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8 Images of Russia in Chinese Literary Periodicals at the Beginning of the 1930s: Nationalist Perspective

Abstract. The contribution of left wing literati to the translation and promotion of Russian and Soviet literature in China at the beginning of the 1930s is widely acknowledged. However, their ideological rivals – Chinese nationalists – did not ignore Russian literature either. Communist and nationalist literati each had their own reasons to address Russia and constructed distinct images of Russia and Russian literature in their publications. This chapter examines the portrayal of the Russians and Russia as well as the translation of Russian and Soviet literature in the nationalist periodicals *Qianfeng Zhoubao* and *Qianfeng Yuekan* in the literary and historical context.

Keywords. Russian literature, Soviet literature, Image of Russia, Chinese nationalism, Vanguard Society.

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Introduction

The introduction of Russian literature to China dates back to 1872 when “A Russian Fable” (*E ren yuyan* 俄人寓言) was first translated into Chinese by Presbyterian missionary William A. P. MARTIN (1827–1916) and published in the first issue of *The Peking Magazine* (*Zhong Xi wen jian lu* 中西聞見錄, 1872–1875). It is supposed to be an adapted version of the story by Leo TOLSTOY (Lev TOLSTOĬ, 1828–1910) “Two Friends”, which itself is based on a popular fable.¹ However, it took almost thirty years for another publication of Russian literature in China when three fables by Ivan KRYLOV (1769–1844) were consecutively published by the Shanghai-based missionary monthly *The Review of the Times* (*Wanguo gongbao* 萬國公報, 1868–1907) in 1899–1900. N. SAMOYLOV draws our attention to the fact that “the content of those fables, being an object of mockery and derision for the Russian people, likewise catered to similar convictions of the Chinese society (in particular, relating to the absolute power of bureaucracy and corruption)”.² However, it may also be that the very selection of these fables by the Western missionaries reflected their negative stereotypes and stereotypes of a Chinese audience toward Russia. I agree with N. SAMOYLOV that: “The most negative image of Russia was formed in Chinese periodicals that were dependent on foreign states”.³ Additionally, since the beginning of the 20th century we can see a growing interest in Russian literature and numerous translations of Aleksandr PUSHKIN (1799–1837), Leo TOLSTOY, Anton CHEKHOV (1860–1904), Leonid ANDREEV (1871–1919) etc. into the Chinese language, which were driven not by the intention to expose the evils of the aggressive northern barbarians, but by the desire of Chinese literati to learn the revolutionary experience of Russia in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, or, by the similar understanding of the moral power of literature in both cultures.⁴

Although initially the translation of Russian literature was lagging behind the Western literature, after the May Fourth Movement in China in 1919 and the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, it started attracting more and more attention.

1 CHEN Jianhua 陈建华: *Ershi Shiji Zhong E Wenxue Guanxi* 二十世纪中俄文学关系 (Comparison between Chinese Literature and Russian Literature of the 20th Century), Beijing: Gaodeng Jiaoyu Chubanshe 2002, pp. 40–46.

2 Nikolay SAMOYLOV: *The Evolution of Russia's Image in China in the early 20th century: Key Factors and Research Methodology*, Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University, Asian and African Studies, 2019, Vol. 11, Issue 1, p. 32.

3 SAMOYLOV: *The Evolution* (2019), p. 36.

4 Mark GAMSÄ: *The Reading of Russian Literature in China. A Moral Example and Manual of Practice*, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan 2010, p. 12.

While Chinese literati were looking for recipes and methods concerning how to make the country strong and how to cope with militarist warfare and foreign aggression, they found, as LU Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936) says, that “Russian literature is our teacher and friend. There we have seen the beautiful soul of the oppressed person, his suffering and struggle; the novels of the 1840s gave us a hope, and the literature of the 1860s made us mourn”.⁵ One of the first Chinese Marxists LI Dazhao (李大钊, 1888–1927) stressed the link between the revolution and literature in Russia and saw in Russian literature the following specific features: “first, it carries a distinct social flavor, second, it is permeated by high humanism”.⁶ In the 1930s, the Russian and Soviet literature became the second most frequently translated foreign literature in China, and from the 1940s up to the end of the 1980s, it was dominant in the circle of foreign literature.

In 1920s–1930s, lots of eminent Chinese leftist literati took part in the translation and promotion of Russian and Soviet literature and literary theory in China. Among them we can name LU Xun, MAO Dun 茅盾 (1896–1981), GUO Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978), QU Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899–1935), JIANG Guangci 蒋光慈 (1901–1931) and many others. It must be noted, however, that the introduction of Russian, and especially Soviet, literature encountered many political obstacles as it became tied to the confrontation between Soviet Russia and capitalist countries, Russian-Chinese diplomatic relations and conflicts, including the Chinese Eastern Railway conflict, the cooperation and struggle of the Guomindang (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), etc. After the split of the GMD and the CCP in 1927 and the rupture of diplomatic relations between China and the USSR in 1929, the promotion of Soviet literature became not only problematic, but also a rather dangerous affair. Nevertheless, the beginning of the 1930s saw a rapid acceleration in the translations of Russian and Soviet literature. On the one hand, there was an objective interest of the society in the understanding of the Soviet experience; on the other hand, there were enormous efforts to achieve this goal by the League of Leftist Writers. At that time, literary journals played a crucial role in authors reaching their audience.

The contribution of the numerous but short-lived left-wing journals, like, *Beidou* 北鬥 (Big Dipper, 1931–1932), *Mengya* 萌芽 (Sprouts, 1930), *Baerdishan* 巴爾底山 (Partisan, 1930), and *Tuohuangzhe* 拓荒者 (Pathfinder, 1930) to the translation and promotion of Russian and Soviet literature in China at the beginning of

5 LU Xun 鲁迅: “Zhi Zhong E Wenzhi Zhi Jiao” 致中俄文字之交 (Greeting the Literary Communication of China and Russia). In: *Lu Xun Wen Cui* 鲁迅文萃 (Collection of Lu Xun), Shanghai: Baijia Chubanshe 2001, Vol. 3, p. 303.

6 LI Dachzhao: *Russkaia literatura i revoliutsiia* (Russian Literature and Revolution). In: LI Dachzhao. *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Selected Works), Moskva: Nauka Publishers 1989, p. 148.

the 1930s is widely acknowledged.⁷ However, Russian literature was also far from being ignored by the nationalist literary journals, like the *Qianfeng Zhoubao* 前鋒週報 (Vanguard Weekly, 1930–1931) and the *Qianfeng Yuekan* 前鋒月刊 (Vanguard Monthly, 1930–1931). Just like the leftists, the nationalist literati had their own reasons to address Russia and constructed rather specific images of Russia and Russian literature in their publications. Further to this we can examine the portrayal of the Russians and Russia as well as the translation of Russian and Soviet literature in the above-mentioned journals in the literary and historical context.

Worldview of the Nationalist Literary Periodicals

Nationalism became a very popular ideology in China since the end of the 19th century. A number of important thinkers and politicians of the late-Qing and early Republican periods, for example, LIANG Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), ZHANG Binglin 章炳麟 (1868–1936), and SUN Yatsen 孫中山 (1866–1925) developed their own concepts of nationalism, though the initial theoretical basis had been borrowed from abroad, especially from the works of the Swiss scholar and politician Johann Kaspar BLUNTSCHLI (1808–1881).⁸ Since the analysis of the evolution of their nationalist concepts as well as the obvious social impact of nationalism is not the focus of this chapter, we will concentrate on the literary nationalism of the early 1930s, represented in the right-wing periodicals *Qianfeng Zhoubao* and *Qianfeng Yuekan*. These Shanghai journals along with Nanjing monthlies *Wenyi Yuekan* 文藝月刊 (Literature and Art Monthly, 1930–1941) and *Maodun Yuekan* 矛盾月刊 (Paradox Monthly, 1932–1934), as well as the Hangzhou journal *Huang Zhong* 黃鐘 (Yellow Bell, 1932–1937) were part of the movement for nationalist literature, launched by Guomindang in an effort to cope with the proletariat literature.

Unlike the kaleidoscopic governments of Chinese militarists in the 1910s–20s, the Nanjing government of Guomindang had a clear ideology i.e., the nationalism of SUN Yatsen, formulated in his works of the 1920s. During the period of military struggle for power, the literature was not a top priority for Guomindang. However,

7 Mark SHNEIDER: *Russkaïa klassika v Kitae* (Russian Classics in China), Moskva: Nauka 1977, p. 272; CHEN: *Ershi* (2002), p. 357.

8 Alekseï MOSKALEV: *Natsiia i natsionalizm v Kitae* (Nation and Nationalism in China), Moskva: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli 2005, pp. 20–23; YANG Sixin 楊思新: *Wenhua minzu zhuyi yu jindai Zhongguo* 文化民族主义与近代中国 (Cultural Nationalism and China in the New Time), Beijing: CASS Press 2003, pp. 68–76.

after the split with the communists and following the swift spread of leftist ideas in the minds of Chinese intellectuals and on the literary arena, Guomindang in 1928–1929 took a series of repressive measures to subdue the opposition. Unsurprisingly, however, it was far from enough; Guomindang had to offer some positive ideology to dominate the literary sphere. The necessity became obvious after the unification of the Marxist literary forces in the League of Leftist Writers in March, 1930. The idea of building the party literature on “three principles” was voiced at the National Propaganda Meeting in June, 1929, but the “Manifesto of Movement for Nationalist Literature and Art” was proclaimed only a year later in June 1930. The “Manifesto” played a very important role in the development of the nationalist literature. It is widely cited in almost all other theoretical articles of the Chinese nationalist literati.

The anonymous authors of the “Manifesto” were the founders of the literary society “Vanguard” (*Qianfeng she* 前鋒社), which existed in Shanghai from June 1930 to June 1931. According to Fudan scholar Ni Wei, the basic ideas of the document are based upon the earlier works of FU Yanchang (傅彥長, 1891–1961), a key member of the “Vanguard” society.⁹ However, a direct and indirect influence of SUN Yatsen’s ideas can also be seen. On the one hand, the society was closely connected to Guomindang (its leaders FAN Zhengbo 範爭波 (1901–1983) and ZHU Yingpeng 朱應鵬 (1895–1966) were the members of the Shanghai executive committee of Guomindang). On the other hand, it was close with Shanghai literary circles, ZHU Yingpeng was the editor of influential Shanghai newspaper *Shen Bao* 申報 (Shanghai News, 1872–1949). There were also direct links to academic circles due to FU Yanchang’s position of professor at Tongji University. Many of the members were young officers of the Guomindang army, such as WAN Guoan 萬國安 (?–?) or HUANG Zhenxia 黃震遐 (1907–1974). The society became famous due to the publication of the *Qianfeng Zhoubao* (QFZB) and the *Qianfeng Yuekan* (QFYK), which not only became very popular with the public but also attracted fierce criticism from the liberal and leftist literati. Among the latter, we can see LU Xun, MAO Dun, QU Qiubai and others. The indignation over the activities of the “Vanguard” society provoked in May 1931 several dozens of leftist activists into attacking the office of the “Xiandai Publishers”, which circulated the nationalist journals. Though very successful in the aspects of ideology, popularity and even finance, the “Vanguard” society turned out to be short lived. Being a group

9 Ni Wei 倪伟: “*Minzu*” *xiangxiang yu “guojia” tongzhi: 1928–1948 Nanjing zhengfu de wenyi zhengce ji wenyi yundong* “民族”想象与“国家”统治: 1928–1948 南京政府的文艺政策及文艺运动 (Nation’s Imagination and State’s Rule: Literary and Cultural Politics and Movements of the Nanjing Government in 1928–1949), Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe 2003, p. 53.

of people, who shared common views and whose relationship was cemented by personal ties, the society disintegrated in June 1931 after the key figures had left Shanghai. It also led to the end of its journals.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the *Qianfeng Zhoubao* and the *Qianfeng Yuekan* made a major contribution to the theoretical development of the nationalist literature. The weekly was the first periodical of the “Vanguard” society. There were 46 issues published between 22 June, 1930 and 31 May, 1931.¹¹ However, only 36 issues survived until today, I have in my possession copies of the 25 issues of the weekly. It is a thin black and white bulletin of eight pages without illustrations. It was edited by LI Jinxuan 李錦軒 (the penname of YE Qiuyuan 葉秋原, 1907–1948), printed by Shanghai “Guangming Publishers” and circulated by the “Xiandai Publishers”. The success of the weekly inspired the “Vanguard” society to announce in August 1930 their plans of establishing a big literary monthly. Edited by the same group of people (reportedly by ZHU Yingpeng and FU Yanchang), its publication was arranged with the help of the “Xiandai publishers”. The first of the 7 issues appeared on 10 October, 1930, the last on 10 April, 1931¹². It was a literary journal of around 300 pages with colored illustrations. After the establishment of the *Qianfeng Yuekan* monthly, the weekly concentrated on short stories and prompt literary critique while the monthly published novels, plays, poems and all sorts of long materials on the nationalist literature and movements in China and abroad. Unlike other nationalist journals, e.g., Nanjing *Wenyi Yuekan*, the periodicals of the “Vanguard” society put special stress on publishing only those materials that supported the Nationalist cause.

On the basis of the “Manifesto” as well as the other articles in both periodicals, e.g., “Minzuzhuyi wenyi zhi lilun de jichu” 民族主義文藝之理論的基礎 (The Theoretical Basis of the Nationalist Art and Literature) by YE Qiuyuan (QFYK, 1930: N 8-10), “*Bianjishi tanhua*” 編輯室談話 (Notes of the Editor, QFYK, 1930: N 10), we can see that just like the concept of nationalism itself, their understanding of the nationalist literature was in many aspects borrowed from abroad. The manifesto of the movement for nationalist literature evidently looked for the theoretical grounds in the experience of foreign literature, especially in the literature of nation states, emerging in the 19th century (Germany, etc) or of countries with strong nationalist movements (India, Ireland, etc). In other words, its nationalism was extremely international.

10 Ni Wei: *Minzu* (2003), p. 51–58.

11 LIU Zengren 刘增人: *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue qikan shi lun* 中国现代文学期刊史论 (On the History of Modern Chinese Literary Periodicals), Beijing: Xinhua Chubanshe 2005, p. 293.

12 LIU Zengren: *Zhongguo* (2005), p. 297.

Theoretical articles on various aspects of nationalism and its representation in the works of literature and art can be found in all the issues of both periodicals, whereas the *Qianfeng Yuekan* pays more attention to the things from abroad. The prevailing authors of the materials are YE Qiuyuan (LI Jinxuan), ZHANG Jiping 張季平, (?-?), YI Kang 易康, (?-?), TANG Bingruo 湯冰若 (?-?), and WANG Tiran (汪倜然, 1906–1984). All of them now are obscure figures in the history of modern Chinese literature but were prolific critics and writers in the 1930s.

In regard to the concept of nationalism itself, YE Qiuyuan acknowledged that “nation” is a relatively new word in the Chinese language, which often causes embarrassment, because the people do not understand clearly the relationship between race, nation, and state.¹³ Thus, he delves into explanation of different criteria of a nation. Among these the most important for him is national consciousness, which is quite natural since his article is about literature. Although “nation” is a notion imported from abroad at the turn of the 20th century, nationalism is regarded as something that had already existed in China, but was lost under the influence of Taoism and Buddhism. In actuality, here he follows SUN Yat-sen’s understanding of nationalism. The major ideas of the latter are described as: self-liberation of the Chinese nation, equality of all peoples in China and the liberation of all the oppressed nations of the world. However, of the main concern is the first point, that is, aspiration for an independent and strong China. YE Qiuyuan says that China is a semi-colony. On one hand, it suffers political and economic aggression of foreign imperialism. On the other hand, China is exploited by remnants of feudalism. Nationalism is seen as the only force which can unite China and guarantee its existence forever in the future.¹⁴

However, in circumstances where nationalist feelings are not strong enough, active measures should be taken to awake the “spirit of the nation”. Nationalist literature and art can be extremely useful in this regard as they are “capable of giving a new life to the nation”. For those ends, nationalism should become the “central idea”, the “ultimate sense” of Chinese literature, which at the beginning of the 1930s was “in a pathological situation”. To achieve the ambitious goals, nationalist literature should reflect the history of both ancient and contemporary struggle of the nation for survival, the real life of the common people, and the local flavor and customs. It should struggle against everything detrimental to the development of the nation, including communism. Despite literature being regarded as a product of a nation by nature, still nationalist literature is the only one which

13 YE Qiuyuan 葉秋原: “Minzuzhuyi wenyi zhi lilun de jichu” 民族主義文藝之理論的基礎 (The Theoretical Basis of the Nationalist Art and Literature). In: *Qianfeng Yuekan*, 1930, No. 8, p. 57.

14 YE Qiuyuan: “Minzuzhuyi” (1930), pp. 57–58.

combines the “national consciousness” and the “spirit of the epoch”. It is proclaimed that nationalist literature is literature “of the people, by the people, for the people”¹⁵ – a clear trace of the Gettysburg Address of Abraham LINCOLN, which was also once cited by SUN Yat-sen. In fact, this proclamation draws comparisons between the revolution in China and the Civil War in the U.S. which was very popular in the circles of Guomindang literati.

What made the nationalist literati so confident in their cause was the history of European literature and its role in the creation of new nation states in the 19th–20th century. They were greatly impressed by the direct influence of literature and art on the development of political nationalism. The examples of Germany, France, Italy and the former Russian Empire were referred to especially often. All this made them conclude that “the movement for nationalist literature and art, first of all, corresponds to the tendencies of world literature and art, but more importantly is that it exactly fits the urgent needs of our nation”.¹⁶

However, their nationalist zeal caused a much distorted presentation of foreign literature. For example, the true spirit of modern French literature and art was said to be fauvism and purism while for Germany it was expressionism, and for Italy futurism¹⁷. These trends were seen as deeply rooted in the national consciousness of the nations. In the article of Yi Kang devoted to Russia, the author characterizes the genuine essence of Russian literature and art as primitivism or archaism, discussing, therefore, only the writers famous for their obsession with the glory of Russia – Aleksandr BLOK (1880–1921), Sergey YESENIN (Sergei ESENIN, 1895–1925), Nikolay KLYUEV (Nikolai KLIUEV, 1884–1937), and Petr ORESHIN (1887–1938)¹⁸. The same goes for German literature, which is mainly represented by writers with strong nationalist sentiment, like Hermann SUDERMANN (1857–1928) and Gustav FRENSEN (1863–1945).

Another international dimension of the *Qianfeng Zhoubao* and the *Qianfeng Yuekan* is a constant critique of Chinese communists and proletariat literature, which were regarded as a major internal threat to Guomindang and Chinese nationalist literature.

Quite telling is, the fact, that we have found neither articles which state superiority of Chinese culture over foreign cultures, nor, in fact, the reverse. What can be found is political motivation of the choice, which is expressed in the interest in

15 “Minzuzhuyi wenyi yundong xuanyan” 民族主義文藝運動宣言 (Manifesto of Movement for Nationalist Literature and Art). In: *Qianfeng Zhoubao*, 1930, No. 2, p. 17.

16 Li Jinxuan 李錦軒: “Bianjishi tanhua” 編輯室談話 (Notes of the Editor). In: *Qianfeng Zhoubao*, 1930, No. 10, p. 79.

17 “Minzuzhuyi”, p. 18.

18 Yi Kang 易康: “Eguo de nongmin wenxue” 俄國的農民文學 (Peasant Literature of Russia). In: *Qianfeng Zhoubao*, 1930, No. 14, pp. 106–107.

the literature of the oppressed nations, or certain restraints, at least proclaimed, in regard to the literature of greater powers, or the anti-communist drive which has been mentioned above. In the “Notes of the Editor” LI Jinxuan indicates that: “when introducing the foreign literary works, we will choose only those which could be useful for the progress of our nation. We do not ignore the foreign culture, but are not going to blindly accept the culture of the countries which harm our nation”.¹⁹

As regards the consistency of literary practice with the theoretical declarations, we prepared statistics on the content of both periodicals with reference to their interest in foreign literature.

Table 8-1: Publications devoted exclusively to foreign nations in the *Qianfeng Zhoubao*

Country	Total number of publications	Number of translations
France	1	1
Japan	1	0
England	1	0
Russia	1	0
Total	4	1
Number of represented countries	4	
Number of all publications, regardless of the content	123 (in issues no. 2-26)	

The statistics for *Qianfeng Zhoubao* (issues no. 2-26) reveals only four publications out of 123 were devoted to foreign literature. This lack of interest in foreign literature is explained by the fact that the weekly, being the first periodical of the movement for nationalist literature, was keen on introducing the basic ideas of Chinese nationalist literature, or on attacks on the proletariat literature. Moreover, due to its size it could not publish literary works in a large number, concentrating instead on literary critique. Nevertheless, foreign literature is still discussed in all articles, devoted to nationalism, regardless of not being the main focus there. In contrast, the more telling statistics is shown in the monthly.

19 LI Jinxuan: “Bianjishi” (1930), p. 80.

Table 8-2: Publications devoted exclusively to foreign nations in the *Qianfeng Yuekan*

Rating	Country / region / nation / peoples	Total number of publications	Translations	Illustrations
1.	Germany	11	1	4
1.	France	11	3	2
2.	England	9	1	0
2.	USA	9	4	0
3.	India	7	0	4
3.	Russia	7	0	6
4.	Ireland	6	0	0
4.	Japan	6	5	0
5.	Norway	3	0	0
5.	Netherlands	3	0	0
5.	Jews	3	1	0
5.	Italy	3	0	0
6.	Scotland	2	0	0
6.	Belgium	2	0	0
7.	Turkey	1	0	0
7.	Isle of Man	1	0	0
7.	Bulgaria	1	1	0
7.	Poland	1	0	0
7.	Vietnam	1	0	0
7.	South America	1	0	0
7.	Denmark	1	0	0
7.	New Zealand	1	0	0
7.	Austria	1	0	0
7.	Canada	1	0	0
7.	Greece	1	0	1
7.	Romania	1	0	0
7.	Australia	1	0	0
7.	Spain	1	0	0
7.	Iceland	1	0	0
7.	Hungary	1	0	0
7.	Finland	1	0	0

Rating	Country / region / nation / peoples	Total number of publications	Translations	Illustrations
7.	Armenia	1	1	0
	Total	100	17	17
Number of represented countries, regions and nations		31		
Number of all publications, regardless of the content		185		

The monthly set up a special section devoted to foreign developments and regularly published translations. We see that out of 185 publications, 100, which take up more than a half, were about literary events from abroad. Geography of the publications covers all the world with 31 countries, regions, or peoples and ranging from the Isle of Man and Iceland to New Zealand and Vietnam. They should have the clear intention to introduce such diverse literature in just seven issues of the monthly. It was important for the *Qianfeng Yuekan* to show that nationalism dominated the world literary arena. Needless to say, most of the reports were quite superficial and biased. I would like to draw special attention to the countries, of which literature and culture attracted the strongest interest of Chinese nationalists – Germany, France, England, the USA, India, Russia, Ireland and Japan. These countries take up between 6 and 11 publications within just 7 issues of the journal. Chinese nationalists were extremely fascinated with the German consolidation under Prussia in the 19th century. For them it was a successful story of “national consciousness” that united the country and made it strong in a very short time. France was also a common reference for Chinese nationalists, mainly as a prime example of strong “national spirit”. India and Ireland were reasonably chosen. The popularity of the UK, the U.S., and Japan was most likely due to the language. English and Japanese were the most popular foreign languages in the circles of intellectuals, which facilitated translations and access to necessary information. Russia actually was not of priority, but by coincidence, there were many Russian illustrations to a poetic play *Blood of the Yellow Race* by HUANG Zhenxia.

To summarize, it is worth reiterating that Chinese nationalism and nationalist literature, represented on the pages of the *Qianfeng Zhoubao* and the *Qianfeng Yuekan*, were considerably internationalized almost in all senses. However, it did not last long. Just one year later JIANG Jieshi 蔣介石 (1887–1975) and Guomindang started to shift to a much more original concept of nationalism.²⁰

20 MOSKALEV: *Natsiia i natsionalizm v Kitae* (2005), pp. 118–123; YANG: *Wenhua minzu zhuyi yu jindai Zhongguo* (2003), p. 390.

Russia, Russians, and Russian Literature in the Nationalist Periodicals

As noted above, Russia and Russian literature were not ignored by the nationalist literati in their periodicals. As can be expected, the leading tone of their portrayal of Russia is abusive criticism. Their indignation over the USSR comes from the Soviet support for Chinese communists and attempts to sovietize China. In this context, the military clashes on the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) in 1929 are usually mentioned. For example, in the article of DI Gengsheng 狄更生 (?-?) “Zhanzheng” 戰爭 (War, *QFZB*, 1930, No. 7), which deals with pacifism in the European and Chinese literature, the peacefulness of the USSR and of the communists, is declared false, as eloquently demonstrated by the events of 1929.²¹

The USSR is often mentioned in articles criticizing Chinese proletarian literature. Quite typical is the article of LI Jinxuan “Boerxiweike de enshang” 波爾系維克的恩賞 (Mercy of the Bolsheviks, *QFZB*, 1930, No. 15), where the author attacks the story of the leftist writer MA Ning 馬寧 (1909–2001), *Xiboliya* 西伯利亞 (Siberia) published in the magazine *Tuohuangzhe* (1930, No. 4-5). MA Ning’s story is dedicated to the stay in the USSR of a Chinese soldier, captured during a military conflict on the Chinese Eastern Railway. The Russians treated the soldier like a blood brother, sharing food and clothes with him.²² MA Ning recalls that the story was written at the request of the editor of *Tuohuangzhe*, a famous communist writer JIANG Guangci, and complained that JIANG Guangci, who had visited the USSR and knew it well, did not correct the apparent flaws contained in the story due to his respect for the author.²³ A certain idealization of the story and the emphasis on the unity of the Russian and Chinese proletarians reflected the heat of political struggle between the communists and the nationalists at that time.

It is known that during the conflict on the CER in 1929 the Communist Party supported actions of the USSR. However, from LI Jinxuan’s point of view, Soviet Russia was an aggressor, and MA Ning and other proletarian writers who defended Soviet interests were traitors, who sold their souls to the “Red Russia imperialism”: “The recent war on the Chinese Eastern Railway revealed the ferocious face of Soviet Russia and its aggressive policy”²⁴; “the proletarian writers, having

21 DI Gengsheng 狄更生: “Zhanzheng” 戰爭 (War). In: *Qianfeng Zhoubao*, 1930, No. 7, pp. 48–49.

22 MA Ning 馬寧: “Xiboliya” 西伯利亞 (Siberia). In: *Tuohuangzhe*, 1930, No. 4–5.

23 MA Ning 馬寧: “Huiyi ‘Zuolian’ wu ji” 回憶“左聯”五記 (Five Memories of the “Left Association”). In: *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yajiu Congkan*, 1980, No. 1, pp. 9–10.

24 LI Jinxuan 李錦軒: “Boerxiweike de enshang” 波爾希維克的恩賞 (Mercy of the Bolsheviks). In: *Qianfeng Zhoubao*, 1930, No. 15, p. 117.

received the Soviet rubles and drunk Soviet beer, dream of Soviet butter, beef, leather boots and do not consider it shameful to write such slave stories out of their fantasies...”²⁵ Invective, addressed to the leftist writers, can be also seen in the articles of ZHANG Jiping “Puluo de shi” 普羅的詩 (Proletariat Poetry) and (“Puluo de xiju” 普羅的戲劇 (Proletariat Drama), as well as DI Gengsheng’s article “War”, all published in the *Qianfeng Zhoubao*. Moreover, ZHANG Jiping and DI Gengsheng suppose that the proletariat literature is not capable of reflecting the spirit of the epoch and is very crude artistically.

On the pages of the nationalist magazines we can also see fictional works that deal with Russia or Russians. Those are the novel “Guo men zhi zhan” 國門之戰 (Battle at the Motherland’s Gate, *QFYK*, no. 6, 1931) by WAN Guoan, poetic drama “Huang ren zhi xue” 黃人之血 (Blood of the Yellow Race, *QFYK*, no. 7, 1931) by HUANG Zhenxia, and the novel “Longhai xian shang” 隴海線上 (On Longhai Railway, *QFYK*, no. 5, 1931) by HUANG Zhenxia. Both writers were the key members of the “Vanguard” society.

The novel of WAN Guoan is devoted to the heroic exploits of the 15th brigade of the North-Eastern army in the defense of Manchuria station, as well as to the ordeal that fell to the lot of Chinese soldiers in Soviet captivity. The story is more documentary in style rather than fictional. From the preface written by HUANG Zhenxia, we know that it is based on the personal experience of WAN Guoan²⁶. Autobiographical characteristics are also confirmed by the fact that the name of the main character is WAN Guoan. The novel is not distinguished by any deep images, or by expressive language, or by the thoughtful composition, but the relevance of the topic, the portrayal of the real horrors of war and the flavor of life in the border areas attracted attention of the readers. The anti-Sovietism of this work is manifested in the repeatedly declared one-sided assessment of what was happening at the CER. It is the USSR, due to its support for the Chinese communists, that is declared to be an aggressor. For example, the beginning of the conflict is described as follows:

I heard yesterday that there were a lot of Communists found in the Russian Consulate in Harbin. Chairman of the board of the CER LÜ wanted to end this once and for all, for a start he decided to return control over the telegraph at all railway stations, and the actions have already been taken at the main Harbin station.²⁷

25 Li Jinxuan: “Boerxiweike” (1930), p. 118.

26 HUANG Zhenxia 黃震遐: “Huang Zhenxia de xu” 黃震遐的序 (Preface by HUANG Zhenxia). In: *Qianfeng Yuekan*, 1931, No. 6, pp. 5–6.

27 WAN Guoan 萬國安: “Guo men zhi zhan” 國門之戰 (Battle at the Motherland’s Gate). In: *Qianfeng Yuekan*, 1931, No. 6, p. 18.

According to WAN Guoan, the communists are “the avowed enemy of humanity”²⁸, and “... Soviet Russia is our biggest enemy”²⁹, “Red Russia, in spite of international commitments, strives to sovietize our land”³⁰. Accordingly, the Soviet Union is usually endowed with very unflattering epithets such as cruel, deceitful, inhumane, ferocious, aggressive, etc. However, the author does not attribute his hostility to the USSR on the Russian people as such. On a personal level his Russian characters differ little from Chinese heroes. Though he mentions the cruelty of the Cossacks, at the same time he describes the reverse scenes of brutal massacres of Chinese soldiers over Red Spies. The story takes place in the Soviet-Chinese border areas, which, in addition to Chinese people, is inhabited by Mongols, White and Red Russians, Koreans, and Japanese. White Russian emigrants are stricken with poverty and live miserable lives while the Reds behave in an unbridled way and “consider Manchuria their colony, use control over the Chinese Eastern Railway for an open propaganda of communism”³¹. Moreover, the Reds treat the Chinese army with contempt, believing that “Chinese soldiers are like flies; it is enough to hush and they will flee.”³²

Young Chinese officers often marry uninhibited golden-haired Russian girls, who, the author stresses, though, marry only for love.³³ The main character, the company commander WAN, also married a Russian girl Lyuba (Liuba) shortly before the war. Since Lyuba turned out to be a Soviet spy and tried to recruit her husband, there occurred a conflict between love and duty, similar to the one described by Boris LAVRENEV (1891–1959) in the novel “The Forty-first” (1924). WAN, like LAVRENEV’s heroine Maryutka (Mariutka), fulfilled his duty and shot his beloved Lyuba. He cries with grief but has no regrets because “she stands for her country, and I stand for mine, this is our duty. If I hadn't killed her, she would have killed me”.³⁴ When describing the family life of the Chinese officer and the Russian girl, the author brings to the narrative some Russian flavor. On the one hand, it is manifested in everyday details (for example, in frequent kisses of spouses), and on the other, there are many Russian words in the Chinese language of WAN and Lyuba.

The portrayal of the stay of Chinese prisoners of war in “cold snow covered Siberia”, contained in the letter of a fellow soldier to commander WAN, is completely opposite to the above mentioned story of MA Ning. Robbery, brutality of

28 Ibid., p. 29.

29 Ibid., p. 118.

30 Ibid., p. 127.

31 Ibid., p. 11.

32 Ibid., p. 41.

33 Ibid., p. 12.

34 Ibid., p. 94.

the guards, hard work in the coal mines, beating with whips, hunger, and cold turned the lives of Chinese soldiers into an absolute hell, from which they did not hope to escape. Such an image of Soviet Russia could not but arouse hatred of Chinese readers for the interventionists, who severely abused their compatriots. The odium of “Battle at the Motherland’s Gate” provoked a fierce reaction of the leftist writers. In his article “Qingnian de shiyue” 青年的十月 (Youth September, 1931) QU Qiubai repeatedly mentions this story as an example of the ideological attack of nationalists and imperialists on the Soviet Union.³⁵

HUANG Zhenxia’s novel “On the Longhai Railway” is about a war between the army of the GMD government and the troops of FENG Yuxiang and YAN Xishan in the summer of 1930. The author compares the punitive operation against rebel generals with the war between the American North and South for the liberation of slaves.³⁶ A motorcycle battalion is dispatched from Nanjing to Henan Province, where it undergoes a baptism of fire, and its soldiers experience numerous hardships and trials. It is an autobiographical novel, where HUANG Zhenxia himself is the narrator and the protagonist. It is interesting to note that among the fellow officers of the main character, we can see a young Nationalist writer, WAN Guoan. However, our attention to this novel is due to the presence in the ranks of the battalion of a significant number of Russian emigrants. For example, out of 11 soldiers sent on patrol, 4 are Russians;³⁷ the same ratio of Russian and Chinese make up the reserve company, commanded by HUANG³⁸. Some of the Russians are regular officers, some are ordinary Cossacks, and the rest are young “Shanghai dandies”, who joined the Chinese army in the hope to earn money and become famous. One might not rule out national animosity between Russians and the Chinese; on the contrary, “despite the difference in language and culture, they could still understand and support each other, becoming close like hands and feet, and all that because they were people, all having the same heart”.³⁹ It is important to note that in this novel there are no criticisms aimed at Soviet Russia. HUANG Zhenxia describes Russians as fearless soldiers, caring officers, and generous friends. At the same time, they all tend to long for the abandoned homeland, often recall Moscow and the broad Volga. Their loss of the motherland makes the narrator sincerely sympathetic with them. Among the Russian characters, the author paid special attention to Ivan BAGROV. This is a short, powerfully built man “with a fox’s nose,

35 ТШУ ТШубо: “Molodezhnyĭ sentiabr” (Youth September). In: ТШУ ТШубо. *Izbrannoe* (Selected Works of QU Qiubai), Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia literatura 1975, pp. 67–75.

36 HUANG Zhenxia 黃震遐: “Longhai xian shang” 隴海線上 (On the Longhai Railway). In: *Qianfeng Yuekan*, 1931, No. 5, p. 77.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

an eagle's eye and an alcoholic smell spouting from his mouth"⁴⁰. He was born in the Amur region in a Cossack family and became a professional soldier. BAGROV is brave in battle and "has all the qualities that a soldier should have".⁴¹ The writer does not report the circumstances that forced the hero to move to China. BAGROV is able to express himself in broken Chinese, placing words in an unusual order. However, the most vivid feature of BAGROV's portrayal is his love for vodka. HUANG Zhenxia mentions this addiction of BAGROV five times, for whom the ability to drink is a matter of special pride. After getting drunk, he usually sings a famous folk song "From Behind the Island to the Midstream", dances the folk dance hopak, harrows a harmonica, or indulges into debauchery.⁴² Being an experienced and smart man, BAGROV in any circumstances manages to get something to eat for himself and his fellows whether it be a pig, flatbreads, a watermelon, etc. At the same time, he constantly takes care of the commander of his squad, HUANG, who had just graduated from the officer's training courses, and went to war for the first time. BAGROV shares food, vodka, blankets, etc. with him. If BAGROV can be considered to be the personification of the Russian soul, then the company commander SELEZEN' is a symbol of the emigrant melancholy. HUANG Zhenxia calls him "a typical Chekhovian Russian"⁴³. He is a lean brunette with lively eyes, who is however extremely meditative and silent – "often he did not say a word all day, and if he did, it was only to attract attention to something".⁴⁴ SELEZEN' is educated, brave, loves his Motherland, but his abilities are not in demand, life has prepared the fate of a wanderer for him. "Failures in life, loss of friends, five to six injuries and tragedy of losing the Motherland have turned this once brave and lively gentleman into the saddest and quiet middle-aged man".⁴⁵ SELEZEN' calmly and accurately executes orders; he does not fear any difficulties. However, he is not indifferent: when, after a long march, the soldiers do not get dinner, he gives them his own money to buy food. SELEZEN' helps his subordinates to pull motorcycles out of the mud and to drag their machine guns. In addition, the writer briefly, just in one or two lines, describes three young Russian men, ANISIMOV, SHEGAN'KO and KOCHUROV, who had left their wives in Shanghai and joined the army in search of heroic deeds and wealth.⁴⁶ Most likely, all the characters of this documentary style novel had real prototypes. The fate of the White Russian emigrants is by no means

40 Ibid., p. 9.

41 Ibid., p. 9.

42 Ibid., p. 9; p. 20; p. 42.

43 Ibid., p. 12.

44 Ibid., p. 12.

45 Ibid., p. 12.

46 Ibid., p. 37.

the theme of "On the Longhai Railway", however, the introduction of Russian heroes undoubtedly gave the novel an additional flavor.

In another famous work of HUANG Zhenxia, a play in verse "The Blood of the Yellow Race", describes the conquest of Russia by the troops of Batu Khan, consisting of Mongols, Hans, Jurchens, and Khitans. The main idea of the play, is eloquently outlined by the poet himself: "In one thousand two hundred forty second / all over the world the yellow wind blew. / In one thousand two hundred forty second / the yellow race was the ruler of the world".⁴⁷ In the context of the political situation of the early 1930s, such a story was perceived as a clear call to war against the USSR.⁴⁸ It must be noted, though, that HUANG Zhenxia was not the first in using the motif of the Mongol conquest. This historical fact was actively used by the Chinese press in the late 1920s during the "anti-Russian campaign", caused by the conflict on the CER. As LU Xun aptly noted, following a similar logic of appropriating other people's victories, "Russians can also ... assert that during the Yuan dynasty they owned China".⁴⁹ Yet, for HUANG, the selection of Russia as an enemy was not a goal itself, but rather a routine moment (that is why the image of Russia is hardly portrayed). The main idea of the play lies in the assertion of Pan-Asian unity. Being united, Asians can easily win over Europeans; however, internal dissensions, including those incurred by a captured Russian Princess, lead to the defeat of the Asian army. Appeals to the kinship of blood, the contraposition of Europeans and Asians were very common among Chinese nationalists, who saw this as a possible basis for the unity of multinational China, and a basis for the struggle against Western colonialism. Of course, after Japan captured Manchuria in September 1931, supporters of Pan-Asianism in China lost their popularity.

As a curiosity, it is impossible not to mention that as an illustration to HUANG Zhenxia's play, the action of which takes place in the 13th century, the magazine chose a painting by Konstantin FLAVITSKY (Konstantin FLAVITSKIĬ, 1830–1866) "Princess Tarakanova" (Kniāzhna Tarakanova, 1864), which actually has nothing to do with the Mongolian conquest. However, the canvas was called "Princess in the Besieged Kiev", and the artist remained anonymous.

47 HUANG Zhenxia 黄震遐: "Huangren zhi xue" 黄人之血 (The Blood of the Yellow Race). In: *Qianfeng Yuekan*, 1931, No. 7, p. 134.

48 LU Xun 鲁迅: "'Minzuzhuyi wenxue' de renwu he yunming" "民族主义文学"的任务和命运 (Tasks and Destiny of the "Nationalist Literature"). In: *LU Xun Wen Cui* 鲁迅文萃 (Collection of LU Xun), Vol 3, Shanghai: Baijia Chubanshe 2001, p. 129.

49 LU Xun 鲁迅: "Wu guo zheng Eluosi zhi yi ye" 吾国征俄罗斯之一页 (How Our Country has Conquered Russia). In: *LU Xun Wen Cui* 鲁迅文萃 (Collection of LU Xun), Vol. 2, Shanghai: Baijia Chubanshe 2001, p. 1156.

One of the major activities of the “Vanguard” society was the development of the theory of Chinese nationalist literature. They believed that “the ultimate mission of literature and art is manifestation of its national spirit and consciousness. In other words, the ultimate sense of literature and art is nationalism”.⁵⁰ As described above, Chinese nationalists learnt a lot in this regard from the national literature of Europe, the rise of which in the 19th century was directly related to the development of the nation states. Russian literature was not left without attention either, though. In the very text of the “Manifesto of the Movement for Nationalist Literature and Art” (June 1930), we can see the statement that the October Revolution led not only to the collapse of the Romanov’s empire, but also stimulated the development of nationalism in Russia, Ukraine, Latvia, Belarus, etc. There we see two mentions that the genuine Russian literature is related to primitivism. Apart from the “Manifesto”, we can find information about Russian literature in a special section of the *Qianfeng Yuekan* called “News of the World Literary Arena”. For example, in issue no. 7, there was an article about the publication of Andre MAUROIS’s book “Turgenev” (1931).

The most detailed information on the attitude of Chinese nationalists’ perception of Russian literature can be found in Yi Kang’s article (“Eguo de nongmin wenxue” 俄國的農民文學 (Peasant Literature of Russia, *QFZB*, no. 14). First of all, Yi Kang notes that Russia is a multinational country, and thus its literature reflects the spirit of different nations. However, at the prevailing moment its national spirit is manifested stronger than ever before. Yi Kang’s narrative can be divided into two parts: first, about the poetry of the so-called new peasant poets, and second, about the literatures of the national minorities of Soviet Russia (Ukrainian, Azeri, Bashkort, Tatar, and Buryat literature). According to Yi Kang, it is exactly the poetry of peasant poets that is truly popular in Russia because ninety percent of the population are peasants there.⁵¹ These genuine national poets, in Yi Kang’s opinion, are Nikolay KLYUEV, Sergey YESENIN, Petr ORESHIN and Aleksandr BLOK. Speaking about the creative writings of KLYUEV, YESENIN, and ORESHIN, the author stresses two moments. First, it is their attitude to the Motherland. They all glorify the greatness of Russia, express their attachment to its villages, fields, wheat, vastness, and patriarchal way of life. “The peasant poets, whose origins are the countryside, treat Russia as their mother and do not want to leave her embrace even for a second”.⁵² Second, it is their attitude toward the revolution. It was crucially important for Yi Kang to show that these poets did not accept the revolution. For example, YESENIN, according to Yi Kang, “was no more

50 “Minzuzhuyi” (1930), p. 10.

51 Yi Kang: “Eguo” (1930), p. 106.

52 Ibid., p. 107.

than a random companion of the revolution”.⁵³ As for KLYUEV, “though he had praised LENIN...but finally took a critical stand”.⁵⁴ For ORESHIN the revolution is no more than “a sudden storm”.⁵⁵ The situation with BLOK is slightly different. Though YI Kang attributes him to symbolists, the reason to include BLOK into the ranks of genuine national poets is the fact that BLOK “in his poetry praises the greatness of Russia”.⁵⁶ In order to prove this basically true assessment, YI Kang cites BLOK’s poem “The Twelve”. The article of YI Kang can hardly give an adequate description of what was going on in Russian poetry of the first quarter of the 20th century. However, if we take into account that for YI Kang, the main criterion was the manifestation of “national spirit”, then this selection of authors seems to be quite logical.

Thus, it can be summarized that at the beginning of the 1930s, the rivalry between the GMD and the CCP, the confrontation between nationalist literature and proletariat literature resulted in a differentiation of attitude to Russia and Russian literature of the Chinese nationalist literati. Soviet Russia, Bolsheviks, and Soviet proletariat literature were perceived with serious hostility; as a direct menace to China and its interests. At the same time, non-revolutionary Russia, Russian emigrants and non-proletarian Russian literature were perceived in a calmer manner, without animosity. Moreover, Russian village literature was one of the important references to the development of the Chinese nationalist literature although much more attention was paid by the nationalists to the countries more distant from communism and to those where nationalism was better represented in the public discourse, such as Italy, Germany, Japan or India.

53 Ibid., p. 107.

54 Ibid., p. 106.

55 Ibid., p. 107.

56 Ibid., p. 107.

