

TIME HAS BEGUN: HU FENG'S POESIS IN SOCIALIST CHINA, 1937-50

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This paper examines the poetry of the Marxist poet and critic Hu Feng 胡风 (1902-85) within the context of the modernizing transformations that took place in the People's Republic of China (PRC), with a particular focus on Hu's claims of the political effects of the Chinese Revolution (1927-50) on creative practices during the 1940s and early 1950s, specifically, the phenomena presented by his poesis. Hu, a *fellow traveller* of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), came into his own in the 1940s during a series of debates with his colleagues in the Party. In his career as a poet and critical intellectual, literary editor and publisher, Marxist-in-exile in socialist China, and political prisoner of the CCP, Hu practiced and called for writings that eventually became oppositional forces against authoritarian practices and populist nationalism.¹ The literary and political career of Hu as a Marxist literary critic at work is an instructive case, not just in the study of the broad history of modern China, but also in our efforts to continue to expand the concept of the "committed critic" in relation to debates about the parameters in which creative freedom and political commitment negotiate with each other. This paper will augment incipient critical discussions of modern Chinese writing in the wide scholarly and cultural sphere of global literatures and advanced criticism.²

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Hu's poesis, which extended beyond poetry to embrace pedagogical and editorial work that nurtured a group of emergent writers (the *July* writers) of his time, gave the poet-critic a chance to develop a subjectivity and poetic form that tantalized the literary space beyond the confines of the CCP's wartime politics. Hu's *Time Has Begun* 时间开始了, a book-length elegy to the founding of the PRC, written amid his long-standing conflicts with Party writers, conflated many of Hu's mixed sentiments about the arrival of a power regime he simultaneously anticipated and apprehended.

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580 The poet is “a soldier in life,” “a fighter of human freedom and happiness,” and “a monk who sacrifices himself for the good life of millions of people”; he is “the owner of a philanthropic soul” (Hu, “A Brief Discussion of Literature from Nowhere” 427-30). Anyone who lives up to these standards “can be honored as a poet even if he or she has not written a single line [of poetry]” (Hu, “Man and Poet” 74). These statements are just some of Hu’s plainest and most instructive claims on the personae and tasks of the poet, claims that lie at the heart of his own writing and his editorial and pedagogical work. Each of these claims leads to the question of the poet as “a soldier in life”: what sort of person can shape such a central place during a decade of wars that defined much of the sociopolitical reality of China and that bore the mark of China’s long journey to modernity? The terms “soldier” and “poet” bear ideologically specific connotations relating to the Chinese Revolution. By putting them together, Hu presented a vision of different elements and goals of the revolution that entered the same historical moment while waiting for the day they would be in equilibrium—a balance of forces guaranteed by the condition of poesis.

In October 1949, Hu recorded in his diary, “a song has been churning in my mind for two months; it strikes the strongest chord and reaches the height of harmony” (Mei 569). This song, which Hu wrote to celebrate the PRC’s founding, was the grand historical epic *Time Has Begun*. In this epic of heroes inciting historical events and imagery of the triumphant joy of transformations in society, Hu presented an overview of the key moments that emerged during the new PRC’s celebratory events. He recorded the poet’s joy in seeing the CCP’s expansion into political, ideological, and social institutions, and in witnessing its historical role in the Chinese socialist struggle. The complete epic, around 4,600 lines in length, is structured around five songs: “Joyous Praise 欢乐颂” (November 11-12, 1949); “Commendation of Honour 光荣赞” (November 26-28, 1949); “Songs of Youth 青春曲”; “Requiem 安魂曲” (December 31, 1949-January 1, 1950); and “The Song of Triumph 胜利颂,” originally titled “Another Joyous Praise 又一个欢乐颂” (January 13-14, 1950).

The first song, “Joyous Praise,” describes the opening ceremony of the PRC’s first People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), reflects the joy of Mao, and memorializes the Civil War. The second, “Commendation of Honour,” focuses on women, including Hu’s mother. In the context of the making of socialist China, these women, in their roles as mothers and as representatives of the peasant-worker class, symbolize the “modesty” and “purity” of the people. The third, “Songs of Youth,” features such characters as “Little Grass,” “Morning Light,” “Snowflakes,” and “Sleeping Village.” They are the voice of a new generation of youths, born in the People’s Republic, and optimistic for the future. This song stands out as the most lyrical of the five, with strong evidence of an emotional investment in lives at the “beginning of time,” at the juncture of the old and new regimes. The fourth, “Requiem,” which can be likened to a continuation or extension of the second song, begins with the inau-

guration ceremony of the “Monument to the People’s Heroes” in Tiananmen Square, and contains many biographical details of the revolutionary martyrs who were also Hu’s friends and comrades. The fifth, “The Song of Triumph,” the shortest of the five songs, is an intensified version of the first song in terms of both content and sentiment. In its march of passion, and in a tempo more intense than the rest of the epic, this song is a reflection of Hu’s feelings of excitement on the PRC’s first National Day. Collectively, these songs embody moments of the Chinese Revolution from related perspectives, but each one is panegyric and passionate in its own way. Moreover, each song touches on the sensitive question, driven by the historical threshold of 1949, of the relationship between the partisan and the fellow traveller, between the “heroic” and the “ordinary.” Ultimately, the epic is a eulogy to Mao’s triumphant rise—a subject that, in Hu’s words, would come to “suffocate” him (Mei 569; Hu, “Man and Poet” 74). In the wake of Mao’s rise to absolute power, fellow travellers of the CCP, like Hu and those who used to work in the Guomindang (GMD) areas, needed to justify and defend themselves more than ever. The songs and Hu’s aforementioned diary entry describing their creation show his thoughts on the difficult relationship between the individual and the collective, albeit in codified terms. Hu considered the fate of the intellectual amidst the imminent arrival of an absolute power and the reality of losing a relatively autonomous foothold in critical and creative work.

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The dynamic interconnection of the “strongest” and the most “harmonic” expresses the intensely self-conscious awareness of the relative, conciliatory, and threatened reconciliation of the individualistic with the collective, as well as that of the heroic with the average and the imaginative with the political. In Hu’s imagination and understanding, the fate of “the strongest” is as much a matter of artistic compromise, or the subjugation of the critical intellectual to the party-state, as it is the eventual retrocession of authorial power to the people. A recurring theme in the epic is its depiction of Mao as a great source of control, a commanding figurehead, deep in the sea of power to the point of standing frozen in time, as exemplified by this passage from “The Song of Triumph”:

He oversees the newborn motherland
 He witnesses the beginning of time
 He looks at the standing people
 He looks on the sea that converges into itself
 laborious, combative, and creative lives. (Hu 264)

By giving “the strongest” an expression, against the background of the “harmonic,” Hu’s epic laid the ground for a three-dimensional structure. It created a space—a reality in which absolute state power (“the strongest”) became a productive basis for the collective (“the height of harmony”). Inherent in the “praise” was the idea that Mao climbed to the height of power by being expansive and inclusive. Inclusiveness compelled the “strongest” to remain strong:

Let also those who arrive in dust and sand
 come here.
 Let those who are stained with dirt and blood
 come here.
 Let those who are redolent of dead bodies
 come here.
 Let the hundreds and thousands of sinful scholars, humbly and timidly,
 come here. (Hu, "Joyous Praise" 103-04)

In the context of modern China, Hu imagines the essentials of a revolutionary leader and figurehead. This excerpt from the song "Joyous Praise" expresses Hu's expectations for Mao and his instructions on the responsibilities of statesmanship. Nowhere else did Hu write as openly and extensively about Mao; only when imagining Mao "announcing to himself" and "the world" that he was living up to the task of an "accommodating" and "boundless" leader did Hu express himself as eloquently:

582 I am the sea.
 I need to be capacious
 Capacious as to
 embrace the world
 as to
 expand beyond time. (Hu, "Joyous Praise" 104)

For Hu, the revolutionary leader of modern China is not only a source of absolute power, but also the cause of a centripetal process that brings average people together. He depicts Mao as appealing to the "we" and "they":

We
 from the axis of the motherland
 from the beginning of history
 in joy
 in songs
 in dance
 in pride
 spread out. (Hu, "Joyous Praise" 104)

The heroic and the strongest are scattered, while, in a state of passionate action and movement, synchronic in its intention and direction, the harmonious forge connections and collectivity that form the grounds for the nurturing of their own strength and consciousness. The last few stanzas of "The Song of Triumph," which conclude Hu's historical epic, powerfully represent the collective's ever-growing strength, which could be summoned, perhaps justifiably at this point, by a stupendous effort of will as surely as Mao remained at a standstill:

He is looking at you
 He is listening to you
 He is cheering out to you
 For the motherland
 For the future

For the species (Hu, “The Song of Triumph” 280)

These last moments of the historical epic show that Hu found confidence in synchronizing divided ideals: the individuality and authoritarianism of the singular, the intensity and desire of the collective, and, ultimately and ideally, the organic flow between the individual and the collective.

“SONGS OF YOUTH”

Hu’s panegyric on Mao and the CCP’s leadership, inspired in part by his political sensitivity, drew attacks from his opponents. Only the first song enjoyed success upon its publication: the *People’s Daily* printed the song immediately after receiving it, and it was also translated into Russian in *Oktyabr*, a monthly literary magazine based in Moscow. This success, however, was short-lived. Notwithstanding the manifest passion of *Time Has Begun* in celebrating Mao and the CCP, the Party called for an end to all publication plans and attempts, including destroying newly printed copies of the epic at Xinhua Bookstore. The epic was not published in its entirety until Hu’s post-prison years in the 1980s.³

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Hu was not surprised by the censorship of *Time Has Begun*, and even expected that his work would provoke negative critical responses. In his letter to Lu Yuan dated January 18, 1950, he admitted: “The publication of #1 has shocked all, despite dismissal by some of those ‘core writers.’ That is fine. Regarding #2, except those who are in the vicinity, no critical reviews have reached [Beijing]. In Tianjin, though, it has made a hit [...] #4 is provocative” (Hu, “Letter to Lu Yuan, 18 January 1950” 367-68). Hu’s letter may well indicate two reasons for the Party’s dismissive reception of *Time Has Begun*. One of those reasons is Hu’s “literary subjectivism,” as reflected in the epic’s structure, writing timeline, and imagery. The writing schedule of the poem shows that, once he had paid tribute to Mao and the new PRC, Hu returned to the third song, a quintet. Yet, whether by pure mischance or other circumstantial reasons such as sickness, travelling, or censorship,⁴ Hu took two years to gradually add to “Songs of Youth” what he called his “most beloved songs”:⁵ “Little Grass Says to the Sun 小草对阳光这样说”; “Morning Light 晨光曲”; “Snowflakes Say to the Land 雪花对土地这样说”; “The Moon 月光曲”; and “Thus Speak the Sleeping Village 睡了村庄这样说”.

Hu wrote these songs in a period of two months, publishing the first, second, and fifth songs first. In a letter to Niu Han, Hu outlined the emotional stages involved in the creative process: “At the time of writing, the whole of history and universe emerged into a galloping *sea* (song #1), a galloping *river* (songs #2 and #4), and a silvery *sea* (song #5). These songs echoed in my heart” (Hu, “Letter to Niu Han” 440).⁶ Hu’s description of his emotions stored up in the shape of a “sea” and a “river” suggests a further correspondence between the “strongest” and the “most harmonic”

discussed above:

The sea
seething
It is swirling around a peak
Mao Zedong
He perches solidly on that peak...
as if he is looking down at all those forthcoming
rivers, big and small (Hu, "Joyous Praise" 103)

Hu's account of his flow of emotions in the creative process allows readers to plot the form of two concentric shapes, with an empty space of possibility in the middle, awaiting the right inhabitants:

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Figure 1. Plotting the five songs of *Time Has Begun*.

Hu's creative mind seemed to be a vast repository for a *hierarchy* of tropes, such as the sea as compared to the river, before he matched this set of carefully-selected images to the characters represented in the poem. In Hu's analogy, the "sea" in the first and fifth songs was to Mao's engulfing "greatness" what the "river" was to the combative spirit of the individual revolutionaries and comrades-in-arms Hu commemorated in the second and fourth songs. Moreover, while recovering from an illness and returning to Shanghai, Hu decided upon the remarkably poetic characters who were featured in the third song, which also incorporated Hu's best lyrics about life in transit. The first

of these characters, “Little Grass,” is a romantic, allegorical, and biographical figure.⁷ In a passage (“Songs of Youth” 157-59) that Hu wrote on December 4, 1949, “at night, seeing first snow, in Beijing” (Hu, “Songs of Youth” 160), Little Grass addresses the Sun in a clear effort to redeem those who, in the first song, were “humbly and timidly” gathering around Mao. In terms of structure, the third song, inserted into the heart of *Time Has Begun*, created an effect of poetic subjectivity, which Hu hoped that the first two songs would anticipate and from which the last two would be seen to proceed. The protagonists of “Songs of Youth” embodied the rosy romanticism of lives surrounded by the excitement of change. Except for song #3.3, “The Moon,” all the songs are told in the voice of a first-person narrator: “Little Grass,” “Morning Light,” “Snowflakes,” and “Sleeping Village” are neither merely poetic objects nor materials, but are characters and actors. As “Little Grass” tells the sun that “when it is time / I will open my eyes / ... / to greet you, love you” (Hu, “Songs of Youth” 158), “Morning Light” speaks directly about personhood and selfhood:

I am a person
I have a heart
a flesh-and-blood life
burning in youth (Hu, “Songs of Youth” 160)

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These “youthful” voices were extremely important to Hu, as they constituted a practical complement to his creative theory and exemplified his “literary subjectivism” at work. They were important not only for their lyrical quality, but also for their counterpoint to the idealized image of Mao Zedong in the first and fifth songs: “Time has begun,” yet, in accordance with whose sense of temporality had time begun? Real time, as we experience it, according to Heraclitus, is like a *river*. As we sail down this river, we encounter such characters as “Little Grass,” “Snowflakes,” and “Sleeping Village,” and pass along views of the “morning light” and “the moon” on the banks of the river in a sequence of past, present, and future. Meanwhile, the man who stands “firmly at the top,” perched on a crag in the “Jinggang Mountains,” sees this sequence as all one vision, outside time.

In their position in the middle of *Time Has Begun*, these five poems present five lyrical accounts of the revolutionary struggles of various individuals, within the context of Marxist ideology as personified by the timelessness of Mao’s “greatness.” Given his emphasis on the poet’s “literary subjectivism” in both the revolutionary and creative processes, Hu expanded on the third song, and well into his post-prison years in the 1980s, he insisted that, although *Time Has Begun* began and ended with an apotheosis of Mao, the entire five-song version of his epic be published in one complete edition, as he had always dreamed. In a letter to Lu Yuan dated September 9, 1984, having made the point that “*Time Has Begun* had never appeared as a single whole,” he continued: “It is the 35th anniversary [of the PRC]. I probably can no longer write another long piece. My feelings for the people and the motherland are all contained in those songs. I wish against wish that they as a whole could be printed”

(Hu, "Letter to Lu Yuan, 9 September 1984" 394).

FREE VERSE: A STYLISTIC INCONGRUITY

586 The second historical reason for the Party's antipathy toward *Time Has Begun* was Hu's use of modern free verse. Poetic free verse, as opposed to "national forms," was one critical weapon that Hu employed to fight against the tendency toward what he called "formulism" in revolutionary literature. Hu's problem with "formulism" constituted perhaps the longest episode in his critical war with Party writers and intellectuals. The genealogy of "national forms" and how "core writers" and "core writings" of the period⁸ came to appropriate and revive traditional cultural forms in revolutionary China was known as "subjective-formulism," or simply "formulism." Marston Anderson defines subjective-formulism as "the term by which critics referred to fiction that advanced its ideological message in an overly mechanical or schematic fashion" (62). Indeed, as early as the mid-1930s, Hu was already concerned about two manifestations of "vulgar Marxism" in literary trends and warned against them in terms that were anticipatory of what he would eventually lay out on the brink of 1949:

There are writers whose passion has receded [...] They have become contented and adopted a passive attitude toward life, taking writing as a professional task that they perform dispassionately [...] This is called objectivism, an evident tendency in the literary circle at present. If [these writers] cannot forget the general [sociopolitical circumstances of our time] and write [about the war] with some preconceived concepts, then they have replaced objectivism with subjective-formulism. ("Some Thoughts about Literary Developments" 10-11)

In his pamphlet "Realism Today," written in the mid-1940s, Hu again used the term "subjective-formulism" in his critique of some writers' perfunctory applications of Marxist views and their reductionist representations of life in accordance with formulaic literary designs. Literary works produced under the influence of "subjective-formulism" were "self-indulgent," "self-delusive," and "devoid of historical content" ("Realism Today" 500-02), Hu argued. Meanwhile, "literary objectivism" looked at life with the sort of cool-headedness commonly found in natural science, and considered reality an empirical object, as "a phenomenal form" that paid no attention to Marx's call for the need to "penetrate" the "illusory" surface of social relations and to discover the underlying structures and forces that generate fundamental historical tendencies or changes.⁹ Though seemingly two opposite tendencies in creative practice, subjective-formulism and objectivism both blocked the "path of realism" (Hu, "The Path of Realism" 502), as the former was "a feeble deduction of political phenomena" (Hu, "The Path of Realism" 502) and the latter was an "illustrative inventory" (Hu, "The Path of Realism" 502) of political concepts. Both tendencies were marked by the use of abstract generalization to replace active think-

ing as a necessary agency for the production of literature about society and life. For Hu, therefore, neither subjective-formulism nor objectivism met the revolutionary expectations or maximized the potentialities of “New Literature,” a term the Party intellectuals used to describe literature in the post-May Fourth era¹⁰ as a *military* achievement of the CCP.

Hu referred to “New Literature” as “*May Fourth* New Literature,” as works that voiced humanist demands and that recorded “living phenomena brought into existence by [...] man” (Hu, “Realism Today” 38). Because “May Fourth New Literature” developed from the decisive historical and humanistic processes that instilled those “demands” and “phenomena,” it contained “materials taken from the street” and a “sincere heart” capable of “extracting from [life] something lively and living” (Hu, “Realism Today” 38). The catalyst of this complete union of life (materials) and a life invested with meaning (an ideological outlook) was the poet’s “subjective combative spirit” (Hu, “Realism Today” 38), by means of which literary practice established an analogous connection with revolutionary life, ensuring that any political stance gained in the creative process was a position born from real-life struggle.

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In his letters to writers and editorial notes, Hu documented and gave birth to his theory of the creative process. He also sought to rehabilitate “free verse” as a critical heritage of the May Fourth Movement, against the CCP’s claims for the use of “national forms” to popularize revolutionary literature and art. By “free verse,” Hu meant “the crystal and ripple formed in the process through which concrete life events strike on the poet’s sea of emotions” (Hu, “Tian Jian’s Poetry” 444). For Hu, Tian Jian’s early poetry was a case of New Poetry approaching the conditions of “crystal” and “ripple.” In his preface to *Chinese Shepard’s Song*, Hu praised this “drummer of the era” (Hu, “Tian Jian’s Poetry” 444) for his intensely “simple and straightforward” (Hu, “Tian Jian’s Poetry” 444) style and for his “most courageous” (Hu, “Tian Jian’s Poetry” 444) attempts to search for form. According to Hu, Tian Jian remained untouched by the “two different streams” of “vulgar Marxism”: “formulism” and “objectivism” (Hu, “Tian Jian’s Poetry” 444), thanks to the originality of the form of his poetry. He particularly commended the following lines from “How Do I Write Poetry”:

I
grew up in a southern village,
the city, I spent yet another decade wandering.
I have neither wept in her arms,
nor dropped a tear!
In this world,
in China,
I rear my small self! (qtd. in Hu, “Tian Jian’s Poetry” 443)

Hu also praised this excerpt from “I Am a Part of the Sea”:

I
am hearty,

am healthy,
am a little fighting fella. (qtd. in Hu, "Tian Jian's Poetry" 444)

Tian Jian's short and self-contained verses not only created silences and space for thought, but also, and most importantly for Hu, effectively displayed a series of images that were a direct record of the poet's immediate response to the "feelings," "images," and "events" (Hu, "Tian Jian's Poetry" 444) he experienced. In effect, even a poetic form as such, however original and unformulaic, was not Hu's concern: "Form alone is not enough for determining the value of poetry" (Hu, "For New Writers on Writing" 228); critics or writers should "pay attention to content, assessing the degree to which such content feeds upon the writer's 'subjective combative spirit,' which must, of course, be sincere and adherent to the literary object" (Hu, "For New Writers on Writing" 229).

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Hu's creative theory differed from the work of some core writers of his time in its argument that the revolutionary mind and poetry do not fully exist, or at least are not fully realized, until they emerge from "a continuing process of self-expansion and self-struggle" (Hu, "For New Writers on Writing" 188-89). By using the metaphor of "crystals" and "ripples"—the result of a continuing process—to describe his standard of New Poetry, Hu was concerned with the creative process as a whole rather than aspects of poetry serving different ends in isolation from one another. Ultimately, Hu's attempt to defend poetic lyricism in wartime China, or what David Der-wei Wang called "the lyrical in epic time," was a treacherous task. Hu recognized the impossibility of distinguishing "May Fourth New Literature" from revolutionary politics, and the possibility of a radicalism among the revolutionaries of his time. Wang aptly described this process in Hu's poetic practice as "a mode 'in the making,' instantiating the poet's *continued struggle, in language as in lived experience*, to render the desire and frustration of his time" (Wang 66; emphasis mine).

Throughout his poetry and editorial work, Hu tried to sing the songs of youth. He sang about his feelings and sentiments at the beginning of time being untouched, uncorrupted, and undistracted by vulgar politics and ideological dogmatism of all kinds. His own "songs of youth" were never simply outbursts of political fervor or aesthetic indulgence. They were tests of the virility of the mind in post-revolutionary PRC, tests that were necessary in a time of enthusiasm for thought reform and ideological reconstruction, and a recourse to the Lu Xun style of "combative criticism." Recalling Lu Xun and celebrating new blood, Hu embraced the warrior figure in his characterization of the poet as "a little fighting fella" and "a soldier in life" (Hu, "A Brief Discussion of Literature from Nowhere" 427).

JULY POETRY: A MODERNISM LOST IN “NATIONAL FORMS”

Wartime China produced national literature and art in a more extensive manner than Hu had ever conceived. Where Hu regarded national forms as the opposite of free verse in the historical development of “May Fourth New Literature,” Mao defined “national forms” as the “fresh lively Chinese style and *spirit* the common people of China love” (Mao 209; emphasis mine). In Hu’s critical genealogy, “May Fourth New Literature,” which served to anticipate and facilitate social changes, should have been ahead of its time, and therefore should continue with the May Fourth tradition of purging the people of their “intellectual servitude.” In Hu’s words:

evidently, in the several thousand years of Chinese cultural history, there are elements that [...] contain democratic thoughts. Yet, because of the strong pressure from feudal power and the absence of a foundation whereupon democratic elements could be built, democracy is either destroyed or trapped in a primitive state: it exists as a dream [...] Therefore, [...] because there is neither a democratic system nor desire informed by democratic ideas, people’s sense of injustice, vexation, bitter pain, sadness, skepticism, resistance, demand, and dream [...] would only be rushing and swerving disorderly within their feudal *consciousness*. Like flies searching for light, they hit aimlessly against a glass window. (“On the Problem of National Forms” 750; emphasis mine)¹¹

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For Hu, any type of formulism in general, and traditional and popular national forms specifically, derived from a Confucius “ruling-class” ethic and had no prerogative claim on New Poetry. Underlying the proposal to mobilize the collective and to promote the practice of pouring “new wine into old bottles” was an undue political pragmatism.

Against their uncompromising assumptions about the vice of the nationalist discourse and politics, Hu and his associate writers, the *July* poets, made paradigmatic distinctions between new and old, free verse and national forms, and, by extension, poetry-driven revolution (enlightenment of the masses 化大众) and poetry for the Revolution (mass entertainment 大众化). Hu’s protégé Lu Ling went so far as to describe “prisons” of Confucius China and “palaces” of the People’s Republic in interchangeable terms. He warned his readers that “prisons surrounding us are impermanent” and “lurking in secrecy” (Lu 2). Significantly, the distinctive working of sociopolitical oppression and its prevalence in one “secretive” form or another found an afterlife in post-1949 modern Chinese writers’ degeneration into the practice of “vulgar Marxism” (Lu 2–3).

In the history of Chinese literature and literary thinking, the transition from traditional to modern was so abrupt that it was a paradigm shift, linguistically, formally, stylistically, and, above all, historically and nationally.¹² This shift was essentially and always already akin to a revolution or a war, an abruptness that Hu considered fundamental to the May Fourth enlightenment project. In this respect, it was no surprise that some *July* poems read like palimpsests of what Carolyn FitzGerald calls

“fragmenting modernisms.” They demonstrated that Chinese socialist realism added to “Western” modernism as much as it remade the genre, overcoming or liberating the “limits of realism” that Anderson identified in Chinese revolutionary and post-revolutionary literature (see Anderson 119-79).

This close affinity between the *July* writers’ poetic works and their Western counterparts created the opportunity to use Hu’s theory of “literary subjectivism” as an Ansatzpunkt of finding a “non-Maoist” tradition of “aesthetic Marxism” in socialist China and beyond. Formerly-marginalized works such as *Time Has Begun* may be further points of entry into the study of *Weltliteratur* in the Auerbachian sense of the word. In his 1952 essay, Auerbach acknowledged the irrefutable power of a “leveling process” (2) taking place in our time despite the existence of ever “stronger and louder” national wills. He thus conceptualized postwar, post-holocaust *Weltliteratur* away from Goethe’s Eurocentric approach, and urged scholars of his time to go beyond old methodologies and mentalities “so that an inner history of mankind—which thereby created a conception of man unified in his multiplicity—could be written” (4). Even with his distance, in every sense, from socialist China, Auerbach’s advice established the basic economy of our reading of Hu’s poesis, especially in terms of how it connects Chinese socialist realism—via the critical spirit of the May Fourth Movement—as something in the world; it also guides us away from nationalist assumptions that “Chinese New Literature” is something “formal,” an artifice construed for certain political and ideological imports. Ah-long’s “White Flower,” for instance, exemplifies how another *July*-school poem achieved a sense of universal humanism by standing on the shoulders of Christian martyrdom rhetoric:

Do not tread on the dewdrops—
for a passer-by had whimpered in the night....

Oh, my people, I remember quite well,
Having read you the Song of Songs in the candlelight.

Don’t pray for me in this manner, don’t!
I am innocent, and shall go to God with this naked body of yours....

Don’t count the space between one star and another.
Don’t count by light-years, but by gravitation, by contrasting lights.

Do blossom into a white flower—
For in this manner I proclaim ourselves sinless, only to wither and fall. (Ah-long 21)

The innocence and the whiteness of the flower in this poem are neither “national characteristics” (Hu, “Realism Today” 38) nor biblical references for the poet-soldier, but rather “living phenomena brought into existence by [...] man” (Hu, “Realism Today” 38). They are the poetic I’s realities of life—revolutionary sacrifice and resurrection—given proper, direct expression, as when soldiers are buried in a snowy battlefield.¹⁴ Any insurgent attempt to reinforce “national characteristics” or biblical messages will only rupture understanding, as though short-circuiting a whole uni-

verse of meanings. This instance of a “non-Maoist,” non-nationalist experiment of aesthetic Marxism can be considered an example of *Welltlliteratur*’s strong confidence in the virtue of fruitful multiplicities, in the power of sympathetic imagination and synthesis, in the potential of “sequins mixed together,” and in poesis.

NOTES

1. In 1955, the CCP mobilized a nationwide campaign to demonize Hu. The Hu Feng Case was, most likely, the most revealing political onslaught against an intellectual and his literary associates in the PRC’s history. Unprecedented in scale and intensity, the Hu Case implicated more than two thousand people. Seventy-eight people were formally charged as “elements of the Hu counterrevolutionary clique,” many of whom went mad and/or died in prison. Among the surviving “elements,” most were imprisoned for more than two decades.
2. For another approach to this subject, see Liu and Tang.
3. After various attempts to publish the complete epic had failed, Hu was eventually able to publish the songs in two installments: Haiyan Bookstore published the first two in January 1950, and Tianxia Book Company published the last two in March 1950.
4. See Alber’s study of Ding Ling’s revolutionary work, particularly Chapter 4, “Spies and Secret Agents,” for a brief account of the publication of a series of articles criticizing *Time Has Begun*, especially song #4 “Requiem,” in *Guangming Daily* (May 5, 1950) and the *Literary Gazette* (1.12 and 2.4 of 1950).
5. Only the first quintet of song #3 appeared in 1950, in the first issue of *Rising Point*, a post-revolutionary magazine edited by Mei Zhi and “a few young friends” of Hu. The other four poems were published separately in 1981, and were then assembled by editors to form the quintet and the complete version of *Time Has Begun*. For information about *Rising Point* 起点, see Denton 437 and note 53 in chapter 13.
6. For a similar sentiment that Hu shared with his fellow writers, see also Lu 776.
7. In her biography of Hu, Mei Zhi recalled the two-month period in which Hu composed *Time Has Begun*: “One early morning, [Hu] woke up to find that the place had overnight been covered with snow [...] Looking at the crystal-clear snow, he finished ‘Little Grass Says to the Sun’ in half an hour, comparing himself to ‘little grass,’ and the CCP and Mao Zedong’s thought to ‘the sun’” (Mei 569).
8. For a list of “core writers” who were “more fitted to and more reflective of the mainstream in literature,” and for an account of how these writers began to occupy central positions of power in literary circles in the early 1950s and beyond, see Hong (36-40).
9. See Marx’s discussion of “scientific realism” in “The Fetishism of Commodities.”
10. On “New Literature,” see Hong.
11. Marston Anderson has argued that the fostering of “national forms” (70) led modernists to dismiss some of the key imperatives of May Fourth literature and culture.
12. From the standpoint of literary history, as Michelle Yeh has demonstrated, modern Chinese poetry is not only fundamentally distinct from its classical form, but also inherits much from English romantic and Modernist poetry.
13. Liu Kang, for example, attempted to give a historical account of “aesthetic Marxism in China” by beginning with Hu’s theory of “subjective combative spirit.” He wrote that “there has also persisted a non-Maoist tradition of ‘aesthetic Marxism’ ever since Hu’s theory of the ‘subjective combative spirit’ emerged in the 1940s to contend that subjective experience was one appropriate site of revolution and

resistance” (Liu 173).

14. The theme of revolutionary soldiers being buried in snow was common among New Poetry in war-time and socialist China. See, for example, Ai Qing’s “Snow Falls on the Land of China 雪落在中国的土地上” and Lu Li’s “Red Snow 红的雪花.”

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