

# Chinese Revolution, Lu Xun and Leon Trotsky

A Review of Lu Xun and Trotsky: 'Literature and Revolution' in China

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## Abstract

**Lu Xun was a giant of modern Chinese literature and a fellow-traveller of the Chinese Communists, to whom he saw no alternative at a time of rampant fascism and the threat of war. However, he was also an admirer of Trotsky, although this fact has been expertly hidden from sight for decades by the Chinese state. Nagahori Yūzō tells the story of Lu Xun's thoughts about Trotsky, in a book translated into Chinese and published in Taiwan. This article is a review of Nagahori's book.**



Nagahori Yūzō 西條照太郎, (2011) *Ro Jin to Torotsukī: Chūgoku ni okeru 'Bungaku to kakumei'* 魯迅とトロツキ: 中国における『文学と革命』 [Lu Xun and Trotsky: Literature and Revolution in China], Tokyo: Heibon sha,

Nagahori Yūzō 西條照太郎, (2015) *Lu Xun yu Tuoluociji: 'Wenxue yu geming' zai Zhongguo* 魯迅與托洛茨基:『文學與革命』在中國 [Lu Xun and Trotsky: Literature and Revolution in China], translated by Wang Junwen 王君文, Taipei: Renjian chubanshe.

Lu Xun (1881–1936) was the pen name of Zhou Shuren 周樹人, a giant of early twentieth-century Chinese literature and popular culture, and, in the 1920s and the 1930s, a leader of China's radical intellectuals. [1] He was a novelist, translator, literary critic, essayist, poet, and editor, and in 1930 he became titular head of the League of Left-Wing Writers. Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎, the Japanese Nobel Laureate in literature, called him 'the greatest writer Asia produced in the twentieth century', but his work is barely known outside East Asia.

Lu Xun was a political and intellectual maverick who came to see himself as a fellow-traveller of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), though he had little time for its hacks and dogmatists. Mao Zedong issued him a Party card after his death, supposedly in posthumous recognition of his contribution to the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the radical New Culture Movement of 1915–21. But that he would have accepted it, given the choice, is doubtful.

Nagahori Yūzō, one of many Japanese experts on Lu Xun, but the only one among them to have sympathised with China's defeated Trotskyists, has written an excellent study (now available in Taiwan in Chinese translation) on Lu Xun and Leon Trotsky, looking in particular at the reception in China of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. Japan was, for many years, the main centre outside

China of Lu Xun studies, and the site, in 1937, of the first publication of Lu Xun's collected works in Japanese translation, [2] a year before their first appearance in Chinese (larger editions followed). [3] Lu Xun's popularity in Japan ensured him a large readership in Taiwan and Korea, under Japanese rule until 1945, where his books, read in Japanese or Chinese, spread a spirit of resistance and internationalism.

For decades, many Japanese and other non-Chinese Lu Xun scholars went along with the Chinese view of him, with minimal reservations. In China, he was portrayed as an 'incarnation of history' and a figure 'between Sun Wen [the Republic's founding president Sun Yat-sen] and Mao Zedong'. Subservience to the Chinese approach to Lu Xun lasted in Japan until the start of the post-Mao reforms in China and the gradual emergence in the 1980s of a more nuanced interpretation of the writer's work – even today, some members of the old school of Lu Xun studies outside China have yet to break completely from the Beijing line. So Nagahori, in seeking to draw a different picture of Lu Xun, principally by highlighting the role played in his literary thought by Trotsky, has ploughed a rather lonely furrow.

Nagahori's book has come out in Chinese at a time of surging academic interest in Lu Xun in China and abroad. Wang Hui 汪晖 and other thinkers associated with the Chinese 'New Left' (a label they themselves reject) have been engaged since the 1990s in a passionate debate about the future of Chinese modernity in which they draw inspiration from Lu Xun, championed as an emblem of 'perpetual revolution' and of the possibility of breaking the seemingly endless chain of Chinese history. Wang Hui's attachment to Lu Xun's critical spirit has led him to resurrect the work of one of Japan's earliest Lu Xun experts, the cultural critic and Sinologist Takeuchi Yoshimi 竹内好 (1910–77). Wang Hui was especially attracted by Takeuchi's criticism of Western concepts of modernity, his idealisation of China, and his promotion of China as a model of Asian resistance to the West, incarnated primarily in Lu Xun. Some Japanese find this Chinese rediscovery of Takeuchi's work on Lu Xun nearly seventy years after its first appearance (in Takeuchi's wartime work) surprising, for in Japan Takeuchi's Lu Xun study has long been seen as out-of-date and severely limited by the materials available to him at the time of its writing. Nagahori argues (in a letter to me) that the interest in Takeuchi in China, South Korea, and the US is due more to his contribution to modern Japanese thought and his work on Japanese and Chinese nationalism than to his Lu Xun scholarship. The desire to rethink Chinese modernity along Chinese lines and to reimagine the Chinese past in patriotic terms can also be said to drive Wang Hui's interest in Lu Xun and Takeuchi. Nagahori's study is of a quite different sort: a rigorous and closely-focused empirical exploration, based on textual and biographical evidence, of an important source of Lu Xun's literary inspiration, free of the ideological intent that animates much of the new Lu Xun scholarship in China.

Nagahori's main sources in writing his book included memoirs, in particular by the scholar Masuda Wataru 増田 渡 (1903–77), one of Lu Xun's many Japanese students, friends, and collaborators; and writings on the literary politics of the 1920s and the 1930s by Lu Xun's Chinese contemporaries, including the Trotskyist Wang Fanxi 王凡西. Nagahori explains how in August 1925 Lu Xun, having already established himself as a leading literary figure in China, bought a Japanese translation, by Shigemori Tadashi 重森 正, of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. [4] From it, Lu Xun borrowed ideas that he cherished for the rest of his life. These included Trotsky's concept of the 'revolutionary person', his belief in the impossibility of proletarian literature ('new culture will be culture all the more to the extent that the proletariat has ceased to be a proletariat'), his insistence on the necessary autonomy of literary production even under the Communists, and his notion of the literary 'fellow-traveller [попутчик]' of the revolution, author of a transitional art that is neither bourgeois nor 'of the Revolution' but nevertheless 'organically connected with the Revolution'. In his book, compiled from articles written by him between 1987 and 2009, Nagahori knits these and other topics into a tightly-edited narrative account of Lu Xun's self-identification as a fellow-traveller, his

rejection of Stalinist literary policy, his attitude towards the Communists, and the fate in China of those who sympathised with Trotsky's idea of 'permanent revolution'.

*Literature and Revolution* had a big impact not just on Lu Xun but on many other writers and scholars in China interested in literary theory. The first full Chinese translation, by Wei Suyuan 魏遂远 and Li Jiye 李季业, appeared in Beijing in February 1928 under the auspices of Weiming she, a publishing house set up by young Beijing writers with Lu Xun's help, and it was frequently republished. Quite a few partial translations also appeared, starting in 1926. Among Trotsky's Chinese admirers were the anarchist writer Ba Jin 巴金, who translated his essay on Tolstoy; the writer and poet Yu Dafu 郁达夫, who wrote essays brimming with his influence; and, of course, Lu Xun's followers Feng Xuefeng 风雪峰 and Hu Feng 胡风.

Even before reading *Literature and Revolution*, Lu Xun was able to acquaint himself with developments on the Soviet literary scene through other channels, including the lectures and writings of Vasily Eroshenko, the blind Soviet poet and Esperantist who turned up at Peking University in the 1920s. [5] (Eroshenko's role is noted by Shi Shu 史书, in her Preface to the Chinese translation of Nagahori's book) [pp. v-xvi]. Lu Xun spent much of his time in the mid-to-late 1920s translating Soviet and Japanese writings on literary theory. However, he refused to settle on a single political authority and embraced revolution 'in his own way', in the manner of Trotsky's Soviet 'fellow travellers'. In 1930, when he joined others in founding the League of Left-Wing Writers, controlled by the CCP and thus, ultimately, by the Comintern in Moscow, he did so not out of commitment to 'proletarian revolutionary culture' and Communism but because in 'dark China' under Chiang Kai-shek he saw the literary movement of the proletarian revolution as the sole 'bud in the wilderness'.

In 1932, the reins on literature tightened in the Soviet Union, with the disbanding of the wide range of writers' and artists' organisations that had flourished in the days of *Proletkult* and their replacement by the monopolistic Union of Soviet Writers. In 1934, the newly promulgated theory of Socialist Realism required art to serve the proletariat, denounced experimentalism as degenerate, and consigned literary 'fellow travellers' to history's dustbin. Inevitably, the CCP took the same view. In those years, Lu Xun generally went along with the Stalinist line on proletarian literature and the CCP's idea of 'mass culture', associated above all with Qu Qiubai. He praised the 'revival' of Soviet literature in the wake of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan (1928-32), and seemed resigned to the idea of Party guidance over creative writing. It was not until 1935, shortly before his death, that he began to take an openly-independent political line.

## **Mao Zedong and Lu Xun**

Mao never met Lu Xun, although both men were in Beijing at the same time in the May Fourth days. Mao first read Lu Xun's writings in 1935, in Yan'an, at the end of the Long March. After that, he kept Lu Xun's works constantly by his side, even on his death bed. He seems to have read Lu Xun at every critical juncture, including in his Moscow hotel in 1949, while waiting to see Stalin. He praised Lu Xun for his clarity, candour, modesty, and courage – and, in a world where some of Mao's rivals in the Party leadership had, unlike him, been to university, he noted with satisfaction that Lu Xun had never graduated.

The glorification of Lu Xun began in 1933, when the Communist Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 described him as 'a true friend, and even a warrior, of the proletariat and the toiling masses'. Lu Xun's apotheosis came in 1937, when Mao appointed him as 'new China's saint' (just as Confucius had been the 'saint of feudal China') and 'commander-in-chief of China's cultural revolution [in the 1910s]'. It climaxed in Mao's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966-76, when the dead Lu Xun was raised to his greatest height.

So close did the association between Lu Xun and the Communist establishment become that, at one stage, Chinese angry with the Party took to venting their feelings on Lu Xun, as its supposed surrogate. What they forgot is that Mao's acceptance of Lu Xun was laughably selective: he could beatify Lu Xun only by ignoring the greater part of his output, which opposed despotism and championed humanism and freedom of expression. Moreover, Lu Xun's satirical and ironic style of writing and his caustic social commentary flew in the very face of Mao's idea of literature. More recently, pro-liberal Chinese netizens have returned the focus to Lu Xun's attacks on past social maladies, which they borrow to criticise unpopular practices of the present regime. There have been massive online protests against the removal, from the latest editions of school literature textbooks, of essays by Lu Xun criticised by Party apologists as 'too deep' and requiring excessive 'reflection and critical thinking'. [6]

Mao's placing of the dead Lu Xun on a literary pedestal started as a Chinese copy of Stalin's Maxim Gorki cult. The canonisation was designed to wrap Stalin, and then Mao, in the respective writer's reputation for independence and integrity, and to imply good writers' inevitable progression towards supporting Communism. Mao's second goal in raising up Lu Xun, first noted by the Chinese Trotskyists, was to use him to hide the embarrassing fact that the New Culture Movement of the 1910s was led by undesirables: Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (founder of the CCP in 1921 and of its Left Opposition in 1931) and the liberal philosopher Hu Shi 胡适. Chen Duxiu was, for a long time, universally acknowledged on the left as the leading light in the May Fourth Movement, which called for democracy and science. However, Chen Duxiu's expulsion from the CCP as a Trotskyist made it difficult for the Party to say anything good about him, so in the late 1930s they began to claim leadership of the May Fourth Movement for Lu Xun, who had in fact played only a minor part in it. In an interview with the American journalist and 'friend of China' Edgar Snow, published in *Red Star over China* in 1936, Mao conceded that Chen Duxiu 'had influenced me more than anyone else' in the May Fourth years, but this statement was omitted from the Chinese translation of the interview. [7]

But while the Communists suppressed much of Lu Xun's legacy and purged his followers, it is also true that Mao and his comrades admired and revered him as modern China's greatest writer and a 'champion of common humanity'. He worked in many different genres and idioms, including the classic, the archaic, and the colloquial. His style was typically dense, complex, experimental, and intense. However, he fiercely defended vernacular writing against writing of the elite, and strove to create a literature and art of the people that could be used to criticise the ruling class and tackle social ills. His value as a resource for critical thought and his fearlessness and backbone were the main positive reasons Mao proposed him as a literary model.

Although Mao initiated a cult of Lu Xun during the Sino-Japanese War, he took pains to ensure that Lu Xun's critical spirit was not imported to Yan'an, his wartime capital. The urban intellectuals who slipped away into the countryside to serve in the anti-Japanese resistance under Mao included many of Lu Xun's loyal followers, who abandoned their families and careers to join the Communists. In the cities, before migrating to Yan'an, they had aimed Lu Xun-style *zawen* (brief topical and polemical reflections on social and political injustice) at Chiang Kai-shek and his regime. In 1942, Wang Shiwei 王实味 and other Lu Xun-ites began, bravely but unwisely, to employ the same *zawen* as daggers to stab at the heart of bureaucracy and iniquity under the Communists. They were denounced at rallies, and Wang Shiwei, the least ready among them to eat humble pie, was gaoled and later murdered. Mao made the writers a target of his famous Yan'an Talks on Art and Literature, discussed below.

### **Lu Xun and *Literature and Revolution* [pp. 14-129, pp. 3-125]**

Lu Xun's acquaintance with Trotsky's literary theories began in the summer of 1925, when he translated the chapter in *Literature and Revolution* on the Russian lyrical poet Alexander Blok. Lu

Xun's translation, and his postscript to it, had a big impact on Chinese writers at the time. Decades later, after his release from gaol under Mao, the dissident writer Hu Feng said that it had 'further freed him from a vulgar sociological [understanding] of the creative process', and had taught him that frustration at the suppression of human vitality is the foundation of literature and art. [8]

After Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Communist Party in 1927, praise for *Literature and Revolution* in the Soviet Union turned to bitter denunciation. In China, following years of silence, the book was eventually criticised by Mao, in his Yan'an Talks, where he summarised it as 'politics, Marxist; art, bourgeois'. Lu Xun's attachment to Trotsky was troubling for the CCP's literary establishment, led by Zhou Yang 阳, which tried for decades to conceal it. Although Lu Xun's admiration for *Literature and Revolution* was open and transparent between 1925 and late 1932, his references to it were minimised or deleted by Chinese editors of his work after his declaration as a Party saint, and they were omitted from the 10-volume *Collected Works* published in 1956-8.

In Japan, too, Trotsky's influence on Lu Xun was marginalised and discounted, but to a less extreme degree, for the same taboos could not be observed by China scholars on the Japanese left as by Lu Xun scholars in China, where they were *de rigueur*. All the same, Lu Xun experts in Japan consciously or unconsciously played down his Trotsky connection, until Nagahori started to confront the issue, in 1987, in his article on the concept of the 'revolutionary person' in *Literature and Revolution*.

Following Trotsky, Lu Xun argued in his work on literary theory that only a revolutionary person can write revolutionary literature, and that 'whatever a revolutionary person writes is revolutionary literature'. But revolutionary literature of this sort could only appear after the passing of the revolutionary storm and the emergence of the 'new revolutionary human being'.

Trotsky wrote *Literature and Revolution* in 1922-3 and published it in 1923-4. Its first part, which is what most people (including Lu Xun) mean when they refer to it, looked mainly at literary trends and movements in the years between 1905 and 1917 and the revolutionary period between 1917 and 1923. Trotsky thought there could only be a real revolutionary literature after the revolution. In times of revolution, most of the talent capable of producing revolutionary literature would be at the front, making actual revolution. As for Lu Xun, he thought (unlike the Russian and Chinese Stalinists) that there was no revolutionary situation in China in the late 1920s and that China, too, lacked the conditions for a revolutionary literature. He thought, like Trotsky, that real revolutionary art and literature would appear only after the revolution. Young Chinese leftist writers claimed in 1927-8 that China had to have a revolutionary literature and attacked Lu Xun, whom they saw as hostile to proletarian literature. This was in line with official policy in the USSR (promoted by Stalin and others).

Trotsky's distinction between revolutionary and non-revolutionary literature is illustrated by his treatment of Alexander Blok. Trotsky noted that 'Blok belonged to pre-October literature, but he overcame his past and entered into the sphere of October when he wrote his poem *The Twelve*', which Trotsky called 'the swan song of the individualistic art that went over to the Revolution'. 'To be sure,' he concluded, 'Blok is not one of ours, but he reached towards us.' Lu Xun not only translated the chapter on Blok from *Literature and Revolution* but embraced its tenets. Nagahori reminds us that the biographies of Blok and Lu Xun have much in common. They were born within months of one another, into literary families; both were 'people of the old era' (Lu Xun's self-description) who reached out towards the revolution; and both knew the value, but also the limits, of the intelligentsia as a 'class'.

Lu Xun's relationship with Trotsky was at the heart of his thinking on literature, but it has rarely been subjected to frontal scrutiny, except in little-known publications of the Chinese Trotskyists. [9]



It was almost wholly ignored in mainstream studies on Lu Xun in Japan before Nagahori began publishing on the subject. The resemblances between Lu Xun's and Trotsky's ideas were viewed as at most a coincidence.

To overthrow this view, Nagahori set out to trace the provenance of Lu Xun's thinking about the 'literature of a revolutionary period', starting with his speech given under that title at the Huangpu Military Academy in Guangzhou on 8 April 1927, on the eve of Chiang Kai-shek's bloody coup against his Communist allies. Nagahori establishes the relationship between Lu Xun's and Trotsky's views on literature mainly by means of a comparative textual study of Lu Xun's writing in Chinese and Trotsky's in Japanese translation.

The first tenet of Lu Xun's 1927 speech was that literature is of no use, for 'only the weakest, most useless people talked about [it, while those] who are strong do not talk, they kill'. His experience in Beijing (a reference to a massacre on 18 March 1926) had taught him that '[a] poem could not have frightened away [the warlord] Sun Chuanfang, but a cannon-shell scared him off.' Nagahori derives this idea from Trotsky's Introduction to *Literature and Revolution*, where he explains that art cannot match the role of warfare: 'The place of art can be determined by the following general argument. If the victorious Russian proletariat had not created its own army, the Workers' State would have been dead long ago, and we would not be thinking now about economic problems, and much less about intellectual and cultural ones.'

Lu Xun's second tenet was that revolutionary literature 'lacks vigour'. Although writers liked to claim that 'literature plays a big part in revolution and can be used, for instance, to propagandise, encourage, spur on, speed up and accomplish revolution', in Lu Xun's view

writing of this kind lacks vigour, for few good works of literature have been written to order; instead, they flow naturally from the heart with no regard for the possible consequences. To write on some set subject is like writing a [stilted and stereotyped] *bagu* essay, which is worthless as literature and quite incapable of moving the reader.

Moreover, during great revolutions, 'literature disappears and there is silence for, swept up in the tide of revolution, all turn from shouting to action and are so busy making revolution that there is no time to talk of literature'. Nagahori likens this idea to Trotsky's abhorrence of art done according to directives, rather than in correspondence with the artist's inner drives and spirit. 'In its immediate effect October more or less killed literature', Trotsky argued. 'Poets and artists fell silent. Was this an accident? No. Long ago it was said: when the sound of weapons is heard, the Muses fall silent.'

Lu Xun's third tenet was that 'it is revolution that plays a big part in literature' rather than the other way around. In revolutions, the material conditions for art and literature are destroyed, and the attention of the proletariat and of revolutionaries is fixed on politics. '[O]nly when revolutionaries start writing can there be revolutionary literature.' This thought corresponds to Trotsky's theory that proletarian art and literature will not come about, and that socialist art and literature will only flourish years after the revolution, when classes will have ceased to be, when socialist ideas and attitudes have become rooted, and when society is prosperous enough to sustain a thriving culture.

However, Lu Xun was more optimistic than Trotsky about the pace of cultural reconstruction after the revolution. Whereas Trotsky asserted, in 1923, that '[t]here is no revolutionary art as yet, [just] the elements of this art, ... [just] hints and attempts at it', Lu Xun said, in 1927, that although the Soviets had not yet produced any great works, 'their new literature strives to make headway' - there was 'already a good deal of new writing and they have passed from the period of raging [against the disappearance of the old] to that of paeans [for the new].'

For the post-revolutionary period, Lu Xun foresaw the rise of a people's literature (*pingmin wenxue*), with the people defined as 'workers and peasants', although he confessed that it was impossible, as yet, to 'predict what will come later'. He added:

Some writers today use the common people - workers and peasants - as material for their novels and poems, and this has also been called people's literature when actually it is nothing of the sort, for the people have not yet opened their mouths. These works voice the sentiments of onlookers, who put words in the people's mouths. Though some of our present men of letters are poor, they are all better off than workers and peasants, otherwise they would not have had the money to study and would not be able to write. Their works may seem to come from the people, but in fact they do not: they are not real stories of the people.

This was true not only of China but of the broader world, and, *eo ipso*, of the Soviet Union. This absence of a people's art and literature chimed with Trotsky's theory, which denied the possibility of such a culture - he used a different terminology - until long after the revolution. According to Lu Xun, 'All our [progressive] writers today are literati [*dushu ren*]': to Trotsky, 'Our proletariat has its political culture, within limits sufficient for securing its dictatorship, but it has no artistic culture', so it must rely on fellow travellers (Lu Xun's literati) in the transition period. Neither Trotsky nor Lu Xun saw 'people's literature' (Lu Xun's term) as a pure emanation of, or written solely for, the proletariat. 'We have the literary works of talented and gifted proletarians,' Trotsky said, 'but that is not proletarian literature.'

Lu Xun accepted another fundamental tenet of Trotsky's liberal approach to literature, the idea of the necessary divergence of literature from politics. In a speech in December 1927, he talked about the 'contradiction' between literature and politics, and even the conflict. Although not actually opposites, politics 'strove to preserve the status quo', while art and literature, imbued in the best of cases with heightened sensitivity, shared the revolutionaries' discontentment with reality and promoted social division.

Lu Xun also took from Trotsky the idea of the literary fellow traveller, which he applied to himself. We have no direct statement of Lu Xun's self-classification as a fellow traveller, but Nagahori cites compelling evidence from Japanese sources. Why didn't Lu Xun openly embrace the term? Probably because it was in principle a category bestowed by revolutionaries rather than claimed, and because he himself defined the fellow traveller as 'heroically embracing revolution though not struggling for it to the end', a status he felt, for reasons of modesty, unable to appropriate.

Lu Xun continued to echo Trotsky's views even after Trotsky's expulsion from the Soviet Communist Party. Nagahori illustrates this point by comparing the views on literature and revolution of Lu Xun and the Japanese Christian writer Arishima Takeo 有島武郎, whose anarchist and socialist beliefs and commitment to the transformative power of universal love exerted a strong pull on Lu Xun in the 1920s. The two writers were kindred spirits, but the differences between them help clarify Trotsky's impact on Lu Xun.

Like Lu Xun, Arishima believed in the inevitability of the victory of proletarian revolution. But he was a member of the landed gentry, and although he supported the call for social reform and gave over his vast estate to his tenants, he saw his background as an insuperable barrier to his joining the workers' movement or supporting its literature. In 1923, he committed suicide after falling fatefully in love with a married woman.

The differences between Lu Xun and Arishima reflected, in part, those between Japan and China: an imperialist country to whose ruling class Arishima saw himself as belonging, and an oppressed

nation in mortal crisis whose intellectuals identified with the national struggle. The other thing that distinguished Lu Xun from Arishima was the concept of the fellow-travelling writer. This idea, taken from Trotsky, gave Lu Xun a 'reason for existing'. Arishima, who was unfamiliar with it (*Literature and Revolution* came out after his death), denied the possibility of the negation of self.

Between 1928 and 1932, Trotsky's name appeared in eleven of Lu Xun's writings. Only once, in August 1928, did Lu Xun openly criticise Trotsky, for the first and last time, for 'idealism'. This criticism was perhaps linked to Lunacharsky's and Bukharin's view in the Soviet debate, for although Trotsky shared their opposition to Party control of literature and their support for free competition between, and the coexistence of, rival styles of writing, he did not share Lunacharsky's emphasis on class consciousness in literature. Lu Xun's criticism of Trotsky may also have foreshadowed Lu Xun's progression after 1930 towards supporting the CCP. However, the exact grounds for it are unclear.

After 1928, there were many occasions on which Lu Xun, surrounded by Communists in Shanghai, could have made life easier for himself by denouncing the ousted Soviet leader. However, he made no further criticisms of Trotsky, even after becoming nominal head of the League of Left-Wing Writers in 1931. Trotsky's name continued to crop up in his work, despite what Nagahori suspects to have been Lu Xun's ever closer affinity with Lunacharsky and a growing divergence between Lu Xun and Trotsky on literary matters.

The Japanese scholar Maruyama Noboru 丸山 碩久 summed up Lu Xun's literary theory in this period in five points, which Nagahori uses as cues for a further exploration of Lu Xun's thinking and Trotsky's influence on it.

(1) For Lu Xun, all literature is propaganda and a tool of the revolution, but not all propaganda is literature, for literature has its own internal laws and cannot be reduced to sloganising. Nagahori adds that although Lu Xun had nothing against using literature for political ends, he believed that a precondition for good writing was the writer's freedom and independence. Dictating had no place or sense in the art sphere. Here, Lu Xun continued to follow Trotsky, who said the Party could use literature in the political struggle but should refrain from interfering in its form or content.

(2-3) For Lu Xun, literature is subject to the constraints of its age – there can be no transcendental literature. Nor is there a never-changing human nature. Human nature is subject to the constraints of class and time. We cannot know the disposition of the primitive or the future human being. Writing is a social product: it can smell either of the young lady's perfume or of the worker's sweat. Nagahori adds that such writing is not necessarily class literature. Yes, from the point of view of Marxist theory literature as an end-product is constrained by class, but that assertion does not apply to the ethical principles that inform a writer's creative effort. What's more, not all writing is class-bound, for people throughout the ages have shared a fear of death, as Trotsky pointed out in 'Class and Art' in 1924. Lu Xun was making a similar point when he said that although all sentiments are governed by economics, they are not 'just' so governed. In this respect, his stance was almost identical to Trotsky's.

(4-5) Literature is, in the end, the product of plenty, not of the struggle against scarcity. Revolutionary writers may aim to aid the weak and the poor, but they cannot change reality – that is the work of armed revolutionaries. This remained Lu Xun's view even after 1928, and it was also Trotsky's view.

**Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai** [pp. 119-41, pp. 103-24]

To explain why Trotsky's name disappeared from Lu Xun's writing (translations excluded) after 19



September 1932, Nagahori explores Lu Xun's relationship with Qu Qiubai, his close friend and literary associate. Lu Xun admired Qu Qiubai for his fluent Russian, and depended greatly on his translations. Qu reciprocated the esteem. The two men probably first met in the autumn of 1931 or the summer of 1932, and continued collaborating on publishing ventures until January 1934, when Qu left Shanghai to join the Communists in the Jiangxi mountains. In 1935, having been left behind in Jiangxi by the Long Marchers, Qu was caught and executed by the Nationalists. The following year, Lu Xun published his posthumous writings as a tribute.

Qu Qiubai had gone to Moscow in 1920, as a journalist. He interviewed Trotsky on several occasions and viewed him as Lenin's equal. After joining the CCP in Moscow, Qu was called back to China by Chen Duxiu, to edit the Party press. In October 1923, his *Yishu yu rensheng* ('Art and human life') drew heavily on Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. Even after the start of Stalin's struggle against Trotsky in 1923, his book *Chidu xinshi* ('Impressions of the Red Capital', June 1924) drew a favourable picture of Trotsky, and he continued to quote Trotsky in his literary writings. Only in 1925 did he join in the campaign against Trotsky. In 1927, he became *de facto* leader of the CCP after the resignation of Chen Duxiu, but he was ousted in 1928 for 'left opportunism' – in reality, as a scapegoat for Stalin's failure. He continued working in Moscow until 1930, when he was dismissed and repatriated.

In July 1928, at the Sixth Comintern Congress, Trotsky, talking about the Chinese Revolution, said some of Qu Qiubai's ideas were 'worthy of consideration'. Nagahori adds that Qu would have judged Trotsky's proposals on their merits, and would certainly not have gone along with the views of Wang Ming 王明, the CCP's arch-Stalinist. However, Qu maintained discretion, to avoid immediate expulsion from the Party, and backed the public criticism of Trotsky. The Trotskyist Wang Fanxi saw Qu as a serious and independent-minded thinker who therefore could never have pleased Stalin. Wang Ming denounced him as a 'semi-Trotskyist' in December 1930. Qu's links with Trotsky had already been investigated earlier. In 1929, for example, he had been called to account after the uncovering of a Trotskyist cell among the Chinese students at Moscow's Sun Yat-sen University, which was blamed in part on Qu's *laissez-faire* regime. Back in China, Qu was again denounced for 'semi-Trotskyism', sacked from his political posts, and assigned to work in the League of Left-Wing Writers, where he met Lu Xun.

After September 1932, Trotsky's name never again appeared in Lu Xun's published work. Nagahori dates this change to the publication of Qu Qiubai's translation of a long poem by Dem'yan Bednyi, an 'official poet' of the Stalin dictatorship, that abused and insulted Trotsky for allegedly posing as a hero in his autobiography, *My Life*. The poem alerted Lu Xun to a negative side of Trotsky's character, what Hu Shi, in his diary entry on *My Life*, called Trotsky's 'conceitedness and censoriousness'. In principle, Lu Xun was opposed to personal vilification, but he accepted Bednyi's poem as 'scolding in jest'. That Qu Qiubai had translated it was probably clinching. In any case, by 1932 the Comintern was equating Trotskyism and social fascism as the two great enemies of world communism, and Lu Xun, a self-confessed political novice, was under pressure to conform.

Qu Qiubai, always susceptible to finger-wagging, had striven ever since 1925 to shake off the Trotskyist hat his enemies were trying to slap on him and to present himself as an anti-Trotskyist. Lu Xun's constant references to Trotsky were a threat to his friend Qu's reputation and safety. One can guess that Qu worked hard to undermine Lu Xun's appreciation of Trotsky and to stop him talking about the deposed leader. Nagahori even surmises that Qu's translation of Bednyi's poem was part of that campaign.

**'Reply to a Chinese Trotskyist'** [pp. 196-229, pp. 179-238]

In 1935, the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in Moscow adopted a political strategy that repelled

Lu Xun and caused him to break with the CCP's literary establishment. The Congress put anti-fascism at the centre of Communist activity worldwide – in China, this took the form of an anti-Japanese united front. In response to the Comintern directive, Zhou Yang dissolved the League of Left-Wing Writers, by now considered too radical, and announced a new slogan, 'literature of national defence'. Lu Xun, who had no faith in Zhou Yang or liking for him, opposed this slogan, and together with his followers Hu Feng and Feng Xuefeng proposed a different one, 'for a people's literature of national revolutionary struggle'. He felt that a united front of all parties, including the Guomindang, risked repeating the disaster of the 1920s, when the Communists had entered into an alliance with their butcher Chiang Kai-shek. He also refused to join the new Writers' Association set up by the CCP in June 1936. Zhou Yang denounced him for 'opposing the united front' and placed him on a par with the Trotskyists, to Lu Xun's indignation.

The Chinese Trotskyists knew about this dispute. Naively, the Trotskyist Chen Zhongshan 陈仲山 (AKA Chen Qichang 陈启昌, 1900–42) wrote Lu Xun a letter opposing the Comintern line and attached some Chinese Trotskyist publications, in the hope of influencing him. The reply to Chen Zhongshan, titled 'Letter to a Chinese Trotskyist', was devastating: an anti-Trotskyist polemic supposedly written by Lu Xun, it implied that the Chinese Trotskyists were 'Han [i.e., Chinese] traitors' secretly in the pay of Japan, just as Trotsky himself was, according to the Stalinists, Hitler's hireling. The reply also expressed open support for Mao's CCP. The reply was actually a fabrication, as we shall see, but it was used for decades to vilify the Chinese Trotskyists and to justify their decades-long imprisonment after 1949. As a result of it, the Trotskyists were unable to escape the traitor charge right up until the 1980s.

Zhou Yang's association of Lu Xun with Trotskyism was not without some foundation, for both Lu Xun and the Chinese Trotskyists questioned the need for a close alliance with the Nationalists. Zhou Yang knew that Lu Xun often talked about Trotsky and had translated his writings. In the mid-1930s, the pro-Guomindang press in China had even reported, on the basis of Lu Xun's 'upright and outspoken' character, rumours of his Trotskyist conversion. Apart from all this, Chen Zhongshan had a personal reason to believe in Lu Xun, whom he had long idolised. Chen had joined the CCP in 1925, along with Wang Fanxi, at Peking University, where he took electives with Lu Xun.

Chen Zhongshan was a relatively minor figure in the Chinese Trotskyist movement. When the Communists published his letter, together with the reply, the name Zhongshan was rendered with two 'X'es, and the letter was wrongly attributed to the Trotskyist leader Chen Duxiu, then in prison under the Guomindang. Even when the author's real name was revealed, many thought it was a pseudonym for Chen Duxiu. It was not until the publication in 1981 of Lu Xun's *Complete Works* that Chen Zhongshan's identity was officially established.

By a cruel and tragic irony, the supposed 'Han traitor' Chen Zhongshan was executed by the Japanese in Shanghai in June 1942. The Chinese Trotskyists have therefore always held that Chen Zhongshan died a martyr, as a result of his activities in the anti-Japanese resistance. However, anti-Trotskyist specialists in the CCP, including the academic researcher Tang Baolin 汤宝林, author of a study on Chinese Trotskyism, [10] have tried hard to undermine Chen Zhongshan's patriotic credentials. According to Tang, Chen Zhongshan actually worked in Shanghai as a Guomindang spy, a role he inherited from his elder brother, when the latter left Shanghai for Chongqing (the Guomindang's wartime capital) at the start of the Sino-Japanese War. Subsequently, Chen Zhongshan allegedly sent economic and political intelligence to the Nationalist authorities in Chongqing, as well as military intelligence concerning the Communists' New Fourth Army, which was active in the countryside around Shanghai. Nagahori deals with these charges at length and rebuts Tang Baolin's claims, which were based on depositions given under duress by Trotskyists gaoled under the Communists after 1949. Nagahori shows, on the basis of writings by Chen Zhongshan's eldest son Chen Daotong and other materials, that Chen Zhongshan's brother, Chen

Qilun, had never belonged to the Guomindang or any other party. As incontrovertible proof of this, he notes that Chen Qilun 'passed the test' after 1949, when he was interrogated by the Communists during the movements to suppress and purge 'counter-revolutionaries'.

Chen Zhongshan sent his letter to Lu Xun despite attempts by his fellow-Trotskyist Zhao Ji 赵季 to dissuade him from acting without authority, and as a result he brought his comrades' wrath down upon his head. Chen Duxiu accused him of having 'illusions' in Lu Xun, whom Chen Duxiu described in private correspondence as 'the Reds' old dog'. In a second letter to Lu Xun, Chen Zhongshan criticised the reply for failing to answer his point about the united front and for impugning the Trotskyists' integrity. In a statement, the Trotskyists dismissed the slanders as 'one slender thread floating in a great torrent of venom'. [\[11\]](#)

It is now known beyond dispute that the reply to Chen Zhongshan was written not by Lu Xun himself but by Feng Xuefeng, his amanuensis. Nagahori confirms my own earlier conclusion, drawn from articles by and correspondence with Wang Fanxi and Zheng Chaolin 郑超麟 and the recollections of Feng Xuefeng and Hu Feng, that there is no substance to Feng Xuefeng's claim that he represented Lu Xun's actual views in the reply, at a time when Lu Xun was too ill to answer the letter himself. [\[12\]](#) Nagahori points out that Feng wrote the reply on 9 June 1936, the same day as the newspaper Shenbao reported on the Moscow purges then in progress – Nagahori guesses Feng read the report and decided to extend the campaign to Shanghai. In Moscow, Wang Ming reported on the episode to his superiors in the Comintern, presumably to demonstrate his loyalty to Stalin. In his report, Wang Ming also wrongly identified Chen Zhongshan as Chen Duxiu – perhaps the source of the confusion on this point.

Some minor issues regarding the Chen Zhongshan letter remain unresolved, but the main point is established: Lu Xun did not write the reply. Other evidence suggests that Lu Xun might even, under other circumstances, have adopted a position on the united front similar to Chen Zhongshan's. For example, among his final notes, written in October 1936, months after receiving Chen Zhongshan's letter, are jottings that make a similar point to Chen's:

Naturally it is good to proclaim by the written and spoken word the sufferings of those who are slaves under a foreign yoke. But we must take great care lest people reach this conclusion: 'Then it is better after all to be slaves to our own compatriots.' Since a 'united front' was proposed, those 'revolutionary writers' who went over to the enemy have reappeared, posing as pioneers of the 'united front.' Their contemptible surrender to and collusion with the enemy is now made out to be 'progressive' and glorious. [\[13\]](#)

These jottings warned against those who would prefer the rule of Chiang Kai-shek to that of the Japanese, and against making 'peace' with the Nationalists, by recanting or involuntary submission.

Despite all the evidence against it, the reply was, for decades, printed along with Chen Zhongshan's letter in school textbooks, thus associating Trotskyism with treachery in the minds of generations of Chinese children. Today, however, the tables have been turned in China. Nagahori concludes, not without reason, that only Chen Zhongshan's letter has stood the test of time, whereas the reply has been thoroughly discredited.

The three surviving 'old men' of Chinese Trotskyism – Zheng Chaolin, Wang Fanxi, and Lou Guohua 卢国华 – responded joyfully to the revelations of Hu Feng and others. Zheng said his faith in Lu Xun, dashed in 1936, when he was in prison under Chiang Kai-shek, had been restored. Wang said Hu Feng had cleansed the reputations both of the Trotskyists and of Lu Xun. Chen Duxiu, it seems, had 'forgiven' Lu Xun (for transgressions that turned out not to have been his) almost immediately, for in November 1937 he praised Lu Xun's role in the radical journal *New Youth* during the New Culture

Movement and the May Fourth era, and expressed admiration for his 'spirit of independent thinking'. Lu Xun also revered Chen Duxiu, even after Chen's Trotskyist conversion. He had said on 5 March 1933, in an essay titled 'How I Started Writing Novels': 'Here I must commemorate Mr Chen Duxiu, who was among those who put most effort into encouraging me to write novels.' [14]

In fact, as Nagahori points out, Lu Xun was not only under Trotsky's intellectual influence but had numerous historical ties to people connected either directly or indirectly with the Chinese Trotskyist movement. Wang Fanxi was in the same class at Peking University as the writer Wang Shiwei, Lu Xun's follower and admirer, himself strongly influenced by Trotskyism, who was Lu Xun's correspondent, and the writer Hu Feng, who saw himself as Lu Xun's student and, like Wang Shiwei and Chen Zhongshan, followed Lu Xun's course at Peking University. While in Beijing, Wang Fanxi had contributed to *Yusi* ('Threads of talk'), a literary journal edited by Lu Xun and his brother Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (although he never met them). The veteran Trotskyist Lou Guohua notes in his study on Lu Xun that a number of Chinese Trotskyists returned to Shanghai from Moscow at the end of 1928 and conducted political discussions in which Feng Xuefeng took part. At the time, Lu Xun was busy translating works on Soviet literary theory from Japanese and got Lou Guohua to ask the returned Trotskyists to explain difficult passages by consulting the original Russian. So, when the anti-Trotsky campaign entered its most intense stage in the mid-1930s, it is easy to see why Lu Xun and Feng Xuefeng felt compelled to draw a sharp line between themselves and the Chinese Trotskyists, with whom they had previously collaborated.

Nagahori ends his discussion of the Chen Zhongshan case by pointing out that as Chen Duxiu and the Trotskyists are no longer officially charged in China with having taken money from the Japanese, the time has come in China to reveal the truth about the reply wrongly attributed to Lu Xun. What was previously a stain on the Chinese Trotskyists has now become a stain on Lu Xun – in a word, the roles are now reversed, and Lu Xun is the one in need of rescue. It is true that Lu Xun took his distance from Trotsky, but he did so in rejection of the cult of Trotsky the hero, the obverse of the Stalin cult. That his position on so many questions, literary and political, was close to those of Trotsky and the Trotskyists made drawing a clear line doubly imperative.

Trotskyism in China seemed at one point to be on the verge of extinction, because of the extreme physical repression applied to it and the hostile official and public perception of it – at best, a failed political project and ideology; at worst, a criminal and counter-revolutionary conspiracy. Today, the taboo on Trotskyism remains, but it has become weaker than it once was. Few of the major universities are now without Trotsky study groups. Nagahori's revelation of Lu Xun's intellectual link with Trotsky may help further loosen the constraints on Trotskyist thinking and activity in China, just as the rehabilitation of Wang Shiwei in the 1980s removed some of the prejudice against Zheng Chaolin and Wang Fanxi, and helped bring their writings to broader notice.

### **Mao and Lenin on the Role of Literature: An Error in Translation** [pp. 258-84, pp. 239-64]

Lenin's arguments in his essay on 'Party Organization and Party Literature' were used first by Stalin and then by Mao to suppress independent and creative writing. In his essay, Lenin described 'literature [Литература]' as the 'cogs and wheels of the socialist machine'. However, as Nagahori shows, what Lenin meant by 'literature' in this context was the Party press or publications and 'writing' in general. That the term as Lenin used it in his essay was rendered by Lenin's Japanese translators as *bungaku* 文学 and by his Chinese translators as *wenxue* 文学, implying creative literature, was a cause of endless trouble, particularly in the Chinese case, where those who set the definition wielded a crushing degree of political power. Mao most famously applied Lenin's idea of 'cogs and wheels' to creative literature in his 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art' in May 1942, thereby sealing the fate of the dissident Wang Shiwei and setting the tone for a generation of

Chinese writers.

The rendering of Литература as *wenxue* / *bungaku* was subsequently corrected in both Chinese and Japanese editions of Lenin's writings. Japanese translators switched in many cases to *bunken* 文庫, 'documents', whereas the second Chinese edition of Lenin's *Collected Works* opted for *chuban wu* 出版物, 'publications'. However, this correction did not happen until the early 1980s, decades after the Yan'an Talks.

Where did Mao get the idea that creative writing should be subject to Party spirit? Between 1926 and May 1942, Lenin's essay was published five times in Chinese translation, and on all but one occasion Литература was rendered as *wenxue*. Nagahori guesses that Mao used the fifth translation as his source, for it appeared in *Liberation Daily* on May 14, nine days before Mao cited the essay in his concluding Talk. Nagahori even thinks Mao may have commissioned its translation.

One of Nagahori's most interesting discoveries – Nagahori poses it as a hypothesis, but it has a strong ring of truth – is the apparent source of the correction of the mistranslation of the word Литература in Lenin's essay. The preparation of the second edition of Lenin's Works in Chinese translation began in the early 1980s, under the direction of Hu Qiaomu 胡乔木, the Marxist philosopher and politician. At the time, Hu Qiaomu pointed out that *wenxue* did not properly convey Lenin's meaning, and instructed his team to use other words instead, including *yanlun* 言论, 'speeches, expressions of political opinion', and *zhuzuo* 著作, or *zuopin* 作品, 'works, writings'. However, this change was easier said than done, given that Mao had borrowed the term from the uncorrected translation of Lenin's essay and cited Lenin as his authority. If the error were publicly exposed, the efforts and sacrifice of generations of Chinese writers would (in Nagahori's words) 'be set at naught' and Mao's own prestige would be damaged. So would Hu's, for he had served as Mao's secretary in Yan'an in 1942 and had edited the Talks for publication in 1943, as well as serving on the team that published Mao's *Selected Works* between 1951 and 1960.

In June 1982, in a speech on the Talks, Hu Qiaomu publicly conceded that *wenxue* did not correctly convey the meaning of литература in Lenin's sense. In 1995, in a memoir, he attributed the error to Bo Gu 薄古 (Qin Bangxian 秦邦宪), author of the 1942 translation, adding that Mao (and, by implication, Hu himself) could not be blamed for a mistake that had 'deeply scarred' creative writing in China and led to the subordination of literature to politics.

Also in 1982, in an article clearly timed to chime with Hu's speech, *Hongqi* ('Red Flag'), the CCP's 'theoretical organ', published a revised translation of the Lenin article using the term 'Party publications' instead of 'literature', and in 1987 the new translation was used in the twelfth volume of the second Chinese edition of Lenin's Works. In 1986, in the annotation to the Talks in *Mao Zedong zhuzuo xuandu* ('Selected Readings from Mao Zedong's Works'), published by People's Press, the correction was noted, but without further explanation of its significance. The same happened in the annotation to the Talks in the second edition of Mao's *Selected Works*, published in 1991, where the reader was referred to the new translation of Lenin's Works. Nagahori points out that only a particularly astute and conscientious reader would realise the implications of the change for Mao's argument. The partial cover-up was apparently aimed at protecting Mao's good name. Nagahori suspects that Party conservatives played a role in it.

Forty years ago, I discussed these issues with Wang Fanxi, whose book on Mao, written in exile in Macau between 1961 and 1964, had appeared in 1973, in a limited edition published in Hong Kong by Wang's comrade Lou Guohua. In the book, Wang had pointed out the mistranslation and analysed its consequences, both for 'Mao Zedong thought' and for Chinese culture under the Communists. Wang's book was practically *samizdat* and had little or no impact on public opinion at the time, though it has become somewhat better known in recent years, since its republication in Hong Kong

and Taipei in 2003. [15] However, it was, so it now seems, the key to Hu Qiaomu's revision of the Chinese translation of the Lenin article.

In a chapter in his book titled 'Literary Policy and Literary Creation', Wang Fanxi had explained at length the various meanings of the word 'literature' in European thought, and distinguished between a broad and a narrow definition of it. Chinese authors had, he concluded, quoted Lenin out of context. Hu Qiaomu was, according to Nagahori, familiar with Wang's argument, and convinced by it. Wang's explanation was particularly important in a 'Marxist' culture like China's, obsessed with textual exegesis and the need to find support in 'classical' authority for any opinion. It helped resolve what had become, in the post-Mao years, a big headache and crisis in Chinese literary policy, for people who wanted to get away from Mao's narrow view of literature and art. How did Hu come across Wang's writings? Almost certainly through the intermediary of Lou Shiyi 卢希夷, a senior literary editor, author, translator, and poet in Beijing, and the elder cousin of Lou Guohua, the Trotskyists' main publisher in Hong Kong. [16]

Nagahori explains that Lou Guohua sent Wang's book on Mao to Lou Shiyi in Beijing, where Lou Shiyi made it available to the CCP's relevant authorities. There is no firm proof that Wang's book directly caused the revision of the Chinese translation of the Lenin text, but Lou Guohua had no doubt about the connection, given the sequence of events – first the sending of the book, then the appearance of the article in *Red Flag*.

Most authorities argue that the arrows of the rectification campaign of 1942–4, of which the Yan'an Talks were a part, had as their principal target not Wang Shiwei's 'humanity' and Trotsky's 'bourgeois' view of literature but the politics of the pro-Stalin clique around Wang Ming, Mao's main rival in the Party. However, Wang Fanxi pointed out that by 1942 the Wang Ming clique had already been definitively routed in China. The criticism of Wang Shiwei and the subordination of creative literature to the Party were aimed at silencing the supporters in Yan'an of Lu Xun, who believed in the need to preserve writers' critical independence, oppose authority, and promote a democratic spirit. In support of Wang Fanxi's contention, Nagahori speculates that it was no accident that the Talks were first published on 19 October 1943, the seventh anniversary of Lu Xun's death, with a preface commemorating Lu Xun.

### **Lu Xun and Mao's Suppression of the AB Corps [pp. 285–335, pp. 265–312]**

Lu Xun was not just a literary maverick. His independence from the Party line also extended, at times, to politics. Citing a memoir by Masuda Wataru, Nagahori establishes a compelling case to show that Lu Xun was concerned by rumours of a massacre of peasants during Mao's purge of the so-called AB Corps at Futian in the Jiangxi Soviet in 1931, and that just before his death he voiced doubts about the Stalin purges in the Soviet Union.

The AB Corps was a secret anti-Communist group formed in Jiangxi in the mid-1920s by Guomindang activists. It is said to have collaborated with the 'liquidationists' (i.e., Trotskyists), but there is no evidence to corroborate this, and the Chinese Trotskyists have dismissed this charge as a fabrication. The letters AB are said by some to mean Anti-Bolshevik and by others to denote different levels of membership (provincial and county) of the Corps. The Corps infiltrated the CCP in Jiangxi and, by engaging in sabotage, supported the Nationalist army's campaign to eradicate the Red Army. Mao launched a major purge of soviet areas in Jiangxi to wipe it out, culminating in the Futian Incident, in the course of which hundreds of actual and alleged members of the Corps were killed. In 1956, Mao conceded that the purge had been a mistake – one in which tens of thousands of innocent people eventually died, according to reports. Nagahori notes that this suggests that Mao pioneered the tactic of mass physical extermination of 'enemies' of the revolution, not adopted by Stalin until 1934. Today, many critical Chinese see the incident as the moment of birth of the trauma that



culminated in the Cultural Revolution.

Nagahori cites a memoir by Lu Xun's Japanese student Masuda Wataru to show that Lu Xun knew of the purges and distanced himself from them, telling Masuda that it was wrong to 'kill peasants', a stance Masuda interpreted as 'humanist'. How did Lu Xun know about the Jiangxi purges? He could have read about them in the Shanghai press, and they were almost certainly a topic of discussion at the time in the League of Left-Wing Writers, where Lu Xun was in close contact with well-informed Party members. He must also have known that Mao Zedong was mainly responsible for what went on in the Chinese Soviet.

Mainstream Chinese Communist commentators have always implied that when Lu Xun criticised 'leftist errors' in the early Party, his target was the 'ultra-left' Wang Ming line of the early 1930s, which Mao claims to have opposed. However, it is clear from Masuda's recollection that Lu Xun was also repelled by Mao's actions in the early years. Later, his doubts about Stalinism, and its Maoist variant, far from receding, seem to have grown. Towards the end of his life, he agreed to a proposal by Japanese supporters that he go to the hot-spring resorts at Unzen and Kamakura in Japan to restore his health (in the event, it deteriorated still further, and he stayed in China), but at more or less the same time he turned down an invitation, by Wang Ming, to go to Moscow for treatment.

According to his associate Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之, a pro-Communist liberal, Lu Xun thought it 'inappropriate' to visit Russia at a time when Stalin was extending his purges ever more widely, and he feared that the purges might even spread to 'our own people'. Why did Lu Xun not break with Stalinism and the CCP in those years? Because, at the time, the Communists seemed to him to represent the only progressive force in the world. Nevertheless, his support for them was never unconditional.

### **If Lu Xun Had Lived...** [pp. 336-400, pp. 313-74]

Nagahori devotes his longest chapter to what has become a popular pastime in China, speculating on what Lu Xun's fate would have been had he survived.

In October 1946, in interviews around half of fifteen famous writers said that he would already have been assassinated by the Guomindang (like the poet Wen Yiduo 闻一多), while the other half said he would be wielding his pen in the battle to overthrow it.

Guo Moruo 郭沫若, Chairman of the Communists' Federation of Literary and Art Circles, in 1950: 'In the case of intellectuals who come over [to us] from the old society, the first thing to worry about is not arranging work for them, but seeing how well they have reformed their thinking. If Lu Xun had reformed his thinking well, we could have arranged a job for him.'

Mao, March 1957: 'If Lu Xun were alive he could still write *zawen*, [but] I'm afraid he'd no longer get round to writing novels, [for] he'd probably be Chairman [instead of Guo Moruo] of the Federation of Literary and Art Circles.... We have no experience of writing *zawen*, we'd need to bring him out so everyone can learn from him.'

Mao, July 1957: Lu Xun would 'either be in prison, continuing his writing, or he would have "discerned the cardinal virtue" and fallen silent.'

(Mao's supporters say the second comment was a criticism not of Lu Xun but of the Party bureaucrats, so the two comments were not in contradiction. However, Mao's critics say this comment, made after the Hundred Flowers had wilted, showed Mao in his true colours and instead meant: no-one – not even Lu Xun – may criticise the CCP. Nagahori agrees with Wang Fanxi: the true 'Lu Xun spirit' was incompatible with Maoist politics. Lu Xun would at best have gone to gaol. Mao treated Lu Xun as a tool, according to expediency.)

Hu Shi, in 1955, at the time of the 'Hu Feng purge': 'If Lu Xun wasn't dead already, he too would have had his head chopped off.'

Guo Moruo, again, in 1966: 'How happy Lu Xun would be if he had lived! He would stand in the front ranks of the Cultural Revolution ... under the leadership of Chairman Mao.'

Zhang Yu'an 张宇安, a schoolteacher from Lu Xun's hometown, in a poem published in *People's Daily* in 1980: 'Perhaps he would be showered with honours / but perhaps - he would only just be out of gaol.' (A Party mogul called the poem 'counter-revolutionary'.)

Shu Wu 舒芜, a friend of Hu Feng, in 2000: If Lu Xun had lived, he would have endured a fate even more tragic than that of Maxim Gorki (who died under house arrest).

Edgar Snow, in 1962, in *The Other Side of the River*: Lu Xun would either have fallen silent or been forced to do thought reform and mouth platitudes (a passage cut from the Chinese translation). [17]

How had Lu Xun imagined his own future under Party rule? He was a fellow-traveller, a member of the old society destined for extinction. He closely followed the lives and deaths of Soviet fellow-travellers: the poet Sergei Yesenin (who hanged himself in 1928), the writer Andrei Sobol (who shot himself in 1926), Alexander Blok (who stopped writing poetry three years before he died in 1921, having been refused permission to go abroad for treatment), Vladimir Mayakovsky (who killed himself in 1930). He probably expected a similar fate. The democrat Zhu Zheng 朱 Zheng lists three relevant pronouncements by Lu Xun. 'If Confucius, Shakamuni, and Jesus were alive, they would be persecuted.' To the Communist Feng Xuefeng: 'Here you are, without first killing me!' In 1934: 'If things fall apart [through revolution] and I unexpectedly survive, I will sweep the Shanghai streets in a [street cleaner's] red vest.'

Nagahori, echoing Wang Fanxi and Zhu Zheng, adds that the purge of Lu Xun's follower Hu Feng in 1955 was, in reality, a posthumous purge of Lu Xun.

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## Footnotes

[1] In the square brackets, regular numbers refer to the Japanese original and italicised numbers to the Chinese translation. Thanks to Kevin Yang for his comments on this article.

[2] Lu Xun 1937.

[3] Lu Xun 1938.

[4] Trotsky 1925.

[5] On Eroshenko's time in Beijing, see Benton 2007, pp. 107–9.

[6] Carter 2013.

[7] In Chinese translation, *Xixing manji* (Snow 1979).

[8] For Lu Xun's postscript to 'The Twelve', see Lu Xun 1963, pp. 397-401.

[9] Among the latter is the excellent but little-known Yi Ding (Lou Guohua), *Lu Xun: Qi ren, qi shi, jiqi shidai* [*Lu Xun: The Man, the Works, and the Age*] (Yi Ding 1978), which anticipated much of the later debate in Chinese about Lu Xun. Several of the arguments in this section and some of the materials used to support them can be found, in English, in Benton 1994, as reprinted in Benton (ed.) 2015.

[10] Tang Baolin 1994. For a critical review of Tang's book, see Benton 2015b.

[11] 'Tebie shengming [Special Declaration]', *Huohua*, Volume 3, No. 3, 25 September 1936, cited in Benton (ed.) 2015, p. 1038.

[12] Benton 2015a.

[13] 'Jottings in Mid-Summer' (Lu Xun 1956-60), cited in Benton (ed.) 2015, p. 1040.

[14] Lu Xun, 'Wo zenmo zuoqi xiaoshuo lai [How I Started Writing Novels]', in *Complete Works*, Volume 4, cited in Benton (ed.) 2015, p. 1034.

[15] Wang Fanxi 1973. The 2003 editions were published in Hong Kong by Xinmiao chuban she, and in Taiwan by Lianjie zazhi she.

[16] To protect Lou Shiyi, Nagahori only made this collusion between Lou Guohua and Lou Shiyi public after Lou Shiyi's death in 2001.

[17] Snow 1984.