

“Follow the Path of the Russians”?
Socialist Realism in the Soviet Union and China

by

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ABSTRACT

Socialist realist fiction is a form that combines images and ideas based on realism and incorporates certain features of romanticism. The concept that human society develops from darkness to light, a key element in historical materialism, forms the foundation of socialist realism. It is a genre whose characters belong to a “great family” of socialist revolutionaries rather than to the traditional biological family of other literary forms. By depersonalizing and objectifying characters, socialist realist fiction highlights the maturation of the hero from spontaneity to consciousness. Socialist realist fiction is akin to Scripture because in its use as a parable to promote the “sacred spirit,” an ideology that incorporates both Marxism and Leninism. It condenses an author’s view on historical development into the behaviors and ideas of a single hero.

Supervisor: Dr. Richard King (Department of Pacific and Asian Studies)

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To Yuko Miyamoto

For her continued love and support

Chapter 1 Introduction

All present definitions of socialist realism can be retraced to a speech given by Andrei Zhdanov, the Soviet Communist Party authority on culture, at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow in August, 1934. According to Zhdanov's official definition, writers are required to give "a truthful, historically concrete representation of reality in...revolutionary development. At the same time, truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic representation of reality must (or should) be combined with the task of ideologically remaking and training the laboring people in the spirit of socialism."¹

Socialist realism has generally been a state-sanctioned literary method, describing the process of socialist development, praising heroes, and enforcing socialist ideology among the people. In her introduction to the book *In the Party Spirit*, Hilary Chung asserts that it would be incorrect to say that Chinese socialist realism was mechanically adopted from the Soviet Union.² There were different phases in which the Chinese Communist Party began to study and slowly accept socialist realism as its literary doctrine. This cautiousness was exemplified in the period from 1945 to 1949, when for native Chinese socialist literature the term socialist realism was deliberately avoided, because it was considered strictly Soviet terminology. This reaction on the part of the Chinese raises some questions. Was Chinese socialist realism the same as Soviet socialist realism, or was it altered to fit the Chinese situation? If there were differences between the two types of socialist realism, what were they?

¹ Quoted in Chung, H. ed., *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*. Amsterdam: Atlanta, GA 1996. p.12.

² *Ibid*, p.13.

This thesis posits that Chinese socialist realism distinguishes itself from Soviet socialist realism in several ways. Soviet socialist realism was developed based upon Russian realism, while Chinese socialist realism, was based upon Soviet socialist realism. Chinese socialist realism, adopted in the early 1930s, stemmed from a harsh political situation, as well as native literary tradition and tended to have a more restrictive nature, as demonstrated by the idealized heroes, the black and white characterizations and the strict adherence to specific plot forms involving love, sacrifice, catharsis and purification. The comparisons between the two types of socialist realism in this thesis will demonstrate that Chinese socialist realism is less realistic than Soviet socialist realism, and that Chinese novels are more puritanical and less graphic than Soviet novels.

Chapter 2 The Definition of Socialist Realism: A Political and Literary Perspective

In this section socialist realism will be examined from political and literary perspectives. The political sphere of socialist realism is intimately intertwined with the philosophy known as dialectical materialism, which involves the concept that human society develops from darkness to light³, and which has played a significant role in forming the political objectives of socialist realism. Dialectical materialism was a state-sanctioned philosophy and needed to be accompanied by a politically “correct” literary style to ensure that writers aided and abetted the goals of the state; socialist realism proved the ideal choice. While dialectical materialism formed the political base, the literary aspects of socialist realism stem from its unique combination of reality and imagination, and the use of both realism and romanticism, a pair of seemingly contradictory literary genres. Examining the literary and political characteristics of socialist realism helps to clarify why it was the ruling literary methodology for over half a century in the Soviet Union, China and other socialist countries.

Working Definitions

Socialist realism, as a literary genre, has philosophical and sociological roots that are somewhat distinct from those of other modern western literary genres. It is therefore necessary to be familiar with certain concepts before discussing socialist realism itself. The most important of these are: materialism, idealism, dialectical materialism, realism

³ According to historical materialism, the struggle between opposite classes has contributed to the development of human society, in similar steps, from a primitive communal society, to a slave society, to a feudal society, to a capitalist society until finally reaching the pinnacle of a communist society. In other words, the evolution of human society involves a movement from dark to light.

and romanticism. Although these concepts first emerged in European capitalist societies, they appear to also have had a significant impact on communist societies. Materialism and dialectical materialism in particular have been highly influential in socialist theory. Realism and romanticism have undergone several permutations throughout their development. At various points in the evolution of socialist realism either realism or romanticism was more favored; this affected the style of writing produced in particular periods. Other notable definitions discussed in this paper include May Fourth realism and individualism.

Materialism Materialism is the belief that only physical things truly exist. Materialists attempt to explain every instance of intangible phenomena in terms of the physical world. The word materialism refers “to a very long, difficult and varying set of arguments which propose matter as the primary substance of all living and non-living things, including human beings.”⁴ In Marx’s critique, materialism “accepted the physical explanations of the origin of nature and of life but rejected the derived forms of social and moral argument.” “This form of materialism had isolated objects and had neglected or ignored subjects and especially human activity as subjective.”⁵ Another definition of materialism is “selfish preoccupation with goods and money... This is of course still a materialist reasoning as distinguished from kinds of reasoning described, unfavourably, as idealist or moralistic or utopian.”⁶

⁴ Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, London: Croom Helm Ltd.. 1976. p.163.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.165.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.166.

Historical materialism Historical materialism “includes human activity as a primary force.”⁷ “Human economic activity -- men acting on a physical environment -- was seen as primary, but in one interpretation all other activity, social, cultural and moral, was simply derived from this primary activity.”⁸ “Men working on physical things and the ways they do this, and the relations they enter into to do it, working also on ‘human nature’, which they make in the process of making what they need to subsist”.⁹

Dialectical materialism Engels “extended [historical materialism] to a sense of laws, not only of historical development but of all natural or physical processes. In this formulation, which is one version of Marxism, historical materialism refers to human activity, dialectical materialism to universal processes. The point that matters, in relation to the history of the words, is that historical materialism offers explanations of the causes of sense.”¹⁰

Idealism Idealism is a system of thought that places greater value on ideas and ideals of the mind than on the physical world. Idealism has its philosophical sense, “in which, though with many variations of definition, ideas are held to underlie or to form all reality”¹¹. Idealism is “contrasted with materialism”¹² and also “contrasted with realism”¹³

In communist societies, materialism and idealism are regarded as opposite ideas which, throughout human history, have formed the basis for the two fundamental branches of philosophical thought. Communist thinkers believe that materialism provides

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid, p.124.

¹² Ibid, p.124.

¹³ Ibid, p.125.

the best foundation for scientific and sociological research, whereas Idealism only offers a backward philosophical base that is often mistaken in its view of scientific and social practices.

Realism Realism is “a term to describe new doctrines of the physical world as independent of mind or spirit, in this sense sometimes interchangeable with naturalism.”¹⁴

Realism is also “a term to describe a method or an attitude in art and literature -- at first an exceptional accuracy of representation, later a commitment to describing real events and showing things as they actually exist.”¹⁵

May Fourth realism When the May Fourth movement took place in early 20th century China, Chinese intellectuals did not have the luxury of time to carefully consider the literary, philosophical and social theories they encountered. Due to the great sense of urgency, intellectuals imported various concepts from the West, one of the most prominent of which was realism. Although in the West, realism had been an ambiguous term which has understood by most scholars as “a fundamentally epistemological exercise, which involves testing the capacity of language to capture and communicate the Real,”¹⁶ in the May Fourth period, “realism served an indisputable purpose in China as long as it was being used to question the underlying principles of traditional Chinese culture.”¹⁷ In his book *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*, Marston Anderson regards Lu Xun as the leading representative of May Fourth

¹⁴ Ibid, p.217.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.217.

¹⁶ Anderson, Marston, *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period*, Berkeley: University of California Press. 1990. p.74.

¹⁷ Ibid.

intellectuals¹⁸. In short stories such as *Kong Yiji*, *the True Story of Ah Q* and *Diary of a Madman*, Lu Xun intensely criticizes Chinese tradition and Confucian morality.

Romanticism Romanticism is a style which cultivated a sense of a freedom and encouraged imagination. The form fosters a greater freedom from rules and conventional forms.¹⁹ It is a reaction against the mechanics and rationalism of the Enlightenment, and against formality and containment. It emphasizes the individual, intensity of expression, imagination, and the power of individual experience.

Individualism "Individualism is a nineteenth century coinage: 'a novel expression, to which a novel idea has given birth'²⁰: a theory not only of abstract individuals but of the primacy of individual states and interests."²¹

One of the important terms in this paper is "puritanical" (Puritan, Puritanism). A precise working definition of this word will clarify the argument of this paper. The word puritanical originated from the puritan movement of 17th century England. A Puritan was "a member of that party of English Protestants who regarded the reformation of the church under Elizabeth as incomplete, and called for its further 'purification' from what they considered to be unscriptural and corrupt forms and ceremonies retained from the unreformed church; subsequently, often applied to any who separated from the established church on points of ritual, polity, or doctrine, held by them to be at variance with 'pure' New Testament principles."²² The word puritan can also mean "a member of any (non-religious) party or school who practices or advocates strict or extreme

¹⁸ Ibid, p.23.

¹⁹ Williams, Raymond. *Key Words: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. p.231.

²⁰ Tocqueville, Alexis de, translated by Daniel Gilman, vol. II, *Democracy in America*, New York: Century Co., 1898), p.119.

²¹ Ibid, p.136.

²² Simpson, J. A. and Weiner, E.S.C. ed., Vol. XII, *Oxford English Dictionary*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p.871.

adherence to its principles; a purist,”²³ “a person with censorious moral beliefs, esp. about pleasure and sex,”²⁴ and “practicing or affecting strict religious or moral behavior.”²⁵

Now that the major terms have been introduced, it is possible to examine the rise of socialist realism.

The Rise of Socialist Realism

As a literary and critical methodology, socialist realism was first articulated in 1934, at the First Congress of the USSR Writers’ Union in Moscow. The definition evolved over a comparatively long period of time and involved two different organizations: the Proletarian Writers’ Association (RAPP) and the Union of Soviet Writers.

In the late 1920s RAPP suggested the creation of a literary methodology which would ensure a ruling position for “proletarian literature”. At that time the members of RAPP divided literature into two categories based on the distinct philosophical worldviews of materialism and idealism. They felt that realism was the literary form of materialism and that romanticism was the literary form of idealism.

Influenced by the concept of dialectical materialism, the members of RAPP embraced the materialist worldview and eventually adopted realism as the chosen literary methodology for socialist writers. RAPP felt that the main features of realism were to be found in the works of nineteenth century writers such as Honoré de Balzac (1799 -1850) and Anton Chekhov (1860 -1904) whose novels vividly described contradictions in reality. At this stage, the concept of socialist realism had not yet been created. The realist

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hobson, Archie, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of Difficult Words*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.351.

²⁵ Ibid.

novels written at the time vary in style, swinging between realism and an early, as yet undefined form of socialist realism.

In 1932, Engels' letter to Margaret Harkness was translated into Russian and published in the second volume of *Literary Inheritance*, a literary journal in Moscow. In the letter Engels discussed his viewpoints on the topic of realism. He wrote: "Realism, to my mind, implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances."²⁶

The publication of this letter marked the beginning of a theoretical switch by the state from RAPP's realism to socialist realism. Engels ideas were critical to the development of socialist realism because they influenced the Communist Party's views on fiction. The Party wanted a new form of fiction to replace the older style of realism, and which would do more than simply and passively reflect plain reality. It would be a new literary genre with the purpose of educating people in Marxism-Leninism to reform the world. Many members of RAPP were opposed such an idea and clung to the older form of realism.

Engels' letter encouraged Aleksandr Fadeev, a leading member of both RAPP and, in later years, the Union of Soviet Writers, to discuss the new concept of socialist realism. Fadeev examined the idea of literary methodology at length in his 1932 book *Writing Methodology*. He believed that the question of literary methodology was critical, and that by using the proper methodology, specifically socialist realism, writers could better achieve their goals. Fadeev felt that the role of writers went beyond simply explaining the world, and included a duty to serve and change the world in accordance

²⁶ Engels, Friedrich, "Letter to Margaret Harkness" [April 1888] in David Craig, ed. *Marxists on Literature and Art: An Anthology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978. p.34.

with the purposes of the state. Fadeev and others viewed art and literature as powerful weapons which could be used to reform and reshape the world according to political aims. In order to enforce socialist ideology Soviet writers needed the brand new, unifying literary methodology of socialist realism to aid them in their endeavors.²⁷

In 1933, Petr Pospelov, a prominent Soviet ideologue, published two books called *About the Debate on Socialist Realism* and *Collection of Questions on Soviet Realism*. In these books he clearly defined the type of realism found in socialist realism as distinct from the kind of realism supported by RAPP. Pospelov discussed realism as well as romanticism because he felt that both, as writing methodologies, were literary principles through which writers expressed life artistically. He felt that the realism that Soviet writers used should not simply mirror reality. According to Pospelov, RAPP's realism and the newly created socialist realism were distinct because socialist realism required the writer to create an artistic reflection of life. The essence of socialist realism then, is that an author can use realism as well as archetypal characters in typical situations. As Engels pointed out to Margaret Harkness "the realism that I refer to can even be expressed in a way against the writer's perceptions."²⁸

In 1932, RAPP was disbanded by the Party and the new Union of Soviet Writers was founded. The term socialist realism was officially endorsed at their first Congress in Moscow, making it the new state-sanctioned literary methodology.

²⁷ Chen, Shunxin. *Shehuizhuyi Xianshizhuyi Lilun zai Zhongguo de Jieshou yu Zhuanhua [The Construction and Transformation of Socialist Realism in China]*. Hefei: Anhui Education Press, 2000. p.44.

²⁸ Engels, Friedrich. "Letter to Margaret Harkness" [April 1888] in David Craig, ed. *Marxists on Literature and Art: an Anthology*. p.34.

The Political Perspective: Dialectical Materialism

In order to discuss socialist realism, one must be familiar with the concept of dialectical materialism, a state-sanctioned worldview in many socialist countries throughout much of the twentieth century.

Dialectical materialism has its origins in the ideas of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 -1831). Hegel's theory of dialectics explained the dialectical relationship and interaction between the surface of things and their essence. He argued that the world was visible, comprehensible and forever changing, and that human beings understand the world in a temporary and subjective manner. Hegel believed that, at its heart, the world and its basic laws were both permanent and objective, but that humans were only able to observe these laws askance, through the lens of their limited perceptions.²⁹ In other words, Hegel believed that it is only through observing the surface of things that people may come to understand some of the essence of the world.

Friedrich Engels elaborated on Hegel's theory of dialectics and developed the theory of dialectical materialism as the major communist philosophy. Dialectical materialism provided an ideology which dealt with both social and scientific problems as concrete concepts. It is based on the idea that everything is material and that occurs through "the struggle of opposites". Everything in this world is composed of elements in opposition and this drives a "self-movement" which leads to growth, change, and development, according to definite laws.³⁰ Another form of this theory is Karl Marx's historical materialism, which has been used to explain the development of human society.

²⁹ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, ed. Carl J. Freidrich, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, New York: Modern Library, 1953. p.53.

³⁰ Engels, Fredrich, *Dialectics of Nature*, New York: International Publishers Co., 1968. p.5.

For Marx, society is divided into different classes according to production and labour.³¹

The class that controls the means of production exploits the class that does not.

According to historical materialism, then, the struggle between these two classes has contributed to the development of human society, in similar stages, from a primitive communal society, to a slave society, to a feudal society, to a capitalist society to a communist society the pinnacle of development. From this is derived the notion of the evolution of human society from darkness to light.

For proletarian writers to satisfy the demands of the prescribed methodology, they needed to study the objective world, and consciously use dialectical materialism to interpret reality. They were required to write about state-approved proletarian viewpoints. On top of these requirements, proletarian writers still needed to carefully observe the real world and to research typical events because a writer lacking on understanding of the surface of society is unable to understand the essence of the world.

The Literary Perspective: Artistic Features

Socialist realism is a literary genre unlike many others in that it has been intimately involved with politics since its inception. In addition to understanding the political background of socialist realism and its roots in dialectical materialism, it is also important to have an understanding of the literary features. Socialist realism evolved out of nineteenth century Russian realism, and therefore shares some of its characteristics, including a strong feeling of authenticity. Socialist realism also contains elements of romanticism, found in many attempts to portray “typical” characters and situations. These literary characteristics are demonstrated through many of the fictional heroes of

³¹ Marx, Karl, *The German Ideology*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970. p.25.

socialist realism, who are not only embodiments of society's class struggles but are also romanticized "typical" characters living in "typical" circumstances.

Authenticity

Authenticity is the essence of socialist realism's aesthetic features. The definition of socialist realism states that it "describes reality and real revolutionary development authentically, historically, and in detail"³² Most Soviet writers regarded the truth to life as a measurement of authenticity. However, is realism equal to authenticity? Pospelov asserts, "To write about authenticity is to reflect the most essential, typical things, things that are either the most progressive or developing and becoming stronger each day."³³

Pospelov asserts that it is not proper to equate realism with authenticity.³⁴ He believes that it is also not correct to consider non-realism (such as romanticism), anti-realism. Pospelov regards literature as a social phenomenon; aside from being a reflection of the objective social condition, literature also reflects the writer's subjective perceptions which are themselves reflective of historical conditions. According to Pospelov then, the essence of socialist realism is in its historical specificity rather than in its authenticity. Socialist realism provides readers with a vision for a future, ideal communist society; romanticism, therefore, is a necessary component of the theory because it helps the reader to envision this future perfection. Realism would not permit such a technique because it only portrays the realities of the present, thus, according to Pospelov, imagination is perhaps more important than authenticity.

³² Chung, Hilary. ed., *In the Party Spirit: Socialist realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China*. p.12.

³³ Chen, Shunxin, *Shehuizhuyi Xianshizhuyi Lilun zai Zhongguo de Jieshou yu Zhuanhua* [The Construction and Transformation of Socialist Realism in China]. p.43.

³⁴ Ibid, p.44.

The romantic characteristics of socialist realism may sometimes have the tendency to obscure its more realistic characteristics. The style has a political obligation to educate the people, but it also attempts to provide a vision for the future, a task which is necessarily unreal. This central feature of socialist realism has caused various ambiguities and debates during the course of its development.³⁵

The question of how to balance the realist and romantic elements of socialist realism was pivotal to its evolution in China. When Zhou Yang first adopted socialist realism in China, he was uncertain about its romantic characteristics and therefore hesitated to accept it as the Party's literary method. After the People's Republic of China was founded, however, the Chinese Communist Party accepted the romanticized authenticity of socialist realism.

Typicality

The Soviet definition of typicality was based upon Engels' ideas. In his definition, Engels wrote that typicality's role is to "genuinely portray typical characters in typical circumstances."³⁶ In his letter to Margaret Harkness regarding her novel *the City Girl*, Engels points out that the proletarian city girl is a typical character because she reflects the poor social conditions experienced by the proletarian class; her life is in stark contrast to the lives of the corrupt British bourgeois. However, Engels also points out that the circumstances of the story are atypical because the working class acts in a passive way; they are unable to help themselves and they make no attempt to improve their lot. Engels believed that the working class had been resisting the status quo and

³⁵ Ibid, p.45.

³⁶ Engels, Friedrich, "Letter to Margaret Harkness" [April 1888] in David Craig, ed. *Marxists on Literature and Art: an Anthology*. p.33.

attempting to regain their rights as human beings for at least fifty years (since 1817) and that this resistance stemmed from awareness of their situation. Engels therefore felt that the resistance of the working class should be considered essential to a proper, realistic portrayal. He did not, however, blame Margaret Harkness for not writing a novel supporting a political proletarian standpoint; Engels definition of typicality acknowledges that writers should write their novels with their own individual intentions. Nonetheless, Margaret Harkness' realist novel appeared naïve to Engels.

Another prominent Soviet literary historian, Vladimir Rodionovich Shcherbina, in his book *Literature and Reality*, asserted that typicality was one of the major artistic features of socialist realism. He asserted that a writer should not simply mechanically mirror the physical world, but should imbue his descriptions with his emotions and his worldview into his descriptions. A writer should choose materials from a large base of events and characters so that he could choose the most essential and typical ones.³⁷ In the Soviet Union, writers always considered essence and typicality at the same time. It was believed that only through the writer's own political beliefs, worldview and individual characteristics, could reality in the novel be properly revealed to readers a correct understanding of reality. A writer's progressive worldview, therefore, is the decisive factor in the creation of a novel that reveals to readers typical characters in typical circumstances and in turn, the essence of society.³⁸

³⁷ Chen, Shunxin, *Shehuizhuyi Xianshizhuyi Lilun zai Zhongguo de Jieshou yu Zhuanhua* [*The Construction and Transformation of Socialist Realism in China*], p.46.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.48.

Romanticism

Socialist realism is a writing method that is based on realism, a literary technique which attempts to create a reflection of real life. The term socialist realism, however, implies that it consists of more than just realism. In 1933, the Soviet literary authority Maxim Gorky discussed socialist realism, giving credit to Stalin for the new form. He said that in order to disclose the evil and disasters of the past, Soviet writers had to develop themselves to a new level from which they could study the past. Gorky believed that this new high would inspire great enthusiasm, and so he devised the new literary form of socialist realism.³⁹ Gorky believed that this writing method had close connections with Socialism, because both had a beautiful ideology that predicted a bright future for all mankind. When socialist realism was first adopted in 1934, romanticism was not excluded. On the contrary, it was an inseparable part of the theory. The major distinction to the Soviet theorist was between the romanticism of socialist realism and the romanticism of the bourgeoisie; one was new and positive and the other was old and negative.

At one of the Soviet Writer's Representative Congresses, Zhdanov asserted that in order to be the "engineer of human souls" as Stalin required of writers, writers had to create their works according to the real life. They had to be disconnected from the old romanticism because it depicted lives and figures that had never existed. It misled readers to a world that would never be created, a utopia. However, Zhdanov stressed that writers

³⁹ Gorky, Maxim. "Comments on Social Realism" in George Becker, ed. *Documents on Modern Literary Realism*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963. p.41.

could not be disconnected from the new revolutionary romanticism, a critical component of socialist realism.

Socialist realism is the fundamental methodology of Soviet literature and literary criticism. However there is a precondition; that is, revolutionary romanticism is an integral part because the whole life of the Party and the lives and struggles of the working class are meant to combine the most serious and realistic practices with the most heroic, splendid predictions for the future. Socialist literature should be able to represent socialist heroes and foresee the future. As Karl Radek said, “our future has been planned in our schedule with consciousness.”⁴⁰

Revolutionary romanticism was an integral part of socialist realism because it combined the present and the future, and combined current struggles with future successes. Romanticizing typical heroes becomes the major approach to achieve such a combination.

The romantic flavor of socialist realism comes from the “socialist” part of the name. From an aesthetic perspective, realism is used to “realistically, historically and objectively” describe reality, and romanticism is used to “ideally, imaginatively and subjectively” describe the future. Can the two be combined harmoniously? Shcherbina, in discussing the connection between literature and reality said that bravery and courage of imagination also have enormous significance in realism.⁴¹ According to Lenin’s “Theory of Reflection”, without imagination, scientific development is impossible.⁴²

⁴⁰ Radek, Karl, “Contemporary World Literature and the Tasks of Proletarian Art,” in Scott, H. G. ed. *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers’ Conference*, New York: International Publishers, 1935. p.32.

⁴¹ Chen, Shunxin, *Shehuizhuyi Xianshizhuyi Lilun zai Zhongguo de Jieshou yu Zhuanhua* [The Construction and Transformation of Socialist realism in China], p.46.

⁴² Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich, *Collected Works*, Volume 4, New York: International Publishers, 1960, p.26.

Gorky also argued that both realism and romanticism developed from the same literary roots, because both require imagination to create meaningful foundations for novels; even realism requires a sense of creativity to succeed with a reader.⁴³ In order to extract meaning from objective reality, and to create the fantasy of a future Communist society, romanticism is required. This kind of romanticism is the basis of fairy tales and it is useful for inspiring people to use revolutionary ways to look at reality, and to take action to reform the world.

In order to conclude the discussion on the composition of socialist realism it is necessary to discuss recent western academic opinions about socialist realism. Katerina Clark and Regine Robin's insightful arguments on the topic will be discussed.

Western Opinions on Socialist Realism

The Political Sphere: Socialist Realism as a Parable

Interestingly, socialist realism is not a new literary method at all. Katerina Clark, in her book *Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, writes that, as early as European medieval times, a style similar to socialist realism was used as a kind of parable for the promotion of "sacred" spirit in the struggle between good and evil. One reason for the similarity to socialist realism is that both socialist realism and this type of medieval parables were created in times of struggle, when it was necessary to have heroic figures in fiction. It is a literary form created not for aesthetic purposes but for ideological purposes.

In order to understand the functions of socialist realism we must return to Hegel's insights about culture. Hegel argues that special events during cultural development

⁴³ Gorky, Maxim, "Comments on Social Realism," p.45.

create particular cultural forms.⁴⁴ In *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach argues that Greek agriculture and preliterate society produced the Homeric epic, which continued to develop in complexity until Greek novels eventually appeared.⁴⁵ Clark argues that the existence of socialist realism demonstrates the fact that cultural development does not necessarily follow one direction. Although socialist realist writings are always in the form of novels or novellas, they are not real novels in the modern sense.⁴⁶ Clark asserts that they do not even conform to Auerbach's discussion on the Greek novel. Her argument is that after 1934, when socialist realism becomes the state-sanctioned literary methodology of Soviet literature, socialist realism is still deeply connected to the old parable form of the genre. Essentially, socialist realism can be considered similar to medieval religious writing. In medieval literature, scriptures used the concept of the Holy Spirit to promote certain ideologies in the struggle between good and evil. In socialist realism, Marxism and Leninism (and in the Stalinist and Maoist eras, Stalinism and Maoism) have replaced the Holy Spirit.

The Literary Sphere: An Impossible Aesthetic

The method for illustrating the evolution of a socialist realist hero underwent long periods of adjustment. Following the first attempt to create a communist hero known as "leather jacket"⁴⁷ there were numerous other efforts, including propaganda, emotional

⁴⁴ Hegel, G.W.F, Miller, A.V., trans. *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. p.237.

⁴⁵ Auerbach, Erich, Verdenius, Willem J, trans., *Mimesis: the Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957. p.26.

⁴⁶ Clark, Katerina, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985. p.53.

⁴⁷ The term was used by Mathewson and others. Because in the civil war era, army officers, police, and party officials all wore leather jackets, leather boots and caps. Such dressing actually separated them from the masses that produced the clothing, and this separation often posed problems. Pilinak's *The Naked Year*

lyric-epics etc..⁴⁸ None of them, however, was successful. Regine Robin argues in her book *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, that after several failures, the eventual solution was to continue the nineteenth century aesthetic, of realism, which vividly described the real world. She argues that a problematic hero is the center of a realist novel. She writes that the dilemma in socialist realism fiction, however, is that the new communist hero cannot be a problematic individual. The hero may become ill, or encounter difficulties, but he cannot be deeply divided or uncertain of himself or his destiny. A communist hero is forbidden to experience an existential crisis. Robin therefore draws the conclusion that because socialist realism lacks the same variety of “problematic” heroes, it can never be as aesthetically pleasing as the nineteenth century tradition of realism. There are, however, exceptions to Robin’s argument, such as Sholokhov’s novel *The Quiet Don*. This novel describes the Russian civil war between the White and the Red Armies. Rather than distinguishing the two armies on the basis of class, the novel examines their individual psychologies as members of the human race. In the Soviet Union, it has generally been categorized as a socialist realist novel. Robin, however, regards *the Quiet Don* as belonging to the nineteenth century realist writing. She feels that *The Quiet Don* remains an enigma, an exception in the socialist realist genre, a masterpiece repeating the ancient forms, without positive heroes, without “new men,” offering the merest hint of what the “new men” might be.⁴⁹

Zhou Yang, a prominent official and literary critic, and also the principal

is one such example. In this novel, people who wear leather jackets always represent violence: wars, revolutionary turmoil and killings.

⁴⁸ Robin, Regine, *Socialist Realism: an Impossible Aesthetic*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. p.102.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.151.

proponent of socialism realism in China, writing in 1952, defended socialist realism by asking: if socialist realism is not an artful literary genre, then why are there so many powerful and influential socialist realist works?⁵⁰ Novels such as the Soviet novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* and the Chinese novel *Red Crag* have affected generations of readers and inspired them to devote themselves to the socialist cause. He says nineteenth century Russian realism is certainly powerful literature, but that does not mean that aesthetic realism is restricted to it alone. He believes that the fact that socialist realism had such large audiences at its height proves its power as a politically effective and literarily aesthetic genre.

In the following chapters, we will examine this controversial literary genre and attempt to understand its development into Soviet and Chinese forms. By analyzing the differences between these two forms, it is possible to appreciate the power of socialist realism in manipulating public discourse.

⁵⁰ Zhou, Yang. *Zhou Yang Wenji [Collected Works of Zhou Yang]*. Beijing: the People's Literature Press, 1985, vol. 2, p.65.

Chapter 3 An Overview of Socialist Realist Fiction

In order to compare Soviet and Chinese socialist realism, it is necessary to examine how a socialist realist novel is structured, including typical storylines and plots.

Socialist realist novels follow a formula which every writer was required to adopt. The protagonists of socialist realism comprise a “great family”⁵¹ to which every revolutionary belongs. The cast of characters typically includes a son-like figure who is the hero of the novel, and one or more father figures who educate the hero as he matures both physically and politically. As in other literary genres, plots involving love, death and villainy are often present in socialist realist novels. This chapter examines plot and storyline characteristics so that they can subsequently be compared between Soviet and Chinese socialist realist novels. Katerina Clark’s analysis of the structure of socialist realism in her works, “Socialist Realism *with Shores*: the Conventions for the Positive Hero”⁵² and *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*⁵³, is the foundation of this chapter. She defined “master-plots” of socialist realist novels, and thereby cast light on how the novels are composed.

The Hero and the Great Family

Socialist realist novels use the behavior and ideas of a hero to symbolize the author’s vision for the future development of society. The hero’s journey normally involves some, if not all of the following elements: death, love, sacrifice, catharsis and purification.

⁵¹ Katerina Clark considers that the concept of the “great family”, as created by socialist realism, is one of the most important metaphors for the communist party or the state.

⁵² Clark, Katerina. “Socialist Realism *with Shores*: the Conventions for the Positive Hero.” In Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko ed. *Socialist Realism Without Shores*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997.

⁵³ Clark, Katerina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.

The maturation of the hero is a dynamic process. The hero, therefore, is not only an archetype, but also follows a characteristic progression. Readers should be aware that these novels are different from other modern fiction because they require a new reading approach. For example, there is a great deal of depersonalization of both protagonists and villains. This may tend to make socialist realist novels appear straightforward in their portrayals of positive and negative characters.

Socialist realist novels create heroes who progress from “spontaneity” to an achievement of “consciousness”. According to official thought in the Soviet Union at the time, an individual could not achieve consciousness without being educated in Leninism and Stalinism in the Soviet Union, or Maoism in China. As a result, the heroes of socialist realism had to be educated in Leninism, Stalinism or Maoism.

Socialist realist novels, therefore, function as parables. The characters tend to be written as politically conscious father figures and spontaneous son-like figures. The father figure educates the son-like figure to help him achieve consciousness. This hierarchy of fathers and sons is nearly always inherent in socialist realist novels. In early Soviet revolutionary novels, characters either act like a family or sometimes actually are a family. With the Stalinist period, the heroic biological family disappeared; instead, the heroes were depersonalized⁵⁴: rather than being portrayed as human beings, they become tools of the Communist Party, functioning as weapons in the battle against capitalism and other anti-communist enemies. These heroes did not have a biological family like normal human beings, they became part of the “great family” of the Communist state and the

⁵⁴ I use the word depersonalize here meaning “to deprive of personality; to make, or regard as, no longer personal” (Oxford English Dictionary), “to make impersonal or present as an object” (*WordNet* ® 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University) and to “objectify.” (“To degrade or demote (a person, class of people, etc.) to the status of a mere object; to treat as an object.” (Oxford English Dictionary))

Party.

Three Typical Socialist Realist Plots⁵⁵

The main story in a socialist realist novel follows one hero and one great family. In this section we will discuss what happens to both. Generally speaking, every story involves death, love and villainy. By reworking these three typical plots, writers are able to express their literary and political views. To be more specific, in socialist realist novels, through these three plots, writers depict the relationship between the idea of becoming a hero and the idea of martyrdom. Writers also express their views on correct behaviour when the hero is in love. Writers also express their understanding of villains. Through these depictions, readers are consciously or subconsciously influenced and use the hero as a model for their lives.

Plot One: Death

Death and rebirth have always had symbolic meanings in fiction. In religion, sacrifice is often linked to selflessly giving other people the opportunity to survive. To complete a sacrifice, death or symbolic death (perhaps in the form of mutilation) occur. Often this is also followed by either the birth of a new life or the symbolic rebirth of an old character. In socialist realist novels, death, symbolic or real, often plays an important role. For example, when a hero dies on his path towards success, he dies as an individual, but his death can lead to a collective rebirth. Another example of the significant role death plays is in the validation of the current collective leadership. Since these novels function partly to enforce the concept that socialist leaders must inherit the reins of the

⁵⁵ The analysis of the three typical plots is based on Katerina Clark's theory on Soviet Socialist realist novels from her chapter "Socialist realism *with* Shores: the Conventions for the Positive Hero."

state, the symbolic pair of occurrence, death and rebirth, help to perpetuate and validate this view. They portray individual sacrifice as a natural along the path to political power and Communist society. In essence, sacrifice legitimizes the birth of a political power or state.

Martyrdom has always been an important form of vindication. Death, being the ultimate form of sacrifice, is the ultimate endorsement of a cause. Martyrs leave the living with a strong impression and they influence the acceptance of new morals. The obvious example in the Western tradition is the martyrdom of Christ. In the extreme practice of socialist realism, however, sacrifices in the novel can also explain or predict future dangers, for example, the massive loss of life in war. In both Soviet and Chinese history, death plays an enormous role in the national identity.⁵⁶ Many important historical events, such as Civil Wars and World Wars, involve massive sacrifice and loss of life.

In socialist realist novels, death is not only used to show the maturation of heroes, it is also a choice: the elders give the younger generation permission to take up the reins of authority. These younger heroes, however, are few and far between.

Traditionally, death has always been a critical element in the making of a hero. Through death the Greek hero achieves a god-like status, for example, Achilles, the greatest warrior in the Trojan War is described in Homer's *Iliad* as a demigod following his death in battle. Religious sacrificial rituals are used to honor the hero and help to maintain his power after death. Heroes are always those who have suffered enormously, particularly during extreme events like wars.

⁵⁶ Clark, Katerina, "Socialist Realism *with* Shores: the Conventions for the Positive Hero." In Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko ed. *Socialist realism without Shores*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997, p.23.

The creation of a “heroic code” played a critical role within the nineteenth century Russian intelligentsia. Leopold Haimson is professor emeritus in the Department of History at Columbia University, and the author of *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries* and *Russian Marxists and the Origins of Bolshevism*, among other works. Haimson links the phenomenon to the ancient heroic tradition: only those who had suffered during the revolution could be honored as heroes.⁵⁷ This system of values was translated into the plots of socialist realist novels. It became a formula: the leaders were those people who experienced the most pain during struggle.

The death of a good character can be seen as symbolic of his coronation as a true hero. In most socialist realist novels, death is present. In addition to the hero, there are usually other victims as well. The deaths of these victims, however, pale in comparison to the moment when the hero sacrifices his life: the climax of the story. The build-up to the hero’s death can be considered akin to a test: the effort that the hero makes to fight against the enemy proves his manliness and loyalty to socialist ideology. For example, in the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, the author Nikolai Ostrovsky depicts the hero Pavel Korchagin’s journey of physical and ideological maturation beginning from his childhood until his ultimate heroic sacrifice for his communist ideal. On his way to maturity there are battles against the enemy, the challenges of production tasks set by the Party, and emotional struggles with love. During these symbolic tests, Pavel achieves victories through his struggles against villain, and the hard work to fulfill the production goals that damages his health, and he sacrifices in love. After he has successfully passed these tests, through his death, the man becomes a hero.

⁵⁷ Leopold Haimson, *The Making of Three Russian Revolutionaries: Voices from the Menshevik Past*, Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press. 1987. p.214.

Over the course of the tests the hero is sometimes very close to death or even believed to be dead; his survival of crisis gives him enormous ability and power. It represents a symbolic rebirth for the hero. Another common plot twist during the hero's trials is the death of a subordinate character. This subordinate may perish as a substitute for the hero. Once the trial is complete, the hero will hold a funeral of great ceremony that not only honors the victim, but confirms the hero in his position of power. Socialist realist fiction always uses funeral speeches as opportunities to remake social values and to legitimize certain behaviors. The heroes of novels, like real-life state leaders, often use the moment to educate the masses about the Dialectical Materialistic view of history and the necessity of sacrifice in revolutionary struggle.

An obvious Chinese example of this phenomenon is chapter eighteen of Qu Bo's novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*. The young soldier Gao Bo, who is under the protagonist Shao Jianbo's command, dies in the battle against the bandits' ambush. He bravely kills nineteen enemies and is eventually shot. At his funeral following the battle, when the surviving soldiers and villagers see the coffin holding his body, their grief at the loss of the young soldier turns into rage. At this moment, under the further strengthened leadership of the protagonist Shao Jianbo, they vow to avenge the young soldier.

In some socialist realist novels, writers write about the heroes' symbolic sacrifice. In some cases the heroes do not die; instead, their subordinates die in place of the hero. In other socialist realist novels writers write about more than symbolic sacrifice: the heroes in their novels literally perish. An example of this can be found in the novel *Young Guard* by Alexandr Fadeev. In the novel, Oleg and Lyutikov are captured by the enemy and executed. In most cases in the tradition, the elders die while the young survive and

continue the work; in this book, however, both generations die. This anomaly in the sacrificial plot does not make the novel less representative of the style because the deaths do not halt the revolution among the youth, but instead encourage support for the heroes' activities. When a potential leader dies, he does not disappear from history; even his death cannot stop the forward march of change. In *Young Guard*, although Oleg and the sixty other Komsomol (Communist Union of Youth) and Communist Party heroes are killed by the Germans, other heroes and the masses still continue the fight. The physical body may die but the spirit will live on; this psychology is manifested in *Young Guard*. When Oleg and Lyutikov are tortured, their spirits are elevated to a higher plane which can only be reached through heroic sacrifice. This marks the difference between the body and the spirit. The idea that a hero's spirit can exist even after his death is a cliché of socialist realist novels. The Soviet way of referring to Lenin after 1924 embodies just such a cliché: "more alive than the living."

The possibility that a hero might die does not mean that such endings are significantly different from those of previous socialist realist novels. Regardless of whether a hero is actually alive or dead, he is always symbolically alive, and therefore has no meaning on his own, the metaphorical meaning being more important. For example, although Lenin died in 1924, he was seen as the symbolic leader of socialism rather than a man who died before the construction of socialism was complete.

The death of heroes is generally formulaic. In socialist realist novels, heroes are depersonalized and therefore the question of whether they are alive becomes unimportant. Their personal tragedies do not represent a tragedy for future society.

In socialist realist novels, the dialectic materialist view of history is given higher priority than the lives of individual heroes. A character's life can be meaningful only within the context of some epic struggle. This makes socialist realist novels distinct from other modern literary genres, although both may use plots involving symbolic death. As will next be discussed, the distinctions between socialist realism and other genres are even more distinct when the storyline involves love.

Plot Two: Love

In his book *The Characters of Love*, John Bayley writes that, "It has become difficult to imagine literature without love. Since the Middle Ages the two have depended on each other more and more, and their interrelation now is as complex as civilization itself."⁵⁸ However, while an interrelationship between love and literature is commonly acknowledged in the West, love is a secondary plot in socialist realist novels. The hero's love life has no inherent value and serves only to help him to fulfill his tasks and obtain "consciousness." Once the task is fulfilled, if the hero attains love then the novel has a happy ending. If the hero does not obtain love, however, the loss is just another one of the hero's sacrifices during his great journey towards success.

One reason for this treatment of love may be the well-known puritanism common to socialist realism, particularly Chinese socialist realism. When the hero achieves love he gains erotic substance, but eroticism is secondary to the partner's role as a spiritual companion and as a member of the hero's great family.

Puritanism was not always present in Soviet socialist realist novels. Erotic descriptions are quite common in Soviet literature, such as in Fyodor Gladkov's novel

⁵⁸ Bayley, John, *The Characters of Love: a Study in the Literature of Personality*, London: Constable, 1960. p.56.

Cement and Fadeev's *Young Guard*. After 1934, however, when socialist realism became the state-approved literary formula, the Soviet authority opposed descriptions of eroticism suppressing explicit descriptions of sex and making them much rarer than in the 1920s.⁵⁹

In socialist realist novels the hero is often separated from his female love interest. The hero's maturation depends solely on his manliness and his devotion to socialist ideology, not on his romantic life. Love, therefore, is not considered part of the hero's maturation.

Socialist realist novels commonly approach love using three different plot forms. The first involves a hero in a world that is essentially without females. The hero may love a woman, but due to uncontrollable circumstances such as war, they live in different places. With this plot type, the writer may choose to write a happy ending. Another possible form involves a female who is close to the hero, but whom he rarely meets. For example, in *Young Guard*, Oleg devotes himself to the war against German invaders and has no time for a love life.

The second plot type involves a hero who is still very young and who does not yet fully understand adult sexuality. The female love interest in the novel is often older, making her both physically and politically more mature. As a result, love between the hero and the female character becomes part of the hero's political maturation.

The third plot type involves a hero who is assisted in his revolutionary development towards "consciousness." There is often a female antagonist who exists to tempt the hero. Sexual description is only allowed in this case. The hero matures by

⁵⁹ Clark, Katerina. "Socialist Realism *with* Shores: the Conventions for the positive hero." p.183.

overcoming sexual temptation and changing from an ordinary human being into an ideological model.

Female antagonists have existed since the beginning of socialist realist literature. They usually represent a negative social class and value system, such as the petty bourgeoisie. They are portrayed as women who only value themselves. If the hero falls in love with such a woman, it will destroy his work and harm the collective socialist cause. "This is not love [on the hero's part] but a disease of the will."⁶⁰ The hero must be able to control his sexual impulses as well as his other emotions.

Plot Three: Villainy

In socialist realist novels, class enemies and villains must be purged or neutralized. Some villains are portrayed as invaders of the "great family;" they threaten its existence and the hero must remove them through his courage and power. In doing so, the hero can show his manliness and devotion to the socialist cause.

It is important to recall that socialist realist novels were often written alongside political movements. When a villain becomes the victim in such situations, the old social order is overturned. In literature such an event is called a "catharsis," and in religion it is called "purification." Cathartic events are always written into socialist realist novels, usually involving the removal of the villain by the hero. The character of the villain therefore functions to help the hero achieve political maturity. For example, in Chapter Six, Part Two, of Fadeev's *Young Guard*, after consulting with the older party members, members of the young guard waylay the traitor Ignat Fomin as he is walking his

⁶⁰ Clark, Katerina. "Socialist realism *with* Shores: the Conventions for the positive hero." p.67.

policeman's rounds late one night. They hang him in the park entranceway, and leave a note explaining that this is the punishment for Fomin's betrayal of the Soviet Union.

Enemies in socialist realist novels represent a destructive power, in that they prevent the hero from fulfilling his destiny. They are often counter-revolutionaries, allies of foreign powers, or, in the mildest form, misled bureaucrats. They are cunning, and sometimes even more powerful than the hero. As the hero develops, he is able to recognize the threat and remove the enemy from the environment.

Plots involving death, love and villainy are the major components of a socialist realist novel. The fourth chapter of this paper will discuss the differences between Soviet and Chinese socialist realist novels; however, let us first examine how socialist realism was introduced to China in the 1930s. We will notice that certain adjustments were made to the Chinese version of socialist realism upon its introduction.

Chapter 4 How Socialist Realism Came to China

Socialist realism was first introduced to China by the head of the League of Left-Wing Writers, Zhou Yang, in 1933. The introduction was somewhat limited, but it included most of the definitive features discussed in the first chapter. The majority of Chinese exposed to socialist realism understood it from two perspectives: the political and the literary. According to their understanding, socialist realism adopted a dialectical materialistic worldview, but also adopted romanticism, which was a controversial literary genre in Chinese left-wing circles. The new socialist realism was different from the realism Chinese left-wing writers practiced in the 1920s and early 1930s, which caused them to reconsider their current writing methods. Although writing about reality was the foundation of socialist realism, the theory did not endorse mechanical duplication of everyday life. Instead, socialist realism promoted the idea that the most important task of the writer was to create a romanticized successful hero. Therefore, socialist realism was unique in that revolutionary romanticism was one of its two major components, making writers' imaginations and logical presumptions necessary when describing socialist society. Socialist realism also had political intentions to educate working people and enforce socialist ideology.

In this chapter, four of Zhou Yang's important articles on socialist realism will be introduced. They are "On 'Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism'" (April, 1933), "Socialist Realism -- the Path Forward for Chinese Literature" (December, 1952), "New Folk Songs Have Broadened the New Path of Poetry" (January, 1958), and "A

Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts” (February, 1958). These four articles mark four stages of the development of socialist realism in China.

Biography of Zhou Yang

Zhou Yang, penname of Zhou Qiyong, was born in Yiyang, Hunan province. Following his graduation from Shanghai Daxia University, Zhou Yang went to Japan to pursue further studies. In 1931, he returned to China and became a member of the League of Left-Wing Writers. From 1931 to 1932, Zhou Yang published three articles entitled, “Who does not Really Want the Truth, and does not Want Literature and Art?” (*Daodi shi shui buyao zhenli, buyao wenyi?*) “Examination of the Literary Theory of being Free People” (*Ziyouren wenxue lilun jiantao*), and “The Truthful Nature of Literature” (*Wenxue de zhenshixing*). Together with Lu Xun, Feng Xuefeng and other left-wing literati, Zhou adopted Marxism to criticize those writers who advocated the notion of taking no political stand. He later assumed the position of director of the League of Left-Wing Writers. He was one of the major figures to take charge of arts and literature in the Chinese Communist Party after 1930. In 1937, Zhou Yang went to the Communist Party’s base area in Yan’an, where he was placed in charge of education and literary associations. Zhou Yang was also appointed president of Yan’an University and the vice-president of the Lu Xun Academy. From 1946 to 1949, he was head of the Ministry of Propaganda in Northern China. In 1949 he was appointed vice-chairman of the Nationwide Representative Meeting of Literature and Art Workers. Following the meeting, Zhou Yang became the vice minister of both the Ministry of Culture and the Chinese Communist Central Propaganda Ministry. During the Cultural Revolution, Zhou Yang was condemned as a counter-revolutionary and imprisoned for nine years until

1978. On July 31st 1989, Zhou Yang died in Beijing at the age of 81. His life had gone through several distinct phases: He was commander of leftwing literature and arts in the 1930s, he organized literature and arts in the Liberal Area in the 1940s, he was leader of the struggle for literature and arts in the 1950s, he interpreted Mao Zedong's thoughts on literature and arts in the 1960s, and he finally became a pioneer in the liberation of literature and arts during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Zhou Yang's major works were *The Era to Represent the New Masses*, and *The New Literature and Arts of the People* and other literary critiques, most of which promoted socialist realism. Zhou Yang also translated Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *Life and Aesthetics*. He always believed that literature and art had a class nature and had enormous effects upon society.

Zhou Yang's Initial Adoption of Socialist Realism – "On 'Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism' "

In 1931, Zhou Yang returned from Japan and became the general secretary of the League of Left-Wing Writers. He thus became the primary authority on left-wing arts and criticism. From 1931 to 1937, Zhou Yang studied texts from the Soviet Union and formalized his understanding of the theoretical basis of socialist realism. By 1937, Zhou Yang had decided that the genre was a form of realism which emphasized a specific view of the future. It distinguished itself from classical nineteenth century Russian realism because it combined the romantic and the heroic. However, the artistic and romantic aspects of socialist realism were often emphasized in the Soviet Union. This was not the case in 1930s China, where the emphasis tended to be strictly on political utility rather than artistry. Nonetheless, Zhou Yang felt socialist realism could help fulfill China's political goals; he therefore decided to adopt the technique despite the left-wing writers'

reservations about its romantic aspects, but he was concerned that the romantic aspects of socialist realism might have a negative effect on Chinese literature. Therefore, he put a great deal of effort into distinguishing the differences between proletarian and bourgeois romanticism. He felt that proletarian romanticism was founded upon socialist ideology and focused on the collective, whereas bourgeois romanticism was based upon capitalist ideology and focused on the individual.

In order to clarify the distinctions between revolutionary romanticism and bourgeois romanticism, after cautious research and consideration, Zhou Yang published an article "On 'Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism' " in April 1933. This marked the first time that the term socialist realism was used in China. Zhou Yang wrote that he approved of the positive effects of heroic romanticism. He was careful, however, not to promote the spread of bourgeois romanticism, which emphasized individual emotions instead of promoting proletarian heroism. In Zhou Yang's view, socialist realism did not place as much importance on authenticity as realism. He advised writers to avoid using realism to evaluate all literary texts. Zhou Yang felt that socialist realism combined the dialectic materialistic worldview with a valuable understanding of the real world; it was an authentic, energetic literary method that belonged to the masses. Zhou Yang qualified this praise with the admission that revolutionary romanticism was still a component of socialist realism. He wrote,

The important aspect of the Soviet literature is still socialist realism. The concept of revolutionary romanticism is only raised as one of the elements

of socialist realism, and does not conflict with socialist realism.⁶¹

Zhou Yang also specifically outlined his concerns about revolutionary romanticism:

Such a methodology was created according to the situation in the Soviet Union, which is more advanced than the current condition in China. It is very dangerous to mechanically adopt it without good understanding.⁶²

As leader of the League of Left-Wing Writers, Zhou Yang was acutely aware of the need to closely monitor Soviet policies but he wanted to avoid carelessly adopting something which might encourage the exploitation of bourgeois literary styles.

Hu Feng's Views on Socialist Realism

Zhou Yang's work emphasized the role of romanticism in socialist realism and discouraged its role in bourgeois subjective individualism. Subjectivity, however, had always been a critical aspect of romanticism. Just as realism requires a sense of authenticity to be meaningful, romanticism requires subjectivity to be believable. Zhou Yang was not the only one who did not realize this was the case; it was a common phenomenon in the League of Left-Wing Writers. Part of the blame can be placed upon the constraints that the Soviet definition of socialist realism imposed upon the League of Left-Wing Writers. The first person to discuss the disregard for subjectivity in romanticism was Hu Feng, who inherited Lu Xun's May Fourth realist tradition and who also played a significant role in the League of Left-Wing Writers.

⁶¹ Zhou, Yang, "Guanyu 'Shehuizhuyi Xianshizhuyi he Geming Langmanzhuyi'" ["On 'Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism'"], *the Selected Works of Zhou Yang*, Vol. 1, The People's Literature Press, 1984, p.113.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.114.

Hu Feng (1902~1985) was a Chinese modern literary critic, poet, and translator. His original name was Zhang Guangren, and he was born in Jinchun, Hubei province. Hu Feng began studying May Fourth literature in high school in the 1920s. In 1929, he went to Japan and joined the Tokyo branch of the League of Left-Wing Writers. At that time many leftist literary works were being introduced to Japan from the Soviet Union and left wing Chinese writers studied many ideas through the Japanese translations of the works. Upon his return to China in July 1933, Hu Feng worked with Lu Xun. This experience gave him a different perspective on socialist realism, causing him to conclude that the May Fourth realist tradition established by Lu Xun was itself Chinese socialist realism.

While Zhou Yang tried to mimic the Soviet version of socialist realism, Hu Feng developed his own interpretation. Hu Feng felt that Soviet socialist realist theories should serve as no more than references for Chinese socialist realism. Nevertheless, from 1949 to 1966, despite the fact that there were always groups of writers who supported Hu Feng's interpretation, Zhou Yang's view of socialist realism dominated Chinese literature.

A Decision Made-- Learn from the Russians: "Socialist realism-- the Path Forward for Chinese Literature"

Despite differing opinions about socialist realism in the literary community, Zhou Yang wrote "Socialist Realism -- the Path Forward for Chinese Literature" in 1952. It was first published in the Soviet journal *Znamia (the Flag)*, and reprinted in the second volume of *the Selected Works of Zhou Yang*. In this influential essay, Zhou Yang asserted that the power of the Soviet literature stemmed from its ability to observe and perceive life according to communist ideology; it combined today's reality and tomorrow's future. Zhou Yang felt the power of Soviet literature was entirely the result of socialist realist methodology. Zhou Yang quoted Mao Zedong's words in *Lun Renmin Minzhu*

Zhuanzheng (On the People's Democratic Dictatorship): "It was through the Russians that the Chinese found Marxism. Before the October Revolution, the Chinese were not only ignorant of Lenin and Stalin, they did not even know of Marx and Engels. The salvos of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism. The October Revolution helped progressives in China, as throughout the world, to adopt the proletarian world outlook as the instrument for studying a nation's destiny and considering anew their own problems. Follow the path of the Russians --that was their conclusion."⁶³ Zhou Yang obeyed the suggestions outlined in Mao's speech and stated that the Chinese should not only learn politics from Russia, but literature as well.

Zhou Yang used the article to clarify what Chinese literature should be, to highlight recent advances, and to demonstrate that literature could successfully be combined with politics. His argument was that modern Chinese literature, inspired by the lives of the masses, incorporated modern politics into the Chinese literary tradition. Zhou Yang felt that the Chinese should continue to oppose western bourgeois literature, but avoid completely isolating themselves from the outside world; China might still learn from new advances and beneficial ideas like socialist realism.

Zhou Yang had previously been doubtful about the adoption of socialist realism due to the romantic flavor which was often present. At this time, however, he did not necessarily condemn such aspects, provided that the text adopted a socialist view to show reality and that it described revolutionary developments in a positive light. Zhou Yang's

⁶³ Zhou, Yang, "Shehuizhuyi Xianshizhuyi – Zhongguo Wenxue Qianjin de Daolu" ["Socialist Realism--the Path Forward for Chinese Literature"], *the Selected Works of Zhou Yang*, Vol. 2, The People's Literature Press, 1984, p188. Also see Mao, Zedong, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," *Mao Zedong Xuanji [Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung]*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978, Vol. 5, p.126.

new criterion for judging a socialist text was simply the socialist viewpoint of the author. His examples included many Chinese texts, such as Ding Ling's *the Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (*Taiyang Zhao zai Sangganhe Shang*) and Zhao Shuli's "Tale of Li Youcai's Rhymes" (*Li Youcai Banhua*), fictional works which described the life and struggle of peasants rather than workers. Zhou Yang felt that these texts were not peasant literature, but instead were socialist realist novels because they had a socialist worldview rather than a peasants' feudal worldview. These writers used proletarian ideology to demonstrate the revolutionary struggles of peasants under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. These fictional works also portrayed the drastic changes in social structure and the feelings of the peasants towards new socialist society. Zhou Yang argued that these texts praised the revolutionary power of peasants and at the same time criticized their formerly conservative and backwards mentalities. He felt that the works' descriptions of social upheaval among the peasantry were excellent demonstrations of leadership on the part of workers and peasants. The enlightened in these novels were no longer simply common peasants; they were pioneers in the village.⁶⁴ In the essay "Socialist Realism -- the Path Forward for Chinese Literature," Zhou Yang made it clear that the use of romanticism in a text did not imply that it was not socialist; the most important criterion for judging a text was the worldview it promoted. With this new mode of thinking, Zhou Yang cleared away the theoretical obstacles to the promotion of socialist realism.

Zhou Yang's article was published at a time the Chinese Communist Party felt was significant for development and change. The working class had become the leaders

⁶⁴ Zhou, Yang, "Socialist Realism-- the Path Forward for Chinese Literature," p.187.

of the country; their enthusiasm for work was a direct result of their socialist consciousness. In villages, agricultural production was becoming industrialized. Intellectuals and students were being educated in the Marxist worldview. All of these changes formed the basis for socialist realist literature. Zhou Yang nonetheless worried that the current Chinese socialist realism was far from maturity; it was still in the process of developing. He placed the blame on Chinese writers' lack of familiarity with Marxism, as well as their lack of literary experience and comprehension. It was in his view even more important for Chinese writers to study Soviet socialist realist methodology. However, the question remained: what aspects of Soviet thought should the Chinese learn and what should they avoid? Socialist realism was meant to authentically reflect revolutionary reality. Writers were instructed to highlight real life conflicts, and to articulate the desired direction for social development. Writers, according to this doctrine, should highlight class conflicts in society. Anything which obscured or weakened the reality of class struggles was seen as a violation of the principle of authenticity, and undermined the power of literature as a political weapon.

When Zhou Yang's article was written in 1952, many writers dared not write about the problems in their country. Zhou Yang writes that in these writers' texts, victory is an easy thing to achieve; they demonstrate an unrealistic revolutionary optimism. He points out that when these writers encounter conflicts they downplay them in their writings to avoid trouble. In this way, writers tend to deemphasize the difficulties of revolution. Zhou Yang, however, feels there are better methods for practicing socialist realism in terms of imagery and maturation of the heroes. He uses Fadeev's novel *The Rout* as an example to articulate his point. In *The Rout*, Fadeev tells the story of a guerilla

brigade. This brigade fights and fights until only nineteen members remain. Zhou Yang says that despite such great losses, the reader still witnesses the determination and grit of the revolutionaries, which demonstrating that they are still victorious. He thinks that this style of storytelling instills the reader with a spirit of revolutionary optimism, yet also portrays the difficulties inherent in revolution. Zhou Yang argues that Fadeev uses the same technique in *Young Guard*, which is another great socialist realist novel.

Typicality is another feature that Zhou Yang feels that Chinese writers should learn from the Soviet Union. He writes that to demonstrate the struggle between new and old powers, writers are required to emphasize, in a realistic way, characters representing the new power. Characters representing the new and old powers should be portrayed in positive and offensive manners, respectively, in order to influence the emotions and politics of the reader. Through such characterization, socialist realist texts educate the masses. Zhou Yang feels current Chinese writers are not skilled at characterizing members of the new power; the characters tend to lack vivid characteristics. The writers, in Zhou Yang's eyes, have a superficial outlook on the new system and therefore lack the ability to infuse their characters with a deeper, political essence. This tends to make their writings spiritless, formulaic and rather dreary. Zhou Yang feels that Soviet literature have created a whole set of new characters for the communist world and that Chinese authors should learn to adapt these characters to Chinese writing. The most important issue is to realistically describe the conflict between the new and old powers and to create characters that embodied communist morals.

Zhou Yang does not feel that learning from the Soviets will prevent the continued inheritance and evolution of the Chinese literary tradition. He feels the realist tradition

has a long history in China, especially in the writings of the May Fourth movement as represented by Lu Xun. He believes that the new democratic realism (*Xin Minzhu Xianshizhuyi*) has created a new era in Chinese literature and is the foundation for the development of socialist realism. In order to demonstrate there is a Chinese realist tradition, Zhou Yang examines two classical Chinese novels, *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihuzhuan*) and *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Hongloumeng*). He argues that *Outlaws of the Marsh* realistically depicts the struggle between the peasant class and the feudal landlord class, and that although the novel contains a certain amount of backwards ideology (the novel was written in the 16th century), it is a remarkably realistic novel. Zhou Yang also regards the 18th century classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* as a model Chinese realistic novel, vividly depicting four hundred and eighty-four characters living in the last feudal society of China.

Zhou Yang emphasizes the need for Chinese writers to adopt socialist realism and persuaded writers to stop worrying about revolutionary romanticism in socialist realist novels. Zhou Yang also maintains that Chinese literature has a long realistic tradition. He concludes that socialist realism is the natural next step in the development of Chinese literature.

The Great Leap Forward of Revolutionary Romanticism -- "New Folk Songs Have Broadened the New Path of Poetry"

The Great Leap Forward movement was launched in China in 1958. The communist government hoped to encourage peasants and workers to produce as much product as possible to speed up socialist development. At the First National Representatives Conference, the Party announced that the country's major task was to gather resources to achieve a great leap forward in both agriculture and industry. The

government would increase investment on infrastructure and manufacturing to enhance production capability. The targets for national economic growth were annual industrial growth of 14.6%, production materials 18.8%, consumer products 9.7%, agricultural production 6.1%, and grain production 5.9%. The total infrastructural investment in 1958 increased 17.8% from 1957.⁶⁵ The Feb.12 1958 *People's Daily* announced, "under the socialist condition, in order to rapidly and fundamentally change the current situation of underdevelopment in our country, and to improve material and spiritual living conditions, it is necessary to have a great leap forward in economic development. The Soviet Union used less than 15 years to achieve what capitalist countries spent half a century to achieve. Its industry has developed 30 times in 40 years. The Soviet Union is the model of China. During the eight years since the country's liberation, industry has developed 6.7 times. However, such speed is far from enough compared to the people's needs."⁶⁶

In such a social environment, the definition of Chinese socialism became distinct from Soviet socialism, as did the definition of socialist realism. The Communist Party required writers to cooperate with politics, as they had when socialist realism was first adopted in the 1930s. The emphasis on revolutionary romanticism became a propaganda tool for the state to encourage rapid economic development. Zhou Yang encouraged writers to collect new folk songs from different industries to increase the working enthusiasm of the masses.

In the January 1958 issue of *Hongqi* (Red Flag), Zhou Yang published "New Folk Songs have Broadened the New Path of Poetry". In this article, he emphasizes the issue of revolutionary romanticism. The terms "revolutionary realism and revolutionary

⁶⁵ *People's Daily*, February 12th, 1958.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

romanticism” are introduced for the first time. Zhou Yang asserts that China is currently undergoing an epic socialist revolution in which workers are combining practical spirit with glorious communist ideals. He claims that if writing lacks romantic revolutionary ideology, the Chinese will not fully experience the new era. Zhou Yang wants the Chinese people to absorb romanticism from their own literary and artistic tradition and to improve it using communist ideology as the theoretical foundation.⁶⁷

Zhou Yang examines revolutionary romanticism from two perspectives. First, he regards revolutionary romanticism as necessary for the portrayal of the great socialist era of reform for working people and communist society. Both realism and romanticism are used to depict communism, and therefore can be considered to be in conflict; Zhou Yang feels that writers must combine the two. Second, Zhou Yang wants Chinese writers to realize that realism would seem like shortsighted naturalism without revolutionary romanticism. Naturalism, “simply mirroring reality,” Zhou Yang writes, “distorts and counterfeits realism.”⁶⁸ Chinese literature, he declares, needs a form of socialist realism that emphasizes revolutionary romanticism.

Zhou Yang believes that a direct way to persuade Chinese writers to adopt revolutionary romanticism in their work is to promote new folk songs and poems, because they have a long and rich history in Chinese culture. Throughout Chinese history, there were many successful romantic poets. The most well known was Li Bai, known as the Sage of Poetry, who lived during the Tang dynasty. Li Bai was considered one of the most important romantic poets in Chinese literary history. Qu Yuan, who lived during the

⁶⁷ Zhou, Yang, “Xin Minge Kaituole Xin de Daolu.” [New Folk Songs have Broadened the New Path of Poetry], *Hongqi* [Red Flag] January 1958. p.35.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Spring and Autumn period (722 BC- 481 BC), was another important figure. The Dragon Boat Festival, which mourns his death, continues to be celebrated to this day. In his article, Zhou Yang quotes Liu Xie, a famous writer who lived about a thousand years ago to praise Qu Yuan's poetry, "strangely mysterious, but still true; it was luxuriously romantic yet still realistic."⁶⁹ Zhou Yang feels this critique marks the earliest record of a poem describes as a combination of realism and romanticism.

In Zhou Yang's 1952 article "Socialist Realism-- the Path Forward for Chinese Literature", he emphasizes that realism is an important part of the Chinese literary tradition. By 1958, however, in his new article "New Folk Songs Have Broadened the New Path of Poetry", he no longer dwells on the Chinese realist tradition, and instead searches for a Chinese romantic tradition. Zhou Yang claims that romanticism is a significant characteristic of literary history and that it is something modern Chinese writers should strive to cultivate in their own work. He writes that folk songs portray socialist development in agriculture and industry and describe new relationships among the working people.

Bourgeois Romanticism -- "A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts"

On May 2nd 1956, at a Supreme State Conference, Mao Zedong proclaimed his new slogan *Baihua Qifang, Baijia Zhengming* (let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend) as the new policy towards intellectuals. The slogan referred to the Spring and Autumn Annals (770-475 B.C.) and the Warring States (770-475 B.C.) periods in Chinese history during which many different schools of thought were

⁶⁹ Ibid. Also see Liu, Xie, Chapter 5, *Wen Xin Diao Long [The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons]*, Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1983.

competing against each other for supremacy, resulting in a golden era of intellectual development. The Chinese Communist Party was attempting to broaden freedom of discussion. The first reason for this was the “thaw” movement that occurred in the Soviet Union after Stalin’s death in 1953. The second reason was that the Party believed “that in China the revolution is developing in original forms since the patriotic national bourgeoisie is participating, together with the workers, peasants, and intellectuals, in building a new society.”⁷⁰ The slogan provoked a broad reaction from scientists and writers. Almost all reputable writers expressed their opinions about the policy. Most of them welcomed it; however, many of them were not certain about the purpose of the Party’s new cultural line or the limits on freedom of discussion. Some writers wrote with the purpose of testing the boundaries of the policy. The reaction from intellectuals made the Party reassess the Hundred Flowers policy in the belief it damaged orthodox socialist literature. At a meeting of Communist Parties from twelve countries in November 1957, revisionism was declared a greater danger than dogmatism. From July 1957 to February 1958, the Chinese Communist Party launched the Anti-Rightist Campaign as a backlash to the Hundred Flowers movement. The Party strove to control authors completely and force them to obey the Party. A huge number of intellectuals were labeled rightists and sent to labor camps, including prominent writers and critics like Ding Ling, Hu Feng and Feng Xuefeng. This is the historical setting in which Zhou Yang’s article “A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts” was written, as a part of the Anti-Rightist Campaign.

Following the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, both Soviet and Chinese writers began to reexamine Soviet literature and socialist

⁷⁰ *Renmin Ribao*, Beijing: Renmin Ribao Press, 2 Dec 1956.

realism. In the Soviet Union Stalinist literature and Zhdanov's literary viewpoints were criticized. Some Chinese writers felt that socialist realism should be revised or discarded. They tried to create a new form of realism to replace socialist realism in the hope that it would allow for descriptions of real life as well as a greater understanding of the dark side of society. Reactions to this idea varied widely within the literary community. Some government officials attempted to suppress debate with violence and brutal policies. Zhou Yang disagreed with such tactics; he wanted the Chinese literary community to better analyze the roots of this phenomenon. In the February 28th 1958 *People's Daily*, Zhou Yang published one of his most famous articles entitled "A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts", in an attempt to rid Chinese writers of bourgeois romanticism. Soon after the publication, Ding Ling, one of the most famous writers in the country, was labeled a rightist, and her writing was condemned as a vehicle for the promoting of individualism. The article represented yet another shift in Zhou Yang's understanding of socialist realism. In his mind, socialist realist literature combined realism and romanticism, but the positive form of revolutionary romanticism was entirely distinct from the negative influence of individual romanticism.

As the Party's representative for literary policy, Zhou Yang was extremely cautious and wary of bourgeois individualism, but what exactly did that mean? The Party believed that two kinds of literature existed. The first served the working class and reflected their life and struggles. This kind of literature was appreciated by the masses, educated people, and encouraged them to support the socialist cause. The second kind of literature served only a small group of people and fulfilled the desire for fame and material gain on the part of the author. It included literature such as Ding Ling's One-

Bookism⁷¹ and was supposedly only appreciated by a small group of readers. It was bourgeois, did not encourage the masses to support the country and spread negative thoughts, showing the dark side of society. In essence, it was opposed to everything that Marxist literature stood for, and represented bourgeois individualism. The Party held that the two kinds of literature had always been in direct opposition. They felt that socialist literature was the only type that was appropriate for the people. In the Party's eyes, the officially sanctioned style attracted writers who were willing to serve the people.

The Party believed that the new revisionist bourgeois individualism was created by a group of writers who held right-wing literary viewpoints. They included Ding Ling, Feng Xuefeng, Liu Shaotang, Wu Zuguang, Qin Zhaoyang and others. Zhou Yang says in his article "the Great Debate" that following the twentieth Soviet Communist Party Congress these Chinese writers decided it is an appropriate time to promote the old ideology of individualism, which many of them support before socialist realism is adopted as the state-sanctioned methodology. Zhou Yang says that prior to the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949, individualism is seen as a way to liberate the people from feudal traditions and to promote the concept of independence. The approach helps the Chinese fight against feudalism and encourages people to fight for their freedom. Many Chinese scholars and writers were born into well-educated bourgeois families, including Ding Ling. These writers were bourgeois new democrats rather than proletarian revolutionaries; they gained much of their knowledge from nineteenth century European literature which often described conflicts between the individual and society.

⁷¹ One-bookism was a term invented to condemn Ding Ling, who was accused of complacency and vanity after winning the Stalin Prize. Ding Ling was quoted as saying "as long as you have one book, no one can really criticize you." The Party viewed this as a form of bourgeois individualism because the Party could not condemn Ding Ling's Stalin Prize winning novel *the Sun Shines over the Sanggan River* (*Taiyang Zhao zai Sangganhe Shang*).

Zhou Yang believes that many of the Chinese writers and scholars with such backgrounds take part in the proletarian revolution but also have a great appreciation of bourgeois individualism.⁷²

Individualist Arguments from Different Writers

In his article “A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts”, Zhou Yang specifically criticized Ding Ling’s early works including *The Diary of Miss Sophie*, *When I was in Xia Village* and *In the Hospital*. Ding Ling published her well-known story *The Diary of Miss Sophie* in the 1920s. The protagonist of this novel, Miss Sophie, is a young woman “about twenty, away from home, and living by herself in Beijing, not enrolled in the university though most of her friends are... Her emancipated way of life is carried further than most [May Fourth women characters]. She finds herself strongly attracted to Ling Jishi, a man who has the ‘handsome air of a medieval knight’ but a despicable soul. Her diary centers on this perverse passion: ... she indulges in feverish fantasies of longing for him and she realizes at the same time that he is unworthy of them.”⁷³ While this novel explores May Fourth women’s attitudes towards life, Zhou Yang argues that Miss Sophie is a bourgeois individualist who is tired of living in the real world, so she begins cheating on her boyfriends and playing around with men in an attempt to better enjoy her meaningless life. The character of Miss Sophie is in direct conflict with traditional Confucian morals, which is one of the major traits of May Fourth literature; however, Sophie’s bourgeois lifestyle is also in conflict with what the Communist Party promotes. The Party wants people to devote their lives to the socialist cause and Zhang

⁷² Zhou, Yang, *Wenyi Zhanxian shang de Yichang Da Bianlun [A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts]*. Beijing: the Author’s Press, 1958. p.20.

⁷³ Feuerwerker, Yi-tsi Mei, *Ding Ling’s Fiction: Ideology and Narrative in Modern Chinese Literature*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982, p.28.

Yang, therefore, argues that Sophie is a corrupt character who lives an immoral lifestyle, and that Ding Ling is mistaken in feeling sympathy for such a bourgeois character. Following Ding Ling's arrival at Yan'an, she wrote two more stories: *When I Was in Xia Village* and *In the Hospital*. The first describes a woman captured by Japanese invaders and forced to be a military prostitute. Ding Ling describes the protagonist as a beautiful goddess who suffers the oppression and judgment of society. In contrast, Communist China viewed prostitutes, even women forced into the occupation by invaders, as the epitome of the bourgeois, corrupted lifestyle. In the second story *In the Hospital*, Ding Ling describes another female character who does not fit into socialist society and who has a rebellious personality. Zhou Yang believes that both stories embody Ding Ling's individualist consciousness. Feng Xuefeng, another scholar who took a similar literary approach to Ding Ling, praised her work because he felt it reflected, in great and beautiful detail, the real soul of her characters. As a result, Zhou Yang also criticizes Feng Xuefeng as a bourgeois individualist. Zhou Yang feels that these novels detract from the power of the Communist Party in Yan'an, and place individuals above society; furthermore, both novels portray the masses as numb and portray Yan'an as a brutal place.

Feng Xuefeng, an important scholar who opposed the adoption of a Marxist worldview in literature as early as 1936, felt that emphasizing a particular worldview would make literature rigid and mechanical. He declared the socialist spirit adopted in socialist realism inferior to the humanism found in older Russian literature. Feng was imprisoned by the Nationalists in their Shangrao Concentration Camp and released in 1942. Soon thereafter he published a collection of short articles entitled *Village Culture and City Culture*. Zhou Yang writes in his article "A Great Debate" that this collection

expresses Feng's view that the entire country has lost its way. Zhou Yang feels that in the collection the masses are portrayed as numb and satisfied with their current status as little more than slaves. Zhou Yang thinks that Feng's articles promote old traditional morals that say "scholars should die for their close friends" (*Shi wei zhijizhe si*) instead of communist ideology. Feng's works do not promote the ideology that people should contribute their lives to the socialist cause. An example that Zhou Yang quotes from Feng's writing is "people should be loyal to their own belief and consciousness"⁷⁴ Zhou Yang believes that Feng promotes the concept of individual subjective power. Zhou Yang says that in Feng's article "On Friendship," Feng ignores the notion of class struggle and emphasizes the existence of a broad friendship between human beings. Zhou Yang writes that for Feng Xuefeng, relationships with friends take precedence over his relationship with the Party; Feng thinks that if someone does not think this way they are "evil and terrible." In Zhou Yang's mentality, however, the Party and the masses should be placed before individual relationships. As a result of Feng's beliefs, Zhou Yang regards him as someone who refuses to obey the Party's desire to adopt socialist realism.

Qin Zhaoyang, another prominent writer at the time, felt writers were too cautious and dared not write about serious or controversial topics that excited them.⁷⁵ He began to write articles that promoted "writing the truth." He believed that realism not ideology was the criterion for judging literature.⁷⁶ In 1957, Qin systematically articulated his arguments on realism in the article "Realism -- a Broad Way." He wanted his peers to be able to

⁷⁴ Feng, Xuefeng, "Tan Shijie Jianlun Zhou Zuoren" [Discussing Moral of Gentries and Zhou Zuoren], Vo.1, *Collected Works of Xuefeng*, Beijing: Renwen Press, 1984. p.54.

⁷⁵ Qin, Zhaoyang, "Richang Tanhua Lu, [Record of Everyday Conversation]", *Qin Zhaoyang Sanwen Xuan* [*Collected Essays of Qin Zhaoyang*], Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Press, 1995. p.83.

⁷⁶ Goldman, Merle, *Literary Dissent in Communist China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1967. p.169.

express themselves according to their own opinions and beliefs. In the article, although he did not mention Mao Zedong's name, he implied that Mao's talks at Yan'an had been incorrect with regard to literary policy, and that "later generations are not satisfied to take principles and theories which have already been determined"⁷⁷ Qin thought the strict framework of socialist realism restrained writers' creativity and restricted their freedom to think, affecting their ability to truly and objectively reflect the real world. He wrote "No one can make the most complete, best interpretation [of reality]; usually, the interpretation which yesterday was claimed to be very correct is overturned today."⁷⁸ He criticized socialist realism for its depiction of characters in an oversimplified way and for restraining authors in creating full characters. He wrote, "Every member of the working class is a common man. As writers, however, we must not only see his common side, but also find in him and his life the things which are not noticed by the average person, things which are deeper and which, therefore, seem somewhat uncommon"⁷⁹ Qin also invented the term "realism of the socialist period" and this slogan became the main thesis of the article, and the focus of opposition to Mao's "Yan'an Talks" at the time. Qin Zhaoyang was regarded as the leader of young writers who held opinions opposed to socialist realism.

Another scholar, Wu Zugang, was also criticized by the Party as an individualist. He wrote, "The more powerful the party is the less powerful individuals will be."⁸⁰ He

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Qin, Zhaoyang, "Xianshi Zhuyi-- Guangkuo de Daolu" [Realism-- the Broad Road], *Renmin Wenxue*, No. 9:2 (1956). p.4.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.3.

⁸⁰ Wu, Zuguang, "Tan Houtai" [Talking about the Backstage], *Wu Zuguang Tan Xiju*, [Wu Zuguang Talking about Drama], Jiang Xi University Press, 2003. p.159.

also wrote that there was no longer any truth in current Chinese literature⁸¹. The Party believed socialism required the surrender of certain individual powers to create a harmonious society. This concept was not seen as being in conflict with communist ideology. The Party viewed Wu Zugang's words as another example of gradually spreading bourgeois individualism. Liu Shaotang, a writer, felt that recent Soviet literature paled in comparison to Soviet literature from forty years past; similarly, he claimed Chinese literature had declined in quality after the Yan'an Talks⁸².

The Party felt these criticisms of socialist realism were the result of bourgeois individualism, and that the critics were not only attacking socialist realism, but also communist ideology. The Party felt that these critics were promoting western modernism and other theories, and that they were therefore anti-revolutionary and bourgeois. Zhou Yang responded to this criticism by stating that socialist realism was a new kind of literature; no other kind of literature in history had used workers and peasants as the main subject matter, that the masses who had been serving society for centuries had never before had the privilege of being part of literature. He writes that the focus of writing have always been landlords, the aristocracy, merchants and the bourgeoisie, and their exploitative ways have always been upheld and promoted in literature. He thinks that socialist realism fundamentally alters this inhumane and exploitative way of thinking – it serves all the people. It promotes new socialist morals and criticizes backwards and corrupt ideologies. He argues that there has never been a form of literature with so much faith in the future of mankind and in the abilities of the working class.⁸³ Socialist realism

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Zhou, Yang, *Wenyi Zhanxian shang de Yichang Da Bianlun [A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts]*. Beijing: the Author's Press, 1958. p.26.

⁸³ Ibid p.28.

is widely appreciated by the masses, Zhou Yang claims, and no other form of literature has ever enjoyed such a large audience.

To anyone who claims that the quality of fiction has declined, Zhou Yang declares that only literature aimed at the aristocracy has declined in quality and that the literature for the working class has improved enormously.⁸⁴ He argues that the number of writers who come from peasant or working class backgrounds have increased and they set their novels in the factory or countryside, making them vivid and realistic. With regard to those Chinese writers, such as Qin Zhaoyang who believes that there is not a great difference between the old and the new literature, are accused by Zhou Yang of wanting to substitute socialist realism with bourgeois literature. Zhou Yang writes that Qin Zhaoyang finds it difficult to draw a line between the two because Qin feels that there is hardly ever such thing as a fixed border between anything.⁸⁵ Qin's opinion is viewed by Zhou Yang as an attempt to obscure differences in ideology between the new and the old literature. Zhou Yang feels that Qin Zhaoyang is trying to deny the traditionally divisive nature of literature. To writers who criticize the authenticity of socialist realism, Zhou Yang stipulates that literature has to be realistic. Literature that is unreal is useless, and undesirable to the people.⁸⁶ Zhou Yang also responds to the criticism with another question: "What is real?" Zhou Yang believes that socialist realism is the most realistic literature. He also believes that the working class is the most progressive and the least afraid to reveal the realities of life. Socialist realism realistically describes the processes of reform in people and in society, and touches the souls of many readers. Zhou Yang writes that if socialist realism is truly unauthentic, how can it have achieved such

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Zhaoyang, "Xianshi Zhuyi-- Guangkuo de Daolu" [Realism-- the Broad Road], p.5.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p.6.

emotional responses? Zhou Yang once again emphasizes the concept that the working class represents the most authentic part of the population.

Zhou Yang regards these literary individualists as “literary aristocrats”. He considers them representatives of bourgeois ideology. Ding Ling, Feng Xuefeng and these other writers who held similar individualist opinions became a target of the Party’s criticism. The Party believed that authors should write with the goal of contributing to the country rather than to individuals. Individualism was in opposition to the Party’s dogma stating that the life of the masses was the foundation for successful texts. Zhou Yang thinks that if stories focus on individualism they can not be successful. Bourgeois individualists tend to describe individual emotions and do not pay enough attention to the masses. The party do not want such writers to be in their midst.

The Chinese Communist Party still believed that Soviet literature had educated progressives throughout the world. They credited it with encouraging generations of progressives to take part in the socialist revolution. Soviet literature was pioneered proletarian literature and socialist realism was a new artistic phase in human history. The Party still upheld socialist realism as its guiding principle and they continued to use Soviet literature as the model for Chinese literature.

The Party’s View on Individualist Writers

From a Marxist point of view, conflicts in human history can be classified as conflicts between people and conflicts between people and nature. These conflicts can be labeled as class struggle and production struggle. Mao Zedong used this theory to further analyze class struggle by categorizing conflicts among people into two subcategories. The first subcategory was conflict within the people (*renmin neibu maodun*), and the

second was conflict between people and an enemy (*di-wo maodun*)⁸⁷. Socialist realist literature utilized both of these conflicts to fulfill various goals. Authors wanted to educate people about possible conflicts and about how to avoid being influenced by the ways of the old society. Literature demonstrated how society could resolve problems between individuals and the collective, and how society could help progressives reform backwards thought.⁸⁸ To the Party, socialist realism was the best way to achieve all these goals.

The Party believed that some authors were unwilling or unable to acknowledge conflicts between people and therefore their writing lacked conflict as well. Others were believed to obscure conflicts between the people and enemies because they preferred to examine conflicts between leaders and the people; such writers saw conflicts as being between the ruling class and the working class of the old society. The Party thought that this group of people therefore exaggerated the conflicts found among the masses and endangered the stability of society; they were only interested in the dark side of society. They felt justified in pursuing societal flaws because they felt such literature was authentic unlike texts that praised positive things. The Party viewed these writers as obstacles to the development of socialist China because they refused to adopt a revolutionary and dialectical materialistic view of history. They also rejected revolutionary romanticism as a part of socialist literature. They insisted on searching for

⁸⁷ Mao, Zedong, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," *Mao Zedong Xuanji* [Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung]. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978, Vol. 5, p.126.

⁸⁸ Zhou, Yang, *Wenyi Zhanxian shang de Yichang Da Bianlun* [A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts]. Beijing: the Author's Press, 1958. p.10.

flaws in society and showing them to the masses.⁸⁹ Their style of literature disappointed the Party, but its creators considered it realistic literature.

In the article “A Great Debate,” Zhou Yang writes that the Party admits that there are flaws in society, and that there will still be flaws in the future. Without flaws there will be no need for societal development. Zhou Yang says that as the old flaws are corrected, new flaws will continue to emerge and that the Party is not attempting to cover flaws, but instead wants to praise positive things and encourage people to see the bright side of society.⁹⁰

The Party’s reasons for criticizing right-wing writers were not just attempts to condemn what they saw as improper exaggerations of societal shortcomings. They felt that descriptions of society from an individual viewpoint, as the writers were doing, had a negative effect on production. For example, some right-wing writers did not agree with agricultural collectivization because they felt the peasants should organize production independently. In Ding Ling’s *In the Hospital* and Liu Binyan’s *Inside News of the Newspaper (Ben Bao Neibu Xiaoxi)*, the flaws within the working class were also exposed. The Party was afraid that these writings would have a negative influence on social production.

The Party’s Views on the Question of the Right to Free Writing

The Party viewed writing and literature as a tool for serving and educating the masses rather than something produced for a small elite, and was willing to provide a comfortable life for writers that described the positive aspects of society and thereby served the masses. The Party gave these writers free access as many resources as they

⁸⁹ Ibid. p18.

⁹⁰ Yang, *Wenyi Zhanxian Shang de Yichang Da Bianlun [A Major Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts]*. p.29.

required. If a writer did not conform to the approved style, the Party viewed them as anti-communist and limited their freedoms. The Party believed this was justifiable because it prevented attacks on the Party and prevented promotion of bourgeois ideology.⁹¹ Right-wing writers were more familiar with bourgeois ideology than the lives of the working class and they therefore could only describe capitalists, a minority group; they did not have the freedom to portray the majority of society.

Writers were instructed to follow Lu Xun's realist style of the May Fourth movement because the Party asserted that Lu Xun's literature was "literature that obeys orders." (*zunming wenxue*)⁹² Lu Xun himself considered it an honor to follow a pioneer's order, and the Party wanted writers to emulate him. The Party disagreed with Feng Xuefeng, who felt that writers were being restrained and that their rights and freedoms were being ignored. The Party told writers to follow the principles of socialist realism, but claimed they had the freedom to write whatever they liked. In other words, the Party gave "freedom" to writers who followed their rules. Mao Zedong said "Marxism could only include but could not substitute literary realism." Marxists considered politics and literature a dialectical pair. They felt writers should combine politics with literature, content with form and communist ideology with literary genres.⁹³ This was the Party's view of free writing.

From the early 1930s to the late 1950s, Zhou Yang introduced socialist realism to China, and continuously adjusted his interpretation over the 30 year period. The reasons for his constant alterations include his own improving comprehension of the literary

⁹¹ Yang, *Wenyi Zhanxian shang de Yichang Da Bianlun [A Major Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts]*, p.42.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Yang, *Wenyi Zhanxian shang de Yichang Da Bianlun [A Major Debate on the Front of Literature and the Arts]*, p.8.

method, and the changes in world and Chinese politics. The ever-changing political situation required Zhou Yang to adjust his interpretations to meet his political duties and to “engineer” the people’s ideology. In the early 1930s, when Zhou Yang first introduced socialist realism to China, he had concerns about the romanticism in socialist realism. He was troubled by the possibility that romanticism might affect the realist part of socialist realism and result in an abuse of bourgeois romanticism and individualism. Despite these concerns, Zhou Yang introduced socialist realism in his article “On ‘Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism’.” Yet, in this article, he reminds Chinese writers that the situation in the Soviet Union is different from the current situation in China: the Soviet Union is more advanced and because China is currently a backward country, it is not proper to adopt much romanticism. In 1952 after the founding of the People’s Republic of China with the Chinese Communist Party firmly established, and following Mao Zedong’s instruction to learn from the Soviet Union, Zhou Yang believed that the right time had come to completely adopt socialist realism as the literary doctrine in China, including its romantic component. In his article “Socialist Realism-- the Path Forward for Chinese Literature,” he encourages Chinese writers to wholly adopt socialist realism in their writings. He believes that Chinese literature should follow the path that the Soviet Union has created. In 1958, after the Great Leap Forward had been launched, the Party encouraged the Chinese people to boldly develop the country’s economy, literature and arts. Therefore, Zhou Yang began to promote romanticism more intensely than ever. He encouraged authors to use their imaginations to envision a splendid socialist cause. In his article “New Folk Songs Have Broadened the New Path of Poetry,” he writes that romanticism has been an important part of Chinese literary tradition for thousands of

years, and that writers should bravely adopt a romantic approach to describe the great socialist construction of the country. In the same year, the Chinese Communist Party realized that bourgeois individualism was beginning to emerge. After the Soviet “thaw” movement, some Chinese writers required the Chinese Communist Party to loosen its political control over literature to follow what had happened in the Soviet Union. The Chinese Communist Party felt that the situation was severe; after the Hundred Flowers movement, it began its new Anti-rightist Campaign to strike bourgeois individualism among literati. In order to cooperate with the campaign, Zhou Yang published another important article “A Great Debate on the Front of Literature and Arts.” In it, Zhou Yang criticizes Ding Ling, Hu Feng, Feng Xuefeng and many other established Chinese writers, accusing them of being bourgeois individualists. Zhou Yang indirectly denies the role that romanticism plays in socialist realism by criticizing writing about individual emotions and about people as human beings, an important feature of romanticism, and considered a major characteristic of bourgeois individualism by the Party. The rightists criticized by this article were all persecuted and made Chinese writers treat politics in their work with even more caution.

Zhou Yang played an important role in introducing and developing socialist realism in China. Over 30 years, Chinese socialist realism developed characteristics different from Soviet socialist realism, although both follow the same general principles. Thorough analysis of Zhou Yang’s articles permit a better understanding of some of the unique features of Chinese socialist realism, like its excessive puritanism.

Chapter 5 Chinese and Soviet Socialist Realist Novels: A Comparison

Now that we have discussed socialist realism, its literary structure, and its adoption in China from the 1930s to the 1960s, a comparison can be made between Chinese and Soviet socialist realist novels, which will clearly demonstrate that Chinese socialist realism is less realistic than Soviet socialist realism. Chinese novels are more puritanical and less graphic in detail.

Three sets of novels from the Soviet Union and China will be analyzed based upon the four categories of commonly used plots: love, death, villainy and the characterization of women. The novels are: *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, *How the Steel Was Tempered* and *Gao Yubao*, and *Young Guard* and *Red Crag*. The novels can be further categorized by theme. *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* represent the land reform genre, which describes the process of land collectivization during the Communist movement. *How the Steel Was Tempered* and *Gao Yubao* examine the evolution of heroes in that they describe the maturation process of a hero. *Young Guard* and *Red Crag* describe underground struggles between the hero and the enemy, showing the hardships and praising the bravery and strong communist beliefs required.

Love-related plots in Soviet and Chinese novels

In this section, love-related plots from each set of novels will be examined. In some, such plots are obvious, but in others, for example, *Gao Yubao*, they are nonexistent. However, all the novels describe some aspect of relationships between the sexes, and so

the term love-related plot is used instead of love plot. Chinese socialist realism tends to be more puritanical about plots involving love or other relationships between men and women than Soviet socialist realism. The word puritanical exemplifies the Chinese de-emphasis on sexuality in comparison to the Soviets; the Chinese tended instead to focus on class divisions between the sexes. In Soviet novels, readers see that attraction between people from opposite classes is possible. In Chinese novels, people from the proletarian class are repulsed by members of the exploiting class. There is no attraction between the two groups.

Land Reform Genre: *Virgin Soil Uplturned and Great Changes in a Mountain Village*

Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov (1905-1984) was born in the land of the Cossacks, now known as the Kamenskaya region in southern Russia. During the civil war he fought on the side of the revolutionaries, and in 1922 he moved to Moscow to become a journalist. From 1926 onwards, Sholokhov began writing *Tikhii Don* (The Quiet Don), which took fourteen years to complete. The novel unites the artistic heritage of Tolstoy and Gogol with a new vision into the Soviet literature first introduced by Maxim Gorky.

Podnyataya tselina (Virgin Soil Uplturned) is another of Sholokov's major works, which deals in part with the collectivization of the Don area. In 1932 Sholokhov joined the Communist Party and, on several occasions, was a delegate for the Supreme Soviets. In 1939 he became a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and was later named vice president of the Union of Soviet Writers.

Zhou Libo (1908-1979), whose original name was Zhou Shaoyi, was a prominent modern writer and translator, who began publishing in 1934, and was a well-known

socialist realist writer. In the early 1930s, he was a member of the League of Left-Wing Writers. He translated Sholokhov's *Virgin Soil Uplifted*. In 1947 and 1948, Zhou Libo wrote *Hurricane* and was awarded the Stalin Prize in 1952. For a long time, this novel was considered a socialist realist classic in China. In 1959, Zhou finished another great novel *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, which is considered the sequel to *Hurricane*. Both novels describe the land reform movement in China.

In *Virgin Soil Uplifted*, readers are often treated to descriptions of male-female affection. Sexual behavior, including premarital sex, is not shied away from. A major character in the novel is the peasant Andrei, who is portrayed as a capable retired Red Army soldier and a model peasant. Andrei supports both collectivization and the communist Soviet government. He is in love with his deceased wife and does not want to remarry. His mother, however, wants him to settle down with another family and have grandchildren. When Andrei meets the widow Marina he is attracted to her physical appearance. Marina is a healthy and strong woman who is good at farming and housework but she is strongly opposed to collectivization. Despite such backwards ideology, Andrei moves in with her before they marry.

The treatment of love is markedly different in Zhou Libo's socialist realist novel *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*. It is important to note again that Zhou Libo was the translator of the Chinese version of *Virgin Soil Uplifted* prior to writing *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*. The protagonist of *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, Chen Dashun, is a firm supporter of collectivization just as Andrei is in *Virgin Soil Uplifted*. Dashun, a communist party member, maintains strong communist beliefs. Sheng Shujun, a progressive young woman in the village, falls deeply in love with

Dashun. Although Dashun is attracted to Shujun, he has serious doubts about her background resulting from of his communist belief system. Shujun's mother is a member of the petty bourgeoisie who is concerned only with individual benefit rather than the collective good and who often has relationships with different men. Dashun becomes concerned that Shujun, like her mother, may be too flirtatious with young men. Although the narrator of the novel criticizes Dashun's "unreasonable" concerns, the way in which Dashun is described serves to demonstrate his loyalty to the communist party, his firm stance against bourgeoisie-corrupted behavior and his loyalty to the communist cause.

In *Virgin Soil Upturned* Andrei's reaction to Marina is completely different from Dashun's reaction to Shujun. The widow Marina is an ideologically backward woman, the complete opposite of Andrei. Nonetheless, Andrei finds Marina's physicality and sexuality irresistible and moves in with her. As time passes, however, Marina continues to be strongly opposed to collectivization, and Andrei decides he cannot continue to compromise his work for his personal life. Unable to find a better solution, Andrei informs Marina that if she continues to oppose collectivization he will have no choice but to leave her. This turn of events shows that Andrei tries to balance his communist ideology with his personal life but that there is a gap between the two; just because he has taken up with an 'unworthy' woman does not mean that he is a not a good role model. Andrei does not voluntarily combine his personal life with the communist cause. Chen Dashun, however, is determined to lead his public and personal lives in exact accordance with the communist cause. Dashun refuses to get too close to Shen Shujun because he questions whether her ideology is communist or petty bourgeois. He is unwilling to be with a woman unless she conforms exactly to his communist standards.

In *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, the female collectivization movement activist, Deng Xiumei, constantly attempts to educate Shujun in communist ideology. When Shujun asks Xiumei “Sister Xiumei, you’re an experienced person, please tell me, when love comes, what is it really like?”⁹⁴ Xiumei answers, “it is an extremely powerful emotion. If you don’t control it, it will drown you and everything about you: your purpose, your vocation, your energy, even your life.”⁹⁵ Xiumei’s view is a clear reflection of Chinese socialist realism’s more puritanical viewpoint compared with Soviet socialist realism. *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* portrays such puritanism as natural. The novel implores the masses to consider individual love carefully because the communist cause requires devotion of both heart and soul to work. Although the Soviet novels also praise a strong commitment to the communist cause, they describe sexuality in a realistic manner.

Once Shujun is educated on the topic of love by Dashun and Xiumei, Shujun begins to understand that, according to socialist thought, the communist cause always comes before love. With Shujun’s indoctrination, the relationship between her and Dashun can move forward. The way in which Zhou Libo describes physical attraction and intimacy, however, is extremely different from the descriptions found in *Virgin Soil Upturned*. As is common in Soviet socialist realism, Sholohov’s novel is straightforward in its descriptions of the affection between Andrei and Marina. For example, when Andrei looks at Marina he notices her beautiful smooth neck, her scent and her rounded breasts. Sholohov is unafraid of describing their mutual sexual attraction. In *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* Zhou Libo takes the opposite approach, trying to avoid

⁹⁴ Zhou, Libo, Trans. Derek Bryan, *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1961. p.44.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

any explicit sexual description. For example, in describing an encounter between Dashun and Shujun, he writes,

Sheng Shujun asked “Do you like me?” He answered, but there was no sound, nor was there a language... a kind of thick and broad contact connected them. This contact was a kind that human beings have been having for a long time. Our talented ancient novelists wisely and correctly described it as “the character of Lü 吕 (*lǚ*)”⁹⁶

Zhou Libo does not even use the word “kiss” to describe the sexual behavior between Dashun and Shujun. There are no descriptions of body parts or literal actions. Instead, Zhou Libo uses the Chinese character “吕” which is composed of two “口 (*kou*)” (mouth). This character, however, does not mean “to kiss”, it is simply a surname. The only reason Zhou Libo uses the character to refer to kissing is because of its visual symbolism. It would be difficult to find descriptions of sexual behavior more obscure than this.

Following this description, the reader is instantly pulled away from the already obscure picture of the loving couple and brought back to the reality of life as a revolutionary. One of the commune’s bulls is stolen and Dachun is immediately able to move his focus to his duties rather away from the intimate moment he and Shujun had just shared. He asks, “Tell me quickly, whose bull was stolen?”⁹⁷ As Dachun listens “all of (his) attention focuses on the bull,”⁹⁸ and “the exciting emotion of being in a battle

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.215.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p.219.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

against the enemy washed away the happiness and the affection between the boy and the girl.”⁹⁹ Soon after this incident, Xiumei warns Shujun “I still need to remind you that it’s ok to love but you better get married after a while...”¹⁰⁰ When Zhou Libo describes the sexual life of the two protagonists, he is not straightforward. When he does describe it at all, he connects it with revolutionary propaganda.

The puritanism inherent in Zhou Libo’s *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* is evident, particularly when the novel is compared to Sholohov’s *Virgin Soil Uplifted*. In Chinese socialist realism, many novels contain a puritanical bent.

Evolution of Heroes Genre: *How the Steel Was Tempered* and *Gao Yubao*

Nikolai Alexeevich Ostrovsky was born on the 29th of September in 1904. He was the fifth child of poor peasants in the village of Viliya in western Ukraine. In 1914, the family moved to the railroad town of Shepetovka. When the Germans occupied the town in the spring of 1918, Ostrovsky ran errands for the local Bolshevik underground. He joined the Komsomol in July and the Red Army in August. In 1920 he was repeatedly wounded in battle, and in October of that year he was demobilized on medical grounds.

Ostrovsky suffered from rheumatism and typhus and by December 1926, polyarthritis had made him virtually bedridden. Nonetheless, in December 1927 he began a correspondence course at the Sverdlov Communist University in Moscow. In August, he lost his vision.

In 1930, undaunted by his paralysis and blindness, Ostrovsky began work on his first novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*. In April 1932, he became a member of the

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.221.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p.222.

Moscow branch of the Association of Proletarian Writers and in June 1934 he joined the Union of Soviet Writers. On October 1 1935, he was awarded the Order of Lenin. In response, Ostrovsky wrote to Stalin:

Dear, beloved Comrade Stalin! I want to address to you -- our leader and teacher, the most dear human being for me -- these few fiery, heart-felt words. I shall strike blows at the enemy with a different weapon, one with which I have been armed by the party of Lenin and Stalin, which took a poorly educated worker and raised him up to be a Soviet writer.¹⁰¹

Ostrovsky died on December 22 1936, at the age of 32.

Gao Yubao was born into a peasant family in Liaoning province in 1927. He had few educational opportunities. He became a laborer in Dalian when he was nine. In 1947 Gao Yubao became a PLA (People's Liberation Army) soldier. In 1949, an army propaganda official encouraged him to learn from Pavel Korchagin (the protagonist of the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* and a favoured example for emulation by members of China's Communist Youth League). According to Gao Yubao, the official encouraged him to write a novel similar to *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Thus Gao began to write his first novel, *Gao Yubao*, based on his own life experiences. It was published in 1955.

Both Ostrovsky and Gao Yubao were born into proletarian families and both fought in the army. They both began to write after being demobilized. Gao Yubao was learning from *How the Steel Was Tempered* as he wrote his own novel. They are an ideal pair for company differences between Soviet and Chinese socialist realist Novels.

¹⁰¹ Luker, Nicholas. "From Furmanov to Sholokhov: an Anthology of the classics of Socialist realism", Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988. p.34.

How the Steel Was Tempered was published in 1935 and is a classic Soviet socialist realist novel. *Gao Yubao* was published in 1955. These novels illustrate ways in which the heroes of socialist realist novels evolve. Again, however, the Soviet and Chinese novels differ in their treatment of sexuality. In *How the Steel Was Tempered*, affection between people from different classes is openly described. In contrast, readers of *Gao Yubao* are only shown hatred between members of opposite classes.

The protagonist of *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Pavel, is the son of a poor worker and therefore is a member of the proletariat. The character of Tonya, Pavel's first love interest, is the beautiful daughter of a bourgeois government official. Despite their different backgrounds, the two are attracted to one other. Ostrovsky writes in detail about their affections, as demonstrated in the following quotations.

A girl in a white sailor blouse with a striped blue collar and a short light-grey skirt stood on the bank, holding on to the willow and bending low over the water. Short socks with a colored edging clung to her shapely suntanned legs. Her chestnut hair was gathered in a heavy braid.¹⁰²

...

Tonya listened with interest. Pavel got over his initial shyness and was soon talking to her as if she were an old acquaintance. Among other things he told her about his brother's disappearance. Neither of the two noticed the hours pass as they sat there in the hollow engrossed in friendly conversation. At last Pavel sprang to his feet.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ostrovsky, Nikolai. Trans. R. Prokofieva, *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Moscow: Progress Publishers. 1976. p.60.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.77.

...

As they stood there panting, their pulses racing, Tonya, exhausted by the wild chase, leaned over so lightly against Pavel in a fleeting moment of sweet intimacy that he was not soon to forget.¹⁰⁴

Gao Yubao himself mentions that he studied the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered* and this influence can clearly be seen in his own story, the self-titled *Gao Yubao*. The novel's protagonist, Gao Yubao, is the son of a poor peasant family. He notices Yingzi, the beautiful daughter of a village government official. The way in which Gao Yubao feels about the girl is quite distinct from how Pavel feels. This is demonstrated when Gao Yubao describes the girl and her mother:

In the village they call her 'Big Chimneystack.' ... taking her daughter to a Japanese school there. I reckon that Yingzi with her frizzed hair will grow up into another witch like her mother.¹⁰⁵

From the two descriptions of Tonya and Yingzi, we notice that the portrayal of young women from exploiting class family backgrounds differs in two ways. The first difference is in their physical appearance. In *How the Steel Was Tempered*, although Tonya is the daughter of a bourgeois government official, she is pure and lovely: She wears a white sailor blouse with a striped blue collar. The color of her clothing is bright and clear, indicating she has an outgoing and brilliant personality. Her suntanned legs show that she is a physically healthy young woman. Her chestnut colored hair and heavy braid also indicate her beauty and good physical condition. However, in the novel *Gao*

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p.78.

¹⁰⁵ Gao, Yubao, *Gao Yubao, Story of a Poor Peasant Boy*, Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1975. p.99.

Yubao, the image of Yingzi is antagonistic and negative. The author's wording, "frizzed hair" and "witch", reveals the author's repulsion toward Yingzi. Readers can feel that Yingzi is a wicked woman. The second difference between the two novels is in the male protagonists' feelings toward the two young women. In *How the Steel Was Tempered*, Pavel likes Tonya and the two youngsters become intimate friends who share secrets. They talk incessantly and do not even realize that time is passing by. They wildly chase each other until becoming exhausted and then Tonya leans into Pavel, a moment he will never forget. The boundary between the two classes no longer exists. Readers see two human beings instead of members of different classes. In the novel *Gao Yubao*, however, the protagonist Gao Yubao thinks Yingzi's mother resembles a witch and that Yingzi will grow into a witch as well. Such thinking encourages repulsion and antagonism between opposite classes.

In *Gao Yubao*, another character, also a daughter of a landlord family, is described in an extremely derogatory way:

The *bao* chief had taken a fancy to Fengzi, who had grown up to be clean and beautiful. He always wanted to flirt with her. When the official saw that Red-eyed Wang was not at home, he immediately began to talk and laugh with Fengzi and her mother. In actual fact, Fengzi had grown up to be ugly and dirty. She was already a seventeen or eighteen year old girl but no matter whether it was night or day, she still shit and peed inside the house.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Gao, Yubao. *Gao Yubao*. Beijing: the People's Literature Press, 1972. p.37.

Members of the upper class are always portrayed as dirty, ugly and stupid in *Gao Yubao*. The constant use of negative characterization weakens the novel's believability, but it supports the author's ideological viewpoints.

Gao Yubao lacks any descriptions of male-female relationships, whereas *How the Steel Was Tempered* constantly mentions such relationships and also describes sex. The more liberal Soviet approach may be due to the influence of the nineteenth century Russian realistic tradition. Below is an example of the less puritanical writing seen in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, with a description of the hero's premarital sexual behavior:

... Then, to his utter surprise, Pavel felt the girl's arms go around him and pull him toward her.

"Listen," hot lips were whispering, "there is no escape for me: if it isn't the officer, it'll be those others. Take me, love, so that dog won't be the first to have me."¹⁰⁷

...

For the first time in eight years Pavel found himself with plenty of time on his hands, and no duties of any kind to attend to. He made good use of his time, reading with the avid eagerness of the newly-enlightened. He studied eighteen hours a day. How much longer his health could have withstood the strain is hard to say, but a seemingly casual remark from Taya one day changed everything.

"I have moved the chest of drawers away from the door leading to your room. If ever you want to talk to me you can come straight in. You don't need to go through Lola's room."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p.126.

The blood rushed to Pavel's cheeks. Taya smiled happily.

Their compact was sealed.¹⁰⁸

The above two paragraphs appear before Pavel has married. The first paragraph of description happens in prison and the female inmate initiates the physical contact. The second paragraph pushes even further, and better demonstrates that Soviet socialist realist novels are more open to a level of sexual description considered immoral in Chinese socialist realism. In this paragraph, Pavel is living at a peasant's house. He and the peasant's daughter fall in love. Taya moves the chest that blocks the entrance away from the door leading to her room and suggests that he will not have to go through Lola's room in order to get to hers, which is an obvious invitation. The two characters make love in her room. No such events take place in *Gao Yubao*, which has no description of sexuality whatsoever. The different treatments of sexuality represent a major distinction between the two kinds of socialist realism.

Underground Struggles: *Young Guard* and *Red Crag*

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Fadeev was born on December 24th, 1901 in Krimy on Volga, east of Tver. His father was a village teacher and his mother was a doctor's assistant. In 1918, he joined the Communist Party. In 1931, he was made chief editor of the literary journal *Red Virgin Soil* (*Krasnaya Nov*). Fadeev won two Orders of Lenin and was one of the leaders of RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers). In 1934 he was elected to the Presidium of the Union of Soviet Writers, and was General Secretary of the organization from 1946 to 1954. In 1939 he became a member of the Party's Central Committee. His first published work, *Against the Current*, appeared in *Molodaya*

¹⁰⁸ Nikolai, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, p.407.

Gvaryiya in 1923. *Young Guard* was his third novel and it was based upon the heroic exploits of young Communist underground workers in the town of Krasnodon during the Nazi occupation. It was criticized for its insufficient portrayal of the Communist Party's role in guiding the youth of Krasnodon. Fadeev rewrote a new version and it won him a Stalin Prize.

In his last years, he suffered from kidney disorder, neuritis, alcoholism, and depression. On May 13 1956, he committed suicide. His bitter suicide note, clearly reveal his disillusionment with the Party and Stalin, and was found by the KGB at the time of his death, but was not released for 34 years, in the era of perestroika and glasnost. In the note, he wrote:

It is impossible for me to live any further since the art to which I have given my life has been destroyed by the self-confident, ignorant leadership of the Party and can no longer be corrected. The best cadres of literature -- in number far more than the tsarist satraps could even dream -- have been physically exterminated or have died with the criminal connivance of those in power.

...

Literature, the highest fruit of the new order, has been debased, persecuted, and destroyed. The complacency of the nouveau riche to the great teachings of Lenin--even while they swear allegiance to these teachings--has led to my complete distrust of them. From them we can expect worse than from Stalin--he at least was educated, these new ones are ignoramuses.

...

My life as a writer loses all meaning. I leave this life with great joy, seeing it as a deliverance from a foul existence, where meanness, lies, and slander rain down on you. My last hope was to tell all this to the people who lead the government, but in the course of three years, despite my requests, they have not been able to receive me.

I ask to be buried next to my mother.¹⁰⁹

Luo Guangbin (1924-1967) was born in Zhong County, Sichuan province. He took part in the anti-KMT underground struggle in 1949 and was captured and imprisoned at the Chongqing Sino-American Cooperation Camp. He survived to see the communist party take-over. In 1949, he and another survivor, Yang Yiyan, began to record their underground struggles and experiences in prison. These recollections form the basis of the novel *Red Crag*, which describes the underground struggle of Communist Party members against the KMT regime. *Red Crag* was first published in 1961. It had an enormous impact in the 1960s and 1970s.

Yang Yiyan (1925-) was born in Chongqing and went to Tongji University, Shanghai, to study Engineering. In 1948, he was captured by the KMT government as a result of his anti-government resistance work and was imprisoned in the Sino-American Cooperation Camp.

Both *Red Crag* and *Young Guard* describe the underground struggles of a group of young Communist Party members instead of focusing on one hero. The heroes in both sacrifice their lives before they can witness the victory for which they were fighting.

¹⁰⁹ Luker, Nicholas. *From Furmanov to Sholokhov: an Anthology of the Classics of Socialist Realism*, Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988. p.51.

There are, however, differences between the two novels, particularly in terms of how the authors portray the heroes. In *Young Guard*, sexual behavior is described constantly.

Below are two examples:

“Vanya,” she interrupted him and brought her face very close, so that her breath was warm on his face. “Vanya, I’m proud of you, so very proud of you! I--” She let out a low moan more like that of a woman than of a girl. In an equally ungirlish, motherly fashion she wound both her large, cool arms round his neck and, throwing caution to the winds, kissed him passionately on the lips.¹¹⁰”

“She could not remember how she ran across the room and rushed like the wind from the porch, how, with all her grateful, unhappy heart, she had flung her strong, nimble arms round the lad’s neck and pressed close to him, her face tear-stained, her half-dressed body warm...¹¹¹”

In *Red Crag*, although men and women are together in both the revolutionary movement and the jail, they do not interact. Romance is avoided, as in the case of Sister Jiang whose husband is killed. This method provides the readers with absolutely no descriptions of sexual behavior.

Conclusion of the Love-related Plot Discussion

Three pairs of novels were discussed in the above section: *Virgin Soil Upturned* and *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, *How the Steel Was Tempered* and *Gao Yubao*, and *Young Guard* and *Red Crag*. These novels demonstrate the ways in which the

¹¹⁰ Fadeev, Aleksandr. *Young Guard*. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958. p.90.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p.283.

portrayal of love and relationships differ between Chinese and Soviet novels. Among these novels, the Chinese writers of first two pairs of novels studied how to write socialist realist novels from the writers of the matching Soviet novels. The novel *Virgin Soil Upturned* describes affection between Communist Party member Andrei and the ideologically backward widow Marina. The novel positively describes Marina's physical appearance. Despite the fact that Andrei and Marina have different attitudes towards the land reform movement, their feelings for each other are genuine. The novel contains explicit sexual descriptions. In contrast, the novel *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, portrays no affection between politically progressive characters and backward characters. While Chen Dashun and Sheng Xiumei, both activists in the land reform movement, are falling in love, the sent-down cadre Deng Xiumei incessantly reminds them their devotion to land reform cause should not lessen in the face of love. The description of their sexual behaviour is extremely obscure.

How the Steel Was Tempered describes human affection across class boundaries: the adoration that develops between Pavel, a worker's son, and Tonya, the daughter of a government official. The description of Tonya is also positive, as in Sholohov's novel *Virgin soil Upturned*. The affection between Tonya and Pavel is pure and sincere. Readers see a different portrayal of cross-class relationships in the matching Chinese novel, *Gao Yubao*. In *Gao Yubao*, the description of Yingzi, the landlord's daughter is negative. Yingzi has an evil mind: she laughs when she sees Gao Yubao getting beaten. There are only hatred and class barriers between Yingzi and Gao Yubao, because they come from opposite class backgrounds. Readers never encounter any descriptions of sex.

In the third pair of novels, *Young Guard* contains frequent descriptions of sexual activity. The matching Chinese novel, *Red Crag*, on the contrary, contains none.

From examples the portrayals of love and sexuality found in these three pairs of novels, one can conclude that Chinese socialist realism is more puritanical than Soviet socialist realism.

A comparison of death plots in Soviet and Chinese novels

Death (or rarely, symbolic death) plays a significant role in Chinese and Soviet socialist realism. As discussed in chapter two, inheritance of authority is legitimized through the death of heroes, because the one who suffers most is the most deserving of power. Thus, by using plots involving death, socialist realist novels can demonstrate to readers why the Communist Party is the most qualified to control the nation. There are two major ways in which authors approach character deaths: sacrifice and purification. When a positive character, particularly the hero of the story, dies, it is presented as a sacrifice. When a negative or evil character dies, it is presented as a purification. The ways in which plots involving death are presented in Chinese and Soviet socialist realism will be analyzed below.

Virgin Soil Upturned and Great Changes in a Mountain Village

In *Virgin Soil Upturned*, when Andrei joins the Red Army, the villagers cannot understand his behavior. In order to punish him, one of the villagers rapes Andrei's wife. This heinous act causes her great pain and she eventually hangs herself. This plot development demonstrates that the masses do not always support the Red Army, nor do they always understand communist ideology. The rape also demonstrates that the masses do not hesitate to use extreme methods to voice their opposition. The people, therefore,

are not always on the hero's side and, although the character is an hero people may fail to see it.

In *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, the situation is far less complicated, because the masses always toe the Party line. It is possible that they sometimes misunderstand Party policies, but it is inconceivable for them to oppose the Party. The Soviet and Chinese novels, therefore, differ in terms of which characters drive the sacrifice of a positive character. In Soviet novels, sacrifice can be driven by enemies or by the masses. In Chinese novels, on the other hand, sacrifice can only be caused by the enemy (including natural enemies such as floods) in the struggle between good and evil.

The Soviet socialist realist novel portrays death in a realistic manner whereas Chinese socialist realist novels describe death in a far less violent way. This distinction will be examined below.

In *Virgin Soil Upturned* there is a character named Yakov who is a peasant opposed to collectivization. In order to prevent a peasant woman from spreading the secret that he is working to damage collectivization, he murders her. The description of the murder is very detailed and graphic. Yakov uses a white cloth to wrap up the woman's head. The woman knows that Yakov is going to kill her and starts shivering. Tiny drops of sweat appear on her white skin. Yakov holds a hammer and strikes her cloth-enveloped head. The material is stained with blood and brain. Upon seeing this, Yakov himself cannot help but turn away and vomit.

“He wrapped her sack-cloth shirt around her head, [...] and as he looked it was swiftly covered with sweat. “She's guessed why I've wrapped up her head. Damn her!” With a snort

Polovtsov brought the axe-blade down on the shirt enveloping her face.

Yakov Lukich suddenly felt a protracted shudder rack her body. The nauseating scent of fresh blood filled his nostrils. He stumbled across to the stove, and, shaken by a terrible attack of vomiting, painfully brought up his insides.¹¹²,

There are two major features in the above description. The first is the detailed and graphic depiction of violence, an important part of realism. The second is the modicum of humanity which Yakov demonstrates when he, the murderer, is physically affected by what he has done. The murder shocks the reader and forces him to experience the brutality of death.

In Zhou Libo's *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, the reader is not given detailed descriptions of either love or death. There are no brutal, violent conflicts between good and bad. Instead of the graphic murder in *Virgin Soil Upturned*, Zhou Libo inserts a treacherous fight against a flood, a non-human foe. When the character of Liu Yusheng almost drowns as he fights the flood, his symbolic death replaces the violent death in *Virgin Soil Upturned*.

Zhou Libo's approach to violence reflects Mao's talk in Yan'an where he opined that writers should write about life in a positive and upbeat way¹¹³. Most Chinese socialist realist writers tend to avoid intensive violence in their novels. When authors portray the socialist struggle as bloodless and supported by the optimism of the masses, they are saying that revolution is the right thing for masses to pursue. The authors are

¹¹² Sholokhov, Mikhail, Stephen Garry, trans. *Virgin Soil Upturned*, London: Putnam, 1935. p.133.

¹¹³ Mao, Zedong, Trans. McDougall, Bonnie S., "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": a Translation of the 1943 text with Commentary. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1980. p.111.

cultivating the hope that if the masses have communist ideology, everything will be perfect.

Another feature lacking in Zhou Libo's novel is realistic, human reactions to violence and death, like Yakov's visceral reaction to committing murder. The description of Yakov's reaction makes him an ambiguous character, neither completely evil, nor completely good. In Soviet novels, struggles between members of opposite classes are not always portrayed as completely black and white; there are often more ambiguous characters. In Chinese novels, however, the exploiting class is nearly always portrayed as cruel and unsympathetic. Chinese novels avoid making the characterization more complex because they do not want evil characters to appear more sympathetic or good characters less so.

Dramatic reactions to violent acts, such as sudden vomiting, are also found in other Soviet socialist realist novels such as Fadeev's *Young Guard*. In this novel, however, it is the hero of the story who throws up after he kills an enemy.

“...Like his friends, who with palpitating hearts were waiting for him to act, Victor suddenly thought that time was racing by and it would soon be daylight. Without stopping to consider that it would be easier now for the sentry to see him and easier still to hear him, because his own footsteps would no longer drown any other sounds, Victor crawled straight towards him. He was already barely two yards from the sentry who still stood, however, in the same position, his hands in his pockets, rifle slung over his shoulder, his head in the forage-cap bent low, rocking

slightly on his heels. Whether Victor made another crawling movement then, or simply leapt up, he could never remember afterwards, but suddenly he was on his feet by the sentry's side, his hunting knife grasped firmly in his hand. The sentry opened his eyes and quickly turned his head-- he was a thin, elderly German with a stubbly beard. A frenzied look came into his eyes and before he could remove his hands from his pockets he let out a strange, soft sound, like "Ugh..." Victor had plunged the knife with all his might into his neck to the left of the chin. The dagger had entered up to the hilt into the soft flesh above the collar-bone. The German fell and Victor fell over him and was about to strike again, but the German had already jerked convulsively and blood was gushing from his mouth. Victor stood aside, tossed the bloodstained knife to the ground and suddenly began to retch so violently that he had to press his jacket sleeve to his mouth to stifle the sound of it.¹¹⁴

The strong physical reactions to acts of violence in Soviet socialist realism stem from the nineteenth century Russian realist tradition. Representatives of these works include Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1865-1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1875-1877), Anton Chekhov (1860-1904)'s short stories and plays such as *Uncle Vanya* (1899). Chinese literature shows no similar tradition.

Lu Xun's realist writings, however, portray a negative attitude towards Chinese tradition and show Chinese society as cannibalistic. Lu Xun and May Fourth realism

¹¹⁴ Aleksandr, *Young Guard*, p.509.

criticize the foundations of Chinese tradition, including Confucianism. In contrast, Mao Zedong, in his talks at Yan'an, required writers to be positive in describing revolution. Lu Xun's realism may be closer to European the nineteenth century realism than Chinese socialist realism. This leads one to conclude that the Communist Party was using Lu Xun's well-established literary reputation, without regard to Lu Xun's own ideology, to promote socialist realism. The Communist Party wanted to use fiction to promote socialist ideology, and although the types of stories they wanted had little to do with Lu Xun's style of realism, they were happy to capitalize upon Lu Xun's notoriety. The differences between the two styles can be seen when comparing Zhou Libo's *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* to Lu Xun's realism. Zhou Libo adopts a positive attitude to examine revolution and society whereas Lu Xun tends to be more negative about the possibilities for social change. Although it purports to follow realism, Chinese socialist realism does not actually emphasize realistic details. In later forms of Chinese socialist realism, revolutionary realism is further disregarded and revolutionary romanticism is emphasized.

Young Guard and Red Crag

In Fadeev's *Young Guard*, death is often described in all its brutal details. The author allows the readers to experience the horrors of war. A particularly graphic example is in the author's description of the riverbank after a German bombing:

“No longer was there any lorry from 1B Pit, nor was there any Grigory Shevtsov and the little girl with the blue eyes. They were gone; they were nowhere to be seen. There was nothing where the lorry had stood but a round, hollow funnel of black churned-up earth, round the

edge of which lay charred bits of lorry and the mutilated bodies of children. A few paces from Ulya a strange stump in a red scarf was moving slightly on the ground. Ulya recognized in it the upper part of the body of the orphanage matron. The lower part with the rubber boots worn straight over the stockings had vanished. It no longer existed.

A boy of eight, his head pressed against the earth, his arms bent back as though he were preparing to jump, was writhing and screaming, his little legs kicking the ground.

Almost beside herself Ulya rushed to him, wanting to take him in her arms. But the boy wriggled away with a shriek. She lifted his head and saw that his whole face was puffed up into a large watery blister and the whites of his eyes were standing out of the sockets. Ulya slumped to the ground and sobbed bitterly.¹¹⁵

Readers are able to see every detail of the land following a bombing and to witness its brutal effects on the people.

In Chinese socialist realist novels, although violent descriptions exist, they appear much less frequently violently. Writers usually describe the scene in a detached manner; for example, a writer might describe the shadow of a torturing scene or a conversation between a tortured protagonist and a villain, such as in the novel *Red Crag*. The writer might describe a brutal scene through the eyes of another after the atrocity is discovered, such as in the beginning of Qu Bo's novel *Linhai Xueyuan (Tracks in the Snow Forest)*.

The novel *Red Crag* describes the Communist Party's underground struggles, in particular the experiences of communist political prisoners in a joint U.S.-KMT

¹¹⁵Ibid, p.117.

government prison. Such a storyline inevitably involves scenes of torture but the authors avoid describing graphic details. The authors depict the prisoners writing poems while incarcerated. By using poetry to romanticize revolution, the novel deemphasizes its violent aspects and promotes a romantic vision of the struggle. The romantic descriptions serve to praise the prisoner's superior ideology and loyalty to the communist cause.

One of the most obvious examples is the torture of Jiang Jie. In this section of novel, Sister Jiang, a female revolutionary is being tortured by KMT spies after she has been captured and imprisoned. The description could be a very graphic and shocking portrayal of torture. However, the writers instead describe words spoken between characters, which is less graphic, and they also frequently use ellipsis to avoid graphic depictions.

“Will you talk now?”

Grotesque shadows danced on the walls.

“No.” Her voice was weak, but as calm as ever.

“The nerves of the fingertips are linked with the heart, so think it over!”

“Will you talk?”

No reply.

A hammer was raised, throwing a heavy black shadow on the wall.

“Drive it in!”

The inmates visualized tightly bound hands, the bamboo splinter piercing a fingertip ... blood spurting....

“Will you talk?”

No reply.

“So you won’t talk? Pull it out! Drive it in again!”

No sound came from Sister Jiang in spite of the excruciating pain. The inmates felt as if the bamboo splinter had been driven into their own hearts....¹¹⁶”

Purification

In socialist realist novels, class enemies and villains must be purged. The way in which the purge occurs varies from novel to novel. Some villains are portrayed as invaders of the “great family.” They threaten the collective good and the hero, must therefore remove or neutralize the threat using his courage and ability. When the hero succeeds, he demonstrates both his physical and ideological superiority.

It is important to recall that many socialist realist novels were written in the thick of political movements. During a political movement, the villain becomes the victim and the desired social order is created. Such purification is a process found in every socialist realist novel when the villains are removed by the hero. Struggles with the villainous characters serve to help the hero mature politically.

An analysis of the ways in which villains are purged in Soviet and Chinese socialist realism demonstrates that Soviet socialist realism is more realistic than Chinese socialist realism. The two major features are once again the differences in descriptions of violence and death, and in the humanity of some characters.

In *Virgin Soil Upturned*, following the rape and suicide of his wife, Andrei returns to his hometown to avenge her. He goes to Anigy Defyetejin’s, the rapist’s house. When Andrei pulls out his saber and places it next to Anigy’s father’s neck, the old man cannot

¹¹⁶ Luo Guangbin, Yang Yiyan, *Red Crag*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press. 1978.p.281.

stop shaking. His grandsons are crying. Upon seeing this, Andrei realizes he cannot kill the old man and avenge his wife. The scene describes both characters in great detail and also depicts Andrei's internal conflict. All the details-- a shaking old man, crying children and Andrei's mental struggle-- create a graphic and realistic world filled with contradictions. The hero's enemy is not an independent entity; he has a family and children. Andrei halts his revenge because he is a humane person. The old man kisses Andrei's foot to thank him for sparing him despite his having committed such a crime. This scene depicts a type of humanity that goes far beyond class struggle:

“[Old Defyetejin] crossed himself and dropped to his knees beneath the icons. “Andrei Stepanich!” was all he said as he bowed himself at Andrei's feet. And he uttered not another word, nor did he raise his rosy, bald head from the floor.

With his left hand he seized the old man's grey beard, then he kicked open the door and noisily dragged him into the porch. The old wife had fallen down in a swoon by the stove, but their daughter-in-law, Anigy's wife, gathered the children into a heap (she had six altogether) and ran weeping out into the porch. Andrei, as white as dead, wind-weathered bone, had swung his body sideways, and already had his saber raised above the old man's neck. But at that moment the snotty, bellowing and howling children flung themselves at his feet.

“Cut them all down! They're all Anikei's whelps! Cut me down!” their mother shrieked. She went right up to Andrei,

unbuttoning her rose-coloured shirt, her dry, withered breasts tossing like those of a bitch with a numerous litter. And the children large and small crawled around his feet. Staring wildly around, he stepped back, thrust his saber into the scabbard, and, stumbling even on the level ground, went towards his horse. As far as the wicket-gate the old man followed him, weeping with joy and his past terror, trying continually to fall on him and kiss his stirrup. But, frowning contemptuously, Andrei pulled away his foot and hoarsely said:

“Lucky for you ... the children...”¹¹⁷”

When purification occurs in *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, there is no detailed description of the characters thoughts and actions. The novel simply states that the villagers searched the house of the story’s villain, Gong Ziyuan, find US-made weapons and then take him away. The struggle between the two sides is clear and simple. There is no begging or sympathy for Gong Ziyuan. By deemphasizing the violent aspects of purification, Zhou Libo replaces realism with romanticized class struggle.

The same approach can be found in the novel *Gao Yubao*. The scene in which the villain is purged is not realistic, and even has comic undertones. The way in which the peasants punish landlord Old Skinflint is written in a humorous manner:

“A couple of days later, the hired hands got the clubs ready. After supper, they put out the lamp and posted Yubao behind the door to keep

¹¹⁷ Mikhail A.. *Virgin Soil Upturned*, p.51.

watch. They waited for some time, until they saw Old Skinflint sneaking over to the henhouse. As soon as he reached it, Yubao shouted: "A thief!"

The hired hands dashed out, each carrying a club. They threw Old Skinflint to the ground and started beating him.

"Lay off! It's me!" he yelled.

"You!" they retorted. "You've asked for it. This'll teach you to come here and steal fowls again!"

Yubao ran to the middle of the courtyard and shouted: "A thief! *Bao* chief, get up quick! We've caught a thief."

On hearing the alarm the Japanese officer in the west front room jumped out of bed and rushed out with two orderlies, a pistol in his hand. He bellowed as he ran: "Catch the thieves! Kill the lot!"

That night the *bao* chief happened to be away. Big Chimney-stack and Little Demon, when they heard the rumpus, screeched: "Stop that! Don't beat him!"

But the next second two shots rang out-- Bang! Bang! The Japanese officer had opened fire. With a shriek of terror Old Skinflint cried: "It's me!--" then tried to crawl into the hen-coop. He was so scared that he shit in his pants.

The Japanese officer was charging forward to shoot again when Big Chimney-stack, only half dressed and holding up her pants, came hurrying out of the house.

"It's the old master!" she panted.

At that the officer put up his gun and, growling at the hired hands in Japanese, went back to his room to sleep. The men hastily crowded forward.

"The old master never goes near the henhouse," they said. "What's he doing here at this hour of the night? Fetch a lamp, somebody, so that we can see."

Little Demon brought out a lamp. Then everyone saw that the two shots had wounded Old Skinflint in one thigh which was bleeding copiously, while the way he was trying to bury his head in the hen-coop made it seem as if he had a liking for fowl droppings! When he was dragged out, his face was covered with them. He sat up, clutched his wounded leg and set up a howl. The hired hands found it hard to keep straight faces.¹¹⁸

This paragraph describes how the peasants hired by the landlord nicknamed Old Skinflint beat him to avenge his ill treatment. This event is a brutal incident a typical of violent class struggle. However, the author downplays the brutality of the incident and instead emphasizes the contrast between the wise peasant class and the ignorant landlord class. Old Skinflint defecates from fear making him seem more foolish and disgusting. After the incident, the peasants forge ignorance that the person they beat is the landlord, and ask for a lamp to check who he is. The author does not realistically describe Old Skinflint's pain and humiliation, yet he instead incessantly focuses on portraying the evil, dumb and ostentatious behavior of the landlord class. The author says the peasants could not keep their faces straight, which instructs readers that they should not sympathize with

¹¹⁸ Yubao, *Gao Yubao, Story of a Poor Peasant Boy*, p.161.

the landlord because he deserves this punishment. The story romanticizes the brutal reality of class struggle.

Suicide

When suicide occurs in socialist realism, it is portrayed differently by Chinese and Soviet writers. In Soviet socialist realism, heroes may try to escape the brutal pain of real life by considering suicide. Such a plot development never occurs in Chinese socialist realism, where only non-party members may consider. The hero of the Chinese novel cannot succumb to or acknowledge the difficulties of real life. The only time heroes commit suicide in Chinese socialist realism is when they refuse to surrender to the enemy.

In the Soviet novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, when the protagonist, Pavel, realizes he might be useless to society because of his poor health, he considers suicide in a moment of desperation, and even raises his pistol to his head. In *Gao Yubao*, however, although the hero Gao Yubao has a very difficult and harsh life, he never considers suicide an option. Instead, he focuses on fighting landlords and other class enemies. Among the six novels compared in this paper, only one Chinese novel, *Red Crag*, mentions suicide in this way. In *Red Crag* a progressive youth named Zheng Kechang says he wants to kill himself because of his dissatisfaction with the KMT regime. Zheng Kechang, however, is not actually a Communist Party member, and he threatens suicide while chatting with his friends. In actual fact, he does not intend to commit suicide. In *How the Steel Was Tempered*, the treatment of suicide is quite different. The character contemplating suicide is Pavel, the central character, a Party member and a hero. Pavel actually reaches the point where he has a gun to his head and is going to pull the trigger. The pain of reality nearly causes a hero to die despite his crucial role in the communist

cause as a weapon of the Party. In Chinese socialist realism, although reality is brutal, heroes have superhuman determination and faith in the ability of communist ideology to overcome all obstacles.

Villainy

The presence or absence of ambiguous characters is an important distinction between Soviet and Chinese socialist realism. In Soviet socialist realism, positive characters are allowed to have a few flaws, and negative characters can be somewhat sympathetic. In Chinese socialist realism, however, the situation is far more unequivocal. The heroic characters do not have many, if any, flaws. As socialist realism spread and evolved in China, flaws in heroes lessened to the point of nonexistence. In the later periods of revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary realism, the hero has absolutely no flaws.

In *Virgin Soil Upturned*, Borodin is a negative character who stands against collectivization. The novel, however, describes his bravery as a soldier during the war against foreign invaders at some length, as well as his diligent work as a peasant.

“This Borodin—we call him Titok—voluntarily joined the Red Guards together with us in 1918. He was the son of a poor Cossack, and fought bravely. He was wounded and was given a distinction, a silver watch, for his revolutionary conduct. So you see, comrade worker, how he has touched our hearts ... He worked day and night, grew a shaggy beard all over him, went about in a

single pair of canvas trousers winter and summer. ... and ruptured himself through lifting heavy weights¹¹⁹”

When Sholohov describes the appearance of the party secretary Nagulnov, who is a positive character, he writes about “the too rapacious slit of the nostrils of his small, abbreviated nose, and the muddy film over his eyes.”¹²⁰ This description is so negative that it taints the image of the party member.

Another example of Solohov’s ambiguous approach is in his description of the poor old peasant Shchukar. Shchukar supports collectivization, and is therefore a positive character despite his propensity for exaggeration. Over the course of his life, he has raised two horses, only one of which he purchased on his own. He does not know how to recognize a quality horse because he has limited knowledge about livestock and he is therefore cheated by the seller. In *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, Zhou Libo creates a character similar to Shchukar named “Flour-paste Ting.” Both are old and poor peasants, who like to exaggerate. “Flour-paste Ting,” however, although not a positive character given his somewhat backward ideology, is very good at farming and raising livestock as a member of the peasant class. He is even able to calm down an angry ox and save people. In Chinese socialist realism, positive characters or characters that belong to working classes are always wise and intelligent; however, in Soviet socialist realism, this is not always the case.

¹¹⁹ Mikhail A., *Virgin Soil Uplifted*, p.41.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p.17.

Portrayal of women

Although the main hero in a socialist realist novel is always male, female heroes, as less important characters, appear in every novel. Soviet and Chinese socialist realism differ in the way they portray women. Soviet socialist realism usually describes women as feminine, curvaceous, and beautiful. Chinese socialist realism, however, describes women in a way that deemphasizes their femininity and strengthens their roles as revolutionaries. In this way, Chinese authors emphasize that women who understand advanced communist ideology are more appealing.

A typical description of a woman in the Soviet novel *Virgin Soil Upturned* is as follows:

“She still retained a vague steppe beauty in her full, strong body and her swarthy features... her proud head with its burden of glossy black hair. It was thick, and looked as coarse as a horse’s mane, but it curled with a childlike turbulence and softness around her little ears.¹²¹”

In the Chinese novel *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* women are described in a way that emphasizes their ideology over their appearance:

“Deng Xiumei was dressed in black, of medium height, strong and well-built.”¹²² “...now she must work with all her strength and determination for several years, giving all the energy

¹²¹ Ibid. p.53.

¹²² Libo, *Great Changes in a Mountain Village*, p.3.

of her youth to work for the Party and for socialism. Children would be a drag and would slow down the work.¹²³”

In the Chinese novel *Red Crag*, the de-feminization of women is pushed to the extreme with “two-pistol Granny.” This character is not a young, beautiful woman, but rather an old grandma whose appearance is barely described. The author’s description of her clothing and movements seem rather masculine.

“...Grandma got out. Flicking the dust from her white silk jacket, she nonchalantly addressed the militiamen: “Another inspection? Everything is on the sedan-chair. Go ahead!” Grandma gestured impatiently towards the sedan-chair with a hand loaded with rings and precious stones.¹²⁴

“You... Two-gun Grandma?!”

Grandma looked up and said graciously: “What a poor memory you have, chief of police. Didn’t you recognize me?”

She beckoned to him with her fan, but the chief of police shrank back. Several figures closed in from behind, and cut off his escape. He could almost see the two loaded pistols under Grandma’s white silk jacket. With a slight motion, she could shoot him through the head! He looked around and saw only strage faces. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Then with shaky knees and a sickly smile he bowed and scraped twowards Grandma.¹²⁵

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Guangbin, *Red Crag*, p.270.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p.275.

This is a new kind of image of women in Chinese socialist realism. The goal of this new image is to diminish the inequality between men and women and also to persuade women to take part in the socialist revolution. Its target is to portray the new women who have been educated by proletariat socialist ideology. The typical occupations of the new women include tractor driver, welder and technician. They have four major characteristics: the first is their female physical form. The second is that they are no longer housewives in the old Confucian society; instead, they work in different agricultural and industrial fields. The third is that their physical appearance is healthy, strong, and they all have determined facial expressions when they are portrayed in novels, posters or other propaganda forms. The fourth is that these women are educated with proletarian ideology and equipped with knowledge in different areas. These new women dare to compete with their comrades and fight against the enemy. A historical example (as opposed to fictional) of the new kind of women is Guo Shulan. One issue of the magazine *Xin Zhongguo Funü* (New China's Woman) published in 1955 introduced Guo Shulan as the new model of Chinese women. It described her "a tool-laden nineteen-year-old woman in a white lab coat fearlessly standing more than thirty meters above the ground."¹²⁶ The magazine reported that her appearance "differentiated her from peasant women, while her confident actions in the realm of heavy industry rendered her a model that challenged the validity of the Confucian exemplary woman."¹²⁷ The new Chinese women usually has "large arms and legs tirelessly engaged in labour"¹²⁸ From their stalwart body and robust arms, the form of new China's women is remolded. While

¹²⁶ Chen, Tina Mei, 'Female Icons, Feminist Iconography? Socialist Rhetoric and Women's Agency in 1950s China' *Gender & History*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. Vol.15 No.2 August 2003, p.272.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Chen, Tina Mai, 'Proletarian White and Working Bodeis in Mao's China', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 11:2. 2003.

women in Confucian society had “limited mobility, lack of education and were confined to the inner sphere of the household,”¹²⁹ Guo Shulan, by contrast, was bound by none of these conventions. She represented a new ideal woman fit for socialist China.

In the novels *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* and *Red Crag*, readers see the same kind of women’s image. In both books, positive female characters are physically and/or mentally strong and capable. They are equipped with socialist ideology and different special skills; for example, Two-gun Grandma can operate two pistols at the same time and shoots accurately. These new women devote themselves to the socialist cause and are critical to the victory of the revolution. Chinese socialist realist novels, as a propaganda, effectively promoted this new image and conveyed it to the Chinese people. In Soviet socialist realist novels, readers see female revolutionaries but the way Soviet writers portray them is less radical than in the Chinese novels.

In above three pairs of novels, we see that Soviet socialist realism and Chinese socialist realism have different characteristics. To be more specific, Soviet socialist realism tends to be more realistic when describing characters or events. For example, descriptions of wars embody the brutality of wars. Characters are more complex. There are more ambiguous characters than in Chinese socialist realism.

Chinese socialist realism however, is more puritanical and less graphic. It has more romantic flavour when it comes to descriptions of characters and events. Characters in the novel are either good or bad. Generally speaking there are no ambiguous characters. Descriptions of sexuality are very rare. Most of the novels do not describe detailed

¹²⁹ Bray, Francesca, *Technology and Gender, Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1977, p.215.

violence, instead they tend to avoid violent descriptions and romanticise revolutionary struggles. These are the major differences between the two kinds of socialist realism.

Chapter 6 Reasons for the differences between Chinese and Soviet socialist realism

In the previous chapter, we discussed the differences between Soviet socialist realism and Chinese socialist realism and demonstrated that Chinese socialist realism is more puritanical in its contents and less graphic in its descriptions. Nonetheless, why do these differences exist? This chapter will examine the political and literary reasons, of which there are three. First, the historical backgrounds of Chinese socialist realism and Soviet socialist realism are different; second, the two communist parties' attitudes towards writers are different; and third, the two parties' attitudes towards literary tradition are different.

To understand the differences between Soviet socialist realism and Chinese socialist realism, it is also important to be familiar with the changes along the development of Chinese socialist realism. In the third chapter we discussed Zhou Yang's four articles, which represent four consecutive stages in the development of Chinese socialist realism. In this chapter, we will discuss what happened during the four stages to help us understand why changes happened and what kind of influence these changes had upon socialist realist literature in China to distinguish it from Soviet socialist realism.

Different historical backgrounds

In most societies, literature develops as new books are written and then theories subsequently appear and are gradually developed. In the Soviet Union and China, the literary theories were the first things to be written, followed by the actual books. At the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Zhdanov declared that socialist realism was to be the new national literary policy. Since the early 1900s, writers such as

Gorky had been writing revolutionary novels with some traits of socialist realism, but following Zhdanov's declaration, writers began to consciously create socialist realist works. During this period of time, the Soviet Union was relatively peaceful following the end of the Civil War in 1920. Eight years later, China held the Yan'an Conference on Literature and the Arts in the "liberal area" controlled by the Communist Party. The Party was under extreme duress from both the KMT and the invading Japanese army and, as a result, the goal of their meeting was not to discuss previous literary and revolutionary practices, but instead to establish literature as a political apparatus for stricter hegemonic control. Under the circumstances then, the significance of the Yan'an meeting was in its creation of a new, politically motivated, national literary policy rather than in the study of literature itself.

Different attitudes towards writers

In Gorky's speech at the 1934 Congress, he pointed out that Russian literature is a part of European literature, and that in the Soviet Union as a result of the Russian literary tradition professional writers were more educated than ordinary people. Zhdanov stated that: "Necessary conditions have been created to enable Soviet literature in producing works according to the needs of the masses, who have grown in culture. Only our literati have the chance to be so closely connected with the readers, the working people."¹³⁰ Gorky felt that as the proletariat grew more literate, it raised the demands for art.¹³¹ Similar comments are to be found in Nilolai Bukharin (1888-1938)'s speech, when he claimed: "The worker of today is not the same worker of five or six years ago. Today's

¹³⁰ Scott, H. G. ed. *Problems of Soviet Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers' Congress*. New York: International Publishers, 1935. p.12.

¹³¹ Gorky, Maxim, "Comments on Social realism" in George Becker, ed. *Documents on Modern Literary Realism*. p.6.

peasants have been converted to collective farmers; they are already quite different from previous kind of peasants regarding their ideology. [...] They claim their status in the arena of history with ever-greater passion, and intelligence, which demands higher quality of literature that contains more subtle approaches.”¹³² The obvious implication being that revolutionary success leads to greater literacy among the masses. As a result of the new literary demands from the population, the bar of literature was being raised. The literary elite of society were meant to create literary works based on the changing literacy level of the masses.

The Yan'an conference had a quite different emphasis from that of the Soviet Congress. The topic of the relationship between writers and readers was among the most important in the meeting. In Mao's speech, he repeatedly mentioned that writers should not live a life distant from the masses; they should join the workers, peasants and soldiers. He asserted that, “The task of understanding the people and getting to know them properly has the highest priority among all the things that we are doing. How have our workers of literature and art performed regarding this aspect up to now? I would say that they have been heroes without a battlefield, they are remote and uncomprehending.”¹³³ He purposefully used the term “workers of literature and art” to place writers on the same level as workers and peasants.

The solution to this problem, in Mao's view, was for writers to enter the lives of the masses. Mao disagreed with the attitude prevalent among writers that they were superior to the masses. He felt that writers must first join the masses before they could be able to write fine texts. He wrote:

¹³² Gorky, Maxim, *Gorky, Radek, Bukharin, Zhdanov and others "Soviet Writers' Congress 1934*, p.10.

¹³³ McDougall, Bonnie S., *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1980, p.11.

“There must be a basis from which standards are raised [...]. Where do we start from? From a feudal basis? From a bourgeois basis? From a petty bourgeois basis? None of these will work. We must raise standards upon the basis of workers, peasants and soldiers, upon the basis of their present cultural level and their literature and art. Instead of raising workers, peasants and soldiers to feudal, bourgeois or petty bourgeois level we raise their standard into the direction towards their own development.¹³⁴”

While in the Soviet Union, the Party depended on writers to write better literature so that the masses' literacy would improve, in China, the Party focused more on persuading writers to go to the masses and join the workers, peasants and soldiers to learn from the masses' lives.

Different attitudes towards literary tradition

The Moscow meetings built upon continuous literary and revolutionary development. Radek has said, “the slogan of socialist realism [...] did not invent a method, but only expressed the ripened requirements of revolutionary art.”¹³⁵ This argument is a continuation of Lenin's criticisms of pre-revolutionary literature. In the Soviet Union, continuity of pre-revolutionary literature preserved important realist traits to a certain degree, such as describing events in a graphic way and depicting ambiguous characters in novels.

However, the development of modern Chinese literature was discontinuous. From the end of the Qing dynasty to the founding of the Republic of China and the May Fourth movement in 1911, there was a nearly complete rejection of Chinese literary tradition.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p.12.

¹³⁵ Gorky, *Gorky, Radek, Bukharin, Zhdanov and others "Soviet Writers' Congress 1934*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977.p.23.

The new generation of scholars, who had Western or Japanese educations, were strongly opposed to classical Chinese literature. Professional artists gained a social status in society that was formerly the realm of traditional scholar-bureaucrats. Left-wing literature appeared alongside such social upheaval. Up to this point then, artists maintained a high social status, just as they had in traditional Chinese society. At the 1942 Yan'an meeting, however, Mao declared that they were simply artistic workers who were of the same value and social status as other workers. In China, the rejection of the literary tradition gave the new literary genre of socialist realism more space to develop freely. In Chinese socialist realism, readers see more ideological propaganda, and more puritanical characters who devote themselves to the socialist revolution, but with less graphic depictions.

At the Moscow Congress, the literary approaches of realism and romanticism were discussed, both of which were from the European literary tradition. At the Yan'an meeting, however, the subject was not even breached. Western terminologies such as realism and romanticism, which were often discussed by May Fourth intellectuals, were rarely mentioned. Mao mentioned neither Western literary terminologies nor traditional Chinese literary terminologies; the only term that Mao used was "proletarian realism." Mao's only emphasis was on the life of the masses. He strongly believed that writers should "devote their bodies and souls to the task" of recording the worker's life. He regarded life as a resource for art, and he saw the "rich deposit of literature and art (that) actually exists in popular life itself." Mao felt such rich deposits were meant to be mined by the artist.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ McDougall, Bonnie S., *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art"*, p.19.

A good example of the new Chinese socialist realism was the novella *Tale of Li Youcai's Rhymes*. It did not use Western literary style, or traditional Chinese literary style; instead it adopted a great deal of Northwest Chinese peasants' local oral literary form from the masses' everyday life. The novella was a great success in "the liberated area." In 1946, Zhou Yang commented on Zhao's work,

"Zhao Shuli deliberately calls his works 'popular stories.' However in fact they are not. Of course, they are popular stories in terms of words that are being used, but indeed they are real works of art. These works blend requirements of the masses with artistry. [...] In his way of expression, especially in his language, [...] what he has achieved is definitely not an old form, but a genuine new and national literary form [...] Since the Yan'an Conference on Literature and the Arts, all branches of art have achieved remarkable achievements and a new epoch has been created. Among these literary achievements, the works of Zhao Shuli had a very important position due to the reason that they put Mao Zedong's literary principles into practice. That is the reason why here I hail and endorse his success.¹³⁷"

Mao believed that literature should be "crude but also energetic," and that "folk literary form was 'the sole source of literature'" because "it was a conceptualized form that was extracted from the masses' lives."¹³⁸ *Tale of Li Youcai's Rhymes* is a model text

¹³⁷ Zhou, Yang. Zhou Yang Wenji [Collected Works of Zhou Yang]. Beijing: the People's Literature Press, 1985, vol. 2. p.76.

¹³⁸ Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art": A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary, p.20.

that follows Mao's demand that authors process and recreate the masses' lives in an artistic form.

Conclusion:

There were three reasons for the differences between Chinese socialist realism and Soviet socialist realism: the social and historical background that produced socialist realism in the two countries were different; the two Parties' attitudes towards writers were different; and the two Parties' attitudes towards literary tradition were different. Different social and historical backgrounds resulted in the different goals of the two socialist realisms. The goal of Chinese socialist realism was to *create* a new literary form as its political apparatus whereas Soviet socialist realism was inherit from previous Russian realist literature and revolutionary literary practice and bring about a new political utility.

The Communist Parties in the two countries' different approaches to writers were another major reason leading to writers creating different socialist realist works. The Chinese Communist Party considered writers as artistic and literary workers. It called on writers to live with the masses and study from the masses so that to discover anew artistic and literary topics and plots from the life of the people and furthermore learn the real (colloquial) language of the peasants, the kind of language Zhao Shuli adopted in his *Tale of Li Youcai's Rhymes*. However, in the Soviet Union, the writers had been looked upon as an elite group. These two approaches to writers led to difference in the images of the working class in Chinese and Soviet socialist realism: in Chinese socialist realism, the working class characters were always portrayed positively, and the bourgeois class characters were supposed to be the opposite. The images of the two kinds of characters

were in stark contrast. Workers and peasants had an honest appearance and decent morals, whereas the bourgeoisie were wicked and evil. In Soviet socialist realist novels, what often occurred was that working class and bourgeoisie had similar appearances, which was one of the reasons that in the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, young people from opposite classes fall for each other, human beings rather than enemies from different classes.

Chinese socialist realism ideologically denied earlier Chinese literature, regardless of whether it is the ancient Chinese literary tradition or the Western literary thought that was introduced during May Fourth movement. The Chinese Communist Party required a new kind of literature, which fundamentally distinguished itself from those previous literary forms. Zhao Shuli's novella *Tale of Li Youcai's Rhymes* was regarded highly by the Party, and differed fundamentally from previous literature that readers would be familiar with. However, Soviet socialist realist works, to a considerable extent, followed and developed of the Russian realist literary tradition and earlier revolutionary literary practice, works like Tolstoy's realist classics *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, and Gorky's *Mother*. This was another reason why in Soviet socialist realism, novels could portray love between members of different classes, and why detailed description of death, as well as ambiguous characters that had both good and evil traits often appeared in Soviet socialist novels.

This paper argues that although both were party political apparatus of their respective Communist Parties, Chinese socialist realism and Soviet socialist realism are distinct from each other. Chinese socialist realism is more puritanical than Soviet socialist realism, and Soviet socialist realism is more realistic than Chinese socialist realism. This

thesis compares three pairs of novels as examples of Chinese socialist realism and Soviet socialist realism, and analyzes their distinctive characteristics to demonstrate this. These three pairs of novels are land reform novels, evolution of heroes and underground struggle novels. The comparisons are on love and death plots of these specific novels, as well as some other themes including the image of women and ambiguous characters. The reason that I choose love and death plots is that these two plots are considered the recurrent motifs of fiction. Through analysis of these two kinds of plots, we can understand better the differences existing in the two types of socialist realism. Through analysis of death plot, we see that Chinese socialist realist novels have the tendency not to illustrate death realistically; instead they tend to omit the detailed violent scenes of death. On the contrary, Soviet novels portray death realistically. Chinese socialist realist novels do not portray cross-class affection whereas Soviet socialist realist novels do. Chinese socialist realist novels very rarely describe sexuality yet there are constant sexual descriptions in Soviet socialist realism.

I hope that the comparison and analysis in this paper would do a little to help with a better understanding of these two seemingly similar but actually quite distinct literary forms.

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