

Goldman

Modern Chinese Literature
in the May Fourth Era

Harvard

M. Lee

Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era

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To Jaroslav Průšek,
whose work made this book possible

Preface

"Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era" was a topic in search of a conference. As soon as the Social Science Research Council announced that such a conference was to be held at Endicott House in Dedham, Massachusetts, August 26-30, 1974, there was an enthusiastic response. Many scholars and graduate students had been working in this field in isolation and welcomed an opportunity to share their ideas with others. The chapters in this book are drawn from the conference and from a workshop that preceded it at the Harvard East Asian Research Center.

This book is not an encyclopedic survey of May Fourth literature. Rather, it shows the dynamics of change, discloses new material, and gives new interpretations. Consequently, there is no attempt at complete coverage. Some very important writers such as Guo Moruo, Lao She, and Ba Jin do not have chapters devoted to them, but they have already been subjects of full-length books. Others, such as Shen Congwen and the nonleftist writers associated with the Crescent Moon group, are topics of forthcoming studies. Also absent are several fine fiction writers, dramatists, and poets about whom no books have yet been written. It is hoped that this volume will act as a stimulus for major works across the wide and varied spectrum of May Fourth literature.

Our inquiry is directed backward and forward in time, as well as at May Fourth literature itself. Thus, Part One focuses on some of the forces—foreign as well as traditional—that affected not only the writers but also the whole generation of intellectuals that lived through the May Fourth era. In literary and intellectual history that era spans the period from the fall of the Manchus to the promulgation of Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" in May 1942. "May Fourth literature" refers to the literature written in that period, particularly the 1920s and 1930s. Part Two deals with representative writers and their works produced in the May Fourth atmosphere. Lu Xun is given disproportionate attention because of his preeminent position and influence. Part Three concludes the book

with discussion of countertrends, criticism of May Fourth literature, and a perspective on May Fourth literature in relation to what existed before and what emerged afterward.

The workshop, the conference, and this book have been a group effort. Many people whose writings are not included in this volume have contributed significantly through questions, papers, and criticisms, including: Gary Bjorge, Lloyd Eastman, Lars Ellström, Donald Gibbs, Michael Gotz, Patrick Hanan, Donald Holoch, C. T. Hsia, Joe Huang, Ted Hutters, Jeffrey Kinkley, Julia Lin, Lin Yu-sheng, William Lyell, William MacDonald, David Pollard, Adele Rickett, Robert Ruhlmann, Tao Tao Sanders, Richard Schirach, Benjamin I. Schwartz, Zbigniew Slupski, A. Tagore, Constantine Tung, Ranbir Vohra, Roxane Witke, and Wong Kam-ming.

Special thanks must also be given to Anna Laura Rosow and Elaine Baxter, who handled the workshop and conference arrangements and correspondence; Ellen Widmer, who was the rapporteur and has contributed valuable editorial assistance; Martin Robbins, who edited the papers and provided useful suggestions; Christopher C. Rand and Lucy M. Harris, who typed the manuscript and compiled the transliteration table; and Patrick Maddox, the representative of the Social Science Research Council. Gratitude must also be expressed to Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, Don Rimmington, William MacDonald, and Wayne Schlepp, who helped plan the conference, and especially to Ezra Vogel, whose commitment, enthusiasm, and ideas helped make the workshop and conference the stimulating beginning to this and future works.

With some exceptions, such as place names, the *pinyin* system of transliteration is used. Though in many cases it is as arbitrary as the Wade-Giles system, this system, now prevalent in the People's Republic of China, was used because it is typographically more consistent. Also, it is our hope that this book will lead to an appreciation of May Fourth literature in China as well as outside of China and among general readers as well as scholars of modern China.

Merle Goldman
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Modern Chinese Literature
in the May Fourth Era

Pinyin-Wade-Giles Conversion Table of Selected Names, Places, and Terms

Ba Jin (Pa Chin)
 baihua (pai-hua)
 Beida (Pei-ta)
 Bing Xin (Ping Hsin)
 Cao Yu (Ts'ao Yü)
 Chen Duxiu (Ch'en Tu-hsiu)
 Chuangzao she (Ch'uang-tsao she)
 Ding Ling (Ting Ling)
 Du Fu (Tu Fu)
 Gongchandang (Kung-ch'an tang)
 (Communist party, CCP)
 Guo Moruo (Kuo Mo-jo)
 Guomindang (GMD) (Kuo-min
 tang)
 guwen (ku-wen)
 Hao Ran (Hao Jan)
 He Qifang (Ho Ch'i-fang)
 Hu Shi (Hu Shih)
 Jiang Guangci (Chiang Kuang-tz'u)
 Li Boyuan (Li Po-yüan)
 Li Dazhao (Li Ta-chao)
 Liang Qichao (Liang Ch'i-ch'ao)
 Lu Xun (Lu Hsün)
 Mao Dun (Mao Tun)
 Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung)
 Qu Qiubai (Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai)

Rou Shi (Jou Shih)
 Shen Congwen (Shen Ts'ung-wen)
 Tian Han (T'ien Han)
 Wen Yiduo (Wen I-to)
 Wenxue yanjiu hui (Wen-hsüeh
 yen-chiu hui)
 wenyan (wen-yen)
 Xiao Jun (Hsiao Chün)
 Xiaoshuo yuebao (Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao)
 Xin qingnian (Hsin ch'ing-nien)
 Xu Zhimo (Hsü Chih-mo)
 Ye Shengtao (Yeh Sheng-t'ao) (also
 known as Ye Shaojun [Yeh Shao-
 chün])
 Yu Dafu (Yü Ta-fu)
 Zhang Henshui (Chang Hen-shui)
 Zheng Zhenduo (Cheng Chen-to)
 Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai)
 Zhou Yang (Chou Yang)
 Zhou Zuoren (Chou Tso-jen)
 Zhu Ziqing (Chu Tzu-ch'ing)

Contents

Introduction	1
Part One: Native and Foreign Impact	15
1 The Origins of Modern Chinese Literature Milena Doleželová-Velingerová	17
2 The Impact of Western Literary Trends Bonnie S. McDougall	37
3 The Impact of Japanese Literary Trends on Modern Chinese Writers Ching-mao Cheng	63
✓ 4 Lu Xun: The Impact of Russian Literature Douwe W. Fokkema	89
5 Qu Qiubai and Russian Literature Ellen Widmer	103
6 Images of Oppressed Peoples and Modern Chinese Literature Irene Eber	127
Part Two: The May Fourth Writers	143
7 The Unlikely Heroes: The Social Role of the May Fourth Writers Ezra F. Vogel	145
✓ 8 Genesis of a Writer: Notes on Lu Xun's Educational Experience, 1881-1909 Leo Ou-fan Lee	161
✓ 9 Lu Xun: Literature and Revolution—from Mara to Marx Harriet C. Mills	189
✓ 10 Lu Xun's "Medicine" Milena Doleželová-Velingerová	221
11 The Central Contradiction in Mao Dun's Earliest Fiction John Berninghausen	233

12	Mao Dun and the Use of Political Allegory in Fiction: A Case Study of His "Autumn in Kuling"	261
	Yü-shih Chen	
13	The Changing Relationship between Literature and Life: Aspects of the Writer's Role in Ding Ling	281
	Yi-tsi M. Feuerwerker	
14	Yu Dafu and the Transition to Modern Chinese Literature	309
	Michael Egan	
Part Three: Continuities and Discontinuities		325
15	Traditional-Style Popular Urban Fiction in the Teens and Twenties	327
	Perry Link	
16	Qu Qiubai's Critique of the May Fourth Generation: Early Chinese Marxist Literary Criticism	351
	Paul G. Pickowicz	
17	Change and Continuity in Chinese Fiction	385
	Cyril Birch	
	Contributors	407
	Notes	409
	Index	449

Introduction

The May Fourth Movement began as a demonstration on May 4, 1919, against the Peking government, which had complied with the decision of the Western powers at Versailles to cede the province of Shantung to Japan. This demonstration provoked others, including the May Thirtieth movement of 1925. But the May Fourth movement was more than the opening attack on domestic weakness and foreign imperialism. It stimulated and galvanized an incipient cultural movement, growing since the late nineteenth century, that was directed at throwing off the weight of China's Confucian tradition and absorbing Western culture. This cultural movement culminated in the early decades of the twentieth century in a literary flowering that was one of the most creative and brilliant episodes in modern Chinese history.

With the rejection of tradition and increasing internal chaos, China's intellectuals and youth in different ways sought to assert a new order. Some, like Mao Zedong, Li Dazhao, and Chen Duxiu, responded with political action. Others, like Lu Xun, Mao Dun, and Guo Moruo, responded by creating a new literature that would establish new values and a new consciousness. Their purpose, like that of their political counterparts, was to "save" China and to integrate her into the modern world. In this effort, these writers avidly devoured the literature and thought of the Western world, searching for models for their creative expression. Though Versailles may have shaken their faith in the Western powers, it did not shake their belief that Western culture was relevant to China's needs. In varying degrees, they absorbed all the main trends in Western culture — romanticism, realism, naturalism, and symbolism. In a short period, they fashioned a modern literature.

The formative process was not easy. Though the traditional styles of

literature were consciously discarded, the influence of tradition lay heavily on the May Fourth writers. As Ezra Vogel points out in "The Unlikely Heroes: The Social Role of the May Fourth Writers," these writers were schooled in that tradition. Further, the values and standards of Western literature that Chinese writers aspired to imitate and absorb had been produced by a society and culture totally remote from China. Most difficult for these writers was the fact that they were personally caught up in the political crises of the time. The cooperation between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist party in launching the Northern Expedition in 1926 to unite the country was broken in 1927 by Chiang Kai-shek's bloody coup against the Communist party in Shanghai. The coup not only sent the Communist party underground but split the Guomindang into the left wing in Wuhan and the Chiang Kai-shek wing in Shanghai. These events, plus the Guomindang's weak response to Japanese encroachments in Manchuria in the early 1930s, led the majority of May Fourth writers, under their acknowledged leader Lu Xun, to the Communist party either as members or sympathizers. Though after 1927 many of them became discouraged by the possibility of change, they believed even more intensely that China needed a total revolution to survive.

Their increasing radicalization was intensified by their own personal experiences. Most of them gathered in Shanghai, the mecca of China's young writers in the 1920s and 1930s. They were attracted not only because Lu Xun was there but also because the foreign settlements in Shanghai offered some free movement and some opportunities for opponents of the Guomindang government to publish dissenting views. Harold Isaacs, who lived in the foreign settlements, has described the atmosphere in his introduction to *Straw Sandals*.¹ Alongside a teeming native population lived the usual colonial groups: the privileged caste of foreigners, a wealthy native upper class and large white-collar class living off the foreign enterprises, and rival gangs involved in smuggling, gambling, and prostitution. Moving among these groups were political dissidents – and most of China's writers. Their position was precarious. Not only were they financially insecure but also their increasingly radical and pro-Communist statements exposed them to attack. Guomindang agents, conniving with the foreign authorities, destroyed their publishing houses and bookstores and subjected them to censorship, intimidation, kidnapping, and even murder. Despite such repression, the restraints of total political control and civil war did not entirely silence them. As Isaacs explained, because of the inefficiency "narrow openings remained in

this system through which much did pass."²

As they committed themselves to a leftist position in the late 1920s and 1930s, a number of important writers shifted the focus of their work from their own personal experience and individual vision to more ideological and programmatic themes. Writers like Mao Dun and Ding Ling moved from stories of individuals and individual consciousness to panoramic treatments of class consciousness and great social and economic forces. Portrayals of contradictions within the individual were replaced by portrayals of contradictions within society. This pattern followed a trend apparent in the West, but their shift of focus was more a result of their own experiences in China. Some writers at this time even questioned the value of the Western literature they had adopted so uncritically. Yet here, too, there were "openings." Despite their growing disillusionment, their aesthetic and cultural tastes, as Bonnie McDougall discusses in "The Impact of Western Literary Trends," were still conditioned by Western standards. Furthermore, as the essays on Mao Dun by John Berninghausen and Ding Ling by Yi-tsi Feuerwerker demonstrate, although their work had become highly politicized, these writers still expressed the individuality and creativity that had characterized their work in the mid-1920s.

The explosive events and chaotic environment in which they participated and lived appeared to kindle rather than stifle their creative energies. The May Fourth literary outburst burned for over two decades until it was smothered by the bombing of Shanghai in 1937 and the dispersion of most writers to the hinterlands as they fled the Japanese and the Guomindang. Gradual implementation of Mao's dictum that politics control art presented in his "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art" in 1942 finally extinguished the lingering glow of May Fourth literature.

The "Extrinsic" versus the "Intrinsic" Approach

The contributors to this book — scholars of Chinese literature as well as historians and social scientists, — regard the political, social, economic, moral, and artistic forces of the May Fourth era as inextricably mixed together in the May Fourth literature. Several different approaches are appropriate for analyzing this literature, and the various essays emphasize these differences. Most combine the "extrinsic" and "intrinsic," the historical and literary, approach to May Fourth literature. Some, however, stress that the "extrinsic" approach, which interprets literature in its sociopolitical and biographical con-

text, gives more insight into the literature and the times. Others maintain that because literature is being studied, the "intrinsic" approach, which treats literature in its own terms, is more illuminating.

Those who emphasize the "extrinsic" approach believe that the literary works of the 1920s and 1930s go deeper than any other sources in revealing the conflict between tradition and change in the May Fourth era. These works provide unique insights into the convulsive social and human changes that accompanied the transition from the disintegrating old society to the revolutionary new one. The writers' lives, as well as their work, were microcosms of their civilization in transition. Reared in the Confucian tradition, they became adults in an age of revolution that exposed them to new and foreign ideas. They witnessed civil and foreign wars, were involved in the political conflicts of the times, and suffered personal anguish. Their efforts to understand these events and the tensions between the old and the new are reflected in their works. It could be said that as Trollope and Dickens depicted England's Victorian age and Turgenev and Tolstoy described the nineteenth-century landed Russian elite, the May Fourth writers portrayed the Chinese urban, upper- and middle-class world in transition to a new society.

Some writers, as Yü-shih Chen's essay on Mao Dun points out, allegorically reproduced specific political events in fiction. The Chinese Communist experience in the Nanchang Uprising and the effort to break with the Comintern are symbolically depicted in Mao Dun's story "Gulingzhi qiu" (Autumn in Kuling). But most works deal more generally with the political and social events of a generation in an age of turmoil. Indeed, many works are stories of youth trapped in and rebelling against the traditional society. Some of them may have been autobiographical, but they are also biographies of their generation. Their frustrations and dreams are also the frustrations and dreams of an entire generation's search for meaning and purpose in a China these writers described as prostrate, morally bankrupt, politically disjointed, oppressed by warlords and bureaucrats, and humiliated by foreign powers. Their works express their generation's indignation with what Lu Xun called the "man-eating" traditional society. They are filled with their excitement and enthusiasm for revolution and subsequent disillusionment when it was not realized, their vacillation in time of violent struggle, their desperate pursuit of personal happiness, and their emotional and mental agitation as they broke from Confucian morality. Theirs was a mixed and contradictory picture, but a true picture of their times and of the circles in which they lived.

Ezra Vogel writes that the May Fourth writers were more successful in interpreting their times than in changing them. "They could not solve problems but in their writings they could capture the drama." Yet the essays of Leo Ou-fan Lee and Harriet Mills on Lu Xun and those by Feuerwerker on Ding Ling and Berninghausen on Mao Dun also show that, as the most sensitive and articulate spokesmen, they not only interpreted but also guided their generation. They were rebelling against their Confucian heritage, but they were a part of it because they believed that as literati they had a responsibility to lead. At the same time, their view of themselves was also inspired by the Western image of the writer standing outside of society so that he can criticize and reform it. Also, like their Chinese predecessors, they assumed that society's essence was found in its culture and literature. If the revolution were to succeed, cultural change was even more important than political and economic change. As intellectuals and writers, they regarded themselves — and were regarded by their contemporaries — as the primary molders of society. They used their literary works as weapons to win personal, national, and revolutionary change. Some of them, as Mills points out in her study of Lu Xun, became frustrated by the ineffectiveness of their literary weapons to achieve change and turned from creative work to direct political commentary. Perhaps Lu Xun's subtle ironies could no longer fully express the massive social and political upheaval.

Though their literary weapons may not have achieved the revolution they sought, their efforts helped engender the revolutionary spirit that made possible the end of one civilization and the beginning of a new one. Their highly articulate and emotionally charged perceptions not only reflected reality but because of their power also helped to change that reality. Making their readers conscious of what the readers had not yet perceived led them toward change. The May Fourth writers provided the symbols, images, and models for their generation. True, many of their characters, such as Lu Xun's Ah Q and Yu Dafu's protagonist in "Chenlun" (Sinking), are submissive, passive, and self-deluding. A number of famous works show the society's diseases without prescribing remedies. But revealing the diseases and pains of their society challenged their readers to find cures. Ding Ling's stories of unattached, sexually liberated young women living in the city induced her readers, as Feuerwerker demonstrates, to liberate themselves from the old mores and to realize their own identities.

Because most May Fourth literature is both politically committed in statement and documentary in nature, there is a body of scholarly