
Missions of Literature: “Revolutionary Literature” and the Political involvement of the Creation Society

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Abstract:

By using the Creation Society as a case study, this paper investigates the origin of the tendency of using literature as a tool for political or social purposes in 20th century China. The main theoretical concern of this paper is to analyze the idea “revolutionary literature” and its origination in the social context of 1920s’ China. Instead of treating this idea as a pure Communist party creation, this paper argues that the urge of discovering the functionality of literature in association with the socio-political revolution in China can be found among many Chinese literary scholars. The political involvement of literature provides a discursive power and a channel for political participation for the intellectuals. The political arts also presented the political parties with necessary tools for social mobilization and serves as a method for competing for discursive power. The intellectual resource for Chinese revolutionary literature also contains various origins not just from Marxism, but also from Japanese and American left-leaning economists and anarchist activists. This paper will also present a historical discussion for such a complex history interaction.

Key Words: Revolutionary literature, National revolution, Chinese political history, Marxism, Anarchism

1. INTRODUCTION

In Chinese politicised literary writings in Republican China, there was a strong tendency to use literature as a tool for certain political or social purposes. The legitimacy of such an instrumental rationality might not simply come from the influence of Marxist-Leninist ideology, but rooted more deeply in the 19th and 20th century Western literary and philosophical tradition. In retrospect, the Creationists' promotion of using literature as a political weapon can also find a deeper connection with such a tradition. From this perspective, the re-examination of the debate between the Creation Society and the Literary Association will bring in some new insights. During the debate, ideas from Thorstein Veblen, Upton Sinclair, and Japanese socialists and anarchists played a quite important theoretical support, which fertilised the discussions and also the formation of the instrumental rationality appeared in Creation Society's promotion of the "revolutionary literature".

The political involvement of the Creationists began roughly in 1925, when the Guangzhou government of the KMT began to attract intellectuals from all over the country. Intellectuals were hired in universities or as political officers in the KMT army. The KMT ambition was to promote its political vision and discourses through them or to create an image that the southern government was gaining more support from the intellectuals. Inevitably, intellectuals in Guangdong province began to get more involved with the political conflicts. Some of them began to criticise the problems within the southern government. The conflicts between the KMT and the CCP also expanded and both sides began to realise the importance of gaining support from the intellectuals.

After the May 30th incident in 1925, the anti-imperialist trend among Chinese strengthened. Members of the Creation Society also began to question the social use of literature. Although still with doubts towards politics, Guo Moruo began to involve himself in politics by providing public speeches on current issues. Others such as Cheng Fangwu, and Wang Duqing (王獨清 1898—1940) directly participated in the KMT political activities in Guangdong. From 1926 to 1928, the KMT led a military campaign commonly known as Northern Expedition (北伐) in order to unify China, which was then under the rule of local warlords. Since 1926, more Creationists became directly involved in the revolution by acting as officers in the Northern Expedition student army. The identity as well as the self-recognition of the Creationists in the 1920s, therefore, were being challenged and went through a transition. The shift of the connotation of the term "revolutionary literary writer" actually reveals this dramatic process of change.

In March 1926, Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu and Wang Duqing took positions in National Guangdong University and arrived in Guangzhou. Soon after they arrived, *Republican China Daily* (Guangzhou) began to publish advertisements of publications issued by the Creation Society.

This KMT official newspaper also referred them as “the most respected revolutionary writers”.¹ “Revolutionary literary writer”, in 1926, was not a new term, yet, it was rather an ambiguous one. In 1923, the Creation Society and the Literary Association debated the issue of “art for art’s sake” and “art for life’s sake”. Early CCP members such as Deng Zhongxia and Yun Daiying began to publish articles and conduct public lectures on the relationship between revolution and literature. What they referred to as “literature of revolution” (革命的文學) was proposed under the direct party line of using literary works as a channel for propagating Marxist discourses. They also directly responded to the debates between the Creation Society and the Literary Association by arguing that both sets of literary views were actually too distant from real life.² However, such an accusation might not be fair since it was roughly at the same period that the Creationists began to publish articles discussing the social “mission” (使命) of intellectuals.³ With the changing social conditions and the rising awareness of political activists of the socio-political importance of literature, the social position and function of intellectuals in the era of great transformation generally became a heated topic for both activists and intellectuals.

After the collaboration between the CCP and the KMT began in January 1924, the political connotation of revolution became even more complex. By using the concept of “nationalist revolution” (國民革命), the revolutionary agendas from both the KMT and the CCP were merged. Fitzgerald argues that “nationalist revolution” claimed the right to govern the people and enlighten them on the path of transforming into modern citizens.⁴ As an awakened self, one must become a patriot and an independent individual who can search for an ideal stage of a state.⁵ Regardless of this ideal vision, the problem of how to achieve such self-awareness remains untouched. From the practical level, both parties agreed, the primary purpose of revolution at the stage was to achieve national salvation. On a theoretical level, this goal must be achieved through a mass self-emancipation rather than a liberation led by elites. This revolutionary discourse was heavily influenced by Marxism and Leninism supported by the Comintern. However, with the involvement of two political parties, the practice of revolution in China was then not only about forming a better society but more importantly, the political hegemony of the revolution. Beneath the agreement of conducting a “national revolution”, differences of opinion on how to modernise China still broadly existed among all the revolutionists. The existence of such differences stirred up the undercurrent of opposition

¹ "Students from Guangdong University Welcome Guo Moruo," *Guangzhou Minguo Ribao* (Republican China daily) (March 26, 1926).

² "Jinri Zhongguo De Wenxuejie (The Literary Sphere of Today's China)," *Zhongguo Qingnian* (China Youth) 1, no. 5 (1923).

³ Cheng Fangwu, "Xinwenxue Zhi Shiming (The Mission of New Literature)," *Chuangzao Zhoubao* (Creation weekly), no. 2 (1923). Also see Xidi, "Wenxue De Shiming (The Mission of Literature)," *Wenxue Xunkan* (Literature ten-day publication), no. 5 (1921).

⁴ John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 87.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 88-102.

between the KMT and the CCP as well as sectarian divisions among both parties. For example, some CCP members in the KMT at the time criticised Guangdong University, described by Sun Yat-sen as the “basic camp of our party’s revolutionary talents”, as “not being revolutionary” at all when Zou Lu was in charge.⁶ These conflicts were manifested in the style of theoretical debates and political quarrels among various factions. Intellectuals, with their significant influence upon the general public, also began to receive political recognition from both parties.

2. THE IDEA OF “NATIONAL LITERATURE” AND ITS PROBLEMS

In May 13th, 1923, the Creation Society began to issue a weekly literary periodical named *Chuangzao Zhoubao* (Creation Weekly). Guo Moruo, Cheng Fangwu, and Yu Dafu were the main contributors. In its second issue, Cheng Fangwu announced that literature had three missions, namely 1) responsibility towards the era (對於時代的使命); 2) responsibility towards national language (對於國語的使命); and 3) responsibility towards literature itself (文學本身的使命).⁷ Compared with their works published between 1921 and 1923, the scope of this article moves beyond the construction of an abstract “self” and focuses more on constituting an individual which is both defined by and contributing to the society. Unlike the protagonists in Yu Dafu’s “The Quarry”, “The Endless Dark Night”, or Guo Moruo’s “Palace of Eternal Coldness”, the individual presented by Cheng Fangwu is no longer an incompetent victim of a repressed nation, but a mighty warrior who takes the responsibility of carrying on the spirit of the time as well as curing diseases of the society.⁸ To the Creationists in this period, both the cosmopolitan ideal and the duty of national-salvation are mingled together in their literary viewpoint.⁹ Therefore, we can see that although Cheng acknowledges that literature serves the purpose of achieving personal satisfaction by providing beauty (美) and perfection (全), he insists more on literature’s social influence. In Cheng’s description, society in this era has been riddled with hypocrisy, offence and notoriety.¹⁰ Writers, Cheng said are the conscience of an era, therefore, they shall take the responsibility and become warriors and missionaries of truth and beauty. A similar attempt to contextualise literature in a broader socio-historical background had been practised by members of the Literary Association in 1921.

In June 1921, soon after the founding of the Literary Association, Xidi (pseudonym of Zheng Zhenduo) published an article in *Wenxue Xunkan* titled “Wenxue de shiming” (The mission of literature).¹¹ The literary view presented in this article was a representative one at its time. The author quotes Theodore W. Hunt, a professor of English in Princeton University at the time,

⁶ Zou Lu, *Huigu Lu* (Memoir) (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe), p. 145 and 169.

⁷ Cheng, “Xinwenxue Zhi Shiming (The Mission of New Literature).”

⁸ Cheng, “Xinwenxue Zhi Shiming (The Mission of New Literature).”

⁹ Zheng Boqi, “Guomin Wenxue Lun (On National Literature),” *Chuangzao Zhoubao* (Creation weekly), no. 33 (1923).

¹⁰ Cheng, “Xinwenxue Zhi Shiming (The Mission of New Literature).”

¹¹ Xidi, “Wenxue De Shiming (The Mission of Literature).”

and said that the truth missions of literature were four: 1) the acknowledgement, embodiment and interpretation of great ideas or principles; 2) the correct interpretation of the spirit of the age; 3) the interpretation of human nature to itself and to the world; 4) the presentation and enforcement of high ideals.¹² To some extents, Hunt's understanding of literature was no different than the dominant literary thought in the late 19th and early 20th century in the English-speaking world, which focused on setting out rules of presenting and understanding beauty as well as principles for literary creations based on the acceptance of the existence of a universal abstract humanity.¹³ However, as Hunt pointed out in chapter six, the relationship between literature and politics was not at all mutually exclusive.¹⁴

Hunt stated that an “author” is also a “statesman”. These two social identities mostly shared the same personality, as it was almost impossible to draw a line of separation when a person is performing its social activities.¹⁵ He also gave a position for “political literature”, i.e. historical works on politics, political essays and political oration, in his literary theory. Together with the aesthetic theories of Kant, Schiller and Schopenhauer, such literary views were used to constitute the social significance of literature during revolution.¹⁶ To Zheng Zhenduo, the ultimate purpose of literature was to “save the corrupted modern people” rather than simply providing shallow happiness or expressing personal feelings.¹⁷ In this image, we can easily notice a heroic saviour complex which can be found in both Lu Xun’s description of “Mara” in his “The power of the Mara Poetry” and the Creation Society’s characterisation of “genius” and “creator”. They are all highly individualised and romantic. These heroic images appear to be universally accepted. Meanwhile, as national icons, they also bear the responsibility of saving their own people. They are doomed to be misunderstood and alienated, yet still take the responsibility of mass salvation into their own hands. Despite the disputes over specific problems, the theoretical similarity between the Creation Society and the Literary Association is actually significant.

Shen Yanbing brought a different perspective to the discussion. Instead of focusing on distinguishing “art for art’s sake” and “art for life’s sake”, Shen switched to the clarification of the relationship between literature and society and gave a more detailed discussion. He also

¹² Theodore W. Hunt, *Literature, Its Principles and Problems* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1906), pp. 188-193.

¹³ "Review: [Untitled]," *The Sewanee Review* 14, no. 3 (1906).

¹⁴ Hunt, *Literature, Its Principles and Problems*, p. 85.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁶ On this issue, see Chen Guanghong, "Huang Ren De Wenxue Guannian Yu Shiji Shiji Yingguo Wenxue Piping Ziyuan (The Literary View of Huang Ren and the Literary Criticism of 19th Century Britain)," *Wenxue Pinglun* (Literary Criticism), no. 6 (2008).

¹⁷ Xidi, "Wenxue De Shiming (the Mission of Literature)."

mentioned the social responsibility of a writer.¹⁸ He believed that the fundamental reason for the underdevelopment of Chinese literature was that Chinese people did not truly understand such a relationship. As he stated, the “literary man” (文學者) in traditional China mostly served the needs of rulers and the privileged few. Literature, in their perspectives, was nothing but a tool or a toy. Although some literary works can be poetic and beautiful, they were just works expressing writers’ personal feelings, which conveyed little spirit of the era. Shen argued that “the evolution of world literature” had gone through ancient, medieval and modern stages, which reflected the discovery of individuality, society/state, and the people respectively.

Shen disparaged didactic literature. Furthermore, he noted that the purpose of literature was to represent life systematically either through the use of figurative or literal methods of representation. Therefore, he suggested the idea of “national literature” (國民文學) as an ultimate form of literary practice.¹⁹ Shen argued that translating Western literature was not only for aesthetic satisfaction, but more importantly for introducing modern thoughts. The ultimate purpose of literature was to formulate a national identity based on the discovery of individuality. Henceforth, the Chinese nation can eventually be established in the world.²⁰

Both the Literary Association and the Creation Society broadly shared Shen’s evolutionist literary view that had an obvious intentionality. From December 1923 to January 1924, Zheng Boqi published a series of articles in *Creation Weekly* titled “On National Literature”, in which he believed that all responsible Chinese writers should promote national literature. In his opinion, national literature should use the life of citizens as background, conveye the national conscience and expresse a strong emotional affiliation towards homeland.²¹ Although literati in traditional China could also occasionally express similar feelings, they could only create privileged patrician literature (貴族文學) because they could never truly mingle with citizens. Zheng condemned that even with modern literary skills, the spirit in Chinese new literary arena remained old. Without truly participating in real life, literature was merely a meaningless sentimentalism based on naïve humanitarianism. Therefore, new literary writers must save themselves and try to achieve self-awareness. He stated that the fate of new literature was bound up with new thoughts.

Zheng advocated, young writers should take the responsibility and decide the path for new literature. In order to achieve such a goal, “we” must break up with the domination of the May Fourth generation and establish a distinguished “new literature”. This long article, on one hand, systematically responded to the debate of “art for art’s or life’s sake”; on the other hand, it also

¹⁸ Shen Yanbing, "Wenxue He Ren De Guanxi Ji Zhongguo Gula Duiyu Wenxuezhe Shenfen De Wuren (The Relationship between Literature and People as Well as the Misunderstanding of Literary Man's Identity since Imperial China)," *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (The short-story monthly) 12, no. 1 (1921).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Langsun, "Xinwenxue Yanjiuzhe De Zeren Yu Nuli (The Responsibility and Endeavor of Researchers on New Literature)," *Xiaoshuo Yuebao* (The short-story monthly) 12, no. 2 (1921).

²¹ Zheng, "Guomin Wenxue Lun (On National Literature)."

further developed the agenda and connotation of “national literature”. Zheng began the argument by acknowledging that “art is a self-expression”. However, he defined “self” (自我) as being neither an abstract individual as philosophers posited, nor an “ego” as psychologists defined it. It was an actual being who articulates his/her existence through social relationships.²² In this sense, self-expression was to portray such social existence, which fundamentally speaking, as he believed, was not at all in conflict with the belief of “art for life’s sake”.²³ He further defined the meaning of aesthetic autonomy as a rebellion against using art as a propaganda tool. By making such comments, Zheng criticised the literary view proposed by the CYP and insists that “national literature” was not even remotely related to etatism.

Zheng elaborated that the autonomy reflects the independent spirit of writers so that they could truthfully represent the reality of people’s life. In his opinion, Oscar Wilde, the representative of aestheticism, had his strong criticisms against the philistinism and mammonism in the society. Zheng argued that the man-made differences between romanticism and realism, idealism and naturalism were merely different expressions of individuality and the spirit of era. Furthermore, Zheng criticised the idea of “art for life’s sake” as being naïve. People who promoted this idea actually treated art as a tool and used it to propagate an unearthly ideal life, he charged.²⁴ On the contrary, national literature helped people to get closer to real life and spirit of era, which might eventually benefit the construction of the identity of modern individual as “guomin” (國民 citizen).²⁵

Just like most theoretical works of the Creation Society, Zheng’s definition of “national literature” was far from being sophisticated. Nevertheless, he raised several essential issues, most importantly the class representation and class affiliation of intellectual, and the intentionality of writers in a class society which were mainly argued in the Revolutionary Literature Debate. In the first article of this series, Zheng directly criticised the idea of “class literature” (階級文學), which he believed should appear after “national literature”. He noted that in order to establish a powerful and independent nation, citizens should voice solidarity and devote their emotion to a unified nation regardless of their class affiliations. He also excoriated the idea of “literature of the common people” (平民文學) as a worthless sympathy carried out by a group of the privileged few, such as Hu Shi.²⁶ Literature as such “is nothing but hollow words spit out by the leisure class (有閑階級)”.²⁷

²² Ibid., no. 33.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., no. 34.

²⁶ Ibid., no. 33.

²⁷ Ibid.

The term “leisure class” is not just a Marxist concept but arose from the new institutional economics in America. First published in 1899, Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* criticised the social structure and the problems created by the “leisure class”. Veblen applied a structuralist view of evolution on the development of human society. He believed that the leisure class was a product of social evolution and the urge of occupying more property feeds the natural need of distinction and vanity of human-beings.²⁸ The complete translation of Veblen’s work was published in 1936 by a Communist intellectual Hu Yimo (胡伊默, 1900-1971). However, it was already known to intellectuals such as Yu Dafu (who studied economics). The term “leisure class” was also often used in their writings in the 1920s. Although Veblen’s theory was demeaned as a vulgar economics by the later Marxists, his clear social evolutionist opinion was much easier to understand by the early Creationists.²⁹

Japanese literature of between 1921 and 1923 also had its impact on the formation of the Creationists’ theoretical discourse. In 1921, Japanese pacifist and early Marxist Komaki Ōmi (小牧近江, 1894-1978) started a literary magazine named as *Tane Maku Hito* (種蒔く人, the sower).³⁰ Heavily influenced by French dramatist Romain Rolland’s concept of “popular theatre” (*Le Théâtre du peuple*, 1902), this magazine promotes the idea of “minsyuu geijutsu” (民衆芸術, popular art or people’s art). The first systematic discussion of the idea “popular art” in Japan was made by Honma Hisao (本間久雄, 1886-1981) in 1916. According to him, it is an art form not only representing the life of the people but, more importantly, created by the people.³¹ Literature, in his perspective, is a mechanism for public education. Anarchist and socialist thought represented by people like Ōsugi Sakae (大杉栄, 1885-1923) prevailed the Taisho Japanese intellectual sphere. Political thinking, especially Saint-Simon’s Utopian socialism and Mikhail Bakunin’s anarchism, and literary trends, such as naturalism and realism, had a significant influence on these intellectuals. These Japanese socialists and anarchists either focused on the idea of “kokumin” (国民, the citizen or the national) or the collective identity of “minsyuu” (民衆, the masses or the people), which diluted the notion of class.

In 1920, Nakano Hideto (中野秀人, 1898-1966) published an article named “第四階級の文学” (Literature of the fourth class) in literary magazine *Bunsyou Sekai* (文章世界, World of articles). This article is believed to be the first theoretical discussion in Japanese about class

²⁸ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class, an Economic Study of Institutions* (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919), pp. 8-21.

²⁹ In 1928, when Cheng Fangwu was criticising Lu Xun, he called Lu Xun as a member of the leisure class. In Cheng’s explanation, leisure class is “a class which has money” (有錢階級). This opinion can certainly find its track in Veblen’s analysis. See Ibid., pp. 22-34. Intriguingly, both Veblen and Upton Sinclair were mentioned in an intellectual journal *Taiping Yang* (The Pacific 太平洋) in 1924. Both of them have their particular impacts on the discourse used by the Creation Society. A detailed discussion on the connection between *The Pacific* and the Creationists will be in the next chapter.

³⁰ Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 595.

³¹ Liu Baiqing, ed. *Riben Wuchanjieji Wenyi Yundong Jianshi 1921-1934* (A Brief History of Proletarian Literary Movement in Japan, 1921-1934) (Changchun: Shidai Wenyi Press, 1985).

differences among the people and systematically constitutes the class feature of workers (which Nakano Hideto refers as “the fourth class”).³² Instead of using the ambiguous word “minsyuu”, Nakano Hideto identifies the difference between the petty bourgeoisie (which he refers as the third class) and the working class. However, such idea received heavy criticisms in 1923, from those like Kikuchi Kan (菊池寛, 1888-1948) who accepted the emergence of proletarians in the society but refused the possibility of writing “proletarian literature” by intellectuals. Kikuchi Kan’s major complaint is that it is impossible for intellectuals who come from the third class to represent the ideas of the fourth class.³³

Similar concern actually appeared a year earlier in Arishima Takeo’s (有島武郎, 1878-1923) “Sengen Hitotsu” (宣言一つ, a manifesto) published in *Kaizou* (改造, Transformation). In this article published in 1922, Arishima Takeo conveyed his conviction that the upper class cannot represent the labouring class and speak for them.³⁴ Zheng Boqi’s article also quoted Arishima Takeo’s “A manifesto”. Zheng accepted the viewpoint that the class conflicts between the third and the fourth classes were fierce, yet, he did not believe it was fundamentally impossible for the third class to speak for the fourth class.³⁵ According to Zheng, from a realist perspective, representing the social reality and revealing the miserable living condition of the oppressed fourth class were absolutely feasible. Only through such practice can intellectuals help to constitute a unified nation for a better future. In his opinion, Flaubert, Zola, Alphonse Daudet, and Guy de Maupassant were some excellent examples of such literary practice.³⁶ Zheng’s major concern was not the problem of representation. He basically used Arishima Takeo’s argument to prove that a unified “national literature” was more suitable for China at the stage since it conciliated the social conflicts and establishes a collective identity rather than splits the nation apart.

The perception of class discourse among the Creationists in 1923 could be better exemplified by Yu Dafu’s “Wenxue shangde jieji douzheng” (The class struggle in the literary sphere).³⁷ The idea of class was mainly perceived as a discourse to legitimise young writers’ rebellion against the established intellectuals, who were “revolutionary when newly emerged” but turned into “veterans” when they acquired cultural positions.³⁸ Although, judging from their writings

³² On the introduction of Nakano Hideto’s literary view and its position in Japanese proletarian literature movement, see Ye Weiqu, *Riben Wenzhe Sichao Shi* (History of Japanese Literary Trends) (Taipei: Wunan Book Inc., 2003), pp. 491-492.

³³ Liu, ed. *Riben Wuchanjieji Wenyi Yundong Jianshi 1921-1934* (A Brief History of Proletarian Literary Movement in Japan, 1921-1934).

³⁴ Arishima Takeo, “Sengen Hitotsu (A Manifesto),” in *Kaizou* (*Transformation*) (1922). Cited from *Aozora bunko* (Aozora Library): http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000025/files/217_20459.html.

³⁵ Zheng, “Guomin Wenxue Lun (On National Literature).”

³⁶ Zheng Boqi, “Guomin Wenxue Lun (On National Literature),” *Chuangzao Zhoubao* (Creation weekly), no. 35 (1924).

³⁷ Yu Dafu, “Wenxue Shang De Jieji Douzheng (The Class Struggle in the Literary Sphere),” *Chuangzao Zhoubao* (Creation weekly), no. 3 (1923).

³⁸ Ibid.

and educational background, the Creationists must be aware of the theoretical debates on “literature of the fourth class” talking place in Japan between 1920 and 1922, there is no obvious evidence that they had sophisticated discussions on Marx’s class theory and, most importantly, the issue of class representation. Such discussions only started from 1927 on, in the course of what is perceived as the “Revolutionary Literary Debate”.³⁹

3. BECOMING REVOLUTIONARY WRITERS: POLITICAL INFLUENCE FROM KMT GUANGZHOU GOVERNMENT (1924-1926)

Until 1923, the Creationists showed absolutely no interests in political participation and were still complaining about “the literary sphere today is almost as filthy as politics”.⁴⁰ However, with the failures and setbacks that occurred in 1924, they generally became disillusioned of being writers and began to complain about “the uselessness of art”.⁴¹ They felt an urge to start a rebellion against the oppressing society rather than sinking blindly into the artistic dream.⁴² At the time, the visit of Cheng Shaowu (成邵吾), Cheng Fangwu’s older brother, opened a new window for the Creationists. Cheng Shaowu, who at the time was working in the Guangdong government, suggested they should give up literary activities and make contributions to the KMT Guangdong government.⁴³ With the collaboration between the KMT and the CCP, some people in China started to feel that a new era of Chinese revolution was coming.⁴⁴ Cheng Fangwu became the first person in the Creation Society to leave Shanghai and join the political movement in Guangzhou. Two years later, in 1926, Guo Moruo and others also took the jobs at Guangzhou University. With the direct participation in politics and the growing awareness of the importance of political communication among political parties, the role of intellectuals in the Chinese revolution started to change subtly.

The split between the CCP and the KMT in 1927 put forward the question of which party could rightfully and legitimately lead the Chinese revolution. Since then, the role of intellectuals in modern Chinese politics became more essential and crucial. With the change of political atmosphere, the debate on literary problems began to have its political significance in 1927. The disagreements then generally became the fundamental differences on revolutionary approaches and agendas between various revolutionary parties. The competition then turned into the struggle for leadership of Chinese revolution. The following parts of this chapter will

³⁹ Li Helin, *Zhongguo Wenyi Lunzhan* (Literary Debates in China) (Xi'an: Shanxi Renmin Press, 1984), p. 10. This research was first published in 1929. It portraits the debate happened between 1927 and 1928 as a “revolutionary literary debate”. This debate will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

⁴⁰ Cheng Fangwu, “Bianji Zongtan (Editorial),” *Chuangzao Jikan* (Creation Quarterly) 1, no. 4 (1923).

⁴¹ Yu Dafu, “Beiguo De Weiyin: Jigei Moruo Yu Fangwu (A Weak Voice from the North: Letter to Guo Moruo and Cheng Fangwu),” *Chuangzao Zhoubao* (Creation weekly), no. 47 (1924).

⁴² Cheng Fangwu, “Jiangnan De Chunxun (News of the Coming of Spring from the Sourth),” *Chuangzao Zhoubao* (Creation weekly), no. 48 (1924).

⁴³ Guo, *Guo Moruo Quanji: Wenxue Bian* (Complete Works of Guo Moruo, Literature Section), p. 182.

⁴⁴ Zheng Chaolin, *Zheng Chaolin Huiyi Lu* (Memoir of Zheng Chaolin) (Beijing: Dongfang Press, 1996), p. 86.

focus on the historical dynamic of as well as the theoretical construction within such transition. By the time the Creationists came to Guangzhou, they were propagated by the KMT official media as “revolutionary writers”. Obviously, they were made into showcases to demonstrate the legitimacy of the KMT Guangzhou government and used to feed the revolutionary fever in Guangzhou by then. Although almost unrecognised in other part of China, their reputation grew with the expansion of the national revolution.

The establishment of National Guangdong University under the regime of Guangzhou Government provided a wonderful chance for members of the Creation Society to gain both cultural and political resources. Under the political and financial pressures from Comintern, along with the ideological influence coming directly from representatives of Comintern, such as Michael Borodin (Chinese name Bao Luoting 鮑羅廷) and Hendrik Sneevliet (Chinese name Ma Lin 馬林), Sun Yat-sen's KMT appeared to become closer to the Communist Party on both organisational and ideological levels after the first National Guomindang Congress (第一次國民黨全國代表大會) in January 1924. The positive reaction toward Comintern and Marxism might likely be a practical choice of Sun Yat-sen, aiming at using the Leninist party organisation methods to reconstruct the KMT. However, by doing so and deliberately calling Communism as a form of Three People's Principle, Sun Yat-sen actually provided a political legitimacy for using communist and socialist discourses to interpret and legitimise Chinese revolution.⁴⁵ The newly established Guangzhou Government gathered a large group of committed young students who were coming from all over China. Zhang Guotao, one of the founding fathers of the CCP, recalled the first impression he had when he came to Guangzhou in 1925. He called it a “strong city”, in which a revolutionary colour was painted upon a backward and chaotic basis”.⁴⁶ However, it was such a political situation that enabled the Creationists to discuss Marxism openly without risking being considered as politically incorrect.

Such a chaotic vision was not at all satisfying to those KMT leaders in Guangzhou. One of the political attempts to ease such chaos was to unify the higher educational system in Guangdong. In February 4th, 1924, Sun Yat-sen issued an order requiring three universities in Guangzhou, namely National Advanced Normal University (國立高等師範), Guangdong School of Law (廣東法科大學) and Guangdong School of Agriculture (廣東農業專門學校), to merge together and form the National Guangdong University.⁴⁷ Zou Lu, head of Guangdong University preparatory committee and later the first chancellor of National Guangdong University, recalled that right before issuing the order to form a large national university in 1924, Sun Yat-sen commented that the “current problem of education in Guangdong” was that

⁴⁵ Sun Yat-sen. “Duiyu Zuzhi Guomin Zhengfu zhi Shuoming”. In *Zhonghua Minguoshi Dang'an Ziliao Huibian, Disi Ji* (Collection of Archives of Republican China, Issue 4), p. 230.

⁴⁶ Zhang Guotao, *Wo De Huiyi* (My Memory), 3 vols., vol. 2 (Shanghai: Dongfang Press, 1980), p. 51.

⁴⁷ Sun Yat-sen. “Zhuo Chuangjian Guoli Guangdong Daxue Ling” (Order on establishing National Guangdong University). In Sun Yat-sen, *Sun Yat-Sen Quanji* (The Complete Works of Sun Yat-Sen), 11 vols., vol. 9 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), p. 433.

it was “unable to deliver the ideology of KMT”.⁴⁸ Therefore, Sun appointed Zou Lu in charge of supervising the educational organisations in Guangdong in order to “protect the higher education in Guangdong from being penetrated by others”.⁴⁹

Under this agenda, the newly formed Guangdong University rapidly grew into one of the largest universities in China and attracted a whole group of scholars who sympathised with or passionate about the KMT revolutionary idea, which at the time was heavily influenced by Communist and socialist discourses. After the second Guomindang National Congress in 1926, Guangdong University became more radical. A telegraph was sent to the national congress saying that Guangdong University should carry out a reform, in order to “attract more revolutionary individuals”.⁵⁰ To be revolutionary, however, at that time was getting much closer to the use of Marxist discourses. According to Guo Moruo’s own memoir, it was Qu Qiubai, an alternate member of KMT Central Committee at the time, who recommended him to teach in Guangdong University in 1925.⁵¹ As a party leader, Qu valued the political importance of theoretical debate quite high. The conflict between him and Chen Duxiu manifested such a political significance of theory.⁵²

Although considering Guo’s memoir was written in 1937, which by the time he was already closely attached with CCP, his description may be biased, it is still quite true that by the time of 1926, Guangdong University had already became a centre with heavy Communist activities. It is also historically accurate that CCP members had the intention of gathering progressive intellectuals such as Guo Moruo and Lu Xun in Guangzhou, the so-called “centre of revolution”. Also in December 1925, Zou Lu, who was anti-CCP and most importantly the organiser of the Western Hills conference (國民黨西山會議) in November 1925, was removed from the position of Chancellor of Guangdong University under the decision approved by the KMT central committee, formed mostly by CCP members and KMT members who were sympathetic to Communism.⁵³ Following Zou Lu’s demission, a group of professors in Guangdong University also resigned in 1925.⁵⁴ In the statement published in *Xuedeng*, these people claimed that the reason for their resignation was to fight against an “education full of communist propaganda” supported by Michael Borodin and Wang Jingwei, also to “maintain

⁴⁸ Zou, *Huigu Lu* (Memoir), p. 118.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Cited from Song Bin Yu and Zhang Aohui, "Tantan Guo Moruo Zaonian Tong Zhongguo Gongchandang De Guanxi (About Guo Moruo's Relationship with the CCP in his Early Years)," *Guo Moruo Xuekan* (Journal of Guo Moruo Studies), no. 2 (1987), p. 82.

⁵¹ Yao Shouzhong, Ma Guangren, and Geng Yi, eds., *Qu Qiubai Nianpu Changbian* (Chronicle of Qu Qiubai) (Jiangsu: Jiangsu Renmin Press, 1993), pp. 177-178.

⁵² van de Ven, “The Emergence of the Text-Centered Party,” pp. 20-26.

⁵³ “National Government’s Order: Dismissing Zou Lu from the Presidency of the Guangdong University. 1 Dec. 1925”. In *Zhonghua Minguoshi Dang'an Ziliao Huibian, Disi Ji* (Collection of Archives of Republican China, Issue 4), pp. 1641-1643.

⁵⁴ “Guangda Lixiao Jiaoshou Fabiao Xuanyan (Declaration of Resignation from Professors in Guangdong University)”, *Xuedeng* (Dec. 11, 1925).

the dignity of professors".⁵⁵ According to the public media in Shanghai, about a hundred professors from Guangdong University left and arrived in Shanghai in December 30, 1925.⁵⁶

After Zou Lu was removed from his position, Chen Gongbo (陳公博), under the persuasion of Wang Jingwei, took the position as the principal of Guangdong University.⁵⁷ Since Chen was a former member of the CCP, his appointment as principal was then seen as another CCP plot to gain full control of the KMT.⁵⁸ As a result more professors refused to teach in this university.⁵⁹ Due to the shortage of teaching fellows, having Guo Moruo in the faculty became an urgent issue for Chen Gongbo. In his open letter to Guo Moruo, Chen claimed that after he turned 20, his actions were completely influenced by literature. From Guo Moruo and his colleagues' works, he found spiritual satisfaction and peace in his busy and stressful revolutionary practices.⁶⁰ To members of the Creation Society, the offer from Guangdong University was much more tempting in terms of the financial and political benefits it could bring.

Yu Dafu recalled that Guangdong University provided them "with a very generous salary and sincere hospitality" in order to "invite them to teach social science and arts there".⁶¹ For Yu Dafu, a professorship was indeed tempting, since at the time Yu was working on several jobs to support his family.⁶² Guangzhou was also largely imagined by intellectuals at the time as a centre of revolution, which also contributed to its ability to attract intellectuals with revolutionary and progressive thoughts. Lu Xun revealed in one of his letters to Xu Guangping that the wage Guangdong University offered to him was 280 Yuan in silver.⁶³ He would like to take the position in a revolutionary regime although the salary was significantly lower than what he was paid in Xiamen University, which was 400 Yuan.⁶⁴

By the end of 1925, most of the early members of the Creation Society had already taken teaching positions in various places. To Guo Moruo, the urge to participate in political

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "Guangda Jinkuang Biebao (Another Report on the Recent Development of Guangdong University Incident)," *Xuedeng* (Dec. 30, 1925).

⁵⁷ Chen Gongbo, *Kuxiao Lu* (Records of Bitter Smile) (Beijing: Xiandai Shiliao Biankan She, 1981), pp. 31-32.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

⁵⁹ AM, "Guanyu Guangdong Daxue Ji Guangzhou Qingxing (Tongxin Er) (About the Situations in Guangdong University and Guangzhou, Two Correspondences)," *Duli Qingnian* (Independent Youth) 1, no. 3 (March 1926).

⁶⁰ Chen Gongbo, "Chen Gongbo Han Cui Guo Moruo Deng Nanguai (A Letter from Chen Gongbo to Guo Moruo and Others in Order to Rushing Them Back to the South)," *Guangzhou Minguo Ribao* (Republican China daily) (Feb. 18, 1926).

⁶¹ Yu Dafu, "Guangci De Wannian (The Last Few Years of Jiang Guangci)," *Xian Dai* (Modern) 3, no. 1 (1933).

⁶² Yu graduated from Tokyo Imperial University in 1922 and then went to Shanghai working a part-time job in Taidong Bookstore, just as many other members of The Creation Society. In October, 1923, he went to Beijing and began to work as a lecturer of economics in Peking University (1923-1925). Later on, he took a position in Wuchang University (1925-1926).

⁶³ Lu Xun. "261120 Zhi Xu Guangping" (To Xu Guangping, Nov. 20, 1926). In Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Quanji* (Complete Works of Lu Xun), 18 vols., vol. 11 (Beijing: Renmin Wenzxue Press, 2005), p. 620.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

activities also became his priority at the time.⁶⁵ He said that in the end of 1925, Jiang Guangci and Qu Qiubai came to visit him. At the time, he was involved in conducting debates with the etatism of the CYP.⁶⁶ Qu Qiubai encouraged him to write more about such subject.⁶⁷ Guo's interaction with CCP members was also getting more intensive in 1926. Together with Yun Daiying, Zhang Wentian and Shen Yanbing, Guo Moruo initiated Zhongguo Jinan Hui (Chinese Association of National Salvation 中國濟難會). The romantic imagination towards revolution was getting more popular among these young writers who were still competing for their literary recognition.⁶⁸ At the time, Guangzhou was considered to be the Moscow in China while Wang Jingwei and Chiang Kai-shek were referred to as Lenin and Trotsky.⁶⁹ Guo also began his teaching career as a lecturer in Daxia University in Shanghai in April 1925, teaching literary theory.⁷⁰ According to him, his ambition to establish his own literary theory emerged during that period.⁷¹ The heat and passion of revolution in Guangzhou made that city a potential destiny for people as Guo Moruo; while the visit of Wang Duqing gave Guo Moruo a final push. Wang Duqing claimed that a secretary of Wang Jingwei, Zeng Zhongming (曾仲鳴) was his friend.⁷² The possibility of both getting involved in political activity and establishing his own unique literary theory in Guangzhou made Guo Moruo decide to accept the offer from Guangzhou University.

Cheng Fangwu, who had majored in artillery when studying in Japan, was the first member of the Creation Society to come to Guangdong in 1924. He was appointed as professor in physics in Guangdong University as well as the deputy chief of weaponry office in Whampoa Military Academy. Despite the financial hardship of Guangdong government, they still promised an attractive salary in Guangdong University, which was paid in silver Yuan instead of the military currency, which was only valid within Guangdong, issued by Guangdong government. Compared with other early members of the Creation Society, Guo was the most famous figure at the time. In March 1926, he took the position as dean of School of Arts and Social Science in Guangdong University. He also invited Yu Dafu, Zheng Boqi and Wang Duqing to join him. Wang Duqing, later assumed Guo's position as the school head for a few months after Guo joined the Northern Expedition in 1926.⁷³ Guo's arrival was a publicity stunt for Guangzhou

⁶⁵ Guo Moruo. "Chuangzao Shinian Xubian" (Continuation of Ten years of Creation). *Guo, Guo Moruo Quanji: Wenzue Bian* (Complete Works of Guo Moruo, Literature Section), vol. 12, p. 273.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 273.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 274.

⁶⁸ Guo said that Chen Yuan invited him to take a teaching position in Wuchang Normal University. Chen compared Wuchang as Weimer Republic, while Guo Moruo as Goethe. Ibid. p. 267.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 267.

⁷⁰ Gong and Fang, eds., *Guo Moruo Nianpu* (*Chronology of Guo Moruo*). p. 190.

⁷¹ Guo Moruo. "Chuangzao Shinian Xubian" (Continuation of Ten years of Creation). In Guo, *Guo Moruo Quanji: Wenzue Bian* (Complete Works of Guo Moruo, Literature Section). vol. 12, p. 225.

⁷² Ibid., p. 293.

⁷³ At the time when Wang took the position, Guangdong University was officially renamed as Sun Yat-sen University in July 1926, as a memory towards Dr. Sun Yat-sen who died in 1925.

government. The arrival of these radical young writers was then used to sell the Guangdong government's image as a leader of a new revolutionary cultural trend. The generosity from a political power also provided social capital for these intellectuals.

4. “DISILLUSION”: THE MENTAL STAGE OF PROGRESSIVE INTELLECTUALS AFTER 1926

Despite the continuous political conflicts between the CCP and the KMT, the Guangzhou Government of the KMT still provided an environment in which Marxism was considered as a revolutionary thought. Starting from 1926, the Creation Society began to acquire a reputation among revolutionary youth as a vanguard literary society. Together with books about Communism, the Creationists' works were considered as spiritual resources for the revolutionary youth.

In Li Jinming's (黎錦明) novel *Chenying* (塵影, Shadow of dust) first published in December 1927, he described a booklist of an ordinary member of a “rebel party” (亂黨), *Hongshui* (洪水, The deluge), a journal published by the Creation Society since 1924 was listed as an important one. Other books included: *New Youth*, *Weiwu shiguan* (唯物史觀, Materialist historiography)⁷⁴, *Gongchanzhuyi de ABC* (共產主義的 ABC, Basic knowledge about Communism)⁷⁵, *Zhongguo qingnian* (中國青年, China youth)⁷⁶, *Shaonian xianfeng* (少年先鋒, Young pioneer)⁷⁷ and *Xianweijing xia de Guojiazhuyi*⁷⁸ (顯微鏡下的國家主義, Etatism under microscope).⁷⁹ Many of these books were publications of the Socialist Youth League of

⁷⁵ Luo, Zhitian. "Xifang De Fenlie: Guoji Fengyun Yu Wusi Qianhou Zhongguo Sixiang De Yanbian." *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue* (Chinese Social Science), no. 3 (March 1999): 20-35.

⁷⁴ There is only one book under such a title published before 1927 edited by *Zhongguo Qingnian* editorial board. This book was first published in February 1926 by Shanghai Bookstore and its second edition was released in January 1926. With only 36 pages, this book has totally four chapters and provides a historical introduction of the formation of historical materialism and its application in understanding the social structure and history. It also contains a bibliography.

⁷⁵ Published by *Xin Qingnian* editorial board in Hankou, the authors of this book are Nikolai Bukharin, then the chairman of the Comintern, and the Soviet economist Yevgeni Preobrazhensky. Its Chinese translation is 176 pages long and was first published in January 1926. By April 1927, the book had been reprinted three times and was quite popular among the Marxist followers.

⁷⁶ The official publication of the Socialist Youth League of China (中國社會主義青年團, a Communist organisation set up in 1920 and later on ran by the Chinese Communist Party, hereafter referred as SYLC), which was founded in May 1920. Section 6.2 in this chapter will give a detailed discussion of this journal.

⁷⁷ It is not clear that which specific journal Li was referring to, but a possibility is a quarterly published by Communist Youth League of China (formerly the SYLC) Guangdong regional committee between 1926 and 1927. It has a total 19 issues.

⁷⁸ Li made a mistake here. The actual book title should be *Xianweijing xia zhi Xingshi Pai* (顯微鏡下之醒獅派, The Xingshi school under microscope). Its author was the famous early Communist leader, contributor of *Zhongguo Qingnian Xiao Chunü* (蕭楚女, 1891-1927). It was published by *Zhongguo Qingnian* editorial board in October 1925. With only 50 pages, this book was mainly a collection of criticisms of Xiao against articles published in *Xinshi Zhoubao* (醒獅周報, Awakening Lion Weekly), a journal propagating etatism.

⁷⁹ Li Jinming, "Chen Ying (Shadow of Dust)," in *Zhongguo Xinwenxue Daxi, 1927-1937* (Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature, 1927-1937) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi Press, 1984), p. 128.

China. To the pro-socialist revolutionists at the time, it was more important to conduct a more thorough revolution targeting on the fundamental structure of the society. Zhu Qianzhi, a former Peking University student in philosophy, anarchist, and later socialist, described, the “true meaning” of revolution was to have a “national revolution” (國家革命) which target private ownership of property, and wage labour system. Without a systematic revolution, we could not solve the social problems from their basis.⁸⁰ This book was first published in 1921 and reprinted with almost the same content in 1927.

The political atmosphere in Guangzhou and the progress of the Northern Expedition created a hope for the revolutionary intellectuals during the Chinese Great Revolution until 1927. The party purge of 1927 plus the conflicts between Stalin and Trotsky on the issue of the nature of Chinese revolution shook the formerly solid belief in Marxism as an ideal solution for Chinese nation-building and achieving international recognition.⁸¹

Since 1926, various groups started to attack each other in the name of revolution. According to Serge Dalin’s observation, from November 1926 on, almost all the strikes in Guangzhou were organised under KMT’s name; while “the bourgeois also use the same flag to support their anti-working class activities”.⁸² Being in “the centre of revolution”, Lu Xun expressed his strong dissatisfaction towards the chaos. He said: “the revolutionists are killed by the count-revolutionists. The count-revolutionists are killed by the revolutionists. The non-revolutionists are regarded as either revolutionists and killed by count-revolutionists or as count-revolutionists and killed by revolutionists.”⁸³ Revolution lost its political and theoretical ground and was used for the purpose of self boast and discrimination against dissenters. In 1926, Guangzhou not only had labour unions organised by workers, but also had 26 unions run by employers, which had a large membership in total.⁸⁴ Such a situation can also find its representation in literary works.⁸⁵ After the March 20 incident in 1926, the anti-Communist attitude from the right wing KMT surfaced, which brought up a crucial problem for nationalist revolution under the leadership of the United Front (聯合戰線). The question of whether or not the bourgeoisie is

⁸⁰ Zhu Qianzhi, *Geming Zhixue* (The Philosophy of Revolution) (Shanghai: Taidong Bookstore, 1927), p. 10.

⁸¹ Kirk A. Denton, ed. *Modern Chinese Literary Thought, Writings on Literature, 1893-1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 257-262.

⁸² Serge A. Darlin, *Zhongguo Huiyilu 1921-1927* (China Memoir, 1921-1927), trans. Hou Junchu, et al. (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Press, 1981), pp. 196-197. For the introduction of Serge Darlin, see Clarence Martin Wilbur, "Sun Yat-Sen De Sulian Guwen, 1920-1925 (the Soviet Consultants of Sun Yat-Sen, 1920-1925)," *Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiusuo Jikan* 16(June 1987).

⁸³ Lu Xun, "Xiao Zagan (Random Thoughts)," in *Lu Xun Quanji* (Complete Collection of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin Wenzxue Press, 1981), p. 532.

⁸⁴ Darlin, *Zhongguo Huiyilu 1921-1927* (China Memoir, 1921-1927), p. 191.

⁸⁵ For example, Duan Keqing's (段可情) *Chapiao yuan* (Ticket officer) described the obstruction during the strike and the problems caused by the so-called “yellow union” (黃色工會), which describes the union in collaborate with employers. Other works such as Lou Shiyi's (樓適夷) *Yan Chang* (Salt mine) also provides a perfect observation of the chaos in the revolutionary movements caused by opportunists, which eventually leads the vacillation of progressive young revolutionists.

still a revolutionary class in China becomes essential for both Comintern and the CCP. The leaders of the Comintern were divided into roughly two camps leading by Stalin and Trotsky respectively. As Stalin believed, it was absolutely a right decision to keep Communists inside the KMT because the coup d'état of Chiang Kai-shek proved the national bourgeois had abandoned the revolution and Chinese revolution had entered its second stage. Wuhan became "the centre of revolution",⁸⁶ while Trotsky still insisted that forcing the CCP to join the KMT was a mistake in the beginning.

The theoretical difference was one of the foundations of the political conflicts. Revolutionists and intellectuals had to identify themselves accordingly since it was a matter of political allegiance and respond to their own belief and self-recognition. Chen Duxiu said in 1923 that the nature of nationalist revolution was "a bourgeois revolution". Its success was a "success of the bourgeoisie". The nature of the Chinese nationalist revolution was shaped by China's socio-economic situation of being a semi-feudalist and semi-colonial society. In such a situation, neither bourgeoisie nor proletariat could form a successful revolutionary power by themselves.⁸⁷ This judgement legitimises the cooperation between the KMT and the CCP. However, after the March 20 incident in 1926, Trotsky became more vigorously against such cooperation and requested the CCP to leave the KMT. The division between Stalin and Trotsky also partly triggered the anti-Stalin parade in the Red Square in November 1927. A group of pro-Trotsky Chinese students in Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow also participated in the parade.⁸⁸ The split between Stalin and Trotsky also stirred up the conflicts and debates within the CCP. After the August 7 conference in 1927, the CCP took an aggressive approach against the KMT, which caused the destruction of the CCP active power in many cities. Mao Dun described the situation in his memoir in intriguing detail. He said: "The failure of the Great Revolution in 1927 broke my heart, made me depressed. It forced me to think: where will the revolution go? I sincerely and truly believe in Communism; I also had no doubts towards Soviet Union as a model for China. However, what is the path for Chinese revolution? I used to believe that I had the answer, yet, in the summer of 1927, I realised I did not! During the Great Revolution, I witnessed all kinds of performances from the enemies – from acting as extreme leftists to the bloody massacre of the revolutionary masses; I also saw every shade and description inside my own camp – the wavering, compromising and fleeing rightists, and the naïve, fanatical and rash leftists. In the core of revolution, I heard nothing but endless quarrels and the authoritarian pressure coming from the Comintern representatives. I do admire these representatives' knowledge of Marxism and Leninism; nevertheless, I seriously doubted that

⁸⁶ Tang, *Zhongguo Tuopai Shi* (The History of Chinese Trotskyists), p. 13.

⁸⁷ Chen Duxiu, "Zhongguo Guomingming Yu Shehui Ge Jieji (Chinese Nationalist Revolution and All the Social Classes in China)," *Qian Feng* (Vanguard monthly), no. 2 (December 1, 1923).

⁸⁸ Sheng Yue, *Mosike Zhongshan Daxue Yu Zhongguo Geming* (Sun Yat-Sen University in Moscow and the Chinese Revolution) (Beijing: Xiandai shiliao biankan she, 1980), pp. 228-230.

they could truly understand a complex society like China.”⁸⁹ Such confusion was typical for intellectuals who had participated in the nationalist revolution and also sympathised with even believed in Marxism. The newly developed social condition forced them into a revaluation of both their self-recognition in the era as well as a proper way out for national salvation. Some of them displayed an obvious feeling of disruption which pushed them into questioning their social positions as well as the importance of literature.⁹⁰

For the Creationists, the abrupt transition of revolution once again drove them to a stage of self-doubt and identity crisis. Even after the March 20th incident, when the anti-Communist atmosphere began to surface, Guo Moruo, as vice director of the political department in Northern Expedition Army confidently claimed that “revolutionary literature is always the vanguard of revolution and a revolutionary age always brings forth a golden era (黃金時代) of literature.”⁹¹ However, Guo’s attitude began to change only a few months after, when the brutal actions taken by Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai. According to his memoir written in 1936, he felt, after April 12th incident that “the tragedy of revolution” was about to happen, whereas he, as an intellectual, did not have the ability to stop it.

The failure of the Great Revolution might be a chance for Guo to become a writer forever, however, he was not happy about such transition, as if he was thrown to an island where he was cut off from all the social connections that actually defined his identity. However, Guo said that he intended to “fight till the end”.⁹² Similar disillusion towards revolution can also be noticed in Shen Yanbing’s work after he left his post as editor of *Minguo Ribao* (Hankou) and went to Shanghai in July 1927, when KMT Wuhan government began to conduct a party purge against the progressive Communists who intended to take over Wuhan by force under the guidance of Comintern.⁹³ Soon after Shen left Wuhan, he began his literary works with pseudonym Mao Dun. Just as the other left-leaning intellectuals who just fled from the party purge, he felt that the Chinese nationalist revolution had totally collapsed.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Mao Dun, *Wo Zouguo De Daolu* (The Roads I have gone through), 2 vols., vol. 1 (Beijing: Remin Wenxue Press, 1981), p. 383.

⁹⁰ Gálik Marián, *Mao Tun and Modern Chinese Literary Criticism* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1969), pp. 98-101. In this part, Gálik has a detailed discussion on the issue of the relationship between literature and revolution after the March 20 incident in 1926.

⁹¹ Guo Moruo, “Geming yu Wenxue (Revolution and Literature),” *Chuangzao Yuekan* (Creation Monthly) 1, no. 3 (May 16, 1926).

⁹² Guo, *Guo Moruo Quanji: Wenxue Bian* (Complete Works of Guo Moruo, Literature Section), p. 164.

⁹³ *Minguo Ribao* (Hankou) was established by Dong Biwu (董必武, 1886-1975) soon after the Northern Expedition Army took over Wuhan in September 1926. It remained as a key propaganda channel for the left KMT and the CCP until July 1927. See Zhang Fukang, “Huiyi Hankou Minguo Ribao, Zhongyang Ribao (In Memory of Hankou Minguo Ribao and Zhongyang Ribao),” *Hubei Wenshi Ziliao* (Historical and Literary Materials of Hubei), no. 4 (1987).

⁹⁴ Mao Dun, “Yanshuang Xia de Meng (Dream under the Harsh Frost),” in *Mao Dun Quanji* (Complete Works of Mao Dun) (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Press, 1984), p. 56.

The tendency of promoting proletarian literature began with a series of questions and doubts under the atmosphere of disillusion. Zhang Zisan (張子三, also known by his penname as Xue Jie 許傑) commented that “when talking about the proletarian literature (普羅文學), we should really participate in the real work rather than just shouting in vain under the shadow of literature. We, as writers, must confess.”⁹⁵ Those such as Lu Xun who used to believe in nationalist revolution and KMT Guangzhou Government also expressed the similar awareness. In June 12, 1927, Lu Xun gave a speech in Whampoa Military Academy stating that “literature is always practiced by the most useless and weakest people” and oppressed by the powerful people. Lu Xun sadly claimed that apart from complaining and shouting, literary writers had no actually methods to overthrow the oppressors. “What good can literature do to people then?” asked Lu Xun.⁹⁶ Although this speech did not link with the party purge issue directly, it still reflected the general intellectual receptions towards the function of literature among progressive intellectuals active in southern China during the nationalist revolution period.

Such a question was similar to the idea of “what is the mission of literature” expressed by the Creationists in 1923. As Guo Moruo said in the beginning of his famous “Revolution and Literature” in May 1926, “in the era of revolution, people who work on literature” lived in a “revolutionary era”, therefore, it was essential to answer: “what is the relationship between literature and this era?”, “what does this era require us to do?”, and “what attitude shall we take towards this era?”⁹⁷ These questions in general, served the purpose of constructing both the social value of literature and the identity of an individual as a “literary man”. They propelled the intellectuals to self-transform into the vessel for broadcasting visions of social transformation based on ideologies. The growing awareness within political parties towards the importance of ideological education and constructing political legitimacy created a perfect platform for intellectuals to fulfil their self-given social obligation.

⁹⁵ Zhang Zisan, *Mingri De Wenzue* (Tomorrow's Literature) (Shanghai: Xiandai Bookstore, 1928), p. 3.

⁹⁶ Lu Xun, "Geming Shidai De Wenxue (Literature in Revolutionary Era)," in *Lu Xun Quanji* (Complete Works of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Press, 1981), pp. 436-442.

⁹⁷ Guo, "Geming yu Wenxue."