic quality was still an indispensable question for professional writers like him.

At the same time the rising concern for literary quality amidst the sweeping tides of cultural movement was under political command. Debate was on about how to pump up the current dull literature in another organ of the League *Beidou* 北斗, edited by the female left-wing writer Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986), a periodical well-known for its open editorial policy in including not just works by left-wing writers but also those by right-wing and so-called "petit-bourgeois" writers. The participants of the debate, all of whom were later contributors to *Shenbao Free Talk*, discussed about how to report, sketch and write about reality, the dynamics

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

of journalism and literature, and the proletarian tendentiousness and literary quality. Yuan Shu 袁殊 (1911-1987), a journalist and a CCP intelligence agent, was particularly concerned about how journalism should not conform to any preset form to best approach the widest possible masses.<sup>83</sup> Mu Mutian 穆木天 (1900-1971), in a similar fashion, called for continuous new literary forms to capture the rich and fast-changing political and social reality.<sup>84</sup> Lu Xun also wrote to the journal editor proposing the short powerful sketches of reality, which only fully fledged after a short while in *Free Talk*. The full discussion with in-depth analysis of ways to report/capture political reality to mobilize the masses only came with the introduction of Kisclean literary reportage.

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<sup>83</sup> Yuan Shu. “Xian zhengzhi zhi kuifu biran fanying yu wenhua de diluo 现政治的溃腐必然反映于文化的低落 (The Current Political Corruption is Inevitably Reflected in the Degradation of Culture).” *Beidou*, vol.2 issue 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Beidou*, vol.2 issue 1.

### Chapter 3 Chinese Reception of Literary Reportage and Kisch

Early in 1932, Kisch arrived at Shanghai after six months travel deep in Russia via the Trans-Siberian railway. Caught between the turmoil of civil war and Japanese invasion, mired in corruption and foreign intrigue, China attracted journalists and intellectuals from all over the world in the 1920s and 1930s. Many of them were left leaning and had been sent to China by the Communist International. The most famous German speaking intellectuals that crowded in Shanghai included the Polish writer Horose (whose novel “Love and Duty” and its subsequent film adaptation by Lianhua Film Company aroused immediate sensation in Shanghai), CCP's military strategist Otto Braun (better known by Chinese name Li De 李德); Soviet spy Richard Sorge, who developed a spy circle in China; the radical communist Anna Wang, the Communist activist Willy Münzenberg and musician Hans Eisler, not to mention the famous English speaking journalists like Edgar Snow and Agnes Smedley.<sup>85</sup> Marvin Marcus also documented four well-known Japanese writers' travel to China in the early twentieth century.<sup>86</sup> Although these writers were not social activists or Communists like most of those who came to China in the 1930s, the document at least pointed to the fact that China of the early twentieth century, just like today, was of significant international interest. But like the communists going into China in the 1930s, their trips were nothing about random viewing of the country; instead, they met Chinese local officials, and had conversations with first-rate intellectuals like Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869-1936). Travelogues and books were written about their own trips, which documented

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<sup>85</sup> Kampen, Thomas. *Chinesen in Europa – Europäer in China: Journalisten, Spione, Studenten*. Gossenberg: Ostasien Verlag, 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Marcus, Marvin. “Four Japanese Authors and their Manchuria/ China Kikôbun 紀行文 (1909-1928): Excerpts.” Manuscript.

not only what they saw in China but deeper analysis of Chinese culture and societies.<sup>87</sup>

According to the studies of the historian Thomas Kampen, Kisch had enjoyed first-class reception in China: through the Communist International, Kisch was highly likely to be in contact with the international Communist group already in China (as mentioned above) and was introduced to China's own social and cultural celebrities. A banquet was said to have been held for Kisch in Song Qingling 宋庆龄 (1893-1981)'s house, that intellectuals and officials (including Lu Xun) attended.<sup>88</sup> That Kisch's subsequent writing of reportage about China, which was acclaimed by its translator Zhou Libo 周立波 (1908-1979) as an in-depth analysis of the Chinese society, must have harvested from the knowledge Kisch already had about China through IURW and the conversations he held with Chinese celebrities.

It was not possible to trace whom Kisch actually met, but it was highly likely that Tretiakov, a personal friend of Kisch during his trip in the Soviet Union as well as a fellow delegate at the Charkov conference, helped him plan the trip in China. Tretiakov had been a visiting lecturer on Russian literature at the National University of Northern China in Beijing from 1924-1925. While there, he collected materials for his play *Roar! China* and the bio-interview with Deng Shi-hua, a biography of the fictional Chinese figure who recites in broken Russian about her own life, hence the term "bio-interview." What this general picture tells us is that Kisch came to a Shanghai that was already culturally and socially prepared for left-wing trends; the Chinese literary circle must have already been aware of the intentional factographic writing from Tretiakov before him. These helped smooth the way literary reportage and Kisch were to be accepted in China.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> see note 59

Upon his return to Europe from the short trip in China, Kisch published the book *China Geheim* (Secret China). The German origin of the book was banned with the rise to power of National Socialism almost immediately after its publication. But the book managed to be translated into French and English and travelled to other parts of the world.<sup>89</sup> The book is a collection of short reportage sketches on China, with topics ranging from colonial exploitation of children, to degradation of Russian women who fled Russia after the defeat of the White army, to the colonial exploitation of China, and even traditional aspects of Chinese theater and eunuchs. The book was translated into Chinese by Zhou Libo – then a well-known journalist and writer – with the title *Mimi de Zhongguo* 秘密的中国, based on the English version of the book translated by Michael Davidson.<sup>90</sup> Individual reportages were first serialized in Shanghai newspapers in 1936, while publication in book form came almost 3 years later. As Zhou Libo wrote in the postscript, the publication of the Chinese version had witnessed a China in critical juncture of falling to Japan’s annexation, a time very different from when the book was written in 1932 - time of the Songhu Battle, when hope was still held by the majority of Chinese people while the government was putting up decent military resistance. Yet Zhou’s publication should be seen more as setting up a model for the reporting of political reality and for mobilizing the masses and to distinguish from the large amount of fast sketches produced by ordinary people without journalistic depths. Zhou’s translation also arrived at the high point of the long discussions about reportage literature, about political tendentious writing and aesthetic quality, and about Kisch – which started at the turn of 1930 and well before Kisch’s China trip. Before

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<sup>89</sup> Schlenstedt, Dieter. *Egon Erwin Kisch. Leben und Werk*. Westberlin: Verlag Das Europäische Buch. 1985.

<sup>90</sup> Zhou Libo. *Houji. Mimi de zhongguo* 后记. 秘密的中国 (Postscript to *Secret China*). Beijing: Qunzhong Chubanshe, 1985.

tracing the transculturation of the genre, we should analyze a report to get a taste of the Kischean literary reportage.

“*Huangbaoche! Huangbaoche!* 黄包车! 黄包车! (Rickshaw! Rickshaw!)” was one of the typical pieces about lives of the oppressed Chinese and was first example of reportage that Kisch published in newspapers in 1936; it appeared in *Shenbao Weekly*, vol. 1 issue 13. The opening paragraph very well situates the rickshaws’ lives within the Chinese social environment.

“Because of war, people are not allowed to walk on the streets after mid-night in the two concessions in Shanghai. Every passenger who violates the rule, if he is not European, nor carrying a police permit, will be brutally arrested. Every night, the arrested Chinese workers – men and women – vendors and porters – are organized into small teams and concentrated into the central police station from various places. Among the people arrested were the several hundred of rickshaw pullers - neither war nor curfew could interrupt these two-legged, two-wheeled cars. They rushed for business just like before the war.”<sup>91</sup>

Much information has been included in the opening scene: that war has broken out but it only affected the concessions in the center of Shanghai by a stricter curfew time; that there was a strict social hierarchy within the concessions, with European citizens ranked the highest, down to authorized Chinese, with Chinese labors like the rickshaw drivers at the lowest and subject to brutal battering by hired (Indian) policemen who were just a little better-off than the former. Nothing, including war and violent humiliation, could stop the rickshaws from making a small amount of money to earn their meager living. In the China image Kisch presented, the rickshaws running back and forth between the busiest parts of the metropolis was juxtaposed with modern automobiles, with whom the “two-legged carriages” fought for the use of the road.

In a detached tone, Kisch continued the descriptive narrative with the history of the rickshaw: that all started with economic vying between Japanese and French colonizers for the

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<sup>91</sup> My translation from the Chinese version.

Chinese transportation market. French businessmen were able to win by securing the initial 20 spots for rickshaw licensing. They sold them to Chinese agents, who leased the rickshaws to the drivers and had to pay big portion of annual share to their French boss. For making the best use of the rented pull carts, day- and night- shifts were employed. In this way, the agents need not worry about parking fees, and rickshaws were better than “horse-carriages” in the way that “there would be no need for horse feed or stable, not even the horseman employed to install the horse shoe.” In a telling depiction, Kisch wrote: “these drivers with bare feet, running here and there, up and down, quick and slow, day and night on the road. Some are very young and others old, some running with whole foot touching the ground and others with only toes, but many are suffering from lung diseases. There have been not yet pastors 牧师 inventing an automatic rent meter to hang on people’s lungs and hearts.” Frequent life-threatening danger accompanied them as they could be easily knocked over by-passing automobiles. When such situations arise, Kisch wrote, their “masters [customers]” would jump down to batter them. The accumulated anger within the pullers would finally be vent towards modern vehicles, which they believed to have stolen their jobs.

The topic of the reportage, rickshaw labors, was certainly not randomly chosen. Tretiakov’s poem *China Roar*, composed a few years earlier during the author’s stay in China, similarly focused in this group of visibly oppressed laborers. There had been also aesthetic similarity in objectifying the rickshaw drivers as two-wheeled cars and reducing them to mechanical power and economic figures by weaving them to the larger commercial life of Shanghai. The historian David Strand, in his 1989 study of Beijing’s social history, uses the rickshaw puller as a representative figure to track the development; he particularly mentioned the

pullers' destructive riots against trams in late 1920s.<sup>92</sup> Kisch's depiction, as well as that of Tretiakov, have been clearly tinted with the Marxist view about social oppression, and irrational workers' revenge on machines instead of on the source of inequality. Towards the end of the report a left-wing optimism emerged in describing the organized underground study groups the pullers attend with arising hopeful vision of the future: "They would die in the same way as their Beijing peers; but their last call will no longer be to curse the tram."

In *Secret China*, Kisch examines China from a wide range of perspectives. No topic was too low for him: from firearm smuggling from Germany, colonial exploitation, social hierarchy, labor exploitation, to eunuchs and puppet shows in the streets. Most reportages start with the sensory depiction of the topic – sights, sounds, smells, and so on – and move onto the social and economic mechanism behind of the topic. Facts were the base for the introduction of the topic, but the scope/perspective and the order they were organized reflect Kisch's left-wing worldview, or, as he termed it – "logical fantasy."

Xia Yan's 1930 essay in the magazine *Pioneer* was perhaps the earliest use of the term "reportage literature (*baogao wenxue* 报告文学)". Before the 1930s, there had been in China left-wing travel literature like Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899-1936)'s *Chidu xinshi* 赤都心史 (Spiritual Journey to the Red Capital) – detailed accounts of exploited workers, the poor, workers' unions, uprisings as well as his experience, including his meeting with Lenin in the Kremlin during his stay in Soviet Russia as a correspondent commissioned by the *Chenbao* newspaper. Qu's factual descriptions of Soviet Russia was obvious tinted with his leftist worldview in his unadorned admiration for the Communist Soviet. A variety of reports from

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<sup>92</sup> Strand, David. *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Chinese writer and journalists on certain social events, like the May 30th Massacre, were published sporadically in newspapers. The first major collection of writings of this type, which were still very much newspaper reportage, was put together by A Ying 阿英 (1900-1977) after 28 January 1932 under the title *Shanghai shibian yu baogao wenxue* 上海事变与报告文学 (The Shanghai Incident and Reportage Literature).<sup>93</sup> Rudolf Wagner, in his study of the development of Chinese prose, traced similar texts of literary reportage to as early as 1930, when Huang Tianpeng 黄天鹏 (1909-1982) summarized what he had learned in Tokyo about journalism. The essay claimed that since Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929), there had been something like *baozhang wenxue* 报章文学, periodical literature, which was functional, but also “contained quite some aesthetic literary quality.” He even said that Wang Tao 王韬’s eye-witness account of the Franco-Prussian War was written “as if he were a novelist.”<sup>94</sup>

Workers’ correspondence movement gave a sudden rise and fame to the genre, though the genre itself was reduced to sketches of factual daily lives. The cultural movement, in the form of a political campaign, was at best received with doubts by writers. Shen Qiyu 沈起予 (1903-1970) represents one of hesitant voices: “In China, there are increasing number of people devoted to writing reportage. But many make it to ‘reports’ and not yet ‘reportage literature;’ literary reportage is still in need of a transformation from quantity to quality. 在中国，从事报告文学写作的人一天天地加多，但许多人尚只作到 ‘报告’ 而不曾作到 ‘报告文学’ ”，报告文学还需要有 “一个量与质的转换。”<sup>95</sup> Kisch's success in Europe pointed the

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<sup>93</sup> Qian Xingcun 钱杏邨, *The Shanghai Incident and Reportage Literature*. Shanghai, 1932.

<sup>94</sup> Wagner, Rudolf. *Inside a Service Trade. Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

<sup>95</sup> Shen Qiyu, "Baogao wenxue jianlun 报告文学简论 (Brief Comment on Literary Reportage)." *Xin zhonghua zazhi*, Vol.5, 7th issue.

way. Xia Yan's initial excitement about the CCP's promotion of the genre soon caused him to be concerned about the aesthetic quality. Again, Kisch was his central figure. In January 1932, Xia Yan 夏衍 (1900-1995) translated the article by Kawaguchi Hiroshi entitled "*Baogao wenxue lun* 报告文学论 (On Reportage Literature), which detailed mostly the German discussions on the genre. The essay clearly distinguished literary reportage from workers' correspondence while both were indispensable of the development of the proletarian culture.

Kisch was exemplified as a good reportage writer and Hiroshi specifically mentioned his "will to give unbiased reports 毫不歪曲报告的意志," "strong feeling for society (sensitivity to social problems) 强烈的社会的感情," and his "effort to form intimate link with the suppressed 企图和被压迫者紧密地连结的努力."<sup>96</sup> Hiroshi's effort in distinguishing literary reportage from the workers' correspondence as a form of literature in the context of the discussion about journalism in *Battle Flag* must be understood as a call for a more aesthetically qualified proletarian literature to reach "unlimited agitation effect."<sup>97</sup> As the leader of the League of Left-Wing Writers, Xia Yan's translation of Hiroshi's article in the organ of the league should also be understood as his attempt to pull reportage away from political tendentiousness and to set as a form of sympathetic social investigation.

A few years later in 1936, Xia Yan published the book *Baoshen gong* 包身工 (Contracted Workers), which remains until now one of the most important pieces of Chinese literary reportage. When reminiscing in 1959 about the creative process of *Contract Workers*, Xia Yan particularly mentioned the importance of authenticity and deep investigation. In order to collect materials, Xia Yan recollected how he went into the factory with help of a Japanese

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<sup>96</sup> Xia Yan, "*Baogao wenxue lun* 报告文学论 (On Reportage Literature)." *Beidou*, Vol.2 issue 1. Jan., 1932

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

friend, interviewed workers and actually lived with them.<sup>98</sup> He also dug into the social-economic system of how the workers became triply exploited by agents, factory supervisors, and foreign capitalists.

The result is an exemplary piece of literary reportage comparable to that of Kisch: the novel-length report does not stop at the sentimental revelation of textile-mill workers' exploited lives, but directs readers' attention to the agents, usually the factory laborers' fellow townsmen who were hired by agent heads reporting directly to the Japanese boss and knew much better how to recruit laborers from their villages and control their resentment and make them work exhaustively for minimal pay. The report on the factual lives of these workers not only evokes deep sympathy for the socially suppressed group but also incorporates the workers misery in an expanded picture of the smartly designed multilayered imperialist exploitation system behind the conditions under which they worked.

Xia Yan's translation of Kisch's essay was chronologically situated at the beginning of the increasing popularity of literary reportage in the 1930s. As his contemporary critic and writer Yi Qun reminisced, "the status of novel is almost eclipsed by reportage sketches 报告速写, ...nine out of ten established writers have written some articles of reportage 既成的作家十分之八九都写过几篇报告... and reportage literature had become the mainstream of Chinese literature."<sup>99</sup> In the same issue of *Beidou* in which Xia Yan's translation was published, there was a debate between many major left-wing writers searching for reasons for lack of creativity in the literary arena and ways to solve the problem. Participants include Yu Dafu 郁达夫

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<sup>98</sup> Xia Yan. "Cong 'Baoshen gong'yinqi de huiyi 从“包身工”引起的回忆 (Reminiscing about *Contract Workers*)" *People's Daily*, April 3 1959.

<sup>99</sup> Yi Qun 逸群, "kangzhan yilai de baogao wenxue 抗战以来的报告文学 (Reportage Literature since the Resistance War)." *Zhandou de suhui 战斗的素绘 (Sketches of Battles)*, Zuoja shuwu, 1943.

(1896-1945), Mu Mutian, Dai Wangshu, Ye Shengtao 叶圣陶 (1894-1988) and others. The focus was placed on new literary forms to write about reality. Lu Xun also published a letter to editor calling for condensing the materials into short and rich sketches instead of stretching limited materials into long novels, which was clearly a critique of the current situation.<sup>100</sup> Yuan Shu's essay almost equated literary reportage as true journalism which he believed describes the oppressed masses in entertaining and popular form of writing.<sup>101</sup>

The discussion was a development from earlier extensive debates about realism and proletarian literature since before the founding of the League of Left-Wing Writers in 1930. Again, Japanese critics and writers were the important source for theoretical inspiration; the Japanese Left-Wing Writers' Association's critic Kurahara Korehito 藏原惟人 (1902-1999) was the central focus. In the high tide of proletarian literature debates in 1928, the left-wing literary critic Lin Boxiu 林伯修 (1889-1961) translated Kurahara's full length article detailing the development of neorealism in European literature. In its radical proclamation of the Sun Society as the authentic bearer of proletarian literature, Lin's translation in the Society's central journal was meant to answer the call for a "true" proletarian literature that focused on class conflict in society instead of simply writing about the proletariat with sympathy, which Kurahara believed to be petit-bourgeois literature.<sup>102</sup> Kurahara's neorealist theories had since then been translated into Chinese in their entirety and promoted in *Sun Monthly* and central left-wing magazines like *Pioneer*, which soon became the organ of the League of Left-Wing Writers. Two years later in 1930, when the tide of discussion in the literary arena had shifted

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<sup>100</sup> *Beidou*, Vol.2 issue 1. Jan., 1932

<sup>101</sup> Yuan Shu. See note 57.

<sup>102</sup> Korehito, Kurahara. *Dao xin xieshi zhuyi zhilu* 到新写实主义之路 (Road to Neo-Realism). Trans. Lin boxiu. *Taiyang yuekan* 太阳月刊 (Sun Monthly). July 1928.

from the definition of proletarian literature to the technical issues of how to create literature for the proletariat, Hua Han 华汉 (i.e., Yang Hansheng 阳翰笙, 1902-1993), in an article published just two months before the founding of the League, criticized the current realist literature as being over-intellectual and distanced from the masses. Referring to Kurahara's neorealism, he criticized the current Chinese left-wing literature for having fallen back to "old realism" instead of going along the road to neo-realism.<sup>103</sup> The article suggested using different literary and artistic forms to approach different groups of the masses based on educational level – the main purpose of the article was to provide more effective strategy to agitate and mobilize the masses for political purposes.

Although such literary discussions were irrelevant to the political campaign of workers' correspondence, they brought fundamental change to the writing practice of established left-wing writers as they eagerly sought means to bring literature close to the proletariat. Ding Ling, editor of *Beidou*, was among the most ardent supporters of factual literature who actively abandoned previous writing styles to experiment new literary forms to approach the proletariat. 1930, with publication of the novella "*Yijiu sanling nian chun Shanghai* 一九三零年春上海 (Spring 1930 Shanghai)," was the time of Ding Ling's first major shift in writing. While Ding Ling had been hall-marked by her in-depth psychological depiction of modern urban women's anxiety, repressed desires and inner distortion, she made a sudden turn to write about experiences and transforming thoughts of the educated youths who decide to take the path of revolution. With the on-going debates on factual and proletarian literature, Ding Ling made another shift in writing in 1931 with the publication of "*Yitian* 一天 (One day)." "Spring 1930

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<sup>103</sup> Hua Han 华汉. *Puluo wenyi dazhonghua de wenti* 普罗文艺大众化的问题 (The Question of Popularizing Proletarian Literature). May 1930. Pioneer, vol. 1. Issue 5.

Shanghai” is written with ideal optimism as the revolutionary protagonist, aspired by ideals and knowledgeable of theories and living well-off lives, resolutely turned their backs to their past bourgeois lives and devoted passionately to the course of revolution. “One day,” on the contrary, explores the actual difficulties in approaching the workers with an educated-youth-turned-revolutionary as protagonist. Setting of the story is no long studios, living rooms, shopping centers, cafes and cinemas as in “Spring 1930,” but the boisterous workers’ residential area; revolutionary activities depicted are no longer flash gatherings 飞行集会 featuring highly sentimental speeches, but down-to-earth contact with workers and practice of approaching them with Communist ideas through writing. The difficulties presented in the story mirror those Ding Ling experienced herself as she went to live and befriend with workers in order to support the workers’ correspondence movement.<sup>104</sup> Ding Ling’s late husband Hu Yepin was appointed “President of the workers’ correspondence movement committee” before persecuted in 1930 and went with Ding Ling and other writers of the League to work and live with the workers. In “One day,” workers were depicted as not trusting, not welcoming Lu Xiang, the protagonist, and even expelling him. Yet Lu Xiang did not give up “out of a consciousness and a belief.” In order to write good correspondences, the protagonist not only needs to “contemplate,” but also to walk into workers’ lives, record their experiences, and agitate the “slaves with similar fate” to “become aware and solidary.” The novel could be read precisely as Ding Ling’s own experience as it depicts the protagonist going out for a day’s interview [with workers] with constant contemplation on new ways to write.

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<sup>104</sup> Ding Ling. *Guanyu zuolian de pianduan huiyi* 关于左联的片段回忆 (Fragmented Memories about the League of Left-Wing Writers). Ding Ling quanji 丁玲全集 (Complete Works of Ding Ling), vol. 10. Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2001. Pp238 - 243

Another medium length novel written at the same time is “Shui 水 (Water),” which bears clear trait of reportage literature. *Water* is based on a true flood in northern China in 1931. Sounds, smells, sights are vividly depicted about the catastrophe after the flood to reflect the villagers’ angst and anxiety. What is unique about the piece is the absence of single protagonists; the collective mass is depicted by having no single character protruding and by depicting them as anonymous – the crowd is depicted to have awoken from passive and anxious waiting for salvation to conscious and organized self-rescuers upon the despair in life in the catastrophic aftermath of the flood. Factual writing had since preoccupied Ding Ling’s oeuvre until her death. Her sketch of a typical northern Chinese peasant *Tian Baolin* 田保霖 was lauded by Mao himself as Mao wrote a letter to congratulate her on achieving a successful new writing style. In reminiscence, Ding Ling believed that the strengths about “Tian Baolin” that Mao appreciated were not simply her depiction of “soldiers, peasants and workers” as topic choice. A more important point lies in the tone of the feature – it is no longer about misery of the oppressed only, but also the possibility that they could be awakened to new hopes and emerged into organized collective.<sup>105</sup> In other words, the debates about literary reportage fell in precisely the same agenda of the development of proletarian literature, where, as exemplified by Ding Ling, writers actively searched for new ways to present the reality in order to mobilize the mass to a conscious revolutionary mass (specifically the urban educated mass that expect higher literary taste and would not be easily fed with campaign and coarse literature).

Zhou Libo’s introduction of Kisch to Chinese audiences came at the high point when literary quality was the major concern and was re-introduced into the debate when the literature tended to be over-popularized with political movements. Zhou Libo introduced Kisch to

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

Chinese literary circle as “a good model 良好的模范.” In his postscript in the book form translation, modified from a 1936 article, Zhou paid particular attention to Kisch's ability in social investigation. Zhou presented the article in a discussion in Moscow in 1935, where Kisch was also present as an important polar of European anti-Fascist left-wing writer, and had transferred the term literature of national defense into the Chinese debate. Zhou lauded Kisch's reportage as “without doubt a paragon of reportage literature 无疑是报告文学的一种模范.” He especially emphasized Kisch's capacity to get at the conflicts inherent in things: “[I]n terms of science, [Kischean reportages] can be regarded as a kind of very specific social investigation 他的每一篇报告，就是在科学的意义上讲，也可以说一种绵密的社会调查.” While Zhou acknowledged that, by 1936, this type of literature had already achieved “very great importance 极其重要的意义,” but simultaneously he acknowledged that the texts were still in their “burgeoning stage 萌芽的时期,” they were written too “fast 速写” and “was lacking in research and analyses of real events 缺乏关于现实事件的立体的研究和分析.”<sup>106</sup> His translation of *Secret China* could be read as an admonishment for the Chinese reportage writers: among the loud calls for reportage writing and the high tide of discussion on what constituted good reportage in China, a foreigner who had zero knowledge of Chinese after a short trip in Nanjing, Shanghai and Beijing could come up with a more insightful depiction and critical analysis of Chinese society than any of his Chinese counterparts could do.

Comparing to Zhou Libo and Xia Yan's emphasis on the revealing feature of reportorial writing and their journalistic social investigation, Mao Dun's reception of Kisch is inseparable

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<sup>106</sup> Zhou Libo, “*Tantan baogao wenxue* 谈谈报告文学 (Brief Talk on Reportage Literature)” *Dushu shenghuo* Vol.3, 12th Issue. Modified version of “*Mimi de zhongguo- yiyou fuji* 秘密的中国·译后附记 *Secret China*□ Translator's Postscript ”

from his sharp view of a skillful writer. “*Guanyu ‘baogao wenxue’* 关于‘报告文学’ (About ‘literary reportage’)”<sup>107</sup> was Mao’s earliest, and perhaps the most important theoretical piece of the genre. Echoing Theodor Balk on the historical conditions conducive to the genre's rise, Mao Dun restates literature's origin in life, and understands the flourishing of reportage as an answer to readers' “impatient demand” for illustrations of new changes of the world in a “hasty and changing age 匆忙而多变化的时代.” While foregrounding the timeliness of the news, Mao Dun defined the genre as literary. A literary quality of reporting the facts “lively 生动地” is important for the genre to better affect readers, and intervene in life. Unlike other Chinese theorists, he incorporated a penetrating psychological depiction into reportorial writing, maintaining such literary quality would make the writing “lively.” The sketch of a moment of life, such as “On Su Jia Road 苏嘉路上,” employs what Rudolf Wagner would call a pointillist technique of close-up, that he identifies as a signature style of later reportage writers like Liu Binyan.”<sup>108</sup> “On Su Jia Road” depicts a typical silhouette of war-time Shanghai daily life that preceded by eight years the much more well-known short story “Sealed Off” 封锁 by Zhang Ailing. No words were written directly about the war or Japanese bombing, yet the detailed depiction of train passengers’ overly cautious actions – prohibition of crying of the baby or lighting a small match to make out the way to the toilet, wild imagination about the reason for the train being stopped etc., together with the story location of a claustrophobic compartment on a still train, all vividly capture the heightened anxiety of common people under the shadow of war.

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<sup>107</sup> Mao Dun. “About 'Literary Reportage'” *Zhongliu* 中流, Issue 11.

<sup>108</sup> Wagner, Rudolf. *Inside a Service Trade. Studies in Contemporary Chinese Prose*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

Mao Dun served as both a promoter and theorist of the genre as he must have distinguished clearly between literary reportage as a literary genre and correspondence as widening political participation. In his conscious performance of his role as a leader of League of Left-Wing Writers, Mao Dun promoted and popularized the genre by encouraging people from various classes and professions to write reportage. Modeling after Maxim Gorki's *One Day in the World*, Mao Dun invited submissions from all over China to report about a particular day (21 May) in 1936. Over 3000 reports were received in June and the editors Mao Dun and Kong Lingjing 孔另境 (1904-1972) made the decision to select 490 reportages to be published in the book collection entitled- *Zhongguo de yiri* 中国的一日 (One day in China, 1936).<sup>109</sup> The introduction of the book, which explained the editorial process of selecting submission of reports, also emphasized the wide coverage of geographic space (all provinces in China except Xinjiang, Qinghai, Xikang and Tibet) and variety of walks of life (all “social strata and walks of life” except “monks and prostitutes”). The book was organized into various provinces – reports from a high school student, soldier, nurse in Nanjing were juxtaposed to those by workers, actress, publisher and department store sales in Shanghai, and are only to be contrasted with sufferings of ordinary people in the war-torn areas like Hebei and Chahaer. Reports from men were included, so were those from women; diaries from university professors, bankers and officials were selected, so were those by prisoners and peasants. The “unequal writing quality” between reports was made sure to be compensated by Mao Dun’s editorial genius in the organization of the book so that the book became an exemplary of “life of ordinary Chinese.” As a committed leftist, Mao Dun saw the massive literary project as

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<sup>109</sup> Mao Dun. *One Day in China. Preface* 中国的一日.序言. Shanghai: Shenghuo Shudian, 1936.

primarily political: on the façade interwoven with ugliness and holiness, and brightness and darkness, we have seen optimism, hope and the awakening awareness of the people...”<sup>110</sup>

The section on Shanghai includes three pieces of writing from the textile factory workers – one is a diary entry of the day, the second is confession of an overstrained worker and the third a description of the workers’ life on that day. The three were likely representative of workers’ correspondence as their authors must have been the active worker participants of the movement who mostly wanted to speak up through writing. The diary entry is direct outcry of the author - exhaustion of life, the miserable amount of earned money that would never pay off his debts, and the ever increasing cost of living in Shanghai. “*Yige shachang gongren de hua* 一个纱厂工人的话 (Words of a cotton mill worker)” also uses first person narrative to complain about the ever lengthening working hours. As has grown increasingly clear to the author in the writing, Chinese and Japanese capitalists are no different – they both impose increasing hours on the workers (up to 16 hours per day) though different excuses are given (the Japanese factory supervisor would complain about the increasing cost for the industry and lowered market price for cotton while the Chinese factory supervisor would play the patriotic card in persuading workers to produce more to defeat Japanese competitors in the market). The piece of writing ends with an outcry for changing the slavery system they are situated within. “*Shachang de yiri* 纱厂的一日 (One Day in the Cotton Mill)” is likely to be written by a factory supervisor – third person narrative is used as the narrator observes women workers rushed to lunch, men workers gathered to cheer the victory of Chinese football team in oversea matches. A lighter tone is used in comparison with the previous two pieces – no misery of the workers is described; exhaustion and business of the factory life are juxtaposed with workers’

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid

occasional entertainment and the good news of rising price for cotton in the newspapers. Ideas and perspectives come in great variety. But in general, very limited literary techniques are involved – all pieces use either first person or third person narrative with direct expression of emotions and depiction of reality, and different ideas are presented on the level of the content that is straight forward with limited rhetorical embellishments. However, as from theoretical discussion on literary reportage, Mao Dun's own reportorial writing practices at the time lived up to the aesthetic quality as a mature writer. The political satires he published in *Free Talk* at around the same time were clearly his practice of reportage writing with time-sensitive news materials. And these were written to propagate to the urban readers by first of all entertaining them – a clearly different strategy than calling for wide participation of writing from the workers.

Mao Dun's article came amidst the debates on the nature of reportage literature - Cao Juren 曹聚仁 (1900-1972) foregrounds its root in journalism while Shen Qiyu 沈起予 (1903-1970) suggested it should be primarily literary.<sup>111</sup> Much of Cao's article resonated well with Kisch's understanding of the genre – that description of an event must be situated within its horizontal and vertical connection with other events to reveal social mechanisms, and that it takes a well-trained, curious and meticulous journalist to sort out the logic and mechanism of single news events and arrange the facts in his own view. What was further mentioned was that literary quality was only important to the extent that it could affect the readers while reading the reported news. Cao named the *Shenbao* correspondent Huang Yuanyong 黄远庸 as a

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<sup>111</sup> Cao Juren. "On Reportage Literature 报告文学论" *A compendium to Chinese New Literature. Literary Theory* 中国新文学大系.文学理论(1937—1949), Vol.1. Shanghai Wenyi chuban she, 1990. Shen Qiyu, "Brief Comment on Literary Reportage 报告文学简论." *Xin zhonghua zazhi*, Vol.5, 7th issue

Chinese exemplar of reportage, where advanced skills were delivered to write news stories with literary tint.

Because reportage was believed to be the most advanced means of journalism, a course on it was taught at the university. Edgar Snow, the left-wing American journalist, taught at Yanjing University a course in 1934, which, according to his student Xiao Qian, was “on *texie* 特写 (sketches).”<sup>112</sup> Xiao Qian remembered that Snow had stressed throughout the course that *xinwen* (news) and *wenxue* (literature) were not inherently different from each other. As a journalist who consciously embedded in his new writing some fine literary embellishments, Xiao Qian mentioned Snow’s favorite examples of Dickens and Shaw, both of whom were seen as simultaneously journalists and writers. Journalism indeed became a burgeoning subject of study in Chinese universities after Walter Williams, dean of the journalism school at University of Missouri, exported American New Journalism to China and established journalism departments in Chinese universities. As the appointed *Dagongbao* war correspondent who studied at Cambridge University and gave on-site report on WWII<sup>113</sup>, Xiao Qian is an exemplary Chinese journalist who combined journalism with literature. Clearly inspired by Kisch, he believed that *texie* (feature articles) should base on hard facts, which should be “artistically processed” by “cropping.” So as for the reports to be circulated and read longer, the “cropping” of the factual materials must highlight/reveal the causal relation between “natural disaster” and “human catastrophe,” hence pointing to the social roots for such happenings.<sup>114</sup> He called himself a “traveler without a map,” implying a widely travelled

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<sup>112</sup> Xiao Qian, “*Weidai ditu de lüren* 未带地图的旅人 (Traveler without a Map).” Shanghai: Guanhua Press, 1930.

<sup>113</sup> Xiao Qian was perhaps the only Chinese journalist who made series of reports on WWII. He accounted how he rushed into the newly liberated Berlin and Hitler’s presidential hall after the end of the war and was on-site journalist for Potsdam Conference. See *Traveler without a Map*, *ibid*.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*

journalist exploring uncharted lands throughout Europe who is not conformed to journalistic dogmas and with free spirit. The many textie/correspondances that he sent back to war time China since the late 1930s and published in *Dagongbao* have demonstrated his skills as a mature textie-ist. The depiction of European countries before the during the war, especially England, showcased his fine literary skills (in a composed and erudite language like prose) and his ability to organize the factual materials to highlight relations and to essentialize his anti-imperial world view for the wartime China.<sup>115</sup>

Kisch's reportage also became model for Hu Feng in his 1938 article, which mocked the current resistance literature as dried up in “dull correspondences in stereotype” and admonished writers to live up to the Kischean literary reportage.<sup>116</sup> The journal *Qiyue* 七月, which was mostly dedicated to publishing reportage literature in wartime China, published in the same year of 1938 Balk's long article on Kisch before Hu Feng's article appeared. In particular, Hu Feng criticized the indifferent reports “that simply record everything heard 有闻必录” as well as those that ignored detailed description of events and were filled with empty anger and sloganeering shouting. He preferred reportage that reflected the whole world through small details with scientific research and analysis – a Kischean reportage that best exemplified in China by works of Xia Yan, Mao Dun and Zhou Libo.

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<sup>115</sup> “*Zhanshi yingguo yinxiang* 战时英国印象 (Impression of Wartime England)” is a typical case in point: Xiao Qian combined the prosaic depiction of English people's daily lives, such as limited consumption of energy during Christmas celebration, with contemporary trade of raw energy materials between England, France and Germany, each benefitting their own economic and military purposes; it also demonstrated how such trade imbalance prompted England's decision to grant Japan's seizure of the Yunnan-Burma Railway in 1940 in China. In the end, all the analyses of the international political situation boiled down to the central point of writing: an anti-Imperial view that “the fate of the Chinese people... were controlled in the hands of the Imperial powers.” See *Xiao Qian xuanji* 萧乾选集 (Selected Works of Xiao Qian), Vol. 2, Literary Reportage. Taiwan: *Shangwu yinshu guan*, 1992.

<sup>116</sup> Hu Feng. “*Lun zhanzheng shiqi de yige zhandou de wenyi xingshi* 论战争时期的一个战斗的文艺形式 (On a Combative Literary Form in War Time).” Originally published in two installments in *Qiyue*, 1938, issues 5 and 6. Quote from *Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi* 中国新文学大系 (Compendium of Chinese New Literature), Vol. 1. Pp462-469

## Conclusion

Throughout this historical phase, *baogao wenxue* of all sorts, whether simple recordings by workers or more Kischean works like Xia Yan's "Baoshen gong 包身工 (Contracted Labors)," had caused the scorn of true literati who considered all of them vulgar. While these attacks were directed against the political attitude of the reportage writers, the more fundamental critique came from Georg Lukacs himself, who had written numerous book on the theory of the novel and an ardent supporter of the nineteenth century Realism.<sup>117</sup> Lukacs acknowledged the literary skills of Kisch, lauding him as "Master of reportage (*Meister der Reportage*)-" duplicating the title of his article published in the German organ of international left-wing writers association *Internationale Literatur*, the third issue of which in 1935 became a festschrift for Kisch in the midday of Kisch's rising fame throughout Europe as a prominently outspoken anti-Fascist writer. However, Lukacs saw reportage in general with no literary value, and called it an "operative genre," or, in his own term, "gebrauchsgenre."<sup>118</sup> In answering the call of Johannes R. Becher in 1932 that a turning point had arrived for the German league of left-wing writers to spread the influence of proletarian literature, Lukacs basically launched a long debate in *Linkskurve* in 1932 that aimed fire at the then popular genre of reportage, in which Brecht also participated. Most distinguished articles include "Reportage oder Gestaltung? (Reportages or Literary Creation?)" and "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit (Tendency or Partisanship)," where Lukacs saw description of the Party's everyday actuality, as he understood to be the nature of the genre in the movement, would not constitute a true socialist and proletarian literature. Instead, he called for abandoning the political aspect in literature and

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<sup>117</sup> Christian E. Siegel, *Reportage und Politischer Journalismus* (Reportage and Political Journalism). Bremen: Studien zur Publizistik, Bremer Reihe. Deutsche Pressforschung.

<sup>118</sup> Lukacs, Georg. "Reportage oder Gestaltung? (Reportages or Literary Creation)" originally published in *Linkskurve*, issue 7 and 8, 1932.

allowing aesthetic problematique in the realm of art and literature to lead the liberation of the workers. He called for an alternative to the reportage with other productive methods to present the reality, which, he acknowledged, had not existed.<sup>119</sup>

Lukacs' opinion might have limited literary reportage from getting over-popular in Eastern Europe, but it did not interfere with the international circulation of the genre, especially in an age where political action was more needed than the gradual long term consciousness cultivation of the workers through true literary evolution. Kisch himself prescribes to the genre a militant role, yet maintains its aesthetic value. In the speech Kisch gave in Paris in 1935, he terms literary reportage as "Kunstform (art form)" and "Kampfform (combat form)." Aesthetic quality matters, but only in so much as the reportage could better wage combat in the political realm. This is precisely the view the Chinese left-wing writers celebrated with the genre. As the cultural leader in the Communist Party, Hu Feng clearly demanded that his fellow writers in the League utilize various techniques, styles and perspectives to fill the reportage with passion so that revolutionary passion could be transferred to the readers. He identified the task of participating in the battle through literary and political activity as top priority for the reportage writer.<sup>120</sup>

Almost all of the major contributors in *Free Talk* were involved in one way or another in the discussion on literary reportage: Lu Xun was active promoter of short powerful sketches like *zawen*, and had to have been well aware of literary reportage with his keen interest and knowledge in German literature; he mentioned Kisch as one of those strenuous defenders of the combative genre in an essay in 1936.<sup>121</sup> Other promoters like Mao Dun, Cao Juren, Kong

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<sup>119</sup> Lukacs. "Tendenz oder Parteilichkeit (Tendency or Partisanship)" *Linkskurve*, issue 7 and 8, 1932

<sup>120</sup> See note 116

<sup>121</sup> Lu Xun, "Sanyue de zujie 三月的租界 (Concession in March)." *Qiejie ting zawen mobian* 且介亭杂文末编 (End Collection of Zawen of Semi-Concession Studio).LQXJ.

Lingjing and Zhou Libo were the most prominent promoters of the genre; their accessibility to *Free Talk* must have been a valuable chance to try out effective means to describe reality in daily newspapers, where previous discussion of the genre remained mostly theoretical.

With all the literary techniques involved to describe reality, the widely circulated newspaper *Shenbao* had become the forefront for testing out reportage to mobilize the massive urban readership. The questions they raised were precisely those arising from debates and the transculturation of literary reportage of Kisch: i.e., how to utilize literary creativity to describe current reality (i.e., news materials) so as to maximize the agitation effect; how to animate indifferent objective news reports; how to pull literature away from total submission to Party propaganda which would otherwise land in demagoguery; how to write about political reality in order to mobilize the educated class of urban citizens. The intellectual twists and turns of how to write about reality through the debate of Kisch and reportage from the early 1930s provided rich intellectual preparation for the full-fledged growth of the miscellaneous essays on contemporary politics in *Free Talk*, the success of which must be directly associated with the winning the masses to the side of the CCP. The larger questions inspired by the Kischean literary reportage - the relation between reportage, fact and literature, and between writing and society – not only brought the genre to full development, but also provoked the complex of debates on the relation between writing and praxis, a central question that remained to capture the attention of international left-wing writers across the continents. The Chinese discussion around the complexities of the genre that Kisch embodied had incorporated Chinese intellectual circle into the picture of international left-wing cultural movement.

### Part III: *Zawen* - Signature Genre of *Free Talk*

#### Introduction

In the postface to *Qiejie ting zawen erji* 且介亭杂文二集 (Essays from the Semi-Concessions, Second Collection), compiled in 1935 with a majority of essays published in *Free Talk*, Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936) gave a word count of his essays as follows: in the span of eighteen years from his first writing in the column *Suigan lu* 随感录 (Random Thoughts) in the May Fourth flagship magazine *New Youth* to the end of 1935 when he compiled the collection, Lu Xun had written a total of 800, 000 words of *zawen*; he wrote twice as many in the latter nine years than in the first nine years; in particular, he wrote as many during the very last three years for *Free Talk* and other newspapers and magazines (between 1933-1936) as the earlier six years.<sup>1</sup>

The last nine years from 1927 to 1936 were his years in Shanghai, a final destination of his wide travels from Beijing down to the south, Xiamen and Guangzhou, and then northward to Shanghai, where he spent his last years. The very name of the essay collection, *qiejie* 且介, embedded his trick of taking off half of the characters *zujie* 租界 (concession) to convey a mixed feeling towards the place he lived. On the one hand, that his writings could quickly turn into publication and spread to the wide urban readers was the result of the protective harbor of the concession, where most left-wing publishers and book stores were able to survive under various disguises; the concession also hosted almost all left-wing intellectuals in Shanghai after the

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<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun. Post script to *Second collection of Qiejie ting zawen. Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 Complete Works of Lu Xun. (Hereafter referred to as LXQJ). 16 vols. (1981; repr., Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1991). Vol. 6

GMD purge in April 1927. On the other hand, the essays he produced in his study *qiejie ting* 且介亭(Semi-Concession Studio) gave pungent accusations of imperialist aggression – both the military encroachment of Japan and the social segregation and unfair treatment of common Chinese residents in the concession. His feeling towards Shanghai was similarly mixed. It was in Shanghai that Lu Xun openly lived with his student Xu Guangping 许广平 (1898-1968)<sup>2</sup> in the Jingyun district, located near Baoshan Road and Sichuan North Road. Bonnie McDougall’s research depicts a lively entertaining life (dining out, going to cinema, visiting friends) that Lu Xun was able to enjoy in Shanghai with Xu Guangping’s company.<sup>3</sup> Their house was situated amidst the commercial and publishing center of Shanghai, with Commercial Press offices (where Lu Xun’s youngest brother Zhou Jianren worked) and *Shenbao* building nearby, along with various bookstores. He was living with family members nearby along with good friends like Ye Shengtao 叶圣陶 (1894-1988), Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) (both of whom worked for the Commercial Press), and Yu Dafu 郁达夫 (1896-1945) as neighbors. Yet he deeply abhorred Shanghai’s commercialism, along with its derivative - fast literary production and intellectual radicalism. He likened the mass-produced “revolutionary literature” in Shanghai as “sour wine in new bottles” and “rotten meat wrapped in red paper”<sup>4</sup> that superficially metamorphosed the revolutionary slogans in Guangzhou into literature to fit commercial interests only. On top of it

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<sup>2</sup> McDougall, Bonnie S., *Love Letters and Privacy in Modern China: The Intimate Lives of Lu Xun and Xu Guangping*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. Out of filial piety to his mother, Lu Xun accepted an arranged marriage with Zhu An, a woman with bound feet, which Lu Xun said he had never consummated. He continued to provide generous living expenses to Zhu An, who took care of Lu Xun’s mother till her death. The only publication where Lu Xun spoke of Zhu An was his letter to Xu Shouchang, dated 15 November 1910. The letter had become scholars’ major source of proof for Lu Xun’s unhappy early marriage, which was further developed by Lu Xun scholars to into seeing this personal influence on his early *baihua* essays.

<sup>3</sup> In his letter dated October 1927 to his former students in Beijing Li Jiye and Tai Jingnong, Lu Xun wrote: “I have been here (Shanghai) for ten days, and am delighted to find many friends I know. Parties have been keeping me very busy.”

<sup>4</sup> “Women yao piping jia 我们要批评家(We need Critics)” *LXQJ*, Vol.4 p240

was the fashion of social sciences publications in the 1930s, which the flock of disappointed readers who were previously infatuated with the belief that “revolutionary literature” could “save them and the society” like a Daoist incantation (*fuzhou* 符咒) now turned to.<sup>5</sup> Hence was the foregrounding of his earlier criticism on the collective efforts between Shanghai writers and publishers in producing the cultural fashion for economic benefits that baffled the already confused readers. Besides the publishing industry was Lu Xun’s personal involvement in the intellectual debates between him and the major literary societies – debates that quickly turned into a unanimous personal attack. Major left-wing writers from the Creation Society, the Sun Society and the Crescent Moon Society– Feng Naichao 冯乃超 (1901-1983), Li Chuli 李初梨 (1900-1994), Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 (1897-1984), Jiang Guangci 蒋光慈 (1901-1931), Chen Yuan 陈源 (better known by penname Chen Xiyang 陈西滢, 1896-1970) and so on – were eager to promote themselves as the new generation of cultural leaders with “proletarian literature” and could not wait to strike down the old authority of the literary arena. Lu Xun was mocked as a “Shaoxing legal clerk (*Shaoxing shiye* 绍兴师爷)” who enjoyed a “leisured and rich” life in wine taverns and who observed the world through “drunken eyes.” From the camp of Lu Xun’s Marxist detractors from the Creation Society, Lu Xun was mocked as not only behind the newest fashion in proletarian literature and developments in Marxist thoughts, but as “the most loathsome agitator against the proletariat.”<sup>6</sup> In an escalating debate, Cheng Fangwu further denounced him as moribund, and Guo Moruo, writing under penname Du Quan 杜荃, called him

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5 Ibid

6 Li Chuli 李初梨. “Qingkan women zhongguode Don Quixote de luanwu 请看我们中国的 Don Quixote 的乱舞” *Geming wenxue” lunzheng ziliao xuanbian* “革命文学”论争资料选编 (Selected Historical Materials on the Debate over “Revolutionary Literature, 2 vols. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1981. Vol. 1 p300

“dregs of feudalism 封建余孽.”<sup>7</sup> Amidst the metropolitan stimulants, commercial publishing and intellectual/personal attacks, Lu Xun’s response to Shanghai was at best a mixed one: in a letter to Guangping during his visit to his mother in Beiping, Lu Xun confessed that despite the changing of short-lived literary fashions, he found himself “too rash and impulsive” to return to the then peaceful Beiping.<sup>8</sup> “Shanghai annoys me, but it after all has its unique vitality.”<sup>9</sup>

Lu Xun’s *Free Talk zawen* were a product of the Shanghai he both hated and loved. By the time he started to publish in *Free Talk* in early 1933 Lu Xun had resigned from all the formal posts he used to hold, which included a professorship at Xiamen University and registrar and head of the Chinese department at Zhongshan University, which provided him a generous monthly salary of 500 *yuan*;<sup>10</sup> “invited compiler 特约撰述员” of the Ministry of Education of the Beiyang Government, appointed by his old friend Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 during the May Fourth days. From the end of 1931, Lu Xun had transformed completely from cultural official to a newspaper contributor and book writer,<sup>11</sup> just like his Marxist detractors of the Creation Society and the “gentlemen 正人君子” of the Crescent Moon Society he often disparaged in his writings. While remaining highly critical of the sloganeering “proletarian literature” that

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<sup>7</sup> Selected historical materials on the debate over “revolutionary literature. p8

<sup>8</sup> *LXQJ*, vol. 11, p293

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p395

<sup>10</sup> Chen Mingyuan 陈明远. *Lu Xun shidai heyi weisheng* 鲁迅时代何以为生 (How to Make Living in the Time of Lu Xun) Xi’an: Shanxi renmin.2011. p55

<sup>11</sup> Lu Xun’s diary entries recorded the details about his income. His typical income before 1931 consisted of three parts: firstly, salaries from the several universities where he was teaching such as China University, Beida, Women’s Normal University and so on, and the salary of 300 *yuan* since 1927 from Department of Education, where he was invited by Cai Yuanpei to serve as the “contributing editor 特约撰述员” ; remuneration from newspaper supplements, and royalties. The total income in 1931 was 8909 *yuan*, with total salary of 4909 *yuan*, 50.5% of the total income, and remuneration and royalties of 4499 *yuan*, 49.5% of the total. In 1932, part of salary completely disappeared, leaving an income total of 4788 consisting of only remuneration and royalties. His income of 1933 drastically increased to 10300 *yuan*, more than double the previous year. One reason for the increase was the copyright royalty of over 1000 *yuan* for *Correspondences between Two Places*; the other reason was the high remuneration from *Free Talk*– a monthly average of 70 *yuan*, and the royalty from *Free Talk zawen* collection *False Freedom*.

publishers rushed to cash in on, he became a highly visible part of the metropolitan mass media, maintaining his own way into the game. To abide the insatiable thirst to always request something new, he became one of the most productive contributors to *Free Talk*, who could come up with political satire of the most recent news event almost immediately thereafter. The path he undertook was indeed a brand new one – his peers from the Creation Society relied on theoretical debates to excite the public mind with theoretical variations in literary creation, whereas writers of the Sun Society kept producing the formulaic “revolution plus love” romances. Lu Xun’s *zawen*, as I will elaborate in the following sections, were on the whole intentionally shifting away from imaginary story plot, symbols, and a transcendental humanist notion – elements we usually associate with literature in a traditional sense. Topics of *zawen* intentionally focused on the “trivial matters” of specific news; the representation of the specific was usually an abstraction of the specifics into a generic type of the society; and, instead of pointing to a philosophical idea, it aimed to expose, to tear off “the cold cream on a devil’s face 鬼脸上的雪花膏”<sup>12</sup> to produce an anti-discourse against the legitimacy of the GMD rule. Lu Xun was not at all against writing for mass media; the idea that his writings could quickly reach a wide audience through commercial newspapers like *Shenbao* excited him. As leaders of the League of Left-Wing writers, whose activities were much limited under the censorship pressure in the 1930s, Mao Dun and Lu Xun resorted to militant descriptions like “victory in the battle” to laud their chance of being able to “seize a corner of the No.1 big newspaper of Shanghai.” As his health deteriorated in the 1933, delivering widely attended and agitating speeches, like the five

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<sup>12</sup>Lu Xun “*Ye song* 夜颂(In Praise of Night).”*Free Talk*, 10 June 1933. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang . The two metaphors have become famous Lu Xun concepts for describing the hypocrisy of modern society.

he gave in Beijing a year before in 1932, had to give way to writings in newspapers, which in turn reached an even wider audience.

*Bishou* 匕首 (daggers) and *touqiang* 投枪 (javelins) had been the metaphors associated with Lu Xun's *zawen* since the 1920s. In 1933, in declaring *xiaopinwen* 小品文 (short personal essays) in crisis, Lu Xun re-conjured the well-known image of dagger and javelin to promote socially engaged essays instead of the personal ones that he compared to as “decorations in life” 生活的摆设.<sup>13</sup> Concurrent with the aggressive image of *zawen* was a more passive role of the genre. In the preface to *Essays of Semi-Concession*, Lu Xun spoke of the role of the author as “providing immediate reaction and resistance to things harmful” and as “sensitive nerves and hands and feet for offence and defense 敏感的神经，攻守的手足.”<sup>14</sup> The essays responding to his criticism in *Free Talk* were to fit the definition well: they were written both in defense of Lu Xun himself and as offense to throw criticism back at his detractors. Moreover, the collective *Free Talk* essays could be seen as providing immediate reactions to the fast-changing political and social climate, as being sensitive to the manufactured political discourse under disguise of objective news, and as defensive gesture to help readers make sense of the society out of the bombarding information (over-) loaded in newspapers. Dailies like *Shenbao* regularly recorded breaking news on politics and society, providing Lu Xun with rich sources of lively writing materials. The author's “sensitive nerves” would capture the topics worth pursuing, and allowed “meandering thoughts 拉扯牵连,” which produced “at times close, at times far apart thoughts 若即若离的思想.”<sup>15</sup> Lu Xun thus presented himself, as usual, as an aloof observer responding to

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<sup>13</sup> “Xiaopinwende weiji 小品文的危机 (The personal essay in crisis)”, *LXQJ* vol. 4, pp576–577

<sup>14</sup> *LXQJ*, vol.6

<sup>15</sup> Lu Xun. “Shenme shi fengci 什么是讽刺 (What is Satire)?” Second Essay Collection of *Semi-Concession*. *LXQJ*, vol. 6

the stimulation of the world around him. Lu Xun's *zawen* cannot be separated from newspapers, nor from the stimulating Shanghai metropolitan environment that gave rise to the invigorating newspapers in the first place. In the words of the scholar Qian Liqun 钱理群, "in writing for newspaper, Lu Xun not only landed at his most befitting way of writing and created his own genre--*zawen*, but also, to a certain degree, made [newspaper writing] his very way of existence."<sup>16</sup> Lu Xun's large corpus of *Free Talk zawen* is both a documentary of the most turbulent time during Japanese aggression and party politics, and a testimony to his perception of the times and his response/offense to it.

The following sections will situate Lu Xun's *zawen* both along the genre's temporal development in his oeuvre and amidst the concurrent political social and intellectual forces that co-shaped it.

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<sup>16</sup> Qian Liqun, *Lu Xun zuopin shiwu jiang* 鲁迅作品十五讲 (Fifteen Talk on Lu Xun's Works). Beijing University Press, 2003.

## Chapter 1 *Zawen* in *Free Talk* and Its Development into a Distinct Genre

### -- Lu Xun and other *Free Talk* *Zawen* Writers

#### *Zawen* in *Free Talk*

When Lu Xun moved from Guangzhou to Shanghai on 3 October 1927, *Free Talk* had long been a popular supplement of *Shenbao*. In the preface to *False Freedom* 伪自由书, a collection of essays written in 1933 and originally published in *Free Talk*, Lu Xun described his initial connection with *Free Talk* as follows: “after arriving in Shanghai, I did read dailies, but have never contributed, nor have thought of contributing. I had not paid attention to the literary columns in daily newspapers, and hence did not know when *Shenbao* started to have *Free Talk*, nor the sorts of essays that had been included [in *Free Talk*.] It was not until sometime at the end of last year when I met Mr. Yu Dafu was I told that a new editor Li Liewen 黎烈文 (1904-1972) had been appointed for *Free Talk* and that he had just returned from France and wanted me to contribute as he was worried about lack of submissions for being new here. I had hence agreed heedlessly 漫应.”<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun had in fact not immediately written for *Free Talk*, but started to pay attention to it. Lu Xun also noted that he heard about the death of Li’s wife in a belated hospitalization for complications in childbirth, which was caused by Li’s lack of attention as he devoted himself completely to editing *Free Talk*. It was not until Lu Xun read later in *Free Talk* Li’s essay “*Xiegei yige zai ling yi shijie de ren* 写给一个在另一世界的人 (To Someone in Another World),” Li Liewen’s mourning for his late wife, was Lu Xun deeply moved and started to write for the supplement. And this had quickly become the most loyal devotion: some

<sup>1</sup> Preface, *False Freedom*, 1933, *LXQJ*, vol. 5, p3.

one hundred and forty *zawen* were published in *Free Talk* under forty pennames between January 1933 and September 1934, turning Lu Xun the most diligent contributor of all.

Before 15 February 1933, contact between Lu Xun and the *Shenbao* office was mediated through Yu Dafu – letters were exchanged on writings for the supplement as well as receiving remuneration<sup>2</sup>. Starting from 15 February 1933, Lu Xun had established direct contact with *Shenbao*, as was indicated from his diary entry “*Wuhou song shenbao guan xin* 午后送申报馆信 (Afternoon Letter to Shenbao Office).”<sup>3</sup> On 24 February 1933, Lu Xun wrote directly to Li Liewen, who immediately responded in the afternoon. In the evening of the same day, Lu Xun replied with a essay submission. Within the following year, frequent correspondence, visits, book giving and dinner gatherings took place between lu Xun and Li Liewen. Lu Xun had become the most influential *zawen* writer in *Free Talk* and had recommended a list of young writers to Li, including those under pennames “Fanke 梵可” “Keshi 克士” and “Shiquan 诗荃.”<sup>4</sup>

Lu Xun’s hesitation at the beginning was understandable given his dislike for Shanghai’s commercial publications, as well as his insufficient knowledge of the editor’s political standing – given the fact that Lu Xun had since 1930 undertaken the nominal leadership of the League of Left-Wing Writers, which, during the 1930s, a<sup>5</sup>rbitrarily united the left-wing cultural camps of theoretical struggles (represented by the Creation Society) and revolutionary romances (represented by the Sun society) and actively promoted the “mass literature” under the CCP’s cultural leader Qu Qiubai<sup>6</sup>. Lu Xun’s initial hesitation for writing for *Free Talk* was also due to

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<sup>2</sup> Lu Xun. “*Ji Dafu duanping er* 寄达夫短评二 (Two Short Reviews to Dafu 午后送申报馆信)” *LXQJ*, vol.15 p63

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p64

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p606

<sup>5</sup> All of *Zawen* in *Free Talk* under Li Liewen’s editorship were published in the three volume collection of *Zhongguo dashihua* 中国大实话 (Frank Truths of China), published by Shanxi normal University Press in 2001. This makes it easy to get the statistics.

<sup>6</sup> Though Qu was ousted from the Party’s central political leadership for his failure in rushed urban revolts in

his cautiousness for being used for commercial interests. Lu Xun was highly aware of his cultural capital as editors and new writers had vied to obtain support from him to jumpstart newly founded magazines, bookstores and individual fame. The fame of *Chenbao* supplement under editorship of Sun Fuyuan 孙伏园 (1894-1966), Lu Xun's student from Peking university, was inseparable from Lu Xun's support, especially with publication of *A True Story of Ah-Q*.<sup>7</sup> Sun's subsequent success in launching the literary magazine *Yusi* 语丝 (Threads of Talk) was similarly secured with contributions from Lu Xun and his brother Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967). Li Xiaofeng 李小峰 (1897-1971), another student of Lu Xun back in Peking University, and his Beixin Bookstore had similarly based their commercial success upon securing a publishing contract with Lu Xun. Lu Xun was also famous for his devoted help for talented young writers – the usual practice was to recommend their manuscripts to publishers along with writing a preface for their books. Rou Shi 柔石 and Xiao Hong 萧红 were both prominent examples that quickly rose to fame with the help of Lu Xun.<sup>8</sup> His contributions to *Free Talk* would soon prove to be another example of the same sort.

On the contrary, once his protégés “strayed away from” him by swerving to different political stances, literary tastes or becoming completely immersed in commercial publishing, he would immediately sunder ties with them. Sun Fuyuan's endorsement of the journal *Modern Review*, with editorial board consisting of Euro-American PhD returnees like Xu Zhimo 徐志摩,

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1927, his knowledge of Russian literature, Bolshevism and the Russian language maintained his cultural leadership in the party Central.

<sup>7</sup> Sun Fuyuan 孙伏园. *Lu Xun xiansheng er san shi* 鲁迅先生二三事 (Anecdotes about Mr. Lu Xun). Beijing, Zuoqia shu wu 作家书屋. 1944.

<sup>8</sup> Diaries of Rou Shi 柔石日记. Quoted after Xu Jilin 许纪霖, *Jindai zhongguo zhishi fenzi de gonggong jiaowang* 近代中国知识分子的公共交往 (The Public Network of Modern Chinese Intellectuals.) Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe. 2008. P227-230

Hu Shi 胡适, Chen Xiying 陈西滢, all of whom Lu Xun was at war with in the 1920s, drew Lu Xun to the decision that Sun was actually a cunning commercial publisher and hence ending completely his connection with him.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Beixin and Li Xiaofeng's increasingly close tie with the Crescent Moon Society led Lu Xun not only to express hostility in their relationship but also to file a lawsuit to claim the large sum of royalties Beixin had owed him. These unhappy experiences in the past made Lu Xun cautious about selecting publishing partners among the plenty in the commercial capital of Shanghai. Shanghai might also have become the cause that Lu Xun once associated with the fall of the once "progressive youth" of Sun Fuyuan and Li Xiaofeng, as their deteriorated relations with Lu Xun both started with their move from Beijing to Shanghai between 1927 and 1928. A parallel could be drawn between the "strayed" students who went their own way and the left-wing youth who betrayed the revolution. In his speech delivered in Guangzhou in 1929, Lu Xun was recorded to have expressed that he was "petrified with terror" and felt "well and truly duped" when seeing the youth once devoted to the course of revolution turned out to be the ones who "betrayed, gathered to slaughter" the young as in GMD's 1927 anti-Communist purge.<sup>10</sup> The way that Lu Xun chose his protégé as well as his choice to break away from them had led many scholars to the conclusion of Lu Xun's grumpiness. To be fair, in the Shanghai between 1927 and 1937, where being revolutionary was at once fashionable and dangerous (real life-threatening danger since the 1927 purge), Lu Xun longed to find allies who not only were radicalized in response to the times but could also endure

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<sup>9</sup> When Sun Fuyuan later endorsed the journal of Modern Review, Lu Xun almost accused him of "selling friends to gain fame 卖友求荣." Early 1929 was the last time the name Sun Fuyuan appeared in his diaries. He concluded that Sun "appeared serious but not really serious, appeared slippery and not really slippery 似认真非认真, 似油滑非油滑" and cut off connection with him ever since. See Wang Xiaoyu 王晓渔, *Zhishi fenzi de "neizhan" 知识分子的"内战"* ('The War' of Intellectuals – Cultural Field of Modern Shanghai). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe. 2007. P129-132

<sup>10</sup> Feng Xuefeng, *Huiyi Lu Xun 回忆鲁迅* (Remembering Lu Xun) Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1952, pp25-26

the burdens of the revolution and stay faithful. That was why he grieved and mourned over the young students who dared to stand out and sacrificed their lives, like Miss Liu Hezhen 刘和珍<sup>11</sup> and Rou Shi 柔石.<sup>12</sup> In 1933, Lu Xun certainly found such quality in the newly returned editor Li Liewen, a devoted left-wing youth who dared to revolutionize the influential supplement and who showed great respect for Lu Xun. Opportunity had become ripe with the newly found protégé alliance for Lu Xun and his fellow left-wingers to break through the blockade of GMD censorship and to spread their voice in such a widely circulated newspaper.

Unlike Lu Xun's early *zawen* before the 1930s, where free style prose was utilized for personal emotion meandering, essays published in commercial newspapers had to submit to certain rules. One of them was to soften the tone to bypass censorship. The two letters to Li Liewen dated 4 May 1935 confirmed his deliberation and his dissatisfaction thereupon. In the first letter, Lu Xun complained that he had "placed enough self-censorship 避忌已甚" in writing for *Free Talk*, and sometimes felt like there was a "fishbone caught in the throat" he must spit out, hence making such writing hateful.<sup>13</sup> Yet so as not to make things more difficult for Li Liewen, Lu Xun had decided to "soften the style even more, only that the essay would be weak, and offending the powerful would be nevertheless unavoidable 更加婉约其辞，唯文章势必流于荏弱，而干犯豪贵，虑亦仍所不免。"<sup>14</sup> Such tension is indeed central to the corpus of *Free Talk zawen*, which takes in general a delightful humorous tone on the surface yet is endowed with powerful critique like a sharp blade towards the GMD rule. On the one hand, it was in Lu Xun's character to make pungent attacks against the "dark forces;" on the other hand, the

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<sup>11</sup> one of the female students from Beijing Normal University who was killed in 1926 by Beiyang troops in a student protest. Lu Xun had written his famous essay commemorating her in "In Memory of Miss Liu Hezhen"

<sup>12</sup> Lu Xun's most trusted student who was killed during the 1927 anti-Communist purge.

<sup>13</sup> LXQJ, vol.12 p172

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

heightened censorship made it a must for him to hide the blade and spite behind a soft and composed rhetoric. The result was a new type of essay that “originally intends at lightly entertaining but turns out to be a showdown. If the heart is not cleansed, how can the face be changed. Alas, what should I do? 原想嬉皮笑脸，而仍剑拔弩张，倘不洗心，殊难革面，真是呜呼噫嘻，如何是好。”<sup>15</sup>

The opus of *zawen* from early 1933 to the forced resignation of Li Liewen in mid 1934 pivots around the topic of the GMD and its (non)-resistance against Japan. The September 18<sup>th</sup> Event in 1931 had triggered public outcry against Japanese aggression in northeastern China. The large batch of news articles in *Shenbao* after the outbreak of war depicted public protests in various parts of China. Reports on northeastern China continued, at least until public anger reached another climax in the sudden fall of Rehe province in 1933. Public attention had now turned from the patriotic sentiments of a united Chinese against Japan to doubt of the sincerity of the Nanjing government’s anti-Japanese policy. What escalated the public distrust of the GMD government, besides its then manifesting passivity against Japan, was the series of military campaigns against the growing Soviet regions in rural China. Five major encirclements were made starting in 1932, with the last one in 1934 successfully wiping the Communists out of the major camp in rural Jiangxi, forcing them onto their “Long March.” Media coverage had been scant on the specifics of the encirclement campaign due to lack of information from the Red Army during long March and censorship of the GMD in Shanghai. Yet through close contact with party leaders of Qu Qiubai and Feng Xuefeng, the latter of whom had actually participated the Long March, Lu Xun must have been up-to-date about the what was happening at the time. This was precisely the time Lu Xun got access to *Shenbao*, and *zawen* had become his weapon in

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid p173

expanding the political discourse under suppression. Almost all of Lu Xun's *zawen* in 1933 were devoted to reveal the real intention of the GMD behind the façade of its manufactured discourse. Even by looking at the titles of the essays can we see the embedded theme: “*Tao de bianhu* 逃的辩护 (In Defense of Fleeing)” “*Hangkong jiuguo sanyuan* 航空救国三愿 (Three Wishes in Saving the Nation by using Aviation),” “*Zhanlue guanxi* 战略关系 (Strategic Considerations),” “*Duiyu zhanzhengde qidao* 对于战争的祈祷 (Prayers for War)” “*Zhongguo ren de shengming quan* 中国人的生命圈 (Life Circle of the )” “*Yi yi zhi yi* 以夷制夷 (To Use the barbarian to contain the Barbarian)” “*Yanlun ziyou de jixian* 言论自由的界限 (The Limits of Freedom of Speech)” “*Duonan zhiyue* 多难之月 (The Difficult Months)” and so on. The essays were direct satire on the manufactured discourse of the GMD either by quoting terms directly or by referring to the GMD's discourse. The terms were usually taken from newspapers like *Shenbao*, and the essays were written in response to “stimulus of news (*shishi de ciji* 时事的刺戟).”<sup>16</sup> Lu Xun embedded in *zawen* a twist – the essays were not direct confrontation with or critique of the GMD policies but were directed to reveal and expose the fallacies of the discourses that the GMD tricked the public into believing. The government's military campaign against the Communists was carefully covered up from media, whereas various nationalistic discourses must be produced to legitimize its passivity in resisting Japan.

Various discourses of “national salvation” were produced whereas Lu Xun took them on to reveal how these were not real efforts in saving the nation from foreign aggression, but mere trend-following and even commercial opportunities. In the above-mentioned essay “Three Wishes for Saving the Nation with Aviation,” Lu Xun condensed a list of news reports

<sup>16</sup> preface to *False Freedom*. LXQJ, vol.5, p4

concerning the discourse of “nation saving,” stripped them to the bare bones of logic and listed them out: “...Bankers promote depositing money [into the banks] as way of saving the nation; booksellers claim reading literature as the way to save the nation; painters promote saving the nation through art; dancing fans encourage saving the nation through entertainment.

Furthermore, tobacco companies propose smoking *General Ma* cigarettes (General Ma Zhanshan 马占山 was hailed as national hero in China in a brave battle he fought in Harbin against the Japanese troops. A tobacco company in Shanghai named the cigarettes after him as a way to attract Chinese smokers.) as a way of saving the nation. All these many ways of saving the nation, in the same way they are implemented before, will continue to be implemented throughout and will not stop short after five minutes.”<sup>17</sup> The picture Lu Xun presented was not only the discourse of “nation salvation” exposed as an empty slogan but that it had become the excuse for the commercial competition for profits.

In the essay “Strategic Relations,” Lu Xun juxtaposed the Nanjing government’s strategic announcements on the defense line for Japanese aggression across the span of two months in early 1933, when the Japanese troops advanced into the northern province of Rehe and seized important cities like Chengde 承德 and Yuguan 榆关 with unimaginably fast speed. The central word of parody in the essay was “strategy-” the word Lu Xun saw as inadequate for such a fast defeat. “Last year when there was fighting in Shanghai, the strategists said: ‘For strategic considerations, we must retreat to hold the second line of defense.’ So our troops withdrew. Two days later they said, for strategic considerations: ‘If the Japanese army does not attack us, our men must not open fire. All soldiers must obey this order’. So there was a cease-fire. Then the

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<sup>17</sup>Lu Xun. “Three Wishes of Saving the Nation From Aviation 航空救国三愿.” *Shenbao, Free Talk*, 5 February, 1933.

‘second line of defense’ disappeared, peace talks started in Shanghai – negotiations, signatures and all was over.’<sup>18</sup>

Another example was his adroit use of reduction to absurdity. This time, he chose to ridicule the much debated policy “first internal pacification, then external resistance 攘外必先安内.”

“For instance, the most important subject today is ‘Pacify internal foes and resist external ones’. A great deal has been written on this subject. Some say that to pacify the interior we must first resist outside foes. Some say the two things should be done together. Some say that unless we resist external foes we cannot pacify internal ones. Some say that by resisting attacks from outside we will pacify the interior. Some say that pacifying the interior will enable us to resist attacks from outside. Some say that to pacify the interior is more urgent than to resist external foes. So now the subject seems quite exhausted. It looks as if the limit has been reached. Therefore if we want to introduce a new angle, we shall look like utter fools, or – to use the most current term of abuse today – like ‘traitors’. This is because only three possible angles are left: ‘Pacify the interior and stop resisting foreign aggression’, ‘Invite the foreign foe to pacify the interior’, and ‘Outside and inside are the same, so no resistance is needed’.”<sup>19</sup>

The irony here lies in reducing all explanations of the situation in the state discourse to the bare-bone of logic of resist/non-resist, inside and outside. As if playing a mathematical game, he deduced the remaining possibilities that were not played out in state discourse: “Pacify the

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<sup>18</sup>Lu Xun. “Strategic considerations 战略关系.” *Shenbao, Free Talk*. 13 February, 1933. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. *Selected Works of Lu Xun*. Vol. 3. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1959.

<sup>19</sup>Lu Xun. “On Writing and the Choice of a Subject 文章与题目,” *Shenbao, Free Talk*, 6 February, 1933. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang.

interior and stop resisting foreign aggression” “Invite the foreign foe to pacify the interior” and “Outside and inside are the same, so no resistance is needed.” All these sayings pointed to the way Lu Xun wanted his readers to get: that Jiang Jieshi’s real intention was not to fight against Japan but the Communists.

The above example had pointed to the most commonly used tactic in Lu Xun’s *zawen* – to cut out materials from newspapers, detach them from the original context and juxtapose them to create new meaning. This led to Leo Ou-fan Lee’s harsh critique of Lu Xun *zawen* as either “cut and paste” or an indolent version of the sort.<sup>20</sup> In the 1936 essay Lu Xun amusingly called himself “*Li ci cun zhao* 立此存照 (For Future Reference)” as a “*wen jian gong* 文剪公 (newspaper clipper)-” as a defiant gesture he usually utilized by taking in the criticism against him only to turn it into an attack on the critic. By acknowledging the title that was usually used to despise the lack of intelligence and creative force in *zawen*, Lu Xun was both doubling the satire on the sufficient fallacies in media discourses to do the drama, and ridiculing those hypocritical “gentlemen” who insisted on aesthetic quality against social relevance. The materials cut out of the newspapers were juxtaposed to each other from different times or across different topics to contrast, expose, and foreground the fallacies in logic.

The title of the *zawen* collection *Wei ziyou shu* 伪自由书 (False Freedom) precisely highlighted what Lu Xun had been doing- the so-called free media discourse was but a “false freedom” of making believe. As from the preface to the collection, Lu Xun stated directly that

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<sup>20</sup> Lee, Leo Oufan, “Pipan kongjian de kaichuang-cong shenbao ziyou tan tanqi 批判空间的开创-从申报 ‘自由谈’ 谈起 (The Making of Critical Space-Talk from ‘Shenbao Free Talk’)” *Voices from the Iron House*. Indiana University Press, 1987.

“‘Free Talk’ was not a cohort magazine, and ‘free’ is of course but an irony. I have absolutely no intention to gallop upon such plateau.”<sup>21</sup>

Tropes like masks and face decoration often appeared, and several essays pointed directly to Lu Xun’s dichotomy of hypocritical surface and the inside intention. These include “*Ye song* 夜颂 (In Praise of Night)” and “*Xiandai shi* 现代史 (Modern History).”

“In Praise of Night” was published in *Free Talk* on 10 June 1933 under penname “*You guang* 游光.” In Lu Xun’s depiction, “Night is a mysterious garment which Nature has woven to cover all men so that they may be warm and calm, so that by degrees, without thinking, they may take off their artificial masks and clothes and wrap themselves stark naked in this boundless mass so like dark cotton.”<sup>22</sup> What Lu Xun was doing here is not to sing the abstract lyrical praise of night, but to find in the darkness the truth of the human world – “to see all the darkness while in the darkness themselves”: “The fall of night blots out all the sublime, confused, abrupt and splendid articles written on shining white paper in the daytime by men of letter and scholars, leaving only the night air with its begging, fawning, lying, cheating, boasting and delivery, to form a bright golden aura over their learned heads, like that seen in Buddhist paintings.”<sup>23</sup> When the day comes, “all is noise and bustle;” these “men of letter and scholars” are dressed up neatly and put on an sanctified manner. Lu Xun hated deeply such hypocrisy – which immediately associates with the “gentlemen” of the Crescent Moon Society and the Euro-American Ph.D. returnees whom Lu Xun had been continuously at war with – as well as the hypocritical culture led by these “men of letters.” He remained constantly alert to the “shocking, palpable darkness

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<sup>21</sup> preface to *False Freedom*. LXQJ, vol.5, p4

<sup>22</sup> Lu Xun “In Praise of Night 夜颂.” *Free Talk*, 10 June 1933. In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1957. Vol.3. pp267-268

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

all around” “behind high walls, in tall buildings, ladies’ chambers, dark prisons, sitting rooms and secret offices.”<sup>24</sup>

Night and day contrast remains a constant theme throughout Lu Xun’s *zawen* opus. So is the imagery of the bat – a night animal that is vigilant at night and is capable of being constantly alert to the sleeping crowds. As early as in the high time of the New Culture Movement in May 1919, Lu Xun compared himself to a bat in his letter to Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950): “‘Diary of a Madman’ was quite naïve and was rushed out. I should not have written such a work according to the credo of art. The reason you thought it was good in the letter might be because that all birds returned to nests to sleep at night so bats seemed the only one capable.”<sup>25</sup> In the above-mentioned *Free talk* article on bats, he wrote: “Men generally dislike creatures that come out at night, probably because they do not sleep as human beings do, and it is to be feared they may observe secrets while men slumber soundly or stir in the darkness.”<sup>26</sup> In another essay he wrote with self-mockery: “Because I read old books and foreign books, some distrusted me and said I am a bat.”<sup>27</sup> All these essays depict bats as, on the one hand, heresy, independent and uncategorized type of individual who goes against the common people and mainstream. Yet such characteristics were valued mostly by Lu Xun in what he saw as the “dark age” as a way for sleeping (numb) folks to see the truth and make critical and objective judgments about the social situation instead of blindly following. Thus “bat” recalls Lu Xun’s most famous image of the lonely fighter, the only sober person among the sleeping masses, whose painful attempts to wake

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Lu Xun. “*Duiyu ‘xinchao’ yibufen deyijian* 对于‘新潮’一部分的意见 (Suggestions to Part of ‘New Tides’).” LXQJ, Vol.7, p236

<sup>26</sup> Lu Xun, “Talk about bats 谈蝙蝠.” *Free Talk*, June 25, 1933.

<sup>27</sup> Lu Xun, A Layman’s Remarks on Writing 门外文谈. *Shenbao, Free Talk*, 1934.

others are futile. The self-mocking tone was a typical Lu Xun rhetoric of seeing himself as a “heretic” of the age who fights helplessly against the numb crowds.

Another similar image was the “alarmer/the herald of danger” 告警者. This started with the translation of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard’s first work *Either/Or*, which was introduced in China in the early twentieth century. One apocalyptic scene captured Lu Xun’s particular attention: a fire broke out in a theater and a clown came out to the stage to notify the audience of the fire. All thought this was a joke of the clown and cheered. The clown repeated that it was a fire, yet the audience guffawed and applause. “No doubt,” Kierkegaard wrote, “the world will end amid the general applause of these laughter-loving people who take everything as a joke.”<sup>28</sup> Lu Xun associated his age as such a scene. In his *Free talk* essay “*Bangxian fa fayin* 帮闲法发隐 (The Secret of Being a Joker)” mentioned above, he set up a contrastive scene with one alarmer that made every effort to admonish people of lurking dangers and the *bangxian* people (joker) 帮闲者 who quickly turned the powerful warning into buffoonery before the warning induced critical responses from the audience. These laugh-loving audience enjoying the buffoonery were but a comical counterpart of Lu Xun’s early image of on-lookers 看客; those who watched the execution of criminals with numb faces were as pernicious as those who ignored the danger to the society/nation by laughing it off. Similarly, the alarmer who wanted to warn the audience was considered as ridiculous and mad as the sober man who attempted to wake others in the iron house.

Lu Xun was determined to become one of the whistleblowers, just like the vigilant person in the iron house from his old days towards the end of the New Culture movement in 1923. In the

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<sup>28</sup> Kierkegaard, Soren. “Either/Or 非此即彼” trans. Chen Junsong 陈俊松, Huang Dexian 黄德先. Beijing, Guangming ribao chuban she 光明日报出版社, 2007. P16

1930s, where “darkness” had been increasingly monopolized by the powerful, he landed at the weapon of *zawen* to continue the fight in a totally different political and social climate in Shanghai. He saw *zawen*’s function as cracking open “the golden lid on a cauldron of human flesh 人肉酱缸上的金盖” and tearing off “the cold cream on a devil’s face 鬼脸上的雪花膏.”<sup>29</sup>

The essay “Modern History” developed the dichotomy even further. The essay does not talk about anything related to modern history per se, but describes the two ways of conjuring tricks Lu Xun remembered from childhood.

“In one type a monkey is made to wear a mask and clothes, flourish a sword or a spear, and ride round in a few circles on a goat. Or else a bear, fed on slops till it is nothing but skin and bones, performs a few tricks. In the end a collection is taken.

In the other type a stone is put in an empty box, which is wrapped round and round in a large handkerchief, and a white pigeon is produced. Or a showman stuffs his mouth with paper, lights it and breathes out flames from his mouth and nose. After which a collection is taken. Upon receiving the money, one fellow complains that it is too little and refuses to go on, while another reasons with him and asks the audience for five more coins. Then sure enough someone gives one and he asks for another four, another three...

When they have enough, another trick starts. This time they put a child into a vat with such a small mouth that only the small tuft of hair on his head can be seen. To get him out, you have to pay. When enough has been collected, a man kills the boy by some means with a sharp knife, covers him with a sheet, and leaves him lying stiff and stark. To bring him to life again, you have to pay.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Lu Xun “In Praise of Night 夜颂.” *Free Talk*, 10 June 1933. In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1957. Vol.3. Pp267-268

<sup>30</sup> “Modern History.” *Free Talk*, 8 April 1933. In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1957. Vol.3. pp235-236

The drastic irrelevance between content and the title of the essay invited the reading of the essay as allegory - what constitutes modern history, in Lu Xun's view, are the various tricks politicians conjure in fooling the people. This is understood both on a macroscopic and a microscopic level. The history of modern China had been dramatic enough to compete with magician's tricks described in the essay: imperial rule substituted by the revolutionary government, which was soon conceded to the warlord Yuan Shikai, who restored monarchy and declared himself Emperor; amidst the united efforts against northern warlords, showdown was presented between the two political parties vying for ultimate power, on top of which was the entire nation being mired in Japanese aggression. More likely, Lu Xun was adopting a usual stance against the GMD's rule. The tricks described in the essay invite immediate comparison with the ways of "nation saving" listed in the earlier quoted essay: saving the nation had become a disguise for the various commercial activities to take place; the ways proposed are presented as far-fetched from saving the nation as a sheer magical trick.

The trick of killing a child was more or less a reference to an earlier essay "*Chongshi* 崇实 (The Fact of the Matter)" published in *Free Talk* on 6 February 1933. Lu Xun's intentional lightheartedness in listing the trick of killing the child with other harmless tricks with monkey and bear resonated with his satire in "The Fact of the Matter-" how the GMD endeavored to rescue art treasures from being destroyed in war while heedless of the lives of the students that remained in the war zone Beiping. In making the contrast explicit, Lu Xun brought out the hidden "fact of the matter:" "...the art treasures are prized not because they are 'ancient,' but because after Beijing is lost we can still carry them with us, and realize money for them anytime. Though university students are the 'backbone' of the country, they have no market value." The child's coming into and out of life in the trick is somehow worth of some money, and hence

guaranteed a place along with other tricks involving monkey and bear. Therefore, Lu Xun is offering us a new way of looking at history through tricks – a repeated history filled with deception, black-mailing, violence and hypocrisy. People were presented as the object of the deception, just like the onlookers of the tricks that look with interest, cheer, and even pay for the tricks. Politics is in Lu Xun’s understanding a performance. The child, the prop of the trick, symbolizing the weak and the innocent, is subjected to free insult, abuse and killing as a tool for making money. As the trick performance ends, “the spectators scatter, looking very foolish.”<sup>31</sup> The ending is a prediction for the present age: immersed in the repeated lies day in and day out, people will become numb and stupid. And it is the duty of *zawen* to puncture the lies and wake them to the truth.

### **Becoming Conscious of *Zawen***

In 1918, Lu Xun’s “*Kuangren riji* 狂人日记 (Diary of a Madman)” was published in the flagship magazine *New Youth* of the quickly rising New Culture Movement. In less than a year in May 1919, in his letter to Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950), Lu Xun almost regretted writing of “Diary of a Madman” and confessed that it “was quite naïve and was rushed out,” and it was written “according to the credo of art.”<sup>32</sup> In the subsequent years, he tried different ways to continue his indictment against traditions, hoping to “cure the minds of the Chinese people.” Lu Xun’s subsequent works not only manifest variety in the use of language and writing style, but in genres as well – from fiction, prose, to poems and to *zawen*. This section aims to portray the trajectory of how Lu Xun had gradually diverted from literary creation that is “dictated by the

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid*

<sup>32</sup> Lu Xun. “*Suggestions to part of ‘New Tides’* 对于‘新潮’一部分的意见.” *Collected Work of Lu Xun*, Vol.7, p236

credo of art 听将令” from the days usually referred to as the period of New Culture, to an increasingly conscious writing that focused on the here and now since 1925/1926, and finally to the culmination of the signature Lu Xun style of *zawen* in *Free Talk* in the 1930s. More than abundant scholarly works have done research on Lu Xun’s life, literary works, studies of traditional literature, intellectual thoughts and his involvement in the literary arena. The section does not go into detail about historical facts of his life or textual analysis. It only tries to highlight some most visible differences between *zawen* and his early works before 1925 by elaborating on some key texts to trace a brief development of Lu Xun’s understanding of literature and its social relation.

“Diary of a Madman,” a first piece of the sort to be published in *New youth* – a magazine that was highly popular among intellectuals and students in Beijing – quickly gave Lu Xun a fame as a new cultural icon. To be sure, this does not mean he had gained absolute popularity among the general reading public. Mao Dun recalled that “Diary” arrived silently, “made no ripple in the ‘literary world’” and even failed to anger the “National Essence” school 国粹派 – whose members were well-known scholars on traditional Chinese culture like Zhang Binglin 章炳麟, Liu Shiwei 刘师培 and Huang Kan 黄侃-with its “unprecedented” nature. The fact that *New Youth* itself had become the iconic magazine for outlandish style and ideology hence made the story look much less bizaare.<sup>33</sup>

Many things have nailed the story down to its unprecedented position in Chinese literature. It was generally considered as marking the beginning of modern Chinese literature,

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<sup>33</sup> Tai Jingnong 台静农, “Du Nahan 读呐喊 (On reading *Call to Arms*),” in *On Lu Xun and his Works*, pp53-61. Quoted after Eva Shan Chou, “Learning to Read Lu Xun, 1918-1923: The Emergence of a Readership.” *The China Quarterly*, 2002

with its use of vernacular, persistent use of first person narrative, its psychological depiction and its damning thesis. The story takes the form of the diary of a madman in seeing the world as people devouring other people. The metaphor of cannibalism has since been widely quoted as Lu Xun's firm indictment towards traditional culture as, in the madman's view, "men eating men." The story has two narrators. The internal narrator is precisely the diary's author himself, which accounts the distorted views of the world around him: dogs ferociously barking, villagers trying to persecute him, and traditional books of Confucian morality transforming into evil teachings of people eating people, which all culminated in the final scene of the hopeless outcry by the madman "save the children!" The external narrator was the self-claimed old friend of the madman, who calmly tells the readers at the beginning of the story that the diary entries were his recent discovery of his old friend and that the madman had recovered and returned to his official post at the end of the story.

Another similarly striking image Lu Xun conjured through fiction against traditional society was the blood-soaked bun in "Yao 药 (Medicine)." In the superstitious belief of the local provincial Chinese, a bun soaked with blood of the revolutionary could save the life of their tubercular son, who nevertheless irretrievably died in the end. The sympathetic third person narrative of the peasant couple, who go into all lengths in attempting to save the life of their son, adds up to an even stronger tragedy on the meaningless sacrifice of the revolutionaries, who, hinted by the naming of locations in the story, was believed to be based on the archetype of the female revolutionist Qiu Jin who was murdered in 1907. The story was first published in the May issue of *New Youth* in 1919, coinciding with the May Fourth Movement. The timely publication of these early stories in the high tide of the new culture movement had firmly established Lu Xun as the icon of the so called "new literature," with adept creative skills in

attacking the traditions. It was the time when literature was endowed with supreme power in rejuvenating Chinese culture, which in turn was believed to be able to revolutionize the country, after all the previous social and political acts from the late Qing self-strengthening in weaponry building, military modernization, Constitutional Reform, and revolution, had failed the course. Lu Xun's anecdote of abandoning medical studies and devoting himself to literary creation had added to his fame of using literature to awaken the social consciousness of the Chinese people. Through each of the leaders of the New Culture Movement had a different revolutionary agenda (Chen Duxiu, founder of New Youth, soon became radicalized and took to the path of Communism and became a political activist and founder of the Chinese Communist Party; Li Dazhao remained throughout the next decade as the erudite Marxist theorist; Hu Shi had continued the route as a Liberalist scholar, who had through the next decades various levels of involvement in the Nationalist government to sort out a pragmatic way of achieving a democratic modern China) that led them to the final break in 1921, they were nevertheless at this time united under the banner of "New Culture-" through which their common task of enlightening the people and rejuvenating China was believed to be achieved. Lu Xun, with his superb mastery of fiction writing skills, was the leader in the literature, while others like Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi took leadership in giving theoretical proposals for a new literature.

Against the highly visible iconoclasm of the time, Lu Xun was hailed as too self-assured a fighter against traditional China and that his doubts about the ambivalent "new culture" were often omitted. It was precisely the hesitation of the sudden undertaking of a "new culture" embedded from early on in Lu Xun's writing that finally escalated into his landing at *zawen* since the mid 1920s. The ending in both of the stories mentioned above cast obvious doubt on Lu Xun's belief in the then widely acclaimed new culture. In "Dairy of a Madman," the ending

plight of “save the children-” given that children symbolize innocence and hope for the future-comes as an awkward moment after all the previous diary entries conjuring a gruesome and hopeless cannibalistic world. It also delivers a sarcastic effect as children are depicted in the previous entries as giving a ferocious stare at the madman in ghastly pale faces. Similarly, in the ending graveyard scene in “Medicine,” an epiphanic moment was added to the otherwise dominantly depressing scene of two peasant women burning incense to their dead children. To the surprise of both women, a wreath of red and white was placed on top of the grave of the revolutionary. The bright colors in the otherwise dull sky and greyish yellow mud ground gives a sense of cheer and hope. The final moment of the story gives a similar sense of hope of some sort, as the crow, who was standing at the top of the grave, “stretch its wings, brace itself to take off, then fly like an arrow towards the far horizon.”<sup>34</sup> The final scene was placed within the conversation between the two women, reiterating the grumbling over the immature deaths of both the young son and the revolutionary martyr. Their blame on fate for the death of the two youths highlights Lu Xun’s hopelessness in changing the minds of the people, apparently weakening the effect of appearance of hope.

As Dolezelova-Velingerova demonstrated in the case of “Medicine,” this story as well as “Diary of a Madman,” “Kong Yiji 孔乙己,” and “Mingtian 明天 (Tomorrow)” all establish a sharp distinction between the evil forces of the past and the weak beginnings of a new order as yet unborn.”<sup>35</sup> Lu Xun contributed significantly to the iconoclastic New Culture Movement by establishing, through the metaphorical rhetoric of the short story, the past as what Theodore Hutters called “a distinct entity embodying evil” to be condemned and possibly to arrive at an

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<sup>34</sup> “Medicine.” In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1957. Vol.1. p46

<sup>35</sup> Dolezelova, M. “Lu Xun’s *Medicine*.” in Merle Goldman edited, *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press. 1977. Pp227-228

alternative for the future.<sup>36</sup> The awkward hopeful moments in the end of the stories should somehow to be taken as Lu Xun's forced acceptance of the optimistic vernacular new culture that his May Fourth peers had painstakingly upheld to combat with the "old school" who held on tight to the defense of traditional culture. This was all the more clearly expressed in his 1922 Preface to his first story collection *Nahan* 呐喊 (Call to Arms), as Lu Xun, for the first time, explained how he had come to fictional writing as well as the naming of the collection: "From that time onwards, I could not stop writing, and would write some sort of short story from time to time at the request of friends ... As for myself, I no longer feel any great urge to express myself; yet, perhaps because I have not entirely forgotten the grief of my past loneliness, I sometimes call out, to encourage those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart. Whether my cry is brave or sad, repellent or ridiculous, I do not care. However, since it is a call to arms, I must naturally obey my general's orders."<sup>37</sup> Lu Xun then gave direct explanation for why he often resorts to innuendoes such as the wreath in *Medicine* that comes from nowhere – "for our chiefs then were against pessimism."<sup>38</sup>

Towards the end of 1921, the united front of New Culture that pivoted around *New Youth* disintegrated. New journals and magazines were established with reorganization of the former peers: as Chen Duxiu moved the editorial office of *New Youth* to Shanghai in early 1921, when the former advocator for cultural revolution took a sharp turn into becoming the site for theoretical preparation for founding of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Shi and other Euro-American educated intellectuals like Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (V. K. Ting), Liang Shuming 梁漱

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<sup>36</sup> Hutters, Theodore. "Blossoms in the Snow: Lu Xun and the Dilemma of Modern Chinese Literature." In *Modern China*. Vol.10, No.1 (Jan. 1984). Pp49-77

<sup>37</sup> "Preface to *Call to Arms*" In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, Vol.1. p6.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

溥 and Tao Menghe 陶孟和 established *Nuli zhoubao* 努力周报 (Work Hard Weekly) in 1922 to propagate reformist politics; the literary magazine *Threads of Talk* 语丝 was established in 1924 with Lu Xun and his brother Zhou Zuoren as core contributors.

In the poem he composed in 1933 on the story collection *Pang huang* 彷徨 (Wandering), Lu Xun compared himself to a solitary soldier carrying a spear and wandering aimlessly in the years following the disintegration of the New Youth cohort. In recollection, he called the past 1921 Beiping as a “lonely new literary arena 寂寞新文苑” and compared it to a “peaceful old battlefield 平安旧战场.” Now that the “chiefs” were gone, the wandering Lu Xun was left on his own to find new ways to express himself and no longer needed to “obey the general’s orders” or write according to some “literary credo.”

“The true Story of Ah Q” was written towards the end of 1921, where Lu Xun clearly abandoned the persistent metaphor of madness and took a more realist turn. The story is the longest one in *Call to Arms*, and was serialized in several installments in the widely circulated newspaper *Chenbao* in Beiping, with the first installment published on 4 December 1921. In the story, Lu Xun created the archetypal illiterate peasant Ah Q, who embodied the extreme selfishness and follies that characterized most Chinese people. Ah Q cultivated “spiritual victories-” a kind of self-deception when one is situated in an inferior position. When encountering people weaker than he, Ah Q would bully them. The character was so successfully created that the years following the publication of the story, debates and curiosity were aroused among the readers, leading Lu Xun to respond in a letter in 1934 that the point of Ah Q was “to make the reader unable to distinguish this character from himself” and hence to provide “a path

to self-interrogation.”<sup>39</sup> The object of condemnation was no longer the cannibalistic Confucian ethics or traditional culture in general, but the predatory masses. In the ending scene of the novella, where the Ah Q was about to be executed, this thoroughly flawed illiterate peasant has for the first time in his life become the focus of so many spectators. When he thought of singing some operatic verses, the crowd that was waiting to be excited roared

“‘Good!’ sounded like the growl of a wolf....

So Ah Q took another look at the shouting crowd....

Now he saw eyes more terrible even than the wolf’s, dull yet penetrating eyes that, having devoured his words, still seemed eager to devour something beyond his flesh and blood. And these eyes kept following him at a set distance.”<sup>40</sup>

Comparing with earlier stories like “Diary” and “Medicine,” “Ah Q” was more of a realistic piece with less metaphorical depth and narrative framing. The society was depicted not through a madman’s view or with a grotesque tint of the superstitious medical practice; there had not been much indulgence in first-person narrative, let alone the frame-within-frame narrative structure. However, what had continued from Lu Xun’s earlier stories was its rhetorical control – the narrator had never stood out to blatant and outright condemnation, instead, the controlled language, rich in its nuanced implicity, was generally believed to arouse strong emotional response in the urban readers who had already been enlightened in the New Culture Movement to sympathetic humanistic values. When such a desired result was questioned by the confusing readers’ response Lu Xun received, he became even more determined to abandon the short story

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<sup>39</sup> “*Da Xi zhoukan bianzhe xin* 答戏周刊编者信 (My Reply to a Letter From the Editor of *Theatre Weekly*)”, quoted after Gloria Davies. *Lu Xun’s Revolution. Writing in a Time of Violence*. Harvard University Press, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> “True Story of Ah Q.” In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1957. Vol.1.

form in total in search of a new form that directly expresses his personal opinion and orients towards action.

In 1926, Lu Xun, someone who obviously did not like to comment on his own writing, published the essay “*Ah Q zhengzhuan de chengyin* 《阿 Q 正传》的成因(How the ‘True Story of Ah Q’ was written)” as a written augment to a recent interview he had with editor of *Wenxue zhoubao* 文学周报 (Literature Weekly). He wrote that the writing of *Call to Arms* “was simply complying with the wishes of some friends: when they asked me to write, I wrote,” and that “I could never have guessed to begin with – in fact I did not guess – that so many people would read my *Call to Arms* during the last few years.”<sup>41</sup> He then came to his own defense why a “grand finale” was given to the story against the many questions he received from readers’ response.

“I though once I had exaggerated, but I do not think so now. If I were to describe events in China today exactly as they happen, they would appear grotesque to people of other countries or those of a future, better China. I often have fancies which strike me as utterly fantastic, until I come across similar events, even more incredible, with my mean intelligence, I could never foresee such happenings.”<sup>42</sup>

What is conveyed here is not simply the fear of being misconstrued but Lu Xun’s start to rethink the conception of literature per se. He admitted that his cry, or specifically the plight of typical characters like Ah Q, should be raised “from time to time, to make things livelier for everyone” and that what happened in Chinese society was as dramatic as an “exaggerated” story like “Ah Q.” The idea that how literature could keep up-to-date with the fast changing world was

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<sup>41</sup> “How the “True Story of Ah Q” was written.” In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Vol.2. p306

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. pp310-311

precisely what Egon Erwin Kisch had been thinking in Germany at around the same time. Kisch was not hesitating upon it but declared the death of the novel, denouncing it as “literary lie” and should be substituted by the factographic genre of literary reportage that depicted the world as it truly was. At this point Lu Xun was only problematizing the relations between literary representation and the all the more dramatic social/political changes. That readers responded vehemently to the ending of the story and to the question whether Ah Q had turned into a real revolutionary bothered Lu Xun, not just because readers’ understanding of Ah Q differed from his own – he had already explained how there could be various possible means of ending the story, but that they still treated Ah Q as a fictional character and not a critical reflection of themselves. This must have come as a disappointment as Lu Xun arranged the story to be told in a realistic manner from a stable narrator in first person narrative, except in the climax of Ah Q’s execution towards the end of the story when the authorial voice got into the mind of Ah Q in seeing the crowd as predatory – a shift in narrative voice that was foregrounded in the “Diary of a Madman.”

In 1925, Lu Xun published his first collection of prose *Refeng* 热风 (Hot Wind) with Beixin Bookstore. Less than a year later in 1925, his first collection of essays *Huagai ji* 华盖集 (Unlucky Star) was published, again by Beixin. In the preface to *Unlucky Star*, Lu Xun had become determined to break away with “literary literature” of “the temple of art” and to take up the “scattered thoughts” with focus on “petty matters.”

“There are also those who advise me not to make these short commentaries. For their kind intentions, I am very grateful, and I’m not unaware of the value of creative writing. Yet when I am compelled to write the sorts of things I’ve been writing, I fear that I will still write them; for I deem that so long as there are such troublesome prohibitions

within the temple of art, it is not worth entering. Nevertheless, I take a stand in the desert and gaze at the dust and stone whipping about. When I find happiness I will erupt with laughter; my sorrow shall be expressed through cries, my indignation through curses. Even if my body should be struck everywhere by coarse sand, even as the blood flown from my head, I would stroke its congealed pattern as though it were a badge of courage. Yet this is not necessarily of less interest than following China's literary scholars, who eat buttered bread in the company of Shakespeare."<sup>43</sup>

The change in Lu Xun's conception of literature was obvious here. Lu Xun was the "solitary warrior" in 1923 and 1924, who involuntarily followed the credo of the May Fourth enlightenment literature, so as "not to infect with the loneliness I had found so bitter those young people who were still dreaming pleasant dreams, just as I had done when I was young."<sup>44</sup> The "dream" referred to the "dream" of the May Fourth generation - the optimistic believe that the nation could be saved through literary enlightenment. Lu Xun's early stories such as those quoted above were part of the "dream" of enlightenment in the sense that they attempted to conjure a vivid archetype of the entire Chinese people so as to awaken them to a change. Even in the high tide of the May Fourth, these stories were cast with a profound doubt of the proscribed new culture and a better future. Now in 1925/1926, Lu Xun had become conscious in staying away from the high-sounding "matters of great importance" and had aligned himself with "petty matters:" "this year I was inclined to run into these small matters, inclined to fixate on their petty-temper."<sup>45</sup> The "high" "great" "profound" topics in the "temple of art" do not belong to the world of *zawen*. Topic aside, the preface also implied Lu Xun's dropping of the disciplined

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<sup>43</sup> "Huagai ji. Tiji 华盖集.题记 (Preface to Unlucky Star)" In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. vol.3. p6.

<sup>44</sup> "Preface to *Call to Arms*" In *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1957. Vol.1. p6

<sup>45</sup> "Huagai ji. Tiji 华盖集.题记"

orchestration of writing that illustrated a preconceived literary agenda – “the troublesome prohibitions,” in favor of a more spontaneous natural self-expression: the eruption “of laughter” in happiness, the expression of “sorrow ... through cries” and “indignation through curses.”<sup>46</sup> Lu Xun also pronounced his disdain for “China’s literary scholars, who eat buttered bread in the company of Shakespeare” in favor of a tough “stand[ing] in the desert and watching the dust and sands stirring up around”<sup>47</sup> The “literary scholars” Lu Xun referred to were very likely Euro-American returnees, especially Chen Yuan 陈源, who had been since the end of 1924 at war with Lu Xun not only on issues like the suppression of students protest at Women’s normal University, but the more personal charges of plagiarism for Lu Xun’s *Zhongguo Xiaoshuo shilue* 中国小说史略 (A brief history of Chinese Fiction). Lu Xun had since then established himself as adversary of the Western educated scholars, including Chen Yuan and scholars closely associated with him such as Xu Zhimo and Hu Shi. The title of the collection “Unlucky Star” was hence named for the likely self-portrait purpose: a normal life for a mortal/commoner in China was more often than not accompanied with “bad luck,” hence the essays’ persistence in dwelling on the “petty matters” of life. Instead of the refined and elegant, Lu Xun chose to be rough and ready.

The essays included in the collection of *Unlucky Star* traversed a wide range of genres – from reminiscent essays, prose, literary criticism and even correspondence. It was true that some “significant” issues of Chinese temperament and teachings of Chinese history were dealt with. But the collection did live up to the words in the preface to show an inclination towards “petty matters” with the majority of the essays pivoting around arguments with other men of letters. As

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

per preface of the collection, the two essays that caused him most trouble were a critic on the contemporary translations of foreign names and a suggestion for Chinese youths not to read Chinese books.

Lu Xun did not provide a clear definition of *zawen* as a distinct genre. The wide range of subject matters and writing styles manifested in his essay collections only add up to the characteristic of “miscellaneous.” In the preface to *Unlucky Star*, introduction to *Sequel to Unlucky Star*, preface to *Sanxian ji* 三闲集 (Three Leisures), and preface to *False Freedom*, Lu Xun called the included essays *zagan* (miscellaneous thoughts) or *zawen*. In the preface to *Fen* 坟 (Grave), collection contemporaneous with *Unlucky Star*, Lu Xun altered terminology between *zawen* and *lunwen* 论文 (treatise). In the postscript of the collection, he said “when I heard the news that half of my *zawen* were printed -” suggesting that he treated the essays in the collection as *zawen*,<sup>48</sup> whereas in the “Preface”, Lu Xun directly confronted the disunity in form among the essays in the collection: “I gather together these formally contrasted things into an essay collection in a common sense, and not out of any grand-sounding reasons.”<sup>49</sup> Several years later, in the preface for his 1932 anthology of essays *Erxin ji* 二心集 (Two Hearts), he wrote: “I no longer want to edit *lunwen* (treatise) collections like *Two Hearts*, nor collection of translations like *Bixia yicong* 壁下译丛. I hence made no restriction and even take the liberty of including correspondence with friends this time in the ‘collection of *zawen*’.”<sup>50</sup> In fact, not only correspondence between friends was included in the collection, but also literary treatises (such as “‘Hard translation’ and the ‘class character of literature 硬译与文学的阶级性’”), public

<sup>48</sup> “Postscript to *Grave*,” LXQJ, Vol.1 P282

<sup>49</sup> “Preface to *Grave*,” Ibid, p3

<sup>50</sup> LXQJ, vol.4 pp189-192

speeches (such as “A glance at shanghai literature 上海文艺之一瞥”), biographies (such as “Brief Biography of Roushi 柔石小传”), translations (such as “Modern Film and the propertied class 现代电影与有产阶级”), interview transcripts (such as “Answering the questions from *Beidou* magazine 答北斗杂志问”), prefaces (such as “Preface to the translation of ‘on Art’ <艺术论>译本序”), and so on. Here, Lu Xun was justifying his wide inclusion of genres by saying “the various essays clipped together are only based on the time they were written, regardless of their genres. They hence live to the characteristic of ‘miscellaneous.’”<sup>51</sup>

*Zawen* under the broad understanding as some personal expression essays came to flourish in the early 1930s as shown by a critic of Lu Xun in October 1933: “Recently, lots of magazines have been promoting short compositions. *Shenbao yuekan* 申报月刊, *Dongfang zazhi* 东方杂志, and *Xiandai* 现代 all have a column for ‘stray thoughts’ and ‘essays.’ It looks as if 1933 will be the year for short compositions. The fact that at present writers of *zagan* are so numerous in China, far in excess of former times, can probably be ascribed to the efforts of Lu Xun alone...”<sup>52</sup> David Pollard, in his solid study of Lu Xun’s *zawen* style, noted how under the “miscellaneous writings” in the broad sense of *zawen*, there “emerged the dissentive commentary to sail under the same name and gradually, as a distinctive form of writing, expropriate the name.”<sup>53</sup> In early 1930s, opposers of *zawen* such as the one quote above had come to despise *zawen* as convenient formulaic compositions for quick publication, with the use of simple “cold sarcasm” or “heated abuse” or the combination of the two.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> Zhou Li’an. “*Zagan*,” quote in Lu Xun, “Postface to Quasi-Romances 淮风月谈.后记.” LXQJ, vol.5, p327

<sup>53</sup> Pollard, David. “Lu Xun’s *zawen*” in, *Lu Xun and his Legacy*, ed. Leo Ou-Fan Lee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp5-56

Critique of *zawen* came in handy as Lu Xun himself did not make a clear definition of *zawen*. Yet the undefined formality of *zawen* was precisely Lu Xun's intention in giving the writings under the broad name of *zawen* a unified characteristic on another dimension – a “negating spirit” that adjusts itself to a suitable form in combatting hypocrisy of all sorts. In the mid 1920s, in Lu Xun's continuous fight against the *Modern Review* school, especially against his accuser Chen Yuan, *zawen* was called for to not only distinguish from high-standing literature in the “temple of art,” but also to gradually “intrude into the noble literary tower.”<sup>54</sup> When Lu Xun started to contribute to *Free Talk*, *zawen* was the uncompromising “negating spirit” that “leaves no face in commenting on contemporary affairs, and needle social ills with typical archetype 论时事不留面子，砭锢弊常取类型。”<sup>55</sup> Lu Xun explained that he loved reading *zawen* because it “speaks with substance 言之有物.” He also listed three reasons why *zawen* should be developed: “first is to vitalize the Chinese literary site; second is to make those bastards pull their heads in 使不是东西之流缩头; and third is to reveal the true colors of the so-called ‘art for art’s sake’ works and expose their half-dead and half alive face.”<sup>56</sup>

The “negating spirit” was what unites the various forms of *zawen* writings together as forcing forward a way like “light cavalry” out of what he saw as a stale cultural arena under heightened censorship control and the increasingly fossilized literary creation dominated by the “noble Chinese scholars” on the one end and the formulaic revolutionary romances on the other. The negating spirit became most manifest in Lu Xun's 1927 speech at Whampoa Military Academy on revolution and literature. After witnessing the violent purge of Communists and left-wing youths in 1927, Lu Xun became so highly radicalized that he proposed the total

<sup>54</sup> Lu Xun. “Preface to Xu Maoyong's compiling of ‘daza ji’徐懋庸作‘打杂集’序” LXQJ, vol.6 p291.

<sup>55</sup> “Preface to *False Freedom*.” LXQJ, vol. 5, p3

<sup>56</sup> Lu Xun. “Preface to Xu Maoyong's compiling of ‘daza ji’徐懋庸作‘打杂集’序” LXQJ, vol.6 p293.

abandonment of writing itself. He talked about the three phases of literary production in relation to the development of revolution: before the revolution, there should be revelatory literature that exposes social ills and agitates for revolution; during the revolution, there should be no literary creation at all but only action; in the post-revolutionary time, literature should either eulogize the revolution or sing the elegy for the old society.<sup>57</sup> Lu Xun foregrounds in the speech another literary form – “literary literature,” which “only the most useless and least powerful people speak. Those who are strong do not talk; they kill. The opposed have only to say or write a few words to be killed.”<sup>58</sup>

This is only a more radical version of what Lu Xun proposed earlier in 1925. Following his ridicule of the “persons of learning” who hid behind the “golden mean” “unruffled in all their slavish self-abasement; remaining nonetheless unsuited to the path of sagehood,”<sup>59</sup> Lu Xun gave a surprising appeal that the Chinese youth should seldom or never read Chinese books because “reading a few Chinese books results in the ability to compose.”<sup>60</sup> In a similar vein, he appealed to the youths to “abandon the antiques and trash” that make human beings “fail to realize that progress and regression is all around them; [so that] naturally they cannot distinguish the men from the ghosts.”<sup>61</sup> By saying that, Lu Xun sets up *zawen* as lively and action-oriented writing that could stimulate creativity, to wake to the darkness in reality and the drive to act for a change. It boils down to the final ardent proclamation:

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<sup>57</sup> “Geming shidaide wenxue 革命时代的文学,” *LXQJ* vol.3, p421

<sup>58</sup> *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Foreign Language Press, Peking: 1957. Vol.3, pp334-335.

<sup>59</sup> *LXQJ*, VOL.3 P27. Quote after Zhang Xudong. “The Becoming self-Conscious of *zawen*: Literary Modernity and politics of Language in Lu Xun’s Essay Production During his Transitional Period.” Translated by Jennifer Dorothy Lee. In *Frontier in Literary Studies of China*. 2014, Vol.8, issue 3. Pp374-409

<sup>60</sup> *LXQJ*, VOL.3 P12. Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> *LXQJ*, VOL.3 P52. Ibid.

“If you admire the ancients, Go back! If you wish to renounce the world, do it soon! If you want to ascend to the heaven, ascend now! Should your soul wish to depart from your body, let it take its leave! Right here and now, we should hold to the present, to the ground where people dwell.”<sup>62</sup>

What is manifested is *zawen*'s anti-metaphysical task of swelling on the contemporary specifics that calls for a direct confrontation with reality instead of escape to a transcendental existence. The immediate response to specific news and its active resistance against the flawed political authority by exposing and condemning the discursive fallacies made Lu Xun's *Free Talk* *zawen* a well-suited form with a militant face for political action in the political environment of the 1930s.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid

## Chapter 2 Cross-Mediational Genre: *Zawen* and Public Speaking

Lu Xun's devotion to *zawen* in the last decade of his life was not only the result of his changed conception of literature, but also related to the language, style and literature's social role in public speeches with which he had been increasingly involved.

The earliest entry in Lu Xun's diary about public speech dated to 1912. At the time he was appointed by Cai Yuanpei as special contributor at the Education Department of the Beiyang Government. He gave a series of talks entitled "*Meishu luelun* 美术略论 (Brief Discussions of Fine Arts)" in June and July. He noted in his diary on June 21 that "[there were] about thirty people present, with five or six withdrawn half way through." On July 17, there was "only one person at the beginning, and ending up with ten. I finished the talk on that day." On July 5, when he came to the lecture hall, "speakers all asked for leave, and there was not one person present, so I made my way back." Although the low attendance was partly due to the academic topic on aesthetics, that Lu Xun was not a good public speaker at the time was obvious. The specific number he noted suggests that he himself was sensitive to the small number of audience. Yet after ten years, Lu Xun, then a cultural celebrity and professor of a number of universities in the south, was certainly confident enough about his public speeches that he was able to reflect with self mocking. During his family visit trip to Beiping in 1924, Lu Xun was invited to give several talks. In his letter to Xu Guangping 许广平 (1898-1968) after the talks, Lu Xun wrote: "I went to *Weiming* Society in the afternoon; in the evening they invited me for dinner at Senlong restaurant at Dong'an marketplace; at seven, I gave an hour long talk at the Second College of Beida, with over a thousand people present. [This might be for the reason] that Beiping has long been a

lonely place, so students were curious about such a new thing.”<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun’s Beiping student Li Jiye 李霁野 (1904-1997) recollected many years later how popular Lu Xun’s talks were among students in the south, despite the fact that he needed to bring a translator for his heavy Shaoxing dialect. “This makes Mr. Lu Xun very pleasant.” Over dinner, “when we talked about the situation of such warm welcome, Mr. Lu Xun told us how young people in the south were more enthusiastic than those in the north that they raised him up, threw him in the air and would only stop when he became nauseated 有时使他头昏目眩才罢手.”<sup>2</sup>

Lu Xun was obviously quite proud about his well-received speeches. These were no records indicating that he received any training in public speaking. Yet since he set off to the south, Lu Xun became an ever more successful public speaker. The many speeches during his two trips back to Beijing were well recorded through memoirs and newspapers – all indicating that he grew to become a popular and successful public speaker as he moved to the south.

According to the scholar Ma Tiji’s 马蹄疾 statistics, Lu Xun gave an average of three to five speeches per year in his early years in Beijing. After he moved south to Xiamen and Guangzhou, the number rose significantly. In the year of 1927 alone, Lu Xun gave a total of 23 speeches in Xiamen, Guangzhou and Shanghai. In his second trip back to Beijing in 1932, the five talks at various universities by Lu Xun were so popular that they were termed by newspapers and the audience as “Five Talks in Beijing 北平五讲.”<sup>3</sup> For him public speeches had grown to become an important way to interact with the society, a function that was to be

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<sup>1</sup>Lu Xun, *Correspondences Between Two Places 两地书*, Collected Works of LU Xun, Vol.11. p308

<sup>2</sup>Li Jiye. “Recollection of Mr. Lu Xun . Mr. Lu Xun’s two trips to Beijing 回忆鲁迅先生. 鲁迅先生两次回北京.” Quoted after Chen Pingyuan 陈平原. “The vocalized – public speaking and the transformation of the essay in modern China 有声的中国-<演说>与近现代中国文章变革. In *The Age of Transformation in Modern Chinese intellectual Thought 中国近代思想史的转型时代*, ed. Wang Fansen 王汎森. Taipei: Lianjing chuban gongsi, 2007.

<sup>3</sup>Ma Tiji 马蹄疾. *Lu Xun yanjiang kao 鲁迅演讲考*. Heilongjiang: Heilongjiang remin chu ban she,1981

taken up soon by Shanghai commercial media after his arrival. and to criticize society. As his student, Lu Xun scholar Cao Juren admitted: over his 24 years of public speaking history, his over 60 speeches left great impact on several generations - public speeches were important throughout Lu Xun's entire life.<sup>4</sup>

The topics of Lu Xun's talks after the mid 1920s, Lu Xun's so-called years on the left, were agitating, and are intended to be so. In his talk at Sun Yat-sen University on January 25 1927, a few months leading up to the April liquidation of the Communists when anti-Communists discourses were already in the air, he so satirized Guangzhou's political situation: "I heard in Xiamen about Guangdong being 'the origin of revolution,' and is a place highly revolutionary, 'communized 赤化' and very 'red.' So I very much wanted to come have a look. ... upon arrival, it was 'revolutionary' indeed! Red posters were all over the streets – on the red slogans were characters written with white chalk – 'white within red 红中夹白.' This makes me frightened about this type of revolution.<sup>5</sup> As he gradually disclosed his critique, the purpose of the talk was given – to call for a stop to the "laziness" among youths, "we should tighten up, and be more revolutionary 我们要得紧张一点，革命一点."<sup>6</sup>

Ma Tiji included several articles from the audience that had been published in journals and newspapers. One student noted: "at the present time, youths with voices should cry out. Since now is not the time to concede." Another agitated student called Lu Xun's speech "heart gripping 动人心海," and described the excitement after the speech:

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<sup>4</sup> Cao Juren 曹聚仁. *Critical Biography of Lu Xun* 鲁迅评传. *Dongfang chuban zhongxin*, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Ma Tiji, p124

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p128. Briefly before publication, the speech was taken out of *Works Outside the Collections (Ji wai ji, 集外集, 1935)*, since Lu Xun himself was not satisfied with the recorded speech draft transcribed by Lin Lin 林霖. It was said to contain several "missing words and mistakes 漏落，错误."

“Applause arose at the end of the speech. [We] clapped so long that our palms hurt; yet conscience makes you continue to clap.” The same writer, after summarizing the speech, extracted from Lu Xun’s speech the punch lines about immediate action: “now is not the time to be courteous. Those with voices should cry out?; those with strength should exert it. Now is the time to move, to take action!” The sloganeering words were repeated in several other impression articles, so Lu Xun’s talk was radicalized into several punch lines to be disseminated through journals. Two of the included impressions mentioned how the excited youths surrounded Lu Xun after the talk, asking him questions; and only when Lu Xun “devotedly, sincerely, kindly 虔诚的, 真挚的, 和蔼的” answered these many questions was he able to withdraw from the crowds and make his way back.<sup>7</sup>

While in Guangzhou, Lu Xun was invited to give two speeches in Hong Kong. One was entitled “Silent China 无声的中国”,<sup>8</sup> and the other one was entitled “Old tunes have all been exhausted 老调子已经唱完.”<sup>9</sup> Both speeches reiterated the May Fourth dichotomy of the “old” and the “new,” which had already been toned down since at least 1923 – the former meaning not only the formal and inflexible classical language but also old literary themes, such as the so-called “revolutionary literature” that gives nothing new about the proletariat and simply recycles naïve sympathy for the working class. Hence the speeches, having wandered into the history of different dynasties of China, came to the conclusion that the old is “harmful to China” and “should be abandoned.” Lu Xun urged the youths (Lu Xun was invited by the Hong Kong

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<sup>7</sup>Ma Tiji, pp132-140

<sup>8</sup>Lu Xun, *Collection of Three Leisures. LXQJ*, vol.4

<sup>9</sup>Lu Xun, *Jiwaiji shiyi 集外集拾遗 Remaining Essays in Collection outside Collection*

YMCA 香港青年会 to speak to young people) towards the end of the speeches to walk away from the old thoughts, to adopt a new language and new ideas, and to make “voices”. The radicalized rhetoric was well-fitted for public speeches for students in the revolution-baptized south – while controlled rhetoric, tropes could be used in the writing form of *zawen*, assuming readers could have more time and stable mind to get the embedded point behind literary decoration, speeches should be endowed with more direct delivery to cultivate a good on-site effect. During his trip to the south (Guangzhou and Hong Kong), the follies he fought against was the stifling literary air under the intense censorship as well as the existing inclination towards anti-revolution. In his recollection about this Hong Kong trip, Lu Xun mentioned that a stranger was growing ever more highly concerned about Lu Xun being assassinated in the south. He even went to great lengths to teach Lu Xun how to escape. Lu Xun and Xu Guangping safely left Hong Kong, of course, but there were “opponents collecting admission tickets, and hiding them, so that others could not attend the talk.”<sup>10</sup> The speeches were forbidden to be published,<sup>11</sup> but finally they went through censorship “with a lot left out and amended.”<sup>12</sup>

Lu Xun recollected in the 1930s that he never supported “sacrifice that had a momentous effect 震撼一时的牺牲” and would opt for “deep and tenacious battles 深沉的韧的战斗” in his speeches given in Hong Kong, implying that the cultural environment was so stifling that it exceeded his rational analysis. His insisting on “talking the same old themes 老生常谈,” calling for daring challenges to the old and the authorities, was explained with his deep disappointment in the south: the real “Republic 民国” never appeared, there were only a “military state 军国”

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<sup>10</sup>Lu Xun. “Brief Talk on Hong Kong 略谈香港,” in *Eryi ji* 而已集 (And That’s That)

<sup>11</sup>Lu Xun, Letter to Zhang Tingqian (1927.05.25.) Lu Xun shuxin ji 鲁迅书信集 (Collected Correspondences of Lu Xun). Beijing: ren min wen xue chu ban she 人民文学出版社. 1976

<sup>12</sup>“Brief Talk on Hong Kong 略谈香港”

and a “party state 党国.” The reason for his disappointment was the observation that the society was as bad as that in Beijing – four years into the Northern Expedition, this “base camp of revolution 革命大本营” of Guangzhou turned out to be the “point of origin of anti-revolution 反革命策源地.” While there in 1927, Lu Xun had witnessed the March Eighteenth Event,<sup>13</sup> heard about April Twelfth Event and eye witnessed the April Fifteenth Event, in which the Nationalist Party massacred a great number of left-wing intellectuals. Censorship was highly intense thereafter, resulting in the entire cultural arena living under “caution.” Bloodshed inspired Lu Xun’s radicalized tone in urging young people to take action rather than “dying in this dullness.”<sup>14</sup> Although censorship did not prevent the two speeches from appearing in newspapers in Hong Kong, Lu Xun’s catch phrases like “uttering a voice/crying out,” not remaining silent and dying away were disseminated among youths that they reappeared in many newspaper *zawen* well into the 1930s.

Shortly before Lu Xun started to publish in *Free Talk*, he gave his famous five speeches in Beijing in 1932. Major newspapers in Beijing like *Republican Daily* (*Minguo ribao* 民国日报) and *World Daily* (*Shijie ribao* 世界日报) gave full coverage on these talks.

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<sup>13</sup>Anti-Imperial student protests cracked down violently by Duan Qirui government in Beijing in 1926.

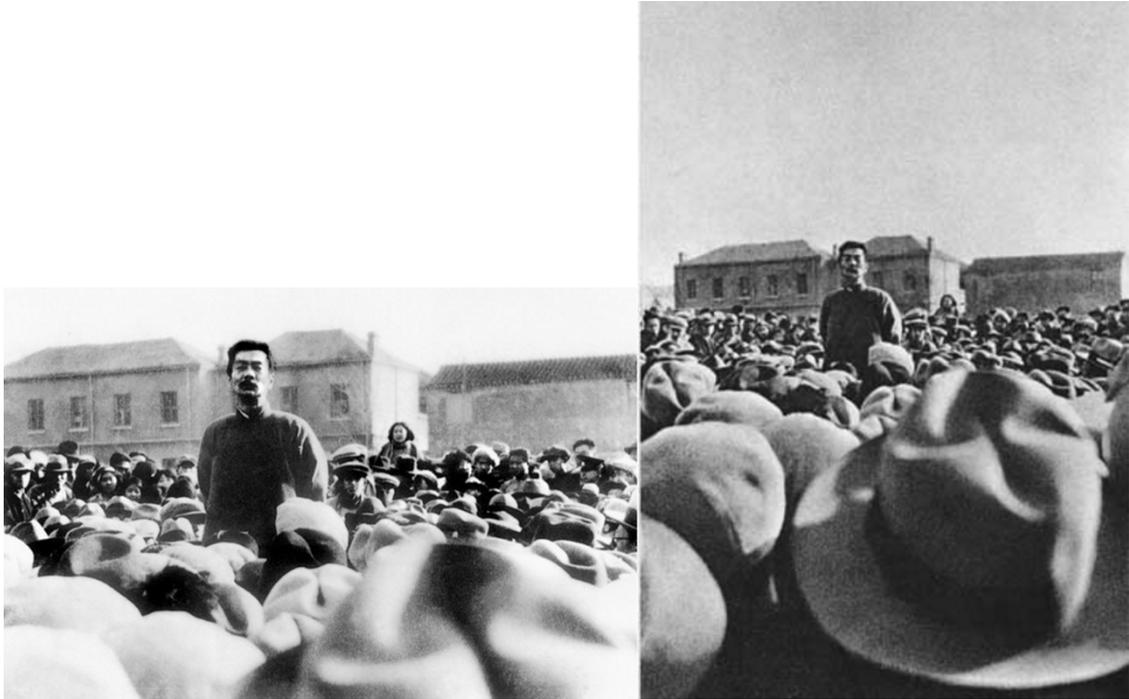
<sup>14</sup>*Remaining Essays in Collection outside Collection*



(*World Daily*'s reports on Lu Xun's speeches in Beiping, November 1932. Image from Ma Tiji 马蹄疾. *Lu Xun yanjiang kao* 鲁迅演讲考 (Survey of Lu Xun's Public Speeches, Heilongjiang remin chu ban she, 1981).

On 28 November 1932, *Republican Daily* described the scene of the lecture hall: "Not even three minutes into the talk was the hall was getting more and more crowded with late comers, so much so that there was no space to set a foot. [The audience] requested moving the talk outside. So the crowd moved to the playground with layers surrounding layers of people of an estimated total of over two thousand..." In the supplement *Pearl* 明珠 of *World Daily* (*Shijie ribao*, 世界日报), one audience member who attended the talk wrote on December 12 about the scene on the playground of the Beiping Normal University: people fought their way out from windows, "northern wind was roaring...thick layers of people surrounded our so-called Mr. Lu on the high table in the center, very similar to the round Temple of Heaven in the south of the city. People were yielding, wind was roaring..." *World Pictorial* (*Shijie huabao* 世界画报) published on December 14 two photographs of Lu Xun delivering talk on the playground, which

remain today as the only rare but widely circulated pictures that show Lu Xun as an intellectual celebrity.



(Lu Xun giving a public speech on the playing field of Beijing Normal University on 27 November 1932)

Along with the photos were an article by Bai Ning 白宁 entitled “*On Lu Xun’s Speeches* (*Lu Xun yanjiang ji*, 鲁迅演讲记)”: “audience were like a thick dark cloud 黑黝黝一片如雷布云...” In the memoir of Yu Ling 于伶 (1907-1997), “on the playground were the standing packed audience. ... So as to allow the several thousands audience in all directions hear, Mr. Lu Xun was literally shouting loudly. Yet the audience far away could only see his fighting stance.” Yu Ling also noted that the day after the talk, “various newspapers in Beiping have published news articles and photographs of Mr. Lu Xun’s talk. Many specifically bought newspapers to

store up.”<sup>15</sup> Yu Fang 俞芳 recollected: “the audience...were sitting in the front and standing at the back, layers upon layers. That day was very cold and windy. There were no loudspeakers at the time. In order to take care of audience of all directions, Mr. Lu Xun had to frequently switch directions. The speech was not clear enough and [I] cannot remember all the detailed content now.”<sup>16</sup>

Various other recollections about that talk noted ardent audience response:

“this grand spectacle was unprecedented, so was the good order [during the speech] ... the teachers’ building by the playground, alleys, dorms, courtyards, and even the university gate were stuffed with people. Later, even outside of the Peace Gate where the entire Normal University was located, the South Xinhua Street were also packed with young people, blocking traffic. Students wanted to listen to Mr. Lu Xun talk, but could not; they would instead see Mr. Lu Xun, but could not do that either. After the talk ended, the crowds were pushing and shoving, with some wanting to see Mr. Lu Xun while others wanting his signature in their autograph book:

‘Mr Lu Xun, Mr Lu Xun!

Mr Lu Xun, Mr Lu Xun!

What an ocean of young people! What a wave of sounds!’”<sup>17</sup>

Reports and impression/review articles in newspapers and journals, his popularity among students and youths and the vehement audience responses all made Lu Xun a cultural celebrity. The frequently mentioned title for Lu Xun, “mentor of the youth,” reached its full meaning: he

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<sup>15</sup> *Lu Xun huiyilu* 鲁迅回忆录 (Recollections about Lu Xun), Vol. 1. Shanghai wenyi chu ban she 上海文艺出版社, January 1978. Pp186-188

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p526

<sup>17</sup> *Recollections about Lu Xun* 鲁迅回忆录, pp206-207

not only supported youth writers personally but, more importantly, inspired and agitated the entire generation of young students through his left-leaning speeches.

Students were not only reacting to his speeches, but to Lu Xun as a celebrity, a cultural icon, like a fan to a movie star. Many recollections intentionally depicted Lu Xu as plain in appearance, stern and tough in character with a sharp in look through the eyes – a coherent person that embodies the spirit of his words. Qing Shui 清水 was impressed by the first meeting with Lu Xun at the Sun Yat-sen University talk: “he bent down slightly, stood up and paced to the front of the lectern to roaring applause. At the moment, people collectively paid attention, and listened to him talk in utter silence. His shriveled yellow face, protruding cheekbones, dark eyebrows, long hair, short beard, cloth shoes, sharp and kind eyes – I have observed them all clearly.”<sup>18</sup> On October 28 the same year, Hu Xingzhi 胡行之, a student who was at the talk at Lida College recollected: “roaring applause broke out all of a sudden before an old man standing on the platform. He does not like adornment, but wears casual clothes, with frequent use of satire in talking, making people laugh in one moment and burdening them with pain in the next moment, just like his essays. The classical saying of “the writing resembles the person 文如其人” was indeed correct.”<sup>19</sup>

At the March 1930 talk at Shanghai China University 中华大学, Lu Xun impressed the audience as: “wearing a grey long gown, as plain as an old peasant. [He] did not wear a hat, growing cropped hair with every string of hair standing straight up, reminding people of the phrase ‘怒发冲冠.’ His cheekbones were high, eyes were brimming with radiating vigour. As soon as I saw the square face, the two dark eyebrows growing in the shape of the Chinese

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<sup>18</sup>Northwest Wind 西北风, bimonthly, issue 3, Hankou, *Xibei feng* she. 1936.12.05

<sup>19</sup>Ma Tiji, p263

character ‘one’ in calligraphy did I realize immediately that this is my long admired great writer Mr. Lu Xun.”<sup>20</sup>

A feature length article about him appeared in the April 1928 issue of Shanghai’s leading glossy magazine of the day, *Young Companion* 良友, - a pictorial featuring a large image of a modern Chinese woman as cover of every issue.

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<sup>20</sup>Ma Tiji, p468

魯迅自述

我于一八八一年生在浙江紹興縣五馬渡村。...



Mr. Lu Xun, the author of 'True Story of Ah Q'...

關於魯迅先生... 魯迅先生...



Mr. Lu Xun in his study

(Lu Xun's introduction in Liangyou Illustrated Magazine 良友画报, Issue No.25. April 1928.)



(*Liangyou Illustrated Magazine* 良友画报, Issue No.25. April 1928. This is a typical cover of the magazine. Lu Xun was introduced in this issue.)

Chinese movie and opera stars, women's fashion were introduced along with foreign and Chinese leading politicians. In the issues in 1928, almost every newly appointed Republican military leaders and government officials as well as warlords were introduced in the current national news like the Northern expedition and wars with local warlords. The magazine's focus was of course not on news/information per se: images (mainly photographs) took the lead, and

only essays that match the images would be included. The politicians were each introduced with close-up portraits and news were written around pictures of the battlefields. Throughout 1928, Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石(1887-1975), Dai Jitao 戴季陶(1891-1949), Yan Xishan 阎锡山(1883-1960), Sun Chuanfang 孙传芳(1885-1935) and many others were introduced along with foreign leaders like Hitler, Roosevelt and others. In the April issue, a whole page was devoted to introducing Lu Xun: Lu Xun's self-introduction specifically written for the magazine, a short introduction article by Liang Desuo 梁得所 (1905-1938), editor of the magazine, together with Liang's photo of Lu Xun and Situ Qiao's 司徒乔 (1902-1958) portrait of him. In the same issue were feature-length introduction of the "Literary Hero" "大文豪" George Bernard Shaw, who, as I will mention later, visited China in 1933. Lu Xun was to write a lot about Shaw and his visit for "*Free talk*" in 1933. Several issues later the magazine made a page long introduction of Hu Shi, Lu Xun's liberal rival, and Liang Qichao, the indispensable intellectual of modern media.

友 良 期 三 十 三 第

33 超 啓 梁

最近  
國學  
家數  
**梁啓超**



梁 啓 超 遺 像

Liang Chi-chao, a Cantonese, well-known for his powerful writings, a scholar and reformer, who died recently at Peking. He had held high posts in the Chinese Republican government, as Vice-Minister of Justice, Minister of Finance, and was a great profounder in popular education movement

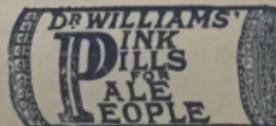
梁啓超，廣東新會人，生於西歷一千八百七十三年，即清同治十二年，壯年頗負文名，極崇拜政治家及文學家。原有為光緒二十六年曾創刊華字日報於北京時，此報僅出一張，并係附送，旋以戊戌政變，故不得已出奔國外，留日多年，遂在東京刊發一華字日報，鼓吹改良政治，嗣後推廣歐美各國，採訪各國政治社會情形，由其創刊之華字報宣傳，以資國人參攷。辛亥武漢起義，共和政府成立，君回國居津門，又創刊一日報宣傳政治學說。袁前總統世凱任君為司法次長，時君方從事唐言報，辭不就職。中華民國二年能感風潮，任君長司法，次年辭職，改任警制局總長。當民國四年，日本致二十一條於中國時，君頗盡其文章之力，竭力反對，卒使日本不敢遂其所欲。民國五年，袁世凱稱洪憲帝，君又盡力反對，旋赴雲南聯合其同學蔡松坡將軍，倡義擁護共和革命。民國六年廣州參戰問題發生，君應段祺瑞之召赴京，對於參戰一節主張最力，未幾段即議決中國加入戰團。同年七月張敬芳上書勸復時，段上將段祺瑞馬廠舉義，君實與有力焉。旋被任為財政總長，兼鹽務署督辦，冬，段祺瑞去職，君聯帶下野。民國八年渡大西洋，赴英國考察，次年回國。當君河廣廣州和會時，曾在法京巴黎考察。君係進步黨中堅領袖，因著作偏海內，故極受中國邦人士所推崇，蓋飲冰室主賓老少皆知，年來寒心學術，講學於北大附屬等學校。十八年一月十九日下午二時，病歿於協和醫院，年五十六歲。

中 國 伶 界 大 王

習 用 天 下 馳 名 二 種 良 藥 於 其 家 庭

章 廉 士

大 醫 生 紅 色 補 丸



嬰 孩 自 己 藥 片





芳 蘭 梅

章廉士大藥房出品蒙各界感佩  
尊廉出品家用良藥譽滿杏林  
領而紅色補丸及嬰孩自己藥片  
所習用特致具書保證專此佈陳  
等社  
梅蘭芳謹啟

(Introduction of Liang Qichao, *Liangyou*, No.33)

Tolstoy was also thoroughly introduced in the same issue for his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, with portraits and photos of his writing room and museum.



托爾斯泰百年紀念

年是於辛一十八年時泰斯爾托之年九〇九一

THE TOLSTOY CENTENARY commemorated on Russian postage stamps (below); the divan on which Tolstoy was born (center right); his tools when he did manual labor (bottom). On left, the great Russian writer at the age of 81, in 1909, the year before his death; center left, the Tolstoy museum of the Soviet Academy of Sciences; and (bottom left) his desk preserved in his home at Yasnaya Polyana



票郵念紀週百泰斯爾托之印發府政俄年今



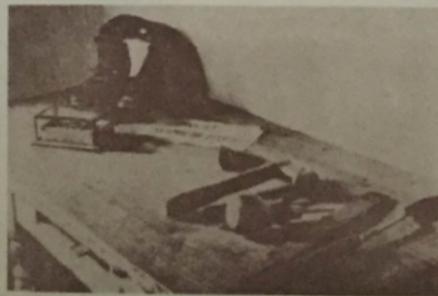
院物博泰斯爾托之設特府政俄



處之生產泰斯爾托為榻此



托爾斯泰之著作室及其書桌



具器之用工木做日平其此常神勤勞張主泰斯爾托

(Commemoration of Tolstoy, *Liangyou*, Issue No. 31)

Lu Xun was presented in the photo as sitting behind his writing desk in a long gown, with fully packed bookshelves along the whole wall in the background. Lu Xun's self introduction adopts his usual self-mocking tone with satire on society. So Liang Desuo had to insert his short

explanation to readers that this is the much honored Mr. Lu Xun. In the chief editor Ma Guoliang's 马国亮 recollection, Lu Xun was opposed to the idea of having his photograph published in magazines: "Lu Xun never easily let others publish his photographs. When Liang Desuo passed him a recent publication of *Liangyou* and requested to take a photo of him, Lu Xun replied wittily while briefly glancing through the pictorial: "These are all celebrities like commander-in-chief, but I am not a celebrity!" Liang succeeded in convincing Lu Xun by not talking about the issue of celebrity but conveying that many readers would love to see the real author after reading his works."<sup>21</sup> However Lu Xun distanced himself from Shanghai's burgeoning celebrity culture, to widely disseminate his ideas in a city like Shanghai would preclude his rejecting his commercial recognition.<sup>22</sup> He had become, however involuntarily, an increasingly proactive player in urban mass media with knowledge of both its rules and flaws, and his unique way of spreading the leftist voice utilizing the platform of mass media. The parallel of Lu Xun's speeches with *zawen* writing suggests that the latter shared many similar stylistic and rhetorical similarities to an extent that we can understand *zawen* as a natural extension of public speeches into the printed mass media at a time when open gatherings for public speeches became impossible under violent censorship. The visualized archetypal images

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<sup>21</sup>Ma Guoliang 马国亮, *Liangyou yi jiu- yijia huabao yu yigeshidai* 良友忆旧——一家画报与一个时代 ( *Recollection of Liangyou- An Illustrated Magazine and A Historical Age* ) . Shanghai: San lian shu dian 三联书店. 2002

<sup>22</sup>Lu Xun thus became a reluctant intellectual celebrity who found his name being used for a variety of advertising purposes. There was at least one case of an imposter in Hangzhou, which led him to publish a notice in April 1928 painstakingly refuting the scoundrel's spurious claims. He painstakingly explained the situation: "Since I've been in Shanghai, numerous papers have reported that I 'intend to open a bookshop' or that I've been 'traveling in Hangzhou.' In fact I have neither opened a book shop nor traveled in Hangzhou. All I've done is to hide upstairs in my room to do a bit of translation." from "A notice from Lu Xun in Shanghai 在上海的鲁迅启事." Collected works of Lu Xun, vol.4, p75. I shared the idea on the commercial packaging of lu Xun with Glorias Davies, *Lu Xun's Revolution. Writing in a Time of Violence*. Harvard University Press, 2014

for social critique as well as the creatively coined terms travelled freely from Lu Xun's speeches to the printed word.

Lu Xun's maturity in writing highly visualized *zawen* went hand in hand with his growing technique in designing popular speeches. A brief look at the titles of Lu Xun's speeches would tell some trick: "What happens when Nora leaves home?" 娜拉走后怎样, "The separated paths of literature and politics 文艺与政治的歧途," "Old tunes are exhausted 老调子已经唱完," "Silent China 无声的中国," "Read fewer Chinese books and be a meddling person 少读中国书, 做好事之徒," "Wei Jin style and the relation between the essay and medicine and wine" 魏晋风度及文章与药及酒之关系, and so on. The design of the titles usually resorts to common images, the juxtaposition of which plays out a polemical voice. Compared to the dry academic title "Brief talk on fine arts 略论美术" in 1912, Lu Xun had obviously become aware of the skills of attracting audiences.

The images he coined in speeches were often also picked up in his *zawen*, which were then popularized in their subsequent appearance in debates between his detractors and his proteges in newspapers and journals to the degree that both the cultural circles and the public knew what the acronyms meant. Another frequently quoted image is "lapdog 叭儿狗" that Lu Xun first coined at his talk at Beijing First Normal College in 1929. The liquidation of Communists and left-wing writers intensified after the April 12 massacre of left-wingers in 1927. "Lapdog" was a highly derogative term comparing writers that turned "right" under high pressure of censorship to speaker for the government and help purge their former comrades on the left. Lu Xun himself suffered a great deal in the year of 1928, as Creationists and Sun Society writers joined hands to attack him in a way both nasty and personal. He used the similar imagery

of lapdogs in the literary debates on revolution and literature – this time, “drowning lapdog 落水狗。” There are a series of articles Lu Xun published with “drowning dogs” in the titles – “bashing the drowning dogs 痛打落水狗” “Second essay on ‘drowning dogs’ 再论‘落水狗’.” These essays both intended to fight back against criticism on Lu Xun, and explained why he would continue to criticize those writers who had stopped publishing. The reason was that “dogs would float up above the water, and once they catch their breath, they would bark again.”<sup>23</sup> Lu Xun used the image to hit two targets with one stone: on the one hand, he implied that he was not being mean when insisting on criticizing those who already stopped writing; on the other, Lu Xun succeeded in satirizing the writers, especially the Crescentists 新月派 like Xu Zhimo who once openly called the left-wing writers uneducated and rude, who were using every chance to make “nonsensical” sounds like dogs’ barking that were completely unrelated to social contingency.

During one talk at the second plenary meeting of the League of Left-Wing Writers in April 1930, Lu Xun warned the left-wing writers not to stick to any dead disciplines and to prevent “coming up from the left now and going down from the right 现在从左边上来，将来从右边下去。”<sup>24</sup> He further compared these people to “*mie pian* 蔑片 (bamboo strips),”<sup>25</sup> a secondary role in traditional Chinese society who was hired to accompany their masters to play chess and draw paintings in spare time.<sup>26</sup> In Ma Tiji’s collection of post-talk audience impression

<sup>23</sup> Lu Xun, “lun ‘feierpolai’ 论费尔泼赖 (On Fair Play)”. In *Grave*. 10 January 1926. *LXQJ*, VOL.1

<sup>24</sup> Ma Tiji, p396

<sup>25</sup> In his translation of the seventeenth-century Chinese story collection *Doupeng xianhua* 豆棚闲话 (Idle Talk under the Bean Arbor), Robert E. Hegel notes how the then contemporary writer/editor Feng Menglong 冯梦龙 pointed the term’s origin to a vulgar joke referring to the stiffening material a man had employed in order to perform sexually. See *Idle Talk under the Bean Arbor: A Seventeenth-Century Chinese Story Collection*, edited by Robert E. Hegel. University of Washington Press, 2017, p233

<sup>26</sup> Lu Xun, “帮忙文学与帮闲文学.” *Ji wai ji shi yi* 集外集拾遗 (Remaining Essays in the Collection Outside

essays, almost all writers mentioned Lu Xun's satirical imageries of “*miepian*,” “*miaotang wenxuejia* 庙堂文学家 (temple writers),” “*shanlin wenxuejia* 山林文学家 (forest writers),” and, in later talks, “*zunming wenxue* 遵命文学 (obedient literature),” “*nitui wenxue* 泥腿文学 (literature of the mudded legs)” and “皮鞋脚 (feet in leather shoes).” He was noted to compare social reform to midwifery. “There is blood and filth, but there is also baby. Only a silly woman would fear giving birth.”<sup>27</sup> Not only would these terms conjure vivid images but they were so saturated with Lu Xun's own wisdom and knowledge of classical literature that they became the only possible and accurate way in conveying the complex ideas like the nature of “true revolutionary writer.” Lu Xun's successful speeches and the dissemination of the speeches through urban media to even broader audiences made these images become widely known, so that during the several widely participated literary debates, as well as in newspaper articles, these images were widely used to refer to a type of people and the public certainly understood them very well.

In most cases, these images achieved humorous effect through caricaturing – common features of a type of people were exaggerated and juxtaposed with social realities to appear ridiculous to the audience. *Miepian* “箴片” visualizes the rich people who ate so much that it “was painful to be idle after meals” that had to hire people to enjoy leisure with them. Hence ridicule was created by juxtaposing a turbulent social revolution that involved bloodshed and foreign invasion with writers like the Crescentists who worshipped only aesthetic principles in literature. The comparison meant to convey the idea that these writers were actually “helping” the government on their pacifying policy towards Japanese invasion.

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Collections). In Completed Works of Lu Xun. Vol.7

<sup>27</sup>Ma Tiji, p511

Similarly, “writers in leather shoes 皮鞋文学家” meant to satirize the writers who cared nothing about the national crisis but only maintaining the identity of “decent scholars.” The article was written to fight back on Liang Shiqiu 梁实秋’s (1903-1987) proposal that essays should be fun and with taste. Lu Xun intentionally brought down the “elegant taste” by juxtaposing the vulgar terms like “muddied legs 泥腿” and “rubber shoes 胶鞋” to make fun of an “elegant” Liang Shiqiu’s ignorance of the common knowledge that these “shoes” were what the common people wore. He had particularly written a series of essays under the title “On humor 论幽默,” which were published in *Free Talk* in 1932, to condemn Lin Yutang’s 林语堂 (1895-1976) light humor that distract attention from social matters.

Another common register across the language of the speeches and *zawen* were creative terms with the innovation of language. The public space was made possible from simultaneous advancement of two fronts– the newspapers and public speeches’ cross-reference of heated topics and terms, and the similar rhetoric of *zawen* with Lu Xun’s public speech. The most distinctive was the debates around “the third type of person 第三种人.” The term was first coined by Lu Xun in his essay “On the ‘Third Category’ 论‘第三种人’,”<sup>28</sup> published in the literary magazine *Modern* (*Xiandai* 现代) in November 1932. Lu Xun’s criticism of Hu Qiuyuan 胡秋原’s (1910-2004) self claim as “free person”<sup>29</sup> was but a part of a larger literary debate between left-wing writers and those against them. To boil the debates down, Su Wen 苏汶

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<sup>28</sup>*Modern*, Vol.2, first issue. 11.1.1932, published in Shanghai by Xiandai Book Company.

<sup>29</sup>Hu Qiuyuan. “Literary Theory of the Dog 阿狗文艺论.” *Literary Criticism*, 1931.12.1. Su Wen, “About the literary debate between ‘Literary News’ and Hu Qiuyuan 关于‘文新’与胡秋原的文艺辩论.” *Modern*, vol.1, third issue, 07.01.1932. There are a series of essays involved in the debate on politics and aesthetics. People involved could be clearly divided into two camps: those who support the Left-Wing League-Lu Xun, Feng Xuefeng, Qu Qiubai, Qian Xingcun etc.; and those who are against it –Hu Qiuyuan and Su Wen.

(1907-1964) and Hu Qiuyuan had published essays earlier in *Modern* comparing the left-wing writers as “lapdogs” whose works were “barking” reiteration of propaganda. Lu Xun’s “third type of person” was to ridicule such a shallow understanding of literature and the naïve belief that some transcendental aesthetics could bridge the divided cliques in revolutionary writing. Another important reason for Lu Xun’s fierce counterattack was Su Wen’s coinage of new terms in attacking him and his peers in the League, which well reminded him of his earlier attack as “Don Lu Xun” and “with hazy drunken eyes” in the late 20s. The “type” of person does not stop short at the criticism of Su Wen and Hu Qiuyuan, who after all were only famous for writing theoretical critiques and not for serious literary or intellectual works. On 27 November 1932, about two weeks after the publication of his essay on Su Wen, he gave a public speech at Beijing Normal University. The title of the talk “More on the ‘Third Category’ 再论‘第三种人’” was to assume that the audience who showed up at the speech were familiar with his previously published essay. Lu Xun’s fame and his popularity certainly allowed him to do so. The literary debate was huge enough, with many big names involved and many major newspapers and literary journals competed to publish essays in series. It climaxed with the creation of Lu Xun’s highly satirical and precise term of “the third type of person:” the whole debate was umbrellaed under the term and which became a proper noun for future debates. Newspaper reports of this speech including those in *World Daily*<sup>30</sup> and *Republican Daily* were quickly to link this speech to the previous essay by Lu Xun. Yet Lu Xun himself did not bother to explain the term in the speech and enlarged the term to criticize right-wing liberals in general. His major critique was their inconsistency in using “pure literature”-- something that Lu Xun did not believe to exist

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<sup>30</sup>*World Daily*, “Beijing Normal University Research Society invited Lu Xun for a speech” 11.27.1932. “Lu Xun gave a talk at Normal University yesterday.” 11.28.1932. *Republican Daily*, “Lu Xun was busy giving talks these days 鲁迅连日讲演忙” 11.28.1932. Ma Tiji. *Lu Xun yanjiang kao*.

from his earlier essay-- as the cover to check the rise of left-wing writers. Lu Xun created another metonymic term “feet in leather shoes 皮鞋脚” to refer to those returned scholars with Western PhDs who quickly seized the leadership of the New Culture Movement in the late 1910s. As the New Culture Movement further developed into the late 1920s and 1930s, when Europeanized thought and language reform gradually gave way to a proletarian mass culture, Lu Xun ridiculed how these “feet in leather shoes” refused to accept new-comers with “feet in straw sandals 草鞋脚,”<sup>31</sup> and threw out one new theory after another to exclude others and consolidate their status in the literary arena. The second day witnessed continuation of the “third type person” and “feet in leather shoes” vs. “feet in grass shoes” debates in newspapers. Except for some intentionally derogative articles such as the one by Gu Ping 孤萍 published in the supplement *Pearl* 明珠 of the *Great Evening News* (*Da wan bao* 大晚报) with groundless critique,<sup>32</sup> Liang Shiqiu’s essay raised the eyebrows of many. Liang picked on the newspaper reports that mentioned particularly Lu Xun’s shoes on the day of the talk. Along his gibe of the straw sandals and leather shoes, these reports focused on the sneakers he wore with canvas and rubber bottom. A couple months after the talk, Liang satirized that Lu Xun himself as the “third type of person,” wearing neither “leather shoes” nor was bare footed. Lu Xun soon caught up Liang Shiqiu’s simplistic “either-or” logic in recycling his own terms, and published an essay in *Free Talk* on 25 June, 1933 to fire back. He wrote: “Professor Liang Shih-chiu, who thinks galoshes are a cross between straw sandals and leather shoes, has a similar mental level. Had he lived in ancient Greece, he might have been second only to Aesop; but today, unfortunately, he is

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<sup>31</sup>Lu Xun used the term to refer to proletarian writers, who neither had Western PhDs nor from or represented upper class.

<sup>32</sup>*The Great Evening News* was taken over in early 1932 by Kong Xiangxi, and hence became blatant propagandistic vehicle for the Nationalist Party. It was famous for blackening left-wing writers, for which became the frequent target of attack of Lu Xun.

born too late.”<sup>33</sup> Lu Xun repeated the use of “university professor” to recapture his critique that Liang Shiqiu, who proposed literature should rise above politics/social combat through his leisurely essays (who represented the refined Beijing School 京派 with cultural tastes along with Zhou Zuoren) was a writer “above” the masses and would not know the practical knowledge of distinguishing between leather and rubber shoes. He further gibed at Liang’s uncreative recycling of Lu Xun’s terms, which could be compared to the millennia-old simple Aesop’s fables. (Aesop used the bat to jeer at double-dealing with its uncategorizable nature--birds do not include it because it has four feet; neither do land animals because it has wings.) We hence trace an interconnected space of the public speech and newspaper writing where similar rhetoric and topics freely float. The example also shows that audience who attended the public speech were likely to be those who read newspapers; even though one does not show up in person in the public site, urban newspapers constructed for the readers the site of the speech, filtering out and highlighting the common themes and terms that cultivated an unobstructed urban communication and debates. Just as Lu Xun’s comment that was recorded in the supplement of *World Daily* after the talk, “I cannot give more talks here and need to return [to Shanghai]. Your generosity is indeed moving 可感的很, and I will work hard to write [newspaper] articles for you. Since ... reading articles will save you from the pushing of crowds.”<sup>34</sup>

Another example follows Lu Xun’s terms “*bangxian* 帮闲 (leisure companion)” and “*bangmang* 帮忙 (helping the business).” On November 22 1932, Lu Xun gave the first use of the two terms in his speech at the Chinese Department of Beijing University. The title

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<sup>33</sup>Lu Xun, “*Tan Bianfu* 谈蝙蝠 (On Bats).” *Free Talk*, June 25, 1933. *Selected Works? Or Silent China?* Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Vol. 3

<sup>34</sup>Gu Ping 孤萍, “Watching Lu Xun’s Speech.看鲁迅讲演记” *World Daily*, December 1 & 2, 1932. Quoted from Ma Tiji.

“*bangmang* literature and *bangxian* literature” denotes another set of characterizations of literature to be satirized by Lu Xun. The target was identified clearly in the talk as the School of *Modern Review* 现代评论派, which was named after the journal *Modern Review* with representatives of Hu Shi, Chen Yuan 陈源 and Xu Zhimo 徐志摩, all of whom were returned students from Europe or America. While most returned students did begin careers in officialdom by entering Jiang Jieshi’s cabinet, Lu Xun, now as a long time independent writer for newspapers and journals, particularly accused them as making compromise to the ruling class discourse. “The most crafty literature today is the so-called school of art for art’s sake. In the May Fourth era, it was indeed revolutionary as it waged a challenge against the old belief of ‘Literature should teach proper moral standards 文以载道.’ Yet it does not even possess any rebelliousness now. Not only is it without rebelliousness, it also suppresses the rise of new literature. It dares not critique society, nor rebel, since it would harm literature if it does. So it now becomes *bangmang* plus *bangxian*.”<sup>35</sup> Lu Xun had grown increasingly left-leaning since the late 1920s. His main literary principle, under significant Soviet influence from his reading and translations, is one that aims to engage the masses to change the political and social situation. In 1927 he gave talks that clearly conveyed this message even through the titles – “Read Fewer Chinese Books and Be a Meddlesome Person 少读中国书，做好事之徒。” In the talk about the relationship between literature and revolution delivered at the Whampoa Academy, Lu Xun claimed that there should be de facto no literature during the revolution but only action. Literature, as also summarized above, was reserved to agitate/mobilize the masses to prepare for revolution or to eulogize and depict the social reconstruction after the success of the revolution.

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<sup>35</sup>Lu Xun, *Remaining Essays of Collection Outside Collections* 集外集拾遗.

Such radical claims from the leader of left-wing writers was not groundless— China in the early 1930s was caught between the social upheaval of civil war and Japanese aggression, and muddled with corruption from within and foreign intrigue. The Nationalist government took over a significant number of newspapers and magazines to promote anti-Communist discourse and its pacifying foreign policy – Lu Xun considered the liberal intellectuals who joined the government as part of this huge public discourse making.

Another reason for the development of such discourse in public speaking was the increasingly severe censorship of left-wing sentiments after the April 12 Incident in 1927. Lu Xun’s active involvement in writing *zawen* for *Shenbao Free Talk* was to be better judged against this light, where both he and Mao Dun saw the left-wings’ contribution as an important success in taking over a small corner of commercial newspapers under the high-pressured censorship. The seemingly “vicious personal attacks” of Lu Xun’s *zawen* harked back to his idea for the talks, where writing was expected to stimulate, to provoke and to agitate. The metaphor of dagger and javelin was taken literally to pierce through the government-produced discourse aiming to pacify and numb the masses towards foreign invasion and direct attention into the anti-Communist discourse. Hence, *bangxian* and *bangmang* were to refer to literature that helps to produce a pacifying discourse and a self-deceiving fight against the imaginary enemy.

Lu Xun’s terms *bangmang* and *bangxian* were soon disseminated in the discussions in *Free Talk*. In his essay on 5 September 1933, following the debate on the meaning of humor in the previous month in *Free Talk*,<sup>36</sup> Lu Xun extended the critique on “*bangxian* literature” to

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<sup>36</sup>The debate was about whether light humor is necessary and meaningful. Lin Yutang published in *Free Talk* in August a series of essays defending for the leisurely essay “*xiaopin wen* 小品文” featuring light humor. Zhang Kebiao and Xu Maoyong, the hard core left-wingers, defended the opposite – satire, pointing out the humor for the sake of fun only is not only meaningless but harmful. Lu Xun was generally in line with the latter, except was able to craft the point better.

being harmful to society. He picked on Lin Yutang's writings on light humor, and pointed out that it was a covert way of *bangxian*. Like buffoonery, light humor of the Lin Yutang type essay was a form of distraction--directing its audience's attention away from the flesh and blood anger over events through numbing and meaningless laughter. *Bangxian* literature also meant the tabloid reports that, e.g., instead of focusing on the cause of a woman's death in the news, dived into the factual and invented gossip around the dead woman. Such boring and pale laughter induced from *bangxian* literature was to contrast sharply with Lu Xun's insistence on direct, precise and powerful satire that stabbed into the heart of the social problem. In his famous essay that marked the climax of the huge debate on *Free Talk* about the Beijing School 京派 and the Shanghai School 海派,<sup>37</sup> Lu Xun famously stated " 'The Beijing School' was the leisure companion of the government; 'the Shanghai School' is helping with the business of commerce '京派'是官的帮闲, '海派'则是商的帮忙. "The satire was conveyed through a similar logic on two levels: while the government was distracting public attention away from its pacifying foreign policy, cultural businesses were focused on calculating figures in their accounts; and while the Beijing School, with a distinct taste for cultural refinement and leisure, cultivated withdrawn pacified sentiments among the public that helped the government's foreign policy, the Shanghai School, with instantly changing literary fashion, actively helped to shape and boost urban literary fashion that dazzled the eyes of millions of Shanghai book buyers.

Lu Xun's term "*bangxian*" was further developed to refer to a general nationalistic character by other *Free Talk* contributors, such as Da Wu 达伍, who fought against such characters among his fellow countrymen with Lu Xun. Along with the verb '推 push' that Lu

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<sup>37</sup>Lu Xun, "*Jingpai yu Haipai* 京派与海派 ('Beijing School' and 'Shanghai School')." *Free Talk*, 3 February 1934.

Xun imbued with metaphorical weight of Shanghai urbanites' snobbish dislike for their social inferiors, *bangxian* added another layer of satire for their fawning on the upper class. The author attributed the verb "push" to another Lu Xun term, "the third type of person," in characterizing how they shoved the poor away on busses, ship decks or in the streets. What he named as the "third type person" in his essay was a third category of characters besides what Lu Xun grouped as "foreign VIPs" 洋大人 and "High Quality Chinese" 上等华人: "such types of person can neither be categorized into the upper class, nor conveniently into the lower. Yet he lived on helping [*bangxian*] the leisurely upper class to 'push' the lower class."<sup>38</sup> Both terms hence travelled from their origin in the public speeches to heated threads of debates in the newspapers.

Lu Xun's *zawen* writing, published mainly in newspapers, took up the last decade of his career and was an extension of his public speaking: First, it was exactly in the rhetoric of his public speaking – a plain daily language, with vivid imagery and satire, saturated with personal emotions and feelings- that Lu Xun wrote his *zawen*, and he did so with the intention of challenging the language of "intellectual sophistry." Second, Lu Xun's speeches were reported and published in various newspapers as a powerful, critical and agitating force that played the lead in public discourse. This is a co-production with both Lu Xun's own incisive personality, biting language and the urban media's favor for intellectual radicalism. Third, with the escalating liquidation of the left-wing's voice after 1927, public gatherings had become impossible. The site of the agitation and social sarcasm naturally shifted to its twin brother in the urban public sphere - the newspapers.

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<sup>38</sup>Wu Da, "Remaining talk of 'push' 推'的余谈" *Free Talk*. 27 July 1933.

### Chapter 3 A Militant Genre for the Masses

#### - *Zawen* Co-shaped by Social and Intellectual Forces.

That *zawen* continues the rhetoric and language style of public speeches is not to be simply explained away as a mechanism of urban media, which produced a public space extending from public activities like speeches to printed media. *Zawen*'s use of speech style - including visualized images, plain oral language, emotion-charged expression - were embedded in the series of literary debates on the relation between literature and revolution/politics. There were many fronts Lu Xun simultaneously fought on: in the late 1920s, he had to defend himself from almost all newly founded literary societies that followed the rising fashion of radical politics; in the 1930s, as the nominal leader of the League of Left-Wing Writers, he had to put aside the internal differences within the League and fight against new enemies of the right-wing - professors, writers of "pure literature." Since the mid 1920s, there had been so many events, theories, individuals and literary groups that Lu Xun was discontented with that his *zawen* had become the form to respond to this social and intellectual environment around him- in Lu Xun's unique way of fighting within the left-wing camp. *Zawen*'s use of plain language, in line with the "mass language" the CPC cultural leader Qu Qiubai proposed since the early 1930s, and its negating anti-discourse foregrounded a defiant gesture against intellectual cowardice and compromise and the high-pitched "revolutionary literature" that served more commercial interests than revolution.

The years following the founding of the CCP, Party leaders like Yun Daiying 恽代英 (1895-1931) and Deng Zhongxia 邓中夏 (1894-1933), Marxist participants of the New Culture movements, had started to promote a new culture for cultivating the proletarian consciousness. Established writers like Lu Xun and Mao Dun had started to turn to the Marxist theories and the

promotion of proletarian culture. Despite his ambivalent attitudes towards the New Youth cohort, Lu Xun had parted with the clique around Hu Shi, who went on to become liberal scholars and reformist political advocates, as Lu Xun's non-Euro-American education background would make him an unfit to the group anyway.

As Lu Xun was lamenting on being a solitary warrior in the post May Fourth literary arena, Mao Dun dwelt on the repeated theme of disillusionment in his writing. The three stories “*Huanmie* 幻灭 (Disillusionment),” “*Dongyao* 动摇 (Vacillation)” and “*Zhuiqiu* 追求 (Pursuit),” published later as a trilogy under the title *Shi* 蚀 (Eclipse), cast negative light on bourgeois intellectuals who were lost in spiritual goal in an age of rising revolutionary violence. Such hesitation between the present and the romantic past (of May Fourth) was soon to be swiped out by the return of the group of young radicals associated with the Creation Society from Japan. Between late 1927 and early 1928, these writers who used to dwell on writings of Bourgeois decadent individuals made a sharp turn to the left with radical embrace of “Marxist literature” and were determined to make a complete break with everyone who was associated with the May Fourth past. The break started with Li Chuli 李初梨's theoretical treatise “*Zenyang de jianshe geming wenxue* 怎样地建设革命文学 (How to establish a revolutionary literature),” which intentionally set up “revolutionary literature” against the May Fourth literature. He associated the task of May Fourth new culture with the “Bourgeoisie's” cultural attack against “feudalism,” and their proletarian literature with that of the emerging new historical subject. This was soon followed by Cheng Fangwu's famous essay “*Cong wexue geming dao geming wenxue* 从文学革命到革命文学 (From Literary Revolution to Revolutionary Literature),” using the Marxist logic in criticizing the May Fourth new culture as “limited to a superficial enlightenment” that failed

to take social conditions into account. He used the Hegelian concept of *Aufheben* (a term with contradictory meanings of “to lift up” “to sublate” and “to suspend” “to cancel”) to refer to the process of “double negation” the May Fourth intellectuals should undergo to realize the change from “literary revolution” to “revolutionary literature.” The oppositional tone setting up proletarian literature as the newest trend of history and May Fourth new culture as fading naïve enlightenment continued to become the major view into the 1930s after the founding of the League of Left-Wing Writers. At the time of 1927/1928 after the profound change in the revolutionary landscape following Jiang’s putsch, these fresh Japanese returnees took with them the most vanguard and fashionable Marxist terms from Japan to the “alphasia of Chinese intellectual arena,” anxious to explain the “metamorphosing, mysterious, and monstrous” reality in China.<sup>1</sup> The most prominent characteristic of the proletarian literature movement in 1928 was its determination to quickly dominate the cultural arena with discourse of proletarian literature. Radical judgmental adjectives like “following the steps of history”, “ideologically correct” and “outdated,” “feudalist” etc. were used to self-package these young Marxist Japanese returnees as leaders of the intellectual frontier through round after round of theoretical debates on the nature and how-tos of revolutionary literature: intellectuals would either follow up with the newest trend of history by adopting the news terms or they became outdated and should be abandoned by history. *Wenhua pipan* 文化批判 (Cultural Critique) was launched on 15 January 1928 devoted specifically to theoretical debates as a way to foster revolutionary literature. An announcement in the first volume eighth issue of *Chuangzao yuekan* 创造月刊 (Creation Monthly), core organ of the Creation Society, predicted that *Cultural Critique* would “open a new age in China’s intellectual realm.” In the initial editorial, Cheng Fangwu declared that the

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<sup>1</sup> Kuang xinnian 卅新年. 1928, *Revolutionary Literature* 1928 革命文学.p60

magazine was to “shoulder the task of history...to engage in reasonable critique of the Bourgeois society...”<sup>2</sup> The divisive and confrontational theoretical debates included in the magazine underlined its take on launching a new Marxist movement in China, starting with the total denial of the May Fourth new literature. Ye Shengtao, Yu Dafu, Zhang Ziping and, especially, Lu Xun, became the representatives of the May Fourth age that were vehemently criticized.

Since the mid 1920s when ideas for a proletarian literature became common, Lu Xun had picked left-wing terms like progressive youth and those who had fallen behind history. In the talks and writings analyzed above, evolutionist view had made an impact on his thought when he gave suggestions for the Chinese youth with a belief that they were the hope for the nation. He had explained in his talks how he became disappointed in seeing how youths turned out to murder other revolutionaries; what he witnessed in Guangzhou, the revolutionary Mecca in China, and the 1927 liquidation of Communists all added to his doubts for revolution. The young Creationists quickly waged war against the old cultural authority, who at least did not express as much passion for their up-to-date banner of revolutionary literature.

The polemics started with a satirical caricaturing of Lu Xun by Feng Naichao, a young student who joined the Creation Society in late 1927 as a Marxist theorist. In his essay “Art and Social Life 艺术和社会生活” published in the initial issue of *Culture Critique*, he named Lu Xun as “petit-Bourgeois” and who had “fallen behind the times” living a life of “looking out the dark tavern window with drunken eyes.”<sup>3</sup> Other than seemingly highly personal assault on Lu Xun, the essay remained to be a manifesto against the May Fourth culture without providing

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<sup>2</sup> “*Chuangzao yuekan de zimei zazhi Wenhua pipan de chuban yugao* 《创造月刊》的姊妹杂志《文化批判》出版预告(Advanced Notice on the Publication of the Sister-magazine of *Creation Monthly – Cultural Critique*)” *Creation Monthly*, Vol.1 issue 8. Jan. 1928.

<sup>3</sup> Chen Fangwu. “Zhuci 祝词(Congratulatory Essay).”Initial issue of *Cultural Critique*. Jan. 1928.

detailed description of the alternative. Lu Xun's reply a month later did not reverse the attack back on Feng Naichao, whom he might have thought was too young to be worth the effort. He made use of Feng's term "haze from drunken eyes" to indict the cultural scene in 1928: the heightened censorship resulted in the softened critique on the GMD with hazy substitutes in attacking the "bureaucrats and warlords;" the attacks, such as that on him, were more of a result of going after fame and profit than powerful social incision as a result of the publishers' taste for radical politics.<sup>4</sup> He accused those from the Creation Society as fake revolutionaries, who followed suit in calling Tolstoy an 'abject preacher,' who dared not stand up for real defiance at the time when all aspects of the society "were dominated by cloudy dark forces."<sup>5</sup> The critique harked back to Lu Xun's 1927 talks calling youths to action instead of writing when he first became highly radicalized after witnessing the liquidation of Communists in April.

The more specific literary critique on Lu Xun came from Qian Xingcun 钱杏邨, chief theorist of the Sun Society. The Sun Society had been at war with the Creation Society, whom they had mocked for turning left from bourgeois individualists to Marxists overnight and for dwelling on the theoretical struggles only without being able to produce real literary works. The two societies came to be united on their shared attack on Lu Xun. Qian believed that the peasants in their present revolutionary age had participated in political struggles organized and with clear purpose and were no longer naïve, blind, ignorant, weak and unenlightened like Ah Q. Qian wrote: "the brave peasants have provided us with valuable, wholesome, and glorious creative materials. We no longer need the age of Ah Q!"<sup>6</sup> In denouncing "The True Story of Ah Q" as

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<sup>4</sup> "'Zuiyan' zhong de menglong '醉眼'中的朦胧 (Haze from the 'Drunken Eye')." First published in *Threads of Talk*, Vol.4 issue 11. 12 March, 1928 *LXQJ*, vol. 4

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Qian Xingcun "Siqu le de a Q shidai 死去了的阿 Q 时代 (Ah Q's Age is Dead)" *Taiyang yuekan* 太阳月刊 (Sun Monthly). 1 March 1928.

loosing historical significance, Qian announced the end of the age of enlightenment new culture. The subsequent pen fight between the Threads of Talk school and the Creation and Sun societies evolved around whether the Ah Q age was dead.<sup>7</sup> The leading writer of *Threads*, Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun's younger brother who constituted the other polemic of Lu Xun as an erudite peaceful writer, denounced the promoters of revolutionary literature as over-idealizing terms like masses and gibed that "China has two classes in life and only one class in thought."<sup>8</sup>

In the first half of 1928, Lu Xun had published a series of essays on *Threads of Talk* in denouncing "revolutionary literature" and his detractors from the two literary societies. In his reply to a reader's letter, which detailed the concerns of a literary youth about China's lack of a specific agenda in cultivating a politically powerful revolutionary literature, Lu Xun wrote: "revolutionary literature has now hung out their banner, but only in order to brag about essays from their fellows while they remain unable to look straight into the present violence and darkness."<sup>9</sup> Two years later in 1931, in his talk of overview of Shanghai's contemporary literary arena, he strengthened his critique of the cowardice of Shanghai writers: "...what is regrettable is that the present writers, even the revolutionary writer and critics, are unable to or dare not look straight into our current society."<sup>10</sup> The "timid revolutionary writers and critics" were his detractors from the two literary societies. And Lu Xun's critique was not ungrounded.

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<sup>7</sup> Essays were scattered in the many issues of *Threads of Talk* from June to August 1928. Typical examples include: Qingjian 青见, "Age of Ah Q is not dead 阿 Q 时代没有死," in Vol.4, issue 24; Changpai 昌派, "Written for the dead Ah Q 写给死了的阿 Q." vol.4, issue 34.

<sup>8</sup> Qiming 岂明. "Firecrackers" *Threads of Talk*. Vol.4. issue 9.

<sup>9</sup> "Art and Revolution 'Letter from Bing Dongfen' 文艺与革命 <并冬芬来信>" *Threads of Talk*, Vol.4 issue 16. 1928 16 April. *LXQJ*, vol. 4

<sup>10</sup> The talk was originally published in the magazine *Wenyi xinwen* 文艺新闻 (Literary News) in two instalments on 27 October and 3 August in 1931 in issues 20 and 21. It was later included in *Er xin ji* 二心集 (Essay Collection of Two Hearts). *LXQJ*, vol.4

The Creation Society, originally composed of May Fourth radical intellectuals who upheld the call for individual liberation, had now turned into radical revolutionary critics equipped with the most vanguard Marxist theories from Japan, made a convincing case for market success. Its leading figure Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) had certainly familiarized himself with the market tricks to sell his manuscript for a good price.<sup>11</sup> The Society's alliance and the later break with Taidong Book Company to establish their own publishing department by issuing stocks to the public indicate the Society's skills in managing the Society's publication like a commercial organization by packaging themselves as the pioneer in vanguard politics.<sup>12</sup> The Creation Society's publications enjoyed such a popular market success that their call for a total break with the May Fourth and radically raising their banner of revolutionary literature was as much a smart sales pitch to fit the sensationalism in Shanghai cultural industry as it was a political proposition. It was precisely this political radicalism for the sake of profits that angered Lu Xun and prompted him to make an immediate accusation of such a dangerous conflation: "This is as much of a fraud as claiming that you can hoist yourself off this earth by pulling on your ear. If society remains static, literature cannot fly ahead on its own. If it flourishes in such a static society, this means it is tolerated by that society and has distanced itself from revolution,

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<sup>11</sup> In the early 1930s, in his letters to Ye Lingfeng, then the editor at Xiandai Book Company, all Guo Moruo talked about was the selling of his works: "I have in hand a full length novel Comrades' Love (tongzhi ai 同志爱) ... I can sell it to you if you agree to offer 1500 yuan"; "Post editing of Ten Years of the Creation Society (*Chuangzao shinian* 创造十年) depends on your purchasing power. If you pay up the entire 1500 yuan, 500 each month, I promise to turn in the draft in November."; "Guanghua has mailed in a thousand yuan to reserve *At Wuchang City* (Wuchang cheng xia 武昌城下) and I have written some one hundred pages...If Xiandai 现代 wants [to publish], [you] can reserve the contract."; "I have now translated *Research on Yan Melodies in Sui and Tang* (Sui Tang yanyue diao yanjiu 隋唐燕乐调研究) with about eighty thousand words. Because this is academic stuff, I am willing to sell with lower remuneration." These are scattered in Guo's letters to Ye Lingfeng between 1932-1935 from *Collection of Guo Moruo's Lost Articles 1906-1949* 郭沫若佚文集 (1906-1949) . Vol.1. Edited by Wang Jinhou 王锦厚, Wu Jialun 伍加伦, Xiao Binru 肖斌如. Sichuan University Press, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> Shen Songquan. "Manager of Taidong Book Store Zhao Nangong 泰东图书局经理赵南公." *Historical Materials of Publishing in China* 中国出版史料. Edited by Song Yuanfang. Shangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001. Vol.1,

the only result being a slightly larger magazine circulation or the chance for publication in the journals put out by big commercial firms.”<sup>13</sup>

In the meantime, their commercial competitor, the Sun Society, had pushed forward with their signature fictional formula: “revolutionary plus love”. These romances characterize the conflation of personal enlightenment with revolution in the whole-colored narrative template of a youth (usually male) who was enlightened to transcend personal love and devote himself to the higher call of revolution. The genre’s spokesperson was Jiang Guangci 蒋光慈, founder of the Sun Society, who reached the height of fame in 1928 and 1929. The genre’s combination of personal sexual love with that of the nation and the passion for a higher course of mankind had become the bible for millions of urban youths who were said to take the path of revolution under inspiration from his novels.<sup>14</sup> Jiang Guangci’s name had become such a magic term that between 1928 and 1930, millions of pirated copies were made and sold, and even Mao Dun’s novels were sold under the authorship of Jiang Guangci.<sup>15</sup> Kuang Xinnian 旷新年 noted that the genre had become so popular that it remained to be the only narrative template for novels into the 1930s.<sup>16</sup>

Lu Xun’s critique of the two societies changed from complaint in the 1928 to vehement attack in the early 1930s. In 1931, he not only critiqued their intellectual cowardice, but called them “*liumang* 流氓 (scoundrels).” In 1928, he caricatured the opportunist quick switching banner of those at the Creation Society: “now that they spoke as critics, they picked up at random whatever discourse is available to attack something contrary to it. They resort to the theory of competition when fighting against ‘mutual support’; they use ‘mutual support’ theory when

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<sup>13</sup> Lu Xun. “Literature and Revolution 文学与革命.” *LXQJ*, vol.4, p83. Quoted after Glorias Davies. P148

<sup>14</sup> Kuang Xinnian. *1928, Revolutionary Literature 1928 革命文学*. P90

<sup>15</sup> T. A. Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968, 63

<sup>16</sup> Kuang. P95

attacking competition; they use class struggle to attack peace theory, and use the view of human love against peace theory and propose human love when they oppose struggle. He takes the stance of a materialist when the enemy is idealist, while turning into an idealist when arguing with a materialist.”<sup>17</sup> While it is clear that Lu Xun was making fun of his Marxist detractors for being opportunists lacking definite theoretical conviction as a response to their ungrounded attack on Lu Xun for self promotion, he soon realized that such an act was not simply resulting in mere commercialization of literature, but was actually harmful for the society as it would weaken the real revolutionary forces and divert public attention from real social contingency. In 1931, he clearly named such intellectuals from the two societies as “scoundrels:” “no matter in ancient or present times, those without a certain theory, or whose propositional change defies traceable track, could all be called scoundrels.”<sup>18</sup> The infamy of “scoundrel” soon travelled out of its original narrow denotation of Lu Xun’s detractors into the larger context of commercialized revolutionary discourse in general. In the *zawen* essay “*Liumang de bianqian* 流氓的变迁 (The transformation of scoundrels)” written in 1930, “scoundrel” had become a metaphor for both the rascals who attached themselves to authorities to bully the weak and to “political scoundrels” who similarly aligned with the powerful to persecute the real revolutionaries who were still at infantile stage. The “Transformation of the scoundrel,” as the title suggests, caricatures the false heroes as *xia* 侠 (knights), who raised the banner of revolt but in fact robbed the weak common people instead of the powerful for their own profits. At the end of the essay Lu Xun named the writer Zhang Ziping 张资平 (1893-1959), one of the most

<sup>17</sup> “Art and Revolution ‘Letter from Bing Dongfen’文艺与革命<并冬芬来信>” *Threads of Talk*, Vol.4 issue 16. 1928 16 April. *LXQJ*, vol. 4

<sup>18</sup> “A brief glance at Shanghai literary scene.”

popular novelists famous for writing the kitschy modern version of scholar and beauty romance, as no different from a timid *qiangdao* 强盗 (bandit) in the way he both undertook a radical gesture while cowardly wreak defiance against the weak and not the powerful. Compared to other essays Lu Xun published at the same period, the critique was certainly not of Zhang Ziping alone. It was part of an enlarged critique on revolutionary critics and writers from the two literary societies whom Lu Xun had believed to be betraying the revolution by distracting the public away from the dark and bloody political present and into the castrated literary fashion that recycled empty revolutionary slogans and terms. Lu Xun called this type of people *bangmang zhe* 帮忙者 (helpers [with political power]), a trope upon the play of language that provoked an enlarged discourse later in *Free Talk*, as has been discussed above.

In a similar manner, the term scoundrel has also been abstracted into an archetype for the commercial-oriented Shanghai intellectuals – who constituted another important opponent of hypocrisy that Lu Xun’s *zawen* aimed to expose and de-mask along with false consciousness in political discourse. Lu Xun likened the Shanghai cultural industry to “*liumang wenhua* 流氓文化 (rascal culture)”: no matter whether righteous or evil, revolutionary or anti-revolutionary, others’ pain and one’s own complacency, everything could be used for commercial opportunity and for profit. He went on to criticize Shanghai intellectuals as a collective: “I know many Chinese intellectuals who gloss themselves with academic thought and ideas yet care only for their own convenience and comfort. Whatever he met [in Shanghai] was turned into materials of life and they eat and swallow along the way like termites. What they left is a long line of dung that was drained 一路吃过去，像白蚁一样，而遗留下来的，却只是一条排泄的粪。”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Lu Xun, “On Xiao Jung, Xiao Hong.致萧军，萧红。” 04.23.1935. *LXQJ*, vol.13, p116

The critic of Shanghai intellectuals as a collective was carried on by Shen Congwen. In his essay “*Wenxue zhe de taidu* 文学者的态度 (On attitudes towards creative writing),” published on 18 October 1933 in the literary column of *Dagongbao* 大公报, which he served as the chief editor, Shen set the *Haipai* 海派 (Shanghai school) against the *Jingpai* 京派 (Beijing school), attaching the dismissive term as “scoundrel + talent” 流氓+才子 to the former. As a writer usually associated with the Beijing school for lyrical depiction of China’s west hinterland away from immediate social resonance, a clear contrast to the militant image of Lu Xun in the 1930s, Shen’s critique of Shanghai writers in general was in line with Lu Xun: they are opportunists with no theoretical beliefs and were after the changing fashion in Shanghai’s cultural industry.

In the same debate about Shanghai cultural production, Lu Xun echoed Shen Congwen by ploughing into the different categories: those who bragged about “writing prefaces for their own work under the name of others” and praised shamelessly themselves as indifferent to fame; “‘contracted’ literary giant ‘商定’文豪”<sup>20</sup> those who contracted with publishers to co-designing their novels for a better market success; and “literary beggars 文乞” who earned money by producing large quantity of works; “literary officials 文官” (who wrote to earn a career in officialdom) and “literary rascal 文氓”<sup>21</sup>, who wrote to condemn others and elevate themselves. These types of intellectuals were further caricatured in a series of seven essays under the title “Scholars scorn each other 文人相轻” between April and September in 1935, in order to alarm

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<sup>20</sup>Lu Xun, “‘negotiating’ literary giant ‘商定’文豪”*Free Talk*, 11 November, 1933.

<sup>21</sup>Lu Xun, “Autumn dream on the bed of literature 文床秋梦,”*Free Talk*, 11 September, 1933.

young intellectuals to constantly reflect themselves and maintain a critical mind and social consciences.

In the early 1930s, after having lived through the purge of Communists in 1927, experienced the continuing heightened censorship, and been dragged into some nasty personal assaults from the young radical intellectuals, Lu Xun's *zawen* had become a self-conscious means for "defense and offense" as a reaction to external oppression picked up by the "sensitive nerves." The false consciousness of political hypocrisy and the profit-driven revolutionary debates in the cultural arena were what constituted the "dark present" that Lu Xun felt obliged to help the public navigate through before any constructive theory could be effective in the 1930s. As so, *zawen*, especially when it took on the platform of mass media instead of narrowly circulated literary magazines, was simultaneously fighting on three fronts for negation: against commercialism, against intellectual sophistication, and against distractive entertainment.

a. Against commercialism

Lu Xun's distaste for the abuse of terms and authors' names were evident. In a 1929 essay he satirized how the tabloids indulged themselves in "revolutionary literature" while "most of the advertisements are for restaurants or cures for venereal disease." "People running these papers are of the same ilk as those who used to specialize in talking about prostitutes and actors, except that they've now replaced the entertainers with authors, male and female, whom they praise or abuse so as to flaunt their own literary prowess."<sup>22</sup>

He had remained resistant to the publishing industry's model in driving the public discourse to intellectual and theoretical radicalism and sloganeering revolutionary literary fashion. In several of the public speeches mentioned above, half jokingly he expressed the fear

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<sup>22</sup>Lu Xun, "*Wo he Yusi de shizhong* 我和语丝的始终 Full Account on *Threads of Talk* and me." Collected works of Lu Xun, vol.4, p171. Quoted after Gloriad Davids. P102

that his talks were to be solidified into didactic principles and that he would be turned into another cultural star just like the revolutionary critics and writers he abhorred. Along the same line, in 1926 Lu Xun wrote that he shuttered at the thought that his writings might be turned into “a kind of respectable monument.” He was similarly quoted by many that he wished his *zawen* to “quickly decay 速朽,” meaning that he hoped his *zawen* to be quickly read and abandoned.

Instead of having the words commercialized into lasting principles and guidelines, he wished for them to be quickly transformed into action for a change. The reprocessing of daily news as well as the attacks into some archetypal critique on immediate present provided an alternative left-wing voice that is uniquely Lu Xunesque to break the overwhelming encirclement of commercially packaged vanguard politics and revolutionary romances. Paradoxically, Lu Xun both relied on the commercial newspapers that flourished upon brawling discourses in strengthening a voice of his own, and remained critical of and vigilant to commercial deflation of intellectual ideas.

In his 1927 speech, Lu Xun particularly raised the warning that intellectuals were inclined to be over-adulated and to forget who they were. In his half-jokingly illustration, he cautioned himself and his audience that “your applause will elevate my status and make me forget what I mean to say.”<sup>23</sup> He pointed his finger at self-indulgence in revolutionary fever, pointing out the inclination that the a writer, when he was endorsed by the rich industry, was prone to fan the flame as an ardent sloganeering mass speaker who grew to detach from the masses and betray his original thoughts. He spoke of both the way he talked in public speaking and writing *zawen* - a form which, despite being generally laughed at by writers and scholars as

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<sup>23</sup>Ma Tiji, p254-259

rudimentary both in thought and skill, was Lu Xun's honest adherence to his own opinion and to stay uncontaminated by ideologies.

b. Opposition to intellectual sophistry

On 6 and 7 March 1922, *Shenbao* supplement serialized Lu Xun's essay "Mission of the Intelligentsia 知识阶级的使命." The essay, which is called *zagan* at the time, was edited into Lu Xun's public speech given at Shanghai Labor University on 25 October 1927. The essay especially mentioned that writing *zagan* 杂感 essays was a defiant gesture to the cowardice of the intellectual.

"As for myself, there was long ago people telling me not to write [social] commentary, not to write *zagan*. You had better create 创作! Because your name could stay in world history if you do creative writing, but not with writing *zagan*. The fact is, even if I do not write *zagan*, my name would not be in world history either. I should make things clear: among those who persuaded me into doing creative writing and not *zawen* writing, several were denounced by me and hence did it with purpose in telling me not to write *zagan*. But I did not listen, and hence could not stand firm in Beijing and ended up having to hide in the library in Xiamen. ... As for that group of self-made 'intellectuals' who returned from abroad with the belief that China would perish without them, I did not include them in the discussion. For intellectuals like these, I do not know what the heck they are?!像这样的知识阶级，我还不知道是些什么东西?!"

The denigration of the self-declared intellectuals (Chen Yuan was his target of attack at this period) echoes Lu Xun's self-abasement at the beginning of the speech:

I do not have much knowledge or ideas to contribute to you. But Mr. Yi had asked me to speak a few words this time ... I had to come. I cannot make public speeches, and cannot

think of anything to talk about. Making public speech is like writing an eight-legged essay, it is extremely hard. It requires genius of making public speeches, and I cannot do it. ... I want to say a few words of personal opinion about the intellectual, only that I am not in the position of a guide, making all of you believe in my words. I myself am not clear about that; how am I to guide you?<sup>24</sup>

Such intentional self-abasement was often found in Lu Xun's speeches and *zawen*. The way he made use of the assault on him to make a fight back was a two-step process: first the sophisticated language with fancy terms was de-padded in Lu Xun's own reading to be exposed as false in logic, null in meaning, and as donning an intellectual shell; second, he further exaggerated the fault and caricatured it in his use to throw back at his detractors. The above-mentioned "haze from the drunken eyes" was a good example: the word haze was first used by Li Chuli to ridicule Lu Xun as a drunken Shaoxing clerk who could no longer see the political situation clearly. The word was soon picked up by Lu Xun and transplanted into a different context to satirize the political confusion where the self-proclaimed radical revolutionary critics and writers just like Li Chuli diverted the focus from "social darkness" to the fashion of political vanguardism. Like his outspoken speech, Lu Xun continuously declared *zawen* as an equal and smooth communication of his "personal opinion" and true feelings instead of dictating to readers on the basis of his intellectual learning.

No other times than the early 1930s, when the ever heightened censorship and growing distractive false consciousness through discursive manufacturing were added on top of the continuously commercialized publishing industry, did *zawen* shoulder the urgent task of exposing the padded discourse that skillfully hid away social contingency.

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<sup>24</sup>Lu Xun. "Mission of the Intelligentsia." Included in *Works outside the Collections* 集外集拾遗. LXQJ, vol.7.

Another highly notable characteristic of Lu Xun's speeches was the use of simple daily language to not be steeped in academic terms. Lu Xun believed such was the language the common people would speak - with no adornment of literary description or theoretical concepts. The early 1930s was the high time of the "mass language movement," under the guidance of the CPC's Central Cultural Committee and with the actual leadership of Communist cultural leader Qu Qiubai. Although Lu Xun had not met Qu until 1932, when Qu and his wife took refuge in Lu Xun's Shanghai residence, Lu Xun was very likely to have heard about the movement from the other two communists - Rou Shi and Feng Xuefeng – who were in close contact with him by the 1930s. In Xu Guangping's recollection, Lu Xun had developed instant friendship with Qu.<sup>25</sup> His fondness of Qu was evident in the emotional couplet he wrote for Qu: "To find a single soul mate in one's lifetime is enough; he will dwell in the heart for as long as one lives." 人生得一知己足矣，斯世以同怀视之<sup>26</sup> The two friends were said to become so intimate to each other that they would sacrifice the nap time during the day to talk about literature. A total of twelve *zawen* essays published in *Free Talk* were planned together by both, written by Qu Qiubai and published under Lu Xun's penname to avoid exposure of Qu's identity.<sup>27</sup> As with such a connection, Lu Xun must have been familiar with the "mass language movement 大众语运动," which his life-time friend Qu Qiubai had proposed since the late 1920s. As the central part of the movement, Qu actively incorporated folk culture elements, such as dialects, theatrical repertoire and indigenous idioms into literary creation. New forms of performances with folk elements were experimented to create effective propaganda. In an extended effort to get rid of all

<sup>25</sup> Tang Tao 唐弢, *Lu Xun lunji* 鲁迅论集(Essays on Lu Xun). Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1991, 46–47

<sup>26</sup> "Guoke 过客," *LXQJ* vol.2, p194.

<sup>27</sup> Tang Tao 唐弢, *Lu Xun lunji* 鲁迅论集(Essays on Lu Xun). Beijing: Wenhua yishu chubanshe, 1991

intellectual erudition, Qu even proposed complete abandoning of Chinese characters and substituting them with Roman letters. The aim was to allow even the illiterate access to reading.

Even as one of the leaders in the *Baihua* movement 白话文运动, Lu Xun was very hesitant, to say the least, to use the Europeanized *baihua* of the May Fourth period. In the 1930s he repeatedly stressed that *baihua* should be kept plain and colloquial to allow it developed into a true language of the people by referring to terms used in the mass language movement like *putong* 普通 (common) and *dazhong* 大众 (the masses) to underlie the smooth communication nature of *baihua*. In 1934, his personal intimacy with Feng Naichao 冯乃超 (leading theorist of the Creation society) and Qu Qiubai delighted him to be used as a valuable source in initiating in *Free Talk* a debate over mass language – a debate which many remember as proposed by the Party’s Cultural Committee for the League of Left-Wing Writers, as a way to promote the cultural movement in urban settings. In the essays Lu Xun wrote during the debate, he frequently admonished his peer leftists not to abandon the masses by indulging in fancy theoretical terms. For instance, he reiterated his 1928 criticisms of his Marxist detractors in an essay in 1934 for *Free Talk*: “Intellectuals often despise others, thinking that they can understand new and difficult terms whereas the masses cannot, and therefore, for the sake of the masses, we must get rid of those new and difficult terms: the simpler our speech and writing, the better. If they carry this further, they will unconsciously become the new classicists.”<sup>28</sup> Lu Xun was obviously successful with this purposeful attempt in not only attracting and engaging a large audience, but also in ridiculing his intellectual rivals for employing a language that was beyond the general public.

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<sup>28</sup>Lu Xun, A Layman’s Remarks on Writing 门外文谈. *Shenbao*, *Free Talk*, 1934. Translation taken from Glorias Davies. P250

Lu Xun once used the word “snow” to explain what he meant by a mass vernacular language: It should not be an invented language heavily imbued with intellectual neatness (referring to the May Fourth *baihua*), but “could take elements from classical Chinese, *baihua*, and even foreign languages 大众语文可以采用文言，白话，甚至于外国话。”<sup>29</sup> For example, when describing the scenario “大雪一片一片纷纷的下着 (great snow falling in flakes one after another),” May Fourth intellectuals Zhang Shizhao 章士钊, Li Yansheng 李焰生 and others proposed the use of idiom “daxue fenfei 大雪纷飞 (snowing in large flakes) ,” upon which Lu Xun simply contrasted with the vivid vernacular folk expression with adverbs like “fiercely” 凶, “vigorously” 猛, and “severely” 厉害. He took sentences from old vernacular novels such as *Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传 (*Water Margin*): “the sentence ‘那雪正下得紧 (the snow was just then falling vigorously)’ is a saying closer to modern mass language. It counts two characters more than ‘daxue fenfei 大雪纷飞,’ but with far better ‘atmosphere/spirit’ 神韵.”<sup>30</sup> Lu Xun’s proposed flexible use of language accentuated the communal properties that the masses could better relate to. The proposal was made as a stark contrast to the May Fourth *Baihua* which was famously developed according to a predesigned radical anti-tradition and cultural Westernization agenda. Elements could be taken from classical Chinese, even foreign languages, as long as the language lively, vividly and precisely communicates. If an intellectual makes some “hideous faults 丑恶” to prove the incapability of the mass – such as the intellectual sophistry including that of Hu Shi and the “art for art’s sake” writers whom Lu Xun was consistently critical of – “would not shame the masses and would only make them laugh.”

<sup>29</sup>Lu Xun, “Daxue fenfei 大雪纷飞(Snow in Big Flakes)” *Huabian wenxue* 花边文学(Fringed Literature). 1934.LXQJ.vol.5.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid

“Though the masses do not have high intelligence like the intellectuals, they have a name for the latter: embroidered pillow 绣花枕头. This could only be understood by the peasants 乡下人, since what was stuffed in the pillow of the poor is not goose down, but straw.”<sup>31</sup>

Such gibes are in accord with Lu Xun’s continuous critique of the returned intellectuals with foreign degrees like Liang Shiqiu and Hu Shi, whom Lu Xun deemed as unqualified to give positive suggestions in constructing the literary arena with their naïve transplantation of Western terms and ideas.

c. Opposition to powerless words

In the final essay of the series “Scholars scorn scholars,” Lu Xun endowed the central task to intellectuals of “fighting the ‘preachers of death.’” The metaphorical function of fighting against death was in line with the metaphor of the sharp blades of daggers or javelins with which Lu Xun frequently symbolized the act of criticism throughout the 1920s. The essay concludes with the telling statement that has been quoted frequently ever since: “Only those able to hate are able to love, and only those able to give life and love can write.”<sup>32</sup> The statement could be both taken as a self-defense and manifesto to the genre – against the rising accusation of his *zawen* as revengeful release of personal resentment, Lu Xun endowed the writing with personal emotions of love and hate as way to oppose the peaceful minded belles-lettres at such a perilous historical juncture; he used a militant gesture to identify it as the sole art form of confronting bravely the “encroaching darkness” by stabbing it in its heart. Again, he was defining *zawen* against the two existing literary genres that were believed to distract from political contingency of the present - *xiaopinwen* 小品文 (short personal essays) and essays that indulge in light humor.

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid

<sup>32</sup> *Second Collection of Qiejie Studio* 且介亭杂文二集. LXQJ, Vol.6. quoted after Davies, p170

In 1933 he announced that his favorite mode of composition, *xiaopinwen*, was in crisis, specifically emphasizing the crisis as similar to a person's life in danger between death and life. He resorted to medical terms like amnesic anesthesia to criticize and warn the current *xiaopinwen* writers of the danger that softened words might reduce intellectual discourse into a hypnosis. It is highly likely that Lu Xun wrote the essay in response to his younger brother Zhou Zuoren's (who came to represent the erudite Chinese belles-lettres who was famous for his beautifully worded prose) earlier attack on Lu Xun's "struggles and combat." Since the brothers' sundered relation in 1924,<sup>33</sup> Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren had become the two poles in the literary arena in the 1930s – one being the peaceful minded prose with natural flow in language and aesthetic adornments, the other being the combative *zawen*.

In an essay "In Praise of Anesthesia 麻醉礼赞" written in November 1929, a time when Lu Xun's combative *zawen* had emerged truly mature from the pen wars he had with the two major literary societies in 1928, Zhou Zuoren wrote that "ordinary people like us" should be satisfied by "living in intoxication and dying while dreaming." He then added the twist: "the sad truth is I don't have the stomach for heavy drinking and don't know how to numb myself. So I see and hear everything clearly but lack the energy to cry out loud. I guess I'll just have to put up with this sorry plight of being plain ordinary."<sup>34</sup> The phrase of "lacking the energy to cry out loud" and insistence on being "plain ordinary" was highly likely to be at the expense of Lu Xun, who had established himself as a firm warrior with loud outcry against social ills through *zawen*.

As a response, Lu Xun called for "essays that assure we are alive," Lu Xun wrote that there were "necessary daggers and javelins." He continued: "They must engage the reader in the

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<sup>33</sup> Scholars have provided various interpretations for the reasons, one of them being Zhou's prodigal Japanese wife, who spent the household's expenses for her own enjoyment of luxurious life.

<sup>34</sup> Zhou Zuoren, "In Praise of Anesthesia," in Zhou Zuoren: Selected Essays, trans. David Pollard. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2006. P254. Translation after Glorias Davies, p246

struggle to clear a path vital to our survival. Naturally, they can also bring happiness and respite. They are no mere ‘knickknacks’; still less do they bring comfort or induce numbness. Rather, the happiness and respite they offer is a form of convalescence: a stage of preparation between toil and combat.”<sup>35</sup> He pointed an accusing finger against the purposeful convalescence by pointing out incisively that at a time “when a sandstorm’s in our eyes and wolf packs and tigers are on the prowl,” what people needed were “daggers and javelins, sharp of blade and highly practical. Elegance is of no use whatsoever.” Accordingly, he accused those who indulged in self-complacency and promoted to the new comers in the literary arena a kind of prose that “turn what is rough and ready 粗糙 into something sophisticated and elegant 风雅.”<sup>36</sup> Through his public speeches and his *zawen* writing, he defended the opposite: turning the sophisticated and refined into something ready and combative.

Lu Xun’s early depiction of the belles-lettres was enlarged in the years to come in a series of satires on contemporary intellectuals published in *Free Talk*. The newly appointed editor Li Liewen pointed out the “way of life 处世之道” for contemporary Chinese intellectuals using irony:

“now all different heresies and ‘isms’ co-exist. Prudent men should choose the safest to read and avoid big mistakes. Otherwise, devoting oneself to reading sutras is also a good choice. Though such classics might not save the nation, they could be promoted by the ruler. As for those who shut the door and live in seclusion to reflect on themselves, the best choice is to follow the strict order of reading [instead of reflecting].”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Lu Xun “The Crisis of the Essay 小品文的危机.” Collected Works of Lu Xun, Vol.4, pp. 576-577. Davies, p236

<sup>36</sup>“Xiaopinwende weiji 小品文的危机” (The Personal Essay in Crisis), *LXQJ* vol. 4, pp576–577. Davies, p237

<sup>37</sup>Li Liewen, “Safe Rules to Read and Write 读书作文安全法.” *Free Talk*, 5 August, 1933.

Zhang Kebiao's 章克标 (1900-2007) essays “*Ge yu song* 歌与颂 (Song and Praise)” and “*Xiugai yu zhizao* 修改与制造 (Amend and Produce)” went step further in calling those who chose a safe way of writing as “penned up intellectuals 圈养知识分子,” intimating that they were government ideologues. By being provided with “... sufficient clothing and food” and instructed to “make some praiseworthy jobs for them to work on,” “they would not have time to rebel now that they are busy singing praise. This is also a good way to keep the nation safe.”<sup>38</sup>

Besides the anti-sentimental rough style, another characteristic Lu Xun associated with a truly powerful essay is the use of satire, which he painstakingly distinguished from humor. The latter had come to be represented by Lin Yutang 林语堂 (1895-1976). Despite of being a peer contributor to *Free Talk*, he had become a target of attack by Lu Xun and his proteges in *Free Talk* for the weightless humorous essays he proposed. In the essay “*Fangjinqi yanjiu-er* 方巾气研究二 (Research on Xiucai's Cap -Two),” published in *Free Talk*, Lin criticized those who kept dwelling on the heavy topics of saving the nation and scorned them as mentally poisoned by the rigid morality of traditional literati and lacking a spontaneous sense of humor. Lin particularly linked this sense of humor to a better construction of the national character. He wrote: “If I could reduce a little pedantry 方巾气 in the nation, and encourage the Chinese people to take a natural and lively view of life, I would consider myself having fulfilled my duty.”<sup>39</sup>

The first counter-fight essay “Funny and Ironic” (*Huaji yu lengchao* 滑稽与冷嘲) made an interesting distinction between the two styles. Lin Yutang claimed that “the latter is

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<sup>38</sup>Zhang Kebiao, “Sing and Praise.”*Free Talk*, 14 June 1933.

<sup>39</sup>Lin Yutang. “Research on Pedantry 2 方巾气研究(二).”*Free talk*, 29 April, 1934.

meaningful and the former is meaningless. The latter is associated with the protagonist while the former with the clown. Both involve labor, in needing to make people laugh through weird faces, and are the product of painstaking efforts. However, those being ruled make irony and rulers make fun.”<sup>40</sup> Irony was understood as a conscious tool with positive value with its negating power. In another essay, the author Jiang Jiping 江寄萍 gave equal value to “heated abuse” and “cold irony.” The most important thing is the object chosen to be abused or satirized.<sup>41</sup>

Lu Xun’s *zawen* is acknowledged by many the apogee of satire in *Free Talk*, which uses all means to reveal the “dark sides” of politics, society and the Chinese people. David Pollard has given a thorough and comprehensive analysis of Lu Xun’s *zawen* rhetoric, naming a list of techniques from repetition of catch phrases, juxtaposition of words with opposite meanings to creating new terms etc.<sup>42</sup> Lu Xun himself also wrote an essay to defend satire. He claimed that the reason why satire exists is because the society that is satirized has not had fundamental change. When the people that were satirized remained the same, then satire would remain valuable. He specifically pointed out how dangerous it was to be a satirist in 1930s China. The danger not only comes from political coercion, but an object that was satirized – the intellectual society, i.e., the gentlemen and elites that Lu Xun deemed as helping with ideology-production. As they could not stand the satire about them, they accused the satirists of “cynicism. Then by degrees they rose in united accusation, calling him a slander, a mischief-maker, vicious, vile, an academic bandit, a Shaoxing pettifogger 绍兴师爷, and so on and so forth.”<sup>43</sup> This was a list of

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<sup>40</sup>Hui 慧: “Funny and Ironic.”*Free Talk*, 13 August, 1934.

<sup>41</sup>Jiang Jiping. “Cold Irony and Heated Abuse 冷嘲与热骂”*Free Talk*, 5 October, 1933.

<sup>42</sup>David Pollard. “Lu Xun’s *zawen*”*Lu Xun and His Legacy*, edited by Leo Ou-Fan Lee, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

<sup>43</sup>Lu Xun, “From Satire to Humor 从讽刺到幽默” *Free Talk*, 7 March 1933. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang

derogative names that writers used to attack Lu Xun in their essays. Lu Xun compared these so-called independent intellectuals to the “king’s lackeys 王之爪牙,” and described the situation for satirists as desperate, suffering attacks from both front and back. Because of that, some satirists started to switch from cynical satire to self-mocking humor, with less incision. Yet he added his doubts as to how large a space for “humor” was there in such a grim situation.

In another essay, Lu Xun made a clear connection between laughter with political diversion at a time “when the enemy is at the gate and they have no arms to resist him, they will at least rage inwardly. Thus they have to find some substitute for the enemy. ‘A wise man keeps out of trouble’, as our ancient sages taught.”<sup>44</sup>

Along a similar line, Yu Dafu criticized those who made “metaphysical talk 玄谈” to avoid confrontation in politics. “To flick dust<sup>45</sup> and talk about metaphysics could both avoid disaster and earn a name. How can those educated not take the fashion to harvest fame and benefits?”<sup>46</sup> This is sarcasm on intellectuals who quickly made a turn to non-relevant talks under heightened censorship.

In a defiant gesture against the aesthetically adorned prose of *xiaopinwen* and the lightly humorous essays, Lu Xun’s *zawen* had set up itself as a powerful genre charged with personal emotions with the use of its signature weapon: heated abuse or cold irony. The emotional stance it took affirmed the genre’s intention to agitate the readers to a similar love and hate instead of inducing a “soporific state” of complacent enjoyment of the prosaic aesthetics and leisure.

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<sup>44</sup> Lu Xun. “From Humor to Gravity 从幽默到正经” *Free Talk*, 8 March 1933. Trans. by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang Chen Shubao was the last Emperor of Chen Dynasty (553-604), an irresponsible emperor who indulged a voluptuous life. He did not even care about his kingdom as it was lost to the Emperor of Sui. “Chen Shubao had no heart 陈叔宝全无心肝” had become a proverb to refer to irresponsible person who only cares about fun.

<sup>45</sup> To flick dust might refer to hold conservative attitudes, specifically referring to the NeoDaoists of the Liuchao period with their Xuanxue metaphysical conversations.

<sup>46</sup> Yu Dafu. “*Qingtan de youlai* 清谈的由来 (Origin of Pure Deliberation)” *Free Talk*, 28 June, 1933

## Conclusion

The multiple layers of Lu Xun's posthumous interpretation finally nailed him down in mainland Chinese history as the brave warrior who fought against dark forces under the rule of the GMD, and against "a feudalistic past." Gloria Davies directs our attention to one of the early anthologists Li Helin 李贺林, a Beijing-based communist who first compiled the discursive fights 论争 in 1928 between Lu Xun and the two major literary society of the time –the Creation Society and the Sun Society. In a third edition of the collection published in 1938, two years after Lu Xun's death, Li portrayed "twentieth-century Chinese literary thought as the story of the proletariat's progressive awakening to their 'historical mission as the leaders and the mainstay of the national movement for revolution'." The historical survey was clearly under the influence of Marxist thought. In particular, he presented Lu Xun as the "intellectual leader and the guiding intelligence of China's proletarian literature and accorded special importance to Qu Qiubai as a theoretical pioneer."<sup>47</sup> The depiction was much to Mao's delight as the subsequent Maoist appraisal of Lu Xun as "leading the national cultural movement of China" was based upon such reception.

Ding Ling, the most prominent bourgeois-new-woman-turned-left-wing-writer in modern Chinese literary history, appreciated a different characteristic of Lu Xun's *zawen*, namely, the courageous dissident voice against the powerful. In 1941, barely one year before Mao's "Yan'an Talks," after which she only barely missed arrest or execution in the Rectification Movement for the critical essays she wrote, she published the essay "Women xuyao zawen 我们需要杂文 (We need *zawen*)," singing high praise of Lu Xun's incisive criticism in what she considered as a similarly dark age just like that in which Lu Xun lived: with "bribery, corruption, darkness,

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<sup>47</sup> Davies, p244

oppression and murdering of progressive people...” which was in critical need of “establishing a more solid unification in criticism.”<sup>48</sup> What Ding Ling embraced as the essence of Lu Xun’s *zawen* had become the reason for her near imprisonment in 1942, which she merely escaped but not her peer Wang Shiwei.

The various interpretations of Lu Xun and his *zawen* have certainly testified to the nature of *zawen* as miscellaneous. Throughout the last decade of his life which he devoted largely to *zawen* writing, Lu Xun did not provide any clear definition to the genre – the blurred distinction with other similar terms like *zagan* (scattered thoughts), treatise or even the general term essay suggests it is not a clearly-defined nominal term. The closest “definition” we get from Lu Xun are the several metaphors he associated with it: daggers and javelins, [the product of] sensitive nerves, and tools for defense and offense, and the emotion-charged words that can affirm our survival. The paradoxical image of both offensive weapon and defensive nerves suggests only that it is a genre for attacking the things Lu Xun abhorred most – suppression and bloodshed of revolutionary youth, distractive political discourse and hypocrisy and cowardice of intellectuals. It is true that Lu Xun’s *zawen* was selective in exposing the violence of the GMD while remaining silent on the CCP’s stress on the necessity of military violence in class struggle. However, that Lu Xun was not writing for the sake of Party’s propaganda was clear: terms like proletarian literature, and even the highly class connoted term “mass” rarely appeared in his writing; he was not a Communist Party member throughout his life and was not familiar with the Party central’s political policies. All of Lu Xun’s knowledge about the Party came from Communists with whom he had close ties: Rou Shi, Feng Xuefeng and Qu Qiubai. It was from the latter two he got to know about the Party and likely about Mao Zedong - but it was this

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<sup>48</sup> Ding Ling, *Jiefang ribao* 解放日报 (Liberation Daily), 23 October, 1941. Retrieved online at: <https://www.marxists.org/chinese/reference-books/yanan1942/2-01.htm>

limited knowledge and his personal experience with the white terror in Shanghai under GMD rule that he was determined to lean towards the CCP and agreed to carry out the its cultural policies as the leader of the League of Left-Wing Writers. The CCP was certainly eager to have such a cultural figure on board. Lu Xun creative ability and writing skills, which were culminated in the latter phase *zawen*, especially his ability to conquer the important page in the most widely circulated newspaper in Shanghai, have proved to bring a heavy blow to the already jeopardized GMD rule in the 1930s, and to put the CCP en route to wider and more vigorous propaganda.

## Conclusions

In the previous pages, I have elaborated, through the study of *Shenbao Free Talk*, an urban underground left-wing propaganda that flowed between literature and journalism and between intellectual literary debates and writing experimentation on mass media. This study purposefully challenges the view of a static top-down propaganda mechanism that attached full agency to the CCP. In the 1930s Shanghai, it was first of all the witty metropolitan satires with renewed literary forms tinted with Western vanguardism, instead of political messages, that sailed into the hearts of the urban readers.

In analyzing how the low-key left-wing propaganda had channeled through urban mass media much to the favor of the CCP, the dissertation examines three key elements of the process: *Shenbao Free Talk*, Chinese and international left-wing community, and the new rhetorical of the left-wing propaganda – *zawen*. Part I of the dissertation traces the institutional history of *Free Talk* – instead of seeing the newspaper as developing a Habermasian public sphere or cultivating the collective imagination of national modernity, as demonstrated in many secondary studies of early modern newspapers, I see *Shenbao*'s role as deepening the public involvement in political and social affairs through analysis of the paper's editorial development. Part II studies the important bond of mass media and the CCP, a.k.a., the left-wing writers. By tracing literary theories/debates on the relation between journalism and literature and between politics and writing that travelled from Europe via Japan to China, I depict a cultural movement that aims to bridge Communist political act and literature featuring full involvement of the entire

international left-wing community at the same period – from mid 1920s to the 1930s. Part III examines *zawen*, the Chinese mass media counterpart of the international literary reportage and the signature *Shenbao Free Talk* rhetoric. I follow the seminal line of Lu Xun – the initiator of the genre – to demonstrate left-wing intellectuals’ creative efforts in packaging the political discourse to not only avoid censorship but also appeal to the urban public into political participation.

This repressed and half hidden left-wing energy fully bloomed into an intense resistance propaganda of high morale when China’s two major political parties united (at least nominally) to resist Japanese aggression in 1937. Developing along with the resistance propaganda were not only patriotic sentiments agitation but also a more manipulated Party propaganda. The All-China Resistance Association of Writers and Artists 中华全国文艺界抗敌协会 was formed under the CCP’s guidance in 1938 in Wuhan with the claimed task of “uniting the dispersive forces, using our pens in the similar way the frontline soldiers use their guns, to mobilize the masses, defend our motherland, smash the enemies and win the victory.”<sup>1</sup> The association appointed the nonpartisan writer Lao She 老舍 (1899-1966) as leader and aligned a diverse list of writers from left-wing to right-wing camp (such as Chen Xiyong 陈西滢) and from politically-detached (Lao She, Zhu Ziqing 朱自清) to the Party’s cultural leaders like Hu Feng and Xia Yan. In his study of the association’s organization, Charles Laughlin reveals an “underlying history” from the late 1930s to the 1940s. Laughlin links the attempt of aligning writers across the political and literary spectrum in the common effort for resistance propaganda to the dismantling of an “independent literary field” and further to the literary/artistic politics of Mao since the early 1940s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Laughlin, Charles. “The All-China Resistance Association of Writers and Artists.” In *Literary Societies of Republican China*. Edited by Kirk A. Denton and Michel Hockx. Lexington Books, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Such hidden historical development is resonated by Chang-tai Hung as he investigates the resistance discourse and isolates the voices of different artistic and political forces.<sup>3</sup> Lao She for instance, arguably the most talented writer of modern China, famous for his “farical representation” of the “violent and outrageous reality”<sup>4</sup> and the vivid depiction of Beijing, resorted to a language highly charged with patriotic emotion in his active performance of the leading role of the association. Most prominent was the slogan he frequently used, “*kang dao di* 抗到底 (Resist to the end),” which Hung explains as “to signal a kind of Sisyphean determination to defend the nation at whatever cost.”<sup>5</sup> The Communists, as Hung argues, instilled into the resistance discourse the message of class struggle for their part. Terms like “*fanshen* 翻身 (to turn over, to liberate oneself)” and “*jiefang* 解放 (to liberate)” were frequently used with the connotation of uniting the socially oppressed in overthrowing the existing social order and creating a new one – hence an attack on the GMD.<sup>6</sup> The Party propaganda travelled along with the flamboyant resistance arts from its urban origin to the countryside as writers and artists ardently embraced the association’s slogan “Literature must go to the countryside! Literature must join the army!”<sup>7</sup>

The picture of subverting literature to a high-pitched political campaign towards the peasants is sketched by Hung, and can serve as proof for Laughlin’s developmental line from war-time propaganda to Maoist literary politics. Popular urban cultural forms such as spoken drama and cartoons<sup>8</sup> that had proven effective in agitating patriotic anti-Japanese sentiments in

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<sup>3</sup> *War and Popular Culture. Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945.* University of California Press. 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Wang, David Der-Wei. *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen.* Columbia University Press. 1992. P18

<sup>5</sup> Hung, p11

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p250-253

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p7

<sup>8</sup> The two are the central cultural forms analyzed by Hung along with newspaper reports of a sloganeering type.

rural China were soon picked out as *the* forms for an “appropriate” revolutionary culture. Finally, the Yan’an forum made its official definition of “good” and only arts as those that lauded peasants as the revolutionary main force and that served the purpose of politics – i.e., explicit Party ideology. Such guidelines marked a new age of making the literary realm totally subservient to politics, which lasted at least till the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The left-wing literary experimentation to capture the urban masses, the intellectual debates on literature and its potential for intervention in reality that extended the Chinese debates to those of the international left-wing society in the party politics era had come to an end. The war certainly gave rise to the CCP’s conscious choice of the self-asserted strident literature and art as the mainstream propaganda form. So when Ding Ling 丁玲<sup>9</sup> wrote the short essay “*Women xuyao zawen* 我们需要杂文 (We need *zawen*)” in October 1941, she was perhaps not simply advising writers to speak truth or to critique the existing system in Yan’an (as stated in the essay), but also expressing her nostalgia for a past when invigorating left-wing literature took the lead in political change. She wrote the *zawen* essay “*San ba jie you gan* 三八节有感 (Thoughts on March 8 [International Women’s Day])” in 1942, in the way she believed to have inherited the spirit of her mentor Lu Xun. The satire on her contemporary situation of women in Yan’an almost got Ding Ling jailed for crossing the line of the then-official revolutionary literature. The vigorous left-wing literary politics in the 1930s that flourished even under heightened censorship was substituted with the relatively non-verbal artistic means (cartoons, drama, dance) of strident party propaganda in 1942.

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the most schizophrenic female writer in modern China – she was in the 1920s widely known to the urban readers with in-depth and frank psychological depiction of modern women and their desires, but made a complete and sudden turn in 1927 to become a left-wing writer focusing on the socially marginalized and the peasants. She remained a staunch Marxist to the end of her life.

The fate of left-wing literary politics of the 1930s in many ways resembles the fate of left-wing cinema, which flourished at roughly the same time. Shared similarities include the convergence of commercialism and foreign artistic influence as origin, urban masses as the main audience, subjection to heightened censorship and a CCP re-make into a propaganda means as the Party realized cinema's potential of mass mobilization. In the 1920s, films rapidly gained popularity in Shanghai primarily because of the medium's ability to gain quick financial profits - great amount of investment in film stock, advanced equipment, theaters and large number of personnel were attracted so that the industry's popularity was sustained.<sup>10</sup> Homemade left-wing films were shown together with big hits from Hollywood and learned from the latter's narrative language and sentimental style to compete for urban audiences. The film-going audience was "urban, upscale and attracted by the cosmopolitan, modern and western connotations of the medium."<sup>11</sup> Pang Laikwan's study of the Chinese left-wing cinema movement even brings to the attention of the movie theaters' air conditioning as one important condition for cinema's popularity. As a conclusion, Pang's study of audience reception through memoirs, news reports along with textual analysis of left-wing films like *Zimei hua* 姊妹花 (twin sisters, 1933), *Dushi fengguang* 都市风光 (City Scenes, 1935) and *Malu tianshi* 马路天使 (Street angel, 1937) showed that it was probably the left-wing films' ability to "evoke and manipulate" the audience's sentiments rather than their political message that made them popular.<sup>12</sup> That was why these left-wing films were allowed to be shown on big screens despite the GMD film censorship

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<sup>10</sup> Pang, Laikwan. *Building a New China in Cinema. The Chinese Left-Wing Cinema Movement, 1932-1937*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Ltd. 2002. P22.

<sup>11</sup> Berry, Chris. "Chinese Left-Wing Cinema in the 1930s." in *Jump Cut*, no. 34, March, 1989, pp. 87-94. p89-90

<sup>12</sup> Pang, p152-153

enforcement in 1930, which stipulated that films should promote Chinese dignity and virtue and that banned the violation of the “Three Principles of the People.”<sup>13</sup>

The commercialist feature of the left-wing cinema ensured its similar development of left-wing literary politics in the 1930s – both started as artistic movements and were taken over by the CCP later only to be transformed into outright Party propaganda that aborted the movements’ initial artistic vigor. For cinema, the movement emerged out of the sister branch of the League of Left-Wing Writers – League of Left-Wing Chinese Dramatists 中国左翼戏剧家联盟, established in 1931 to promote, along with spoken drama and theater, revolutionary cinema among the urban workers.<sup>14</sup> An all dramatist and intellectuals Film Critics Group was established soon afterwards in 1932 to not only facilitate discussions about film aesthetics and its social role, but also introduce foreign film theories into the production of Chinese films. The leader of the film league Xia Yan, the active left-wing writer who introduced Kisch and reportage discussions to China via Japanese, translated with his peer dramatist and film director Zheng Boqi 郑伯奇 Pudovkin’s *Film Techniques and Film Acting* in 1932<sup>15</sup> – the same time he translated Kawaguchi Hiroshi’s essay on literary reportage.

These efforts from early left-wing film makers and critics ensured the development of a film movement in the realm of left-wing aesthetics before the CCP established its Film Group in March 1933. Xia Yan was appointed leader of the group as probably the only capable left-wing talent in film making and critic at the time. He continued the endeavor in charting the new territories for left-wing cinema and its possible intervention in politics and the society until the power of cinema had become clear enough for the CCP to order the conforming of all artistic

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<sup>13</sup> Pang, p29

<sup>14</sup> Pang, P39-44

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

variants to a sole official version. Chris Berry's dilemma of whether to see the Chinese left-wing cinema of the 1930s as "poisonous weeds"<sup>16</sup> or "national treasure" for the subsequent Chinese cinema points precisely to the perplexity of the Party's arbitrary dictate on the art of film-making. Berry locates the development of Party-directed art to start as early as in Mao's 1937 essay "*Shijian lun* 实践论 (On Practice)" that called for a "guerilla cinema that can act as a cultural vanguard," which was epitomized and became consolidated in the 1942 Yan'an Forum talk.<sup>17</sup>

The same question can be asked about left-wing literature of the 1930s: was the anti-GMD discourse of *Free Talk* a valuable heritage for the Party's later propaganda literature or a dissident voice that was dangerous to the main ideology of Mao? The Yan'an forum and the subsequent Rectification Movement<sup>18</sup> were sufficient to prove that Mao had resolutely defined it as the latter: the cosmopolitan wit fused with Western avant-gardism in the anti-GMD literary experimentation mingled with "national unification" sentiments should be ruthlessly banned in preference for the emergence of a robust Party-directed mainstream ideology. In the realm of cinema, the Yan'an forum talk made a purist standardization of films as a medium to function only as "direct and intolerable attacks on the system."<sup>19</sup> The leftist films of the thirties pursuing a "national unity" policy under censorship was "seen by the cultural revolutionaries as a compromise and a sell out."<sup>20</sup> What became in the following decades in Chinese cinema from 1940s to the 1970s was probably familiar to all – a cultural vanguardism to flaunt socialist

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<sup>16</sup> The metaphor Mao used in a talk in the 1950s to refer to art works or literature that failed to glorify peasants and workers, or to promote the core socialist ideologies and therefore should be banned.

<sup>17</sup> Berry, p92

<sup>18</sup> political movement from 1942-1944, where educational institutions were established to promote the Maoist thought; writers and artists were required to conform to the official artistic line of ideology making or should be forced to make self-criticisms.

<sup>19</sup> Berry, p92

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

ideologies where the good guys (peasants, soldiers, workers, and the socially oppressed) triumphantly marched over the bad ones (landlords, urban capitalists, and Japanese armies).

As mentioned in the Introduction above, Xi Jinping's recent forum with writers and artists in 2014 manifested the Party's urgency in renewing the propaganda arsenal to "keep up with the times." Although Xi called for invigorating good art that is free from "the stench of money" and should not become "the slave of the market," the talk particularly emphasized the need to popularize art – to use renewed artistic means to propagate "socialist core values."<sup>21</sup> Film is without doubt the ready medium that the CCP had so adeptly utilized for ideological presentation in the past decades.

The forum came in a time of increasing China-Hollywood connection in film making, where China welcomed advanced film-making experiences to make better propaganda films. On the one hand, Hollywood studios have been vying for a spot in the annual quota<sup>22</sup> of 34 foreign films by making script and setting alterations to appeal to the Chinese audiences and state censors; on the other hand, China needs Hollywood blockbusters both to boost the domestic film market and to learn from their film-making experiences to create domestic films that can "keep up with the times." The 2009 film *The Founding of the Republic* 建国大业 very well showcases how the Party actively seeks commercialism and Hollywood style to repackage political messages and make propaganda up-to-date. The film was made by China Film Group

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<sup>21</sup> Xinhua News. Oct. 15, 2014. Retrieved at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/14/c\\_1116825558.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-10/14/c_1116825558.htm).

<sup>22</sup> As of now, only 34 foreign films are allowed to be screened in Chinese cinemas per year, after successful passing of censorship. Due to the limited spots, Hollywood studios actively searched for cooperation with Chinese film enterprises, Shanghai Media Corporation being the most typical Chinese company that cooperates with foreign studios, to be considered as joint productions to avoid the "foreign film" quota. For further regulations on the benchmarks for "co-production" and further statistics on the Chinese film market, see official website of the censor of China SARPPFT (State Administration of Radio, Press, Publication, Film and Television) at: State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT), at: <http://www.sarft.gov.cn/articles/2015/01/05/20150105174531720823.html>. Another source for thought here: Giuseppe Richeri. "Global film market, regional problems" *Global Media and China*. 1-19.

Corporation, a state-supported large film enterprise which, as per its chairperson as well as *Founding*'s director Han Sanping 韩三平, actively "provides timely reports on the Chinese film industry, propaganda policy of the Party and the Government."<sup>23</sup> *Founding* both tones down the propaganda message of CCP's victory over the GMD in the founding of new China, humanizes and romanticizes the CCP political leaders, and portrays Jiang Jieshi as helpless and somewhat pitiful old man who lost the country due to his corrupt political party rather than his own evil doing. By doing so, *Founding* sets a new example for Party propaganda – turning away from old propaganda models that celebrated victory of the Party in making history or representing heroes featured with socialist values that characterized propaganda film and theater since the 1950s. Han Sanping acknowledged that such representation would only arouse ridicule and "the public [artistic] taste has been raised in standard."<sup>24</sup> The propaganda aspect was further neutralized by its casting of almost all of the A-list actors/actresses in China. Besides very good box office, the film reached its desired results in drawing millions of young Chinese to understand the Party's history and generating among them nationalist pride and hence identification with the [current] socialist values.<sup>25</sup> The film can hence be regarded as a typical example as the Party intentionally sought after commercialism and neutralization of overt ideological messages in making propaganda films that "keep up with the times."

Although the feature of avoiding outright propaganda and repacking ideology through popular aesthetic means resembles the propaganda in *Free Talk* in the 1930s, the current propaganda differs from left-wing literary politics of the 1930s in a fundamental way. The 1930s

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<sup>23</sup> Han Sanping's speech on the website of CFGC. Quoted from Shenshen Cai, "An Unconventional Mainstream Film: *The Founding of a Republic*." *Asian Cinema*, Vol 25, No. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Many online reviews from general public suggested an overall enthusiastic appreciation of the film. Further analysis of the audience response came from Shenshen Cai, "An Unconventional Mainstream Film: *The Founding of a Republic*." *Asian Cinema*, Vol 25, No. 2.

featured a group of talented and highly motivated writers devoted to the earnest course of left-wing literary politics, inspired by but independent from direct Party instructions. The current situation under Xi's regime is clearly characterized with the top-down model of propaganda, that, however ardently artists and writers responded to the 2014 forum, is the effort of making mainstream art confined to the domain of political ideology. As to how far the contemporary Party directive on mainstream (propaganda) films<sup>26</sup> can go, only history will tell.

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<sup>26</sup> The term "Chinese mainstream film" was used first to refer to films in the late 1980s to propagate the socialist ideas. *Kiaguo dadian* 开国大典 (The Birth of New China, 1989) was generally regarded as the first of the sort. The term is now widely used in media and scholarly works to refer to films like *The Founding of a Republic*, 2009, *Jiandang weiyue* 建党伟业 (The Founding of a Party, 2011), and the most recent *Jianjun daye* 建军大业 (The Founding of an Army, 2017)

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