

RED DISCIPLINE – THE TRANSFORMATION OF LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE EARLY PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a case study of how university reforms, public campaigns and pre-1949 scholarship merged and redefined the contents and shape of early People's Republic of China (P.R.C.) liberal arts by focusing on one of the most central and delicate subjects in Chinese academia: the study of classical Chinese literature, completely curtailing any residues of earlier, pre-1949 scholarship. The paper argues that a 1954/55 campaign on the correct interpretation of the Dream of the Red Chamber, was the first large-scale public severing of intellectual ties with the past, it was also an important step within the general political agenda to standardize textbooks and academic perspectives on classical Chinese literature.

Keywords: People's Republic of China, post-1949, classical novel, Dream of the Red Chamber, education

DISCIPLINA ROSSA - TRASFORMAZIONE DELLA STORIOGRAFIA LETTERARIA DEL PRIMO PERIODO DELLA REPUBBLICA POPOLARE CINESE

SINTESI

L'articolo presenta uno studio di caso su come le riforme universitarie, le campagne pubbliche e gli studi scientifici pre-1949 si siano congiunti e abbiano ridefinito i contenuti e la forma delle arti liberali della Repubblica Popolare Cinese (R.P.C.) del primo periodo, incentrandosi sul soggetto più essenziale e delicato dell'ateneo cinese: lo studio della letteratura tradizionale cinese che interrompe completamente tutti i residui degli studi scientifici pre-1949. L'articolo sostiene che la campagna del 1954/55 sulla corretta interpretazione del romanzo Il sogno della camera rossa sia stata la prima grande rottura dei legami intellettuali con il passato ed abbia inoltre rappresentato un importante passo nell'ambito dell'agenda politica generale che ha standardizzato i libri di testo e le prospettive accademiche sulla letteratura classica cinese.

Parole chiave: Repubblica Popolare Cinese, post-1949, novella classica, Il sogno della camera rossa, educazione

INTRODUCTION¹

In the fall of 1949, after several years of civil war against the Chinese National Party (*Guomindang* – GMD), the Chinese Communist Party (*Zhongguo gongchandang* – CCP) succeeded in assuming full control of mainland China. Whereas the GMD government under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) was forced to flee to Taiwan, the Communists were able to officially establish the People's Republic of China (P.R.C.). Their main priority after taking power was to consolidate their rule by means of systematic state- and nation-building efforts in all domains, including education. Initially, these efforts were heavily funded and ideologically shaped by the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the first ten years of the People's Republic of China (1949–1959) saw a series of radical transformations on all levels of higher education, as universities and curricula were reformed to follow the Soviet model. At the same time, public campaigns to “reform the thought” of an entire generation of older academics and intellectuals were instigated, which aimed at conforming “antiquated” mindsets to the new standards in politics and education. This paper presents a case study of how these elements – university reforms, public campaigns and pre-1949 scholarship – merged and redefined the contents and shape of early P.R.C. liberal arts by focusing on one of the most central and delicate subjects in Chinese academia: the study of classical Chinese literature, i.e., the roughly 3,000 years of literary production from the beginnings of Chinese civilization until the fall of imperial China in 1911.

Only seemingly peripheral, the study of classical Chinese literature was in fact crucial to the nation-building efforts of the new rulers in the sense that this was the locus where the traditional cultural legacy was the most resilient. As such, it needed to be redefined according to the new socialist standards in force. At the same time, it still had to retain distinctly indigenous features that were able to satisfy the urges of Chinese nationalism. This tension between nationalism and socialism could create strong oscillations between the extremes of philological expertise and Marxist ideology. Not very surprisingly, to strike the perfect balance between “expertise” (*zhuan*) and “redness” (*hong*) became one of the most challenging tasks of the cultural agenda in the first decade of the P.R.C. Far from being a linear process with clearly defined goals, the transformation of the academic study of classical Chinese literature in the years from 1949 to 1959 had a strong experimental dimension that recently has been characterized as the signature trademark of the CCP's style of policy implementation from its beginning until the very present (Heilmann and Perry (eds.) 2012).

The present paper aims at tracing this trial-and-error development in the field of classical Chinese literature. The goal is to provide a case example that helps us to shift our perspective from a broad brush historiography of socialist China to a more nuanced micro-level approach that takes into account the rich and complex texture of its historical

1 This paper is based on research for my PhD project at Freie Universität Berlin, entitled “Red Discipline: A Shandong Professor, *Honglou meng* and the Rewriting of Literary History in the Early P.R.C.”. All translations from Chinese sources presented in this paper are – if not otherwise indicated – entirely my own.

reality, especially in the 1950s². At a decidedly more pedestrian level, as this is still a rather understudied topic, the paper also represents an attempt to simply document the emergent years of the socialist version of classical Chinese literary history.

BACKGROUND: INSTITUTIONS, CURRICULA AND INTELLECTUALS AT THE START OF THE P.R.C.

At the Communists' ascent to power in 1949, China's modern tertiary education sector did not look back on a particularly long history. It had, in fact, only begun to emerge in 1905, the year in which the traditional Chinese civil service examination system was abolished. Focused almost exclusively on the Confucian canon and its philosophical and philological exegesis, the civil service examinations had systematically monopolized and shaped the educational landscape of late imperial China. Thus, it also quickly became obsolete in the face of a modern Chinese nation in need of scientific and technological skills. For lack of indigenous standards, China's modern tertiary education, when it began to develop at the start of the 20th century, followed different university models from the West, especially Germany, France and the United States. Instead of merging into a single architecture that would be binding for all colleges and universities in China, these models competed with each other, thereby creating a heterogeneous tertiary education sector that consisted of state, provincial and private institutions with different systems at work. In the 1930s, the ruling GMD government made some efforts to unify and standardize the educational system at all levels, but these efforts bore few fruits, mainly due to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, which forced the GMD to retreat into the Chinese hinterland. A considerable number of colleges and universities moved along, establishing their campuses in the southwestern parts of mainland China, specifically Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. Meanwhile, the Communists set themselves up in the northeastern areas, with Yan'an in Shaanxi province as their main political and cultural center. Here, they tried to create their own form of higher education, combining academic knowledge with political content. Initially rather flexible and informal, this model grew increasingly rigid, reflecting the new epistemological orthodoxy as it was articulated by Mao Zedong in his 1942 *Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art*. (Hayhoe 1996, Chapter 2) (Pepper 1996, Chapter 2) (McDougall 1980).

Therefore in 1949, the fragmented and heterogeneous tertiary education sector in China was in dire need of reorganization. As of June 1950, China had 227 extant institutions

2 The 1950s and 1960s in China have only in recent years slowly become the focus of academic attention. In May 2011, for example, Columbia University hosted a graduate student workshop entitled "The Transnational '50s: New Perspectives on the Early P.R.C. and the Outside World". On the Chinese side, East China Normal University organized an international conference in Shanghai, entitled "*1950 niandai de Zhongguo shehui wenhua*" (Chinese society and culture in the 1950s), in July of the same year. The early years of the P.R.C. are currently also the focus in several ongoing PhD projects, of which one by Xin Fan (Indiana University Bloomington) on the development of ancient historical studies in modern China and one by Amanda Shuman (University of California at Santa Cruz) on elite competitive sports in the early P.R.C. are two examples I have recently read into.

that were the legacy of the former Nationalist government, as well as several more recent “people’s universities” that had been set up following the movements of the Red Army within the “liberated” areas and served as short-term cadre training institutions (Hayhoe 1996, 73). Both of these legacies differing vastly in terms of recruitment focus, curriculum and general outlook, it was clear that the young People’s Republic required a new standard in tertiary education, and all existing institutions were expected to conform and adapt to the new circumstances.

One aspect of the need for higher education reform pertained to the problem of accessibility: geographically speaking, most of the extant universities (after their eventual return from their war-time exile) were located on the eastern coast of the country, which caused an imbalance to the detriment of the Chinese hinterland. Also, higher education had previously been restricted to young men and women of privileged backgrounds, a fact which the Communists sought to change by further opening the system to the workers, peasants and soldiers whose representatives they saw themselves to be. A second, central aspect was concerned with curricular reform: understood as principally serving the economic reconstruction of the P.R.C., a strong emphasis was laid on the adaptation of the curriculum to encompass a solid theoretical foundation as well as ensure the practical applicability of the skills learned to the needs of the P.R.C. (Ibid.). Finally, the administrative structure of the universities was to be changed, with the center of the country having more control over national universities, through the Ministry of (Higher) Education on the one hand and, on the other, through the formalization of Party influence in daily administrative affairs. In their state-building efforts, which included the reform of higher education, the CCP relied to a great extent on Soviet aid, expecting the Russians to partake of the Chinese experience of socialist economic construction while providing large amounts of capital along with advisers, technicians and relevant literature (Stiffler 2002, Chapter 1).

While some of these educational reform plans were at least partially carried out from 1950 onwards – such as, e.g., at Shandong University, where in 1951 a Party group [*dang-zu*] and committee [*dangweihui*] were instituted alongside an interim “school council” [*xiaowuhui* or *xiaoweihui*] to oversee and decide upon academic restructuring (Shandong University Archives 1991, 75 f.) –, the greatest bulk of centrally managed changes was undertaken in the summer of 1952 under the slogan of “the restructuring of colleges and departments” (*yuanxi tiaozheng*).³ Before then, Sino-American tensions during the Korean War had caused all U.S.-funded universities to be shut down, ending the era of such prestigious bilateral education projects as Yenching University and Peking Union Medical College in Beijing (Pepper 1996, 164-165). Concurrently, the new government in Beijing had carried out the first large-scale campaigns against unwanted residues of the old system which became known as the Three-Anti (*sanfan*) and Five-Anti-Campaigns (*wufan*), respectively: while the former, beginning in 1951, had targeted members of the

3 Despite the availability of Soviet aid starting from August 1949 onwards, the CCP initially hesitated to carry out a radical reform of higher education. The reason for the delay was the CCP’s policy of including (rather than alienating) the national intelligentsia in order to be able to rely on them in the rebuilding of the Chinese state (Stiffler 2002, 55).

bureaucracy and public service (“anti-corruption”, “anti-waste” and “anti-bureaucratism”), the latter, beginning in early 1952, was focused on industrial and commercial practices (i.e., bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating on government contracts, and stealing state economic information) (Pepper 1996, 166). While these campaigns were underway, the reform of the state-run higher education system was gradually begun.

In a first step starting in 1951, the colleges and universities were broken up into comprehensive, polytechnical, normal (i.e., pedagogical), agricultural and other specialized institutions respectively, and placed within a hierarchical system in which the leading institutions were mostly situated in Beijing (Hayhoe 1996, 77-79). On an overall ideological level, China People’s University, which was jointly run by the Ministry of Higher Education and the CCP Central Committee, was the core institution entrusted with developing a Marxist-Leninist canon for the social sciences (Stiffler 2002). It was followed on the national level by three other centers of academic excellence, one for each area of specialization: Harbin Polytechnical University for the applied sciences, Peking University for the humanities, and Beijing Normal University for teacher training (Hayhoe 1996, 76).

With the implementation of the *yuanxi tiaozheng* in 1952, the Chinese higher education system followed the Soviet model: within the administrative hierarchy of the university, the “college” (*yuan*) level was largely abolished and only the departments (*xi*) were retained, though reorganized into smaller units of specialization. As a consequence, first-year students now no longer enrolled into a large-scale college, but directly into a specific subject, which led to shorter durations of study and increased specialization overall (Ibid., 77-79). The faculty, too, were not exempted from the general restructuring process. One of the main Soviet-bred tools that was to ensure the coordination and streamlining of a department’s overall activities was the “teaching and research section” (*jiaoxue yanjiu zu*, or *jiaoyanzu*; *kafedra* in Russian) into which all members of a department were organized (Pepper 1996, 174-175). Also, starting around that time, regular large-scale “scientific symposia” (*kexue taolunhui*) were organized as mandatory events at the universities, at which representatives of all specializations were required to present their current research topics in accordance with Marxist-Leninist guidelines (Yuan 2011).⁴

In terms of curricular reform, the lack of standardized textbooks at the start of the fifties was to some extent made up for by translating materials from the Soviet Union. Additionally, Soviet experts were dispatched to the major institutions around the country to advise academic regulators on how to construct a socialist higher education. Not all subjects readily lent themselves to advice or guidance from the outside, though. Certain areas within the humanities required a knowledge and expertise fostered solely on indigenous grounds, with outside influences restricted to a supervision of the general ideology. One such subject, central to higher education at the restructured Chinese departments (*zhongwenxi*), was that of Chinese literary history.

4 Though I have been focusing mainly on the establishment of such regular symposia at Shandong University, where, starting in 1952, they were held each year in March in connection with celebrating the university’s anniversary, I was informed by my interview partner Yuan Shishuo of Shandong University, that these symposia were also the norm at other universities at the time. Cf. also (Shandong University Archives 1991, 89).

The question of how best to canonize and narrate the history of traditional Chinese literature had already in pre-Communist times been entangled with questions of nation-building and the definition of a national culture. At the start of the Republican period, for example, literary history was taught at the universities as a part of a larger subject complex subsumed under the term “national studies” (*guoxue*). From the perspective of modern academic disciplines, the term “national studies” was rather ambivalent, as it touched upon different fields of expertise most notably history, literature and linguistics. The reason for this was that “national studies” was directly connected to the late imperial civil service examination system curriculum with its focus on the Confucian canon and its different schools of interpretation, in particular the so-called school of “evidential learning” (*kaozheng xue*) that emerged in the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

Based solely on a close reading of canonical texts, which were often written in an arcane classical style and could pertain to various fields of expertise (such as literature, history or linguistics), Qing “evidential” scholars meticulously commented on them by annotating such details as personal and geographical names and other historical references (Elman 1984) (Sela 2011). This legacy persisted in modern higher education after it was established in China in the early 20th century. Thus, students of “national studies” at such prestigious institutions as National Peking University or Yenching University were educated to become professional philologists in the tradition of Qing “evidential learning” (Yeh 2000, 32-33). A somewhat radical new outlook on the *kaozheng* method was first provided in the wake of the New Culture Movement (from 1917) by Hu Shi (1891-1962), whose novel focus on canonizing Chinese literature written in the vernacular (*baihua*) revolutionized traditional literary historiography. By providing the literary heritage with a new narrative thread that focused on a language free of the cumbersome allusions and arabesques associated with the traditional written style (*wenyanwen*), Hu Shi was the first to merge traditional philological studies with a modern outlook on literary development.

However, Hu Shi’s revision of classical Chinese philology and literature had been motivated by his experiences as a graduate student in the USA and his general interest in finding developmental parallels between the West and China. Comparing the “scientific spirit” of the European Enlightenment with the evolution of classical textual philology in the Qianlong (1735-1795) and Jiaqing (1796-1820) eras of Qing-China, he concluded in his famed *The Chinese Renaissance* (1933): “The latter created three hundred years of scientific book learning; the former created a new science and a new world.” (Hu 2001, 107). In Hu’s view, philology and modernism were not opposite ends of an educational spectrum, and his wielding together of traditional philological methods with an interest in a progression of literature towards a “modern” use of language underscored this belief. At the same time, traditional philology itself was being innovated vis-à-vis the wealth of recent discoveries of archaeological objects and archival materials, a process which was not uncontroversial in Republican intellectual circles (Wang 2000, chapter 2). Through these different threads, classical literary scholarship was gradually transformed into a modern discipline which combined old techniques with new methods, old contents with new focus points, and provided the Chinese tradition “with a linear sense of historical progression” (Ibid., 25-27).

The scholars and academics of the literary field that were professionally active during the transition phase from the Republic to the People's Republic had largely been educated under Hu Shi's new approach to and use of traditional *kaozheng*. Many of them had spent time studying abroad in the 1920s and the 30s and returned to China with foreign (often Western) PhD degrees. Among several of those studying in the West, particularly in France, an interest was sparked in leftist philosophy and political theory, especially as political tensions grew within the nations of Europe between the wars. Nevertheless, few professional academics came back from their sojourns abroad with a clear political agenda, and though many may have been sympathetic to the Communist cause in the years immediately preceding and during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), few ended up participating in the Yan'an experiment or even joining the CCP.⁵ Instead, a large group of people from some of the country's most prestigious institutions followed their universities into exile in Yunnan in 1937.⁶

When the war drew to a close and intellectuals formerly clustered in the southwest of China once again spread out to institutions across the country, they had generally been through a series of transformative processes: from May Fourth in China and academic experiences abroad back to research and teaching in domestic war-time exile, the people holding university positions by 1949 welcomed the promise of peace and unification that the Communists appeared to embody. Relations between intellectuals (especially in the liberal arts) and the GMD government had been tense, as regulators strove towards sinification, standardization and specialization of the university curriculum, whereas most of the professors in charge at the top institutions demanded more freedom and believed that students would benefit most from a broad liberal education (Israel 1998, 132-134).⁷ Thus, when the CCP equally called for a standardization of the curriculum, installed mandatory

5 The example I have been studying in this respect are the individual itineraries of Lu Kanru and his wife, Feng Yuanjun, who both got their PhD degrees in Paris where they stayed between 1933 and 1935. Former students of Hu Shi's and meticulous philologists by training, they became involved in leftist activities during their time abroad and in works following that time even referring to themselves as "students of Plekhanov". However, neither of the two became CCP members upon their return. For further details, see (Yan 2008) (Xu 2006), and for the Plekhanov reference, see the final chapter in (Lu and Feng 1947).

6 For a concise and very readable history of the most prestigious institute during this period of exile, namely Xinan Lianda, see (Israel 1998).

7 In John Israel's book, Mei Yiqi (1889-1962), the academic affairs provost at Lianda, a converted Christian originally hailing from Qinghua University, is quoted as summing up the purpose of education at Lianda as follows: "Liberal education is primary, specialization is secondary." Israel further writes of the general curriculum at that institution: "The idea was to give students a wide base of knowledge that they could build on in keeping with their own interests and strengths. Like the American liberal arts curriculum on which it was modeled, Lianda's course of study eschewed narrow concentration and gave the individual a wide range of choices. Humanities and social science majors were required to take at least one natural science course, but they were free to choose from among mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, and geology. The two required social science courses could be chosen from the departments of economics, politics, or sociology. Each student had to take "Introduction to Philosophy" or "Introduction to Science". Even in the core curriculum required for all students – "Survey of Chinese History", "Survey of Western History", "First-Year Chinese", and "First-Year English" – there was considerable leeway to shop among sections and instructors, and students could add and drop courses without penalty during the first weeks of a semester (Ibid., 132-133).

political education courses and study groups with the aim of coordinating the political consciousness of those involved in educating a new generation of socialist-trained intellectuals, hardly anyone would have been taken by surprise – similar attempts had after all already been made under the exiled GMD government in Chongqing (Ibid., 95–98).

The infamous Communist “thought reform” (*sixiang gaizao*) campaigns targeting academics and intellectuals began as soon as the P.R.C. was officially established.⁸ From contemporary source material such as collectively kept diaries of university *danwei* (work units) we know that by early 1950, regular sessions of criticism and self-criticism among faculty members were already a firm part of the university routine (Li 2009, 191). That the attendees of such meetings who pertained to the generation educated under May Fourth and various Western influences were aware of the difficulties their training posed for the Communist educational cause can be seen in statements such as the following, made by professor of classical Chinese literature at Shandong University, Lu Kanru (1903–1978), in his function as head of the university library on June 23, 1950:

Recently, I have had the profound feeling that the burden of history weighs so heavily on people like us, who are around fifty years of age, that we can hardly breathe, we should not talk and even slowly crawling is extremely difficult. Although I am not at all discouraged, when my eyes see the advances by leaps and bounds of the young, I am honestly overwhelmed with admiration. (Ibid., 195)

Thought reform, though generally identified with specific campaigns taking place at various times in the early P.R.C., can actually be understood as a kind of ongoing current underlying all areas of cultural and academic production, which alternated and at times merged openly political (e.g., the aforementioned Three-Anti and Five-Anti-Campaigns), somewhat more topical (e.g., against the film *The Life of Wu Xun* [*Wu Xun zhuan*] in 1951) and personal campaigns (e.g., an early attempt in 1951 to publicly discredit Hu Shi who by that time was, however, no longer living in the P.R.C., or the targeting of prominent intellectuals who were seen as particularly “backward” representatives of the old system, such as Liang Shuming, Mei Yiqi or Zhang Boling) to achieve its end (Goldman 1987). As such, the main mechanism of thought reform campaigns, i.e., approximating an otherwise undefined ideological standard through a process of criticism and self-criticism, also played a crucial part in the redefinition of academic content. Literary historiography and research were naturally not exempt from this process.

THOUGHT REFORM IN LITERARY HISTORY: FIRST STEPS, 1949–1954

Classical literary historiography in the P.R.C. began with Zhejiang University professor Jiang Zuyi’s (1913–1992) *Zhongguo renmin wenxueshi* (*Chinese people’s literary history*, hereafter: *People’s history*) of early 1950, which was the first literary history written according to the “dialectical materialist method” (*bianzheng weiwuzhuyi*) and thus adhered to

8 For a detailed account of early P.R.C. thought reform campaigns, see the still very useful (T. H. Chen 1960).

the official academic requirements decided upon by the central government in as early as October, 1949 (Chen and Xu 1987, 477) (Jiang 1991, repr.).⁹ The period between 1949 and 1954/55 (specifically, the Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign, see below) has been described as the first phase of P.R.C. literary historiography, specifically as the phase in which the need to develop a Marxist-Leninist critical and historiographic framework was officially recognized, and regulations and reforms were initiated to accommodate this need (Deng 1987).

Jiang Zuyi's *People's history* was in one sense a typical academic textbook of modern China, in that it had originally been compiled based on the author's lecture notes, which again bespoke the lack of standardized textbooks available for teaching classical literature in both the Republican period and the early P.R.C. (Hayhoe 1996, 55). However, several of its components presented a complete break with the way literary histories had previously been written. It began, for example, with an introductory section (*zonglun*) of about 30 pages (a considerable portion of a text that was only 244 pages in total) which read like a policy statement within its specific historical context: a part of its theme was dedicated to explaining the benefit of dialectical materialism in the study of literary history, contrasting the new method with the methods of pre-1949 literary historiography, which it found guilty of a bourgeois bias. Most literary histories of the previous three decades, the text claimed, had been written from a "capitalist world view" which favored a cyclical (rather than a linear progressive) understanding of history and held "popular literature" (*renmin wenxue*) in low regard (namely as a mere first stage within a literary process eventually leading up to the accomplished works of the literati, the *wenren wenxue*). To correct this bias, the text called for a broadening of the scope of literary history: instead of focusing on what it termed "orthodox history" (meaning the history of an elite minority of the population), it suggested a return to popular literature as a genre in its own right that had a developmental logic completely independent of the "soulless skeleton" (*meiyou linghun de haigu*) that the feudalist, formalist literature of the literati had become (Jiang 1991, repr., 6-7). It further proposed a redefinition of the origins of popular literature as based on oral traditions, specifically "work songs", thus reiterating the Engelsian claim that all literature – as a part of the development of language and crafts – originated in human labor (Ibid., 12).¹⁰

9 According to the "Preliminary Regulations for the Curricula of Every Department in the Colleges of Literature and Law of Every University and Professional School" (*Ge daxue zhuanke xuexiao wenfa xueyuan ge xi kecheng zanzing guiding*) released on October 12, 1949, there were three required courses that all students of the literature and law colleges had to take [note: this was before the *yuanxi tiaozheng*, so these colleges, aside from the departments of literature and law, included the following departments: history, philosophy, education (*jiaoxuexi*), economics, and political studies (*zhengzhixue xi*): 1. Dialectical materialism and historical materialism (including a short history of social development) (first semester, 3 hours per week), 2. On New Democracy (including the history of modern Chinese revolutionary movements) (second semester, 3 hours per week), and 3. Politics and economics (starting from the second year of studies for one total year of studies, 3 hours per week). Cf. (Xinhua 1949)

10 This claim was famously stated by Engels in an article for *Die Neue Zeit* in June, 1895, entitled "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man" (later incorporated in *The Dialectics of Nature*). In a passage in which he expounded on the development of human dexterity, Engels wrote: "Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, it is also the product of labour. Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, through the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more

But despite its avowed commitment to the new methodology and content, a closer look at Jiang's *People's history* still reveals a strong indebtedness to pre-1949 – and in that sense “traditionally” practiced – post-May Fourth literary historiography. For example, while the introduction of the *People's history* leaned heavily on quotes from Mao Zedong's *Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art*, the officially endorsed scholarship of Lu Xun (1881-1936) and Wen Yiduo (1899-1946), as well as the theories of the Soviet models Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) and (then still) Georgi Plekhanov (1856-1918), the first chapter of the *People's history* began with an exploration of mythology in Chinese literature (*shenhua*), in which extensive references were made to non-Soviet Western texts and authorities, such as the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (James Hastings ed., 1907-1928), Emile Durkheim or James Frazer (*Ibid.*, 27-50). Only a year later, at the height of the first large-scale thought reform campaign in November 1951 and in the middle of the Korean War, vice-Minister of Education Qian Junrui (1908-1985) would condemn the use of Anglo-American scholarship by Chinese professors as a “mechanical copying of foreign dogmas” and proof of the academics' lack of progress in their thought reform (Pepper 1996, 170-171).

Also, in dealing with specific genres of the Chinese literary tradition, the *People's history* in fact did not appear to put into practice its suggestions of research into socio-historical contexts. Instead, it was still very much reminiscent of such texts as Hu Shi's *History of Vernacular Literature* (*Baihua wenxueshi*, 1928), focusing primarily on textual traditions from Zhu Xi to Lu Xun to explain the development of a literary genre, and made very little effort to go beyond textual philology to place these genres within their respective moments in history, let alone a grander scheme of socio-political development (such as, to cite an obvious example, the Stalinist five stages of social development).

Thus, in the very first years of the P.R.C., despite burgeoning efforts to standardize the curricula of the humanities, the teaching plans in literary history were far from concrete. In fact, in as late as 1952, the aforementioned Shandong University professor for classical literature Lu Kanru (who had by then become the university's vice-president) remarked in an article for *Renmin jiaoyu* (*People's education*) that no two schools had the same curricular standards when it came to teaching literary history. Lu himself, a specialist for pre-Qin and Qin dynasty literature, admitted to frequently omitting the literature of the Ming and the Qing in his courses, despite having twenty years of experience teaching classical literature at a university level (Lu 1952b, 19).

One result of this was that at the start of the fifties, academics were still able to write literary histories of all kinds of scopes and with all kinds of emphases and focal points, as long as they claimed an affinity with Marxism-Leninism and its method, dialectical

and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the high degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini.” (Engels, *The Part Played by Labor in the Transition From Ape to Man* 1895). The main point of Engels' article was, however, not to trace the development of man's use of his hands in the creation of arts and sciences, but to set right what he perceived to be a gross imbalance in pre-Marxian intellectual historiography: the focus of the mind over the body in the narrating of the achievements of human civilizations. Deeply rooted in materialism, his text was motivated by an emphasis of human physical labor over mental labor, which the Chinese Marxists took over in their own search for the cultural origins of Chinese literature.

and historical materialism. Though a need for standardized textbook production had been expressed, it was in fact not until 1957 that the first officially sanctioned course outline for teaching the subject of classical literary history was released in the P.R.C. (Ministry of Higher Education 1957). Until then, the compilation and use of textbooks was largely left to individual academics and their respective institution's extant control mechanisms (such as, for example, the university Party group/committee or the *jiaoyanzu* in charge of producing and critiquing teaching materials at the department level) to produce the textual materials that became the foundation for teaching classical literary history.

This led to an initial surge of varied opinions on and approaches to topics related to literary history that at a first glance do not seem to be particularly relevant: while no one could seriously call into question the basic tenets of Marxist-Leninist literary criticism, which – simply put – was focused on materialism, realism, and lauding the portrayal of social progress, academics did find reasons to argue and disagree over such apparently insignificant details as whether periodization schemes should follow an ideological (i.e., according to Stalinist theory of stages), generic (i.e., according to literary genre) or dynastic (i.e., according to a dynastic chronology) logic, and whether literary periods of production always coincided with social periods of production.¹¹ It was, however, not until the fall of 1954 that the (post-) May Fourth traditions of writing literary history were questioned on a large and offensive scale.

THOUGHT REFORM IN LITERARY HISTORY: CRITICIZING YU PINGBO AND HU SHI, 1954/55

On September 1, 1954, an article appeared in the journal *Wenshizhe* sharply criticizing the most recent published work of famous literary scholar Yu Pingbo (1900–1990), an expert for the 18th-century Qing-novel *Honglou meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*).¹² Written by two recent graduates of Shandong University now living and working in Beijing, the article presented the views of a younger generation who had received their entire tertiary education within the university system of the P.R.C., and these views were largely unfavorable of the kind of scholarship Hu Shi had once popularized with regard to the study of classical literature.¹³

11 For the various approaches, see e.g. (Li 1954/55), (Tan 1952/58), (Lu and Feng 1954–1955) and (Zheng 1957). The final decision in the matter of periodization was made at the preparatory meeting for the “Conference of the Colleges and Schools of Higher Normal Education on the Teaching Syllabus for Classical Chinese Literature” (*Gaodeng shifan yuanxiao Zhongguo gudian wenxue jiaoxue dagang zuotanhui*), held between April 8 and April 12, 1956. At this occasion, it was decided that in literary historiography, the larger historical periods should follow the dynastic chronology, which could further be sectioned according to authors, works or genres (Chen and Wan 1987) (Lu and Feng 1956).

12 *Wenshizhe* (*Literature, History, Philosophy*) was one of the most prominent academic journals focusing on the humanities in the early P.R.C.: founded in 1951 at Shandong University and appearing monthly, it quickly drew the attention of even the highest political circles, including Mao Zedong who is said to have been a subscriber (Y. 郭. Guo 2011).

13 For further treatments of Li and Lan's attacks of Yu, cf. (Grieder 1956), (Bonner 1976), and especially the extremely informative and well-researched (Sun 2003).

In contrast to these recently graduated authors, Yu Pingbo was a scholar with a Republican educational background who through his expertise in *Honglou meng* studies had very close ties with Hu Shi. In fact, based on *kaozheng* scholarship, he and Hu Shi had succeeded in providing a novel interpretation of *Honglou meng* in the 1920s. Considered one of the greatest masterpieces of traditional Chinese fiction, Cao Xueqin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, whose 120 chapters revolve around the fate of a wealthy family in the late 18th century, was a fairly controversial text in the sense that Cao's authorship was contested for the last forty chapters. In his *Honglou meng bian* published in 1923, Yu Pingbo provided ample evidence for his claim that Cao Xueqin only wrote the first eighty chapters of the novel, whereas the final part was authored by Gao E. This matched Hu Shi's own *kaozheng*-based analysis, presented in an essay of 1921 entitled "Honglou meng kaozheng" (Textual criticism of Dream of the Red Chamber). On the basis of this essay, Hu was able to highlight the authorship of Cao Xueqin, claiming that the novel had to be read as an autobiographical work (Chen Weizhao 2005, 128-157).

In their first of what was to become a series of texts challenging Yu Pingbo's authority in *Honglou meng*-studies, the two young men Li Xifan (*1927) and Lan Ling (1931-2005) consistently (and, some might argue, a little doggedly) applied strict Marxist-Leninist criteria in their reading of one of the greatest and most popular literary works of the Chinese tradition: a "classical realist masterpiece" to be re-appropriated by "the people as a whole", Li and Lan saw *Honglou meng* as desperately requiring a "correct analysis and evaluation", so as to "deliver it of all types of fallacious arguments, so that the broad masses of the people can appreciate it even more, and that the literary and art workers can accurately study it." (Li and Lan 1954a, 20). Yu Pingbo, the two authors argued, had not only failed to read *Honglou meng* as a novel expressing a peak in Chinese realism, he had also followed in the fallacious footsteps of Hu Shi, who had been the first to view it as Cao Xueqin's autobiography. (Li and Lan 1957, 33).¹⁴

14 While from an outsider's perspective it may not necessarily be clear why ascribing autobiographical traits to *Honglou meng* should stand in the way of a full-out Marxist-Leninist interpretation, the logic of it was clear to anyone who had read Engels' remarks on Balzac in a letter he wrote to the author Margaret Harkness in 1885 as a response to her novel *A City Girl*. Canonized as one of the central texts in Chinese Marxist literary criticism [which had inherited it from the Soviet critical canon of which it had already been a part since 1932, cf. (Günther 1984, 32)], it contained a few crucial passages on one of the most important criteria for the Marxist evaluation of literature, namely the representation of the "typical" (*dianxing*) as opposed to the meaninglessness of individual representation that stood for nothing. Good literature, good realism, according to Engels, included "besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances." In this respect, Balzac was to be preferred as the superior realist when compared to his naturalist counterpart Zola: "Balzac was politically a Legitimist; his work is a constant elegy on the inevitable decay of good society, his sympathies are all with the class doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer, than when he sets in motion the men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply – the nobles." (Engels 2000). The idea that was taken up and expanded on first by Soviet literary criticism, then by Chinese literary criticism, was that realism was politically relevant because it – unlike naturalism – represented the constituent elements of historical social classes by way of the literary protagonists created in its vein. To draw the full circle back to *Honglou meng*: to read the novel as an autobiography of its author Cao Xueqin, rather than a realist novel critiquing the conditions of feudal China in the late 17th century robbed it of its meaning within a Marxist interpretive community.

Furthermore, they criticized Yu Pingbo's research methods as "basically copying the *kaozheng* perspective of the old redologists." *Kaozheng*, Li and Lan maintained,

can only be used in specific circumstances to discern chronologies or differentiate between the true and the false [i.e., whether a text was from a specific historical period]. But Mr Yu [Pingbo] has also employed the kaozheng perspective in his analysis of artistic imagery [within Honglou meng], and the result is that he has come to a series of anti-realist, formalist conclusions. [my insertions] (Li and Lan 1954a, 25)

Though also acknowledging that Yu Pingbo's *kaozheng* had determined the novel's earliest extant manuscript, an effort which "of course has been greatly helpful for the readers of *Honglou meng*", Li and Lan otherwise criticized Yu's philological studies (such as, e.g., his insistence on treating only the first eighty chapters of the novel as a part of the "original") as characteristic of his status as a "feudalistic scholar" who was oblivious of any greater value of the novel beyond the myriads of detailed (and largely irrelevant) results achievable through *kaozheng* (Li and Lan 1957, 21-23). The main share of the blame was, however, placed on Hu Shi, whose "bourgeois subjective idealism" (*zichanjieji zhuguan weixinlun*) had negatively influenced scholars of Yu's caliber and whose scholarship thus was to be strongly rejected (Ibid., 33).

Li and Lan's initial attacks of Yu Pingbo, which were all published between September and mid-October 1954, thus heralded the advent of what was to become the first large-scale campaign against Hu Shi in the 1950s that spearheaded an all-out rejection of *kaozheng* in literary historiography for the sake of a more theory-based and ideological rereading of the classical heritage. Commencing with a speech by Mao Zedong – who had read Li and Lan's initial attacks in *Wenshizhe* and supported their cause – before members of the Politburo of the CCP Central Committee on October 16 in which he elaborated on the necessity to criticize Hu Shi, the most important CCP organ *Renmin ribao* (*People's daily*) followed suit on October 23, publishing an editorial entitled "We must take the criticisms of the mistaken views in Honglou meng-research seriously" ("Yinggai zhongshi dui Honglou meng yanjiu zhong cuowu de guandian pipan").¹⁵ From there it was only a few months until the focus of the criticisms had shifted away from Yu Pingbo and the Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign was in full swing.

The Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign officially took place between December 1954, and March,

In such a community, literature was not to be appreciated as a mere pastime (this was, after all, how the bourgeois scholars had gone about it), but as the bearer of politically relevant messages for the process of state-building in the present. For a concise overview of the main ideas of Marxist literary criticism in the 20th century, see (Fokkema and Ibsch, *Theories of Literature in the Twentieth Century: Structuralism, Marxism, Aesthetics of Reception, Semiotics* 1995, Chapter 4). For a discussion of its present-day relevance, see (Eagleton 2002).

- 15 Mao's speech was only made public in *Renmin ribao* in May, 1967. Before that time, only high-ranking Party officials in charge of disseminating propaganda and official policy (such as, e.g., Deng Tuo, the editor-in-chief of *Renmin ribao*) knew of Mao's early support of the campaign and were endorsed to act on his behalf (Dai 1990, 49). On the process of writing the *Renmin ribao* editorial as a young journalist who was not privy to such classified information, see (Yuan 2006, 87-89).

1955. In its course, at least twenty-one large-scale conferences dedicated solely to criticizing Hu Shi were organized across China (Sun 2003, 85) (Dai 1990, 74). By May 1955, over 200 articles criticizing “Hu Shi thought” had been published in national newspapers and periodicals since November of the previous year (PLA Defence Academy 1985, 563). The end of the campaign was marked by the publication of an eight-volume collection of these critical essays written by cultural politicians and academics throughout its course which attacked the influence of what came to be known as “Hu Shi thought” (*Hu Shi sixiang*) in all areas of intellectual life, especially the core humanities philosophy, history and literature (HSSP 1955). Acting as a kind of negative role model, Hu Shi’s formerly so influential literary research came to represent nearly everything Chinese Marxist-Leninist literary criticism would not stand for: in terms of content, his endorsement of just a small part of the literary heritage written in the vernacular (*baihua*) was seen as an act of national betrayal; in terms of rhetoric, his open identification with American pragmatism (as represented by his teacher at Columbia University, John Dewey) led to his being labeled a “bourgeois idealist” and a “running dog of American imperialism” (*Mei diguozhuyi de zougou*), and a “reformist” (*gailiangzhuyizhe*) rather than a revolutionary. Though most of the articles published during the campaign were little more than generally ideological, reiterating the same criticisms over and over again and rarely going into the specifics of Hu’s work or alleged “thought”, the Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign provoked a rethinking of academic genres and categories according to principles that had rarely been well-defined, let alone concretely exemplified, prior to 1954.¹⁶

From then on, literary historians had an idea of how not to do it: methodological concepts like *kaozheng* officially became associated with meaningless philological work, and literary research according to criteria that did not revolve around either officially sanctioned themes in Marxist-Leninist literary criticism (such as, e.g., realism, the “typical”, an affinity with “the people” [*renminxing*], or the “tendentiousness” [*qingxiangxing*] of a work of literature etc.) or general socio-political contextualization (such as, e.g., finding the roots of capitalism in Qing China by looking into economic modes described in such works as *Honglou meng*) was completely out of the question.

16 In fact, there had been attempts to criticize Hu Shi already in 1950/51 during the first thought reform movement. At the time, his son, Hu Sidu, had published an essay criticizing his father as a “loyal official of the reactionary class” and an “enemy of the people” in the left-wing, Hong Kong-based *Dagong bao* (September 22, 1950). In 1953, during the Second Congress of Literary and Art Workers (*Zhongguo wenxue gongzuozhe di'er ci daibiao dahui*), Shao Quanlin had also linked Hu Shi with a negative trend that had developed in Chinese literature since the May Fourth Movement, which was characterized by anti-realism, decadence, aestheticism and reformism (Shao 1953, 56) (Bichler 1999, 102-104). However, none of these earlier efforts had resulted in a campaign of a similar scope as the one in 1954/55, also because the CCP was initially wary of alienating the intellectuals too much in their initial state-building efforts.

THOUGHT REFORM IN LITERARY HISTORY: AFTER THE ANTI-HU SHI-CAMPAIGN, 1955-1959

The period after the Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign was to some extent characterized by extremes. In 1956, Mao Zedong's call to "let one hundred flowers bloom and one hundred schools contend" provoked tepid reactions among the intellectuals. It was not until his speech to the eleventh (enlarged) Supreme State Conference on February 27, 1957, entitled "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People" ("Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti") that the voices of criticism began to gain some momentum.¹⁷ On April 27, the CCP Central Committee launched a "rectification campaign" (*zhengfeng yundong*) targeting first and foremost Party members suspected of dissenting against Mao's Hundred Flowers Campaign. Both members and non-members of the CCP were invited to participate in the accusations. In the following two months, said participation developed into what was perceived as an unprecedented lack of restraint, until an editorial in *Renmin ribao* on June 8 cut short the period of relative outspokenness. Warning against the dangers of criticism weakening the socialist cause, the *Renmin ribao* text called for a period of counter criticism, prompting the start of what would soon be known as the "Anti-Rightist Campaign" (Fokkema 1965, 123).

An attendee of the Supreme State Conference at which Mao held his "Handling of Contradictions" speech, Shandong University professor Lu Kanru later noted:

Because we [i.e., the "older academics"] have only studied Marxism-Leninism to a shallow and limited degree, we often cannot freely debate academic matters, we are "scared of our own shadows" and worry and fret endlessly. If we read an academic paper in Renmin ribao or an essay in literary criticism in Wenyi bao, we immediately wrongly assume that this is the final verdict of the Party central, and even if we have a different opinion, we do not dare to voice it. If the author of that article is an academic leader or a comrade in charge of some government office, then it is even more daunting, and we just copy everything mechanically, not daring to modify even slightly. Of course, this is a "prison we drew for ourselves". Obviously, the Party central does not intend to provide a conclusion to every academic problem, and the authors of these essays do not think [of their work] as a "golden rule" that is not open to discussion. The result of "drawing our own prison" has merely been an obstruction to the flourishing of our scholarship. And that is exactly why the "Let one hundred flowers bloom, let one hundred schools contend" policy has met with such enthusiastic support from intellectuals in all of China. [my insertions] (Renmin ribao, March 16, 1957)

As it turned out, Lu Kanru's intuitions as a member of the intellectual class reluctant to provide criticisms proved correct: on June 30, with the appearance of a *Wenyi bao* edi-

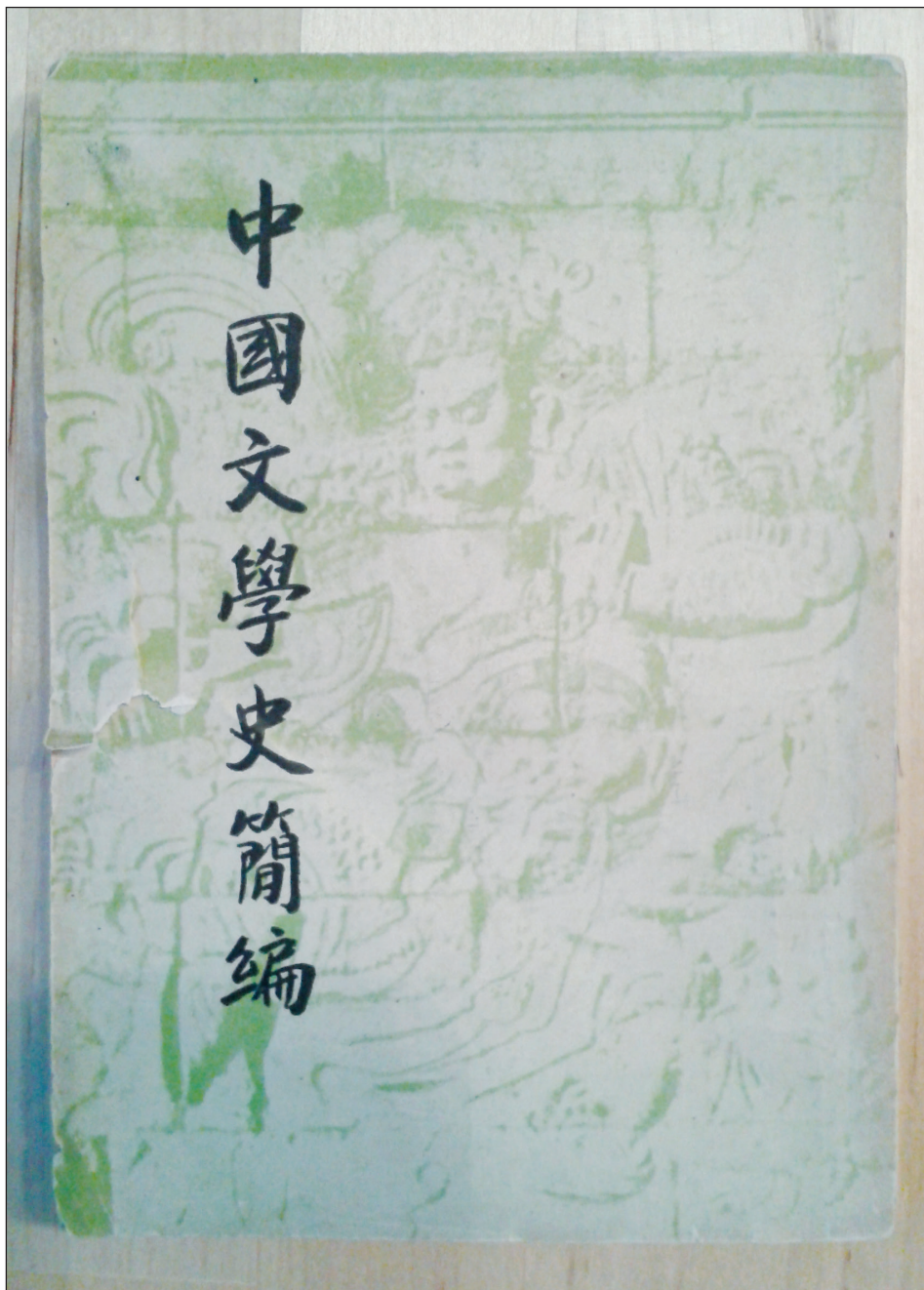
17 The speech was made public in several stages, the most ample version – also warning of the dangers of "rightist opportunism" being even greater than that of "dogmatism" (i.e., the rigid application of Marxist-Leninist principles without questioning) – being printed in *Renmin ribao* only on June 19 (Fokkema 1965, 120).

torial entitled “Oppose rightist thought among the literary and art ranks” (“Fandui wenyi duiwu zhong de youqing sixiang”), the Anti-Rightist-Campaign of 1957 was officially launched, and any further criticism by intellectuals and academics came to a sudden halt.

It was against this background in August, 1957, that the first official university syllabus for the subject of literary history was published by the Ministry of Higher Education (*Zhongguo wenxueshi jiaoxue dagang*, or: *Chinese literary history teaching syllabus*, hereafter: *Syllabus*). As such, it was also the first successful collective work mainly authored by five of the most renowned literary historians of the early P.R.C., namely You Guo'en and Wang Yao (both professors at Peking University), Liu Dajie (Fudan University), Feng Yuanjun (Shandong University), and Liu Shousong (Wuhan University). Distributed not only to the teaching staff at universities, but also to the students of Chinese literature (Müller 2009), the *Syllabus* was for the most part not written as a running text, but rather contained pointers as to the topics and themes considered mandatory in teaching the subject.¹⁸ These by that time also included the lessons learned during the Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign: as the final point on the agenda of teaching *Honglou meng*, for example, the *Syllabus* prescribed a “criticism of bourgeois idealism in the research of *Honglou meng*.” (Ministry of Higher Education 1957, 198)

During this time, literary histories written by individual academics continued to be published – the *Syllabus* was, after all, not a substitute for book-length running texts on the subject. Two of the most prominent ones, in fact, were reworked editions of pre-1949 texts that had been altered by their authors to fit the post-1954/55 shift of paradigms. The first had originally been written in 1932 by the married couple Lu Kanru and Feng Yuanjun (both Shandong University), and had undergone a series of revisions and draft versions before being published in its final, P.R.C.-friendly version in 1957, entitled *Zhongguo wenxueshi jianbian (xiuding ben)* (*Short Course in Chinese Literary History [revised edition]*, hereafter: *Short course*). The *Short course*, by all standards, was a perfect example of the merging of traditions of literary scholarship that resulted in what could be called “professionalized ideological research”. The book was structured following the periodization scheme decided on in 1956, and thus largely followed traditional dynastic chronology. At the same time, it was sectioned according to Marxist priorities, each chapter beginning with a socio-historical overview of the period that had brought forth the respective literary genres under discussion. It contained an introductory “policy chapter”, which laid out its basic motivations as providing a literary history that

18 The passage describing what was to be taught with respect to the socio-historical backdrop of *Honglou meng*, for example, reads as follows: “Social foundations of the production of *Honglou meng*: the capitalist elements which at the beginning of the Qing had suffered destruction [i.e., by the Manchu invasion and takeover] are recovered and developed. Urbanite thought [*shimin sixiang*] begins to gain some ground following the expansion of urbanite power. From among the bureaucrat-landowner class people are produced that show a tendency towards freedom and liberation. The content of the work and the author's life experience – profound life experience is an advantageous condition for the creation of general and focused works. *Honglou meng* is an unfinished work. The problem of the supplements. The achievement of Gao E. The accomplishments of Gao E's last forty chapters: it generally reflects the spirit of Cao's work. The first eighty chapters and the last forty chapters have become an integral whole in the eyes and hearts of the readers. The shortcomings of the last forty chapters.” (Ministry of Higher Education 1957, 195)



Lu Kanru and Feng Yuanjun: 中国文学史简编, 1948 edition. Photo: M.-T. Strauss.

would enable its readers to understand the historical progress of Chinese literature from its origins in manual labor to present-day socialist realism, thus defining its goal as “to help build a socialist society” (Lu and Feng 1957a, 1-2).

At the end, the authors also included a postface, in which they lauded the guidance of the CCP and Mao Zedong in the research of literary history and reiterated the concept of a linear progression in building the nation’s critical canon from the May Fourth Movement (which was seen as taking place in the wake of the Russian October Revolution) through the *Yan’an Talks* of 1942 until the present. It was only when seen from this angle, Lu and Feng argued, that it was possible to read the literary heritage of China as the foundation on which contemporary authors now struggled to construct a new national literature in the spirit of socialist realism (Ibid., 292).

In terms of content and style, the *Short course* was written so as to be easily understandable and hardly contained references to secondary works (except for general ideological texts). It was certainly no longer concerned with philological issues, as previous versions of it had been. However, certain residues of Hu Shi-inspired studies remained: in the section on *Honglou meng*, for example, a preoccupation with the author’s biography as in a way definitive of some the story’s elements was still included, though the authors took pains to emphasize that *Honglou meng* was an accurate depiction of the “corruption and cruelty of the high official-landowner class” that Cao Xueqin had been able to access due to his own family history. Thus, as with Engels’ appraisal of Balzac in his letter to Margaret Harkness in 1888, the distinction between a realist “channeling” of historical conditions and a naturalist autobiography was kept up in the *Short course*.

Similarly, the second prominent literary history, entitled *Zhongguo wenxue fazhanshi* (*Developmental history of Chinese literature*) published by Liu Dajie (Fudan University) in 1958, argued:

Although Honglou meng is a novel with autobiographical character, it absolutely does not record every single detail of the author’s family background and history. Cao Xueqin took his family background and life experience as a foundation, and added every kind of protagonist and fact he had witnessed in society, underwent careful inspection and experience, and finally through editing and creation composed this masterpiece. In the creative process of Honglou meng, the Cao family was the foundation, but after the creation was finished, the Jia family became the model of an aristocratic family during the feudal period, subsuming the specific characteristics, the substance and fate of countless aristocratic families. This forms the profundity of the foundation of Honglou meng and the breadth of its representativeness, as well as the greatness of its literary value. We can absolutely not view Honglou meng as we do Rousseau’s Confessions, we can absolutely not view Honglou meng as Cao Xueqin’s veritable autobiography. (Liu 1957/58, 344)

But despite these adaptations on the part of the older academics, the late 1950s experienced a series of rifts that brought to light the growing antagonisms between the generation of academics whose thought had to be “reformed” in order to function within the

context of P.R.C. cultural policy, and the younger generation of students who had experienced the governmental transition as children and young adults and whose educational background was entirely shaped by P.R.C. institutions.

Following the silencing of many of the older academics during the Anti-Rightist-Campaign, the year 1958 marked the start of the infamous Great Leap Forward which equally occasioned a “great leap” in academia and a decisive shift in literary historiography as it had been hitherto practiced. Leading the campaign in the field of the humanities was the slogan of “emphasis on the past and belittling the present” (*hougu bojin*), which was considered a trend in intellectual circles that was to be decidedly opposed: scholars, as one article published in early 1958 argued, were still too busy “worshipping knowledge” or “famous experts of the past”, not caring “what kind of knowledge this was” and thus not “drawing a clear line of separation from the rightist faction”. As a result, they “buried their heads in old books, weren’t interested in politics and became usable both by the CCP and the GMD”, rather than serving the workers, peasants and soldiers as was their actual duty in the process of Communist nation-building (Guo Shengwu 1958, 8).¹⁹ The ideal intellectual, by contrast, was supposed to be “both red and expert” (*you hong you zhuan*), an ideal which not only envisioned peasants and engineers who wrote revolutionary poetry after work, but was equally aimed at the educators at universities whose goal it was to raise the next generation of scholars to a new and integrated awareness.

Thus, the summer of 1958 saw the first coordinated attempt by the generation of P.R.C. students to supersede their teachers and assert their authority by demonstrating “redness” in a field formerly reserved for the “expertise” of the older generation: at the start of the Great Leap, the first collective student-authored literary histories appeared on the scene. The vanguard of these efforts came from Peking University, where a two-volume *Zhongguo wenxueshi* (*History of Chinese Literature*) totaling 1300 pages authored by third-year students of literature at the Chinese department was published in September, 1958 – after a mere 24 days of incessant writing time over the summer holidays (Peking University 1958, 699). It was soon followed by a similar publication by students at Shanghai’s Fudan University and by other institutions all across the country (Fudan University 1958/59).

In these publications, the tone of voice had become decidedly more militant as well as defiant towards the teachers they sought to topple, while at the same time making no mistake as to who had enabled their move towards academic “independence”:

When the proposal to write a literary history was made, not only did the bourgeois scholars shake their heads, but even among us there were several people raising their

19 One has to keep in mind that the idea of artists and intellectuals serving the “masses of workers, peasants and soldiers” had been especially emphasized during the Yan’an period, when, as Gao Jiye analyzes it, the slogan was understood in the context of aligning different kinds of people in the “defence of the motherland.” Therefore, Gao states, the idea of “serving” these people was not only an abstract guideline for literary creation, but always also causally linked to “greater issues such as the life or death of the nation, the prosperity and strength of the country, and the stability of state power.” Cf. (Gao 2001, 105).

doubts. Yes, sure, according to the old “imperial almanac” only professors and experts could write scholarly works, but what about us youngsters – third-year university students?

The Party determinedly supported our bold proposal, the Party gave us strength and faith. Not so long ago, the Party-led movements to criticize bourgeois academic thought helped us, and after the Party had guided our initial inspection tour through the labyrinth of bourgeois science, the formerly blindly adored idols of bourgeois science were duly destroyed. As a result, the students remaining at the school [i.e., during the holidays] immediately took action under the guidance of the Party branch. [my insertion] (Peking University 1958, II, 698)

Also, the focus on literary historiography as a contribution to the common cause of building a socialist nation was more emphasized than ever before. Thus, the Peking University publication began its prefatory statement with the following passage:

On China's vast, majestic and fertile soil, six hundred million hardworking, brave, and wise people are presently and by use of their overwhelming powers engaging in building socialism on a glorious scale. To build socialism is our common great ideal; to contribute all our forces to socialism is our greatest happiness and pride. Like the rising sun in early spring which paints everything in a bright and dazzling hue, socialism endows all battlefronts that serve it with incomparable glory, while at the same time defining their direction and tasks. At this great turning point in history, every battlefront must examine whether it has already begun without any regret to shoulder the responsibilities it should. The research of literary history, which is a constituent part of the cultural battlefront, is of course no exception. (Ibid., I, 1)

With regard to their content, the student-authored publications amalgamated previous research with campaign articles, in that they introduced the direct criticisms of individual scholarship back into the main text. Both the Peking and the Fudan University publications, for example, contained passages in their chapter on *Honglou meng* that openly criticized Hu Shi and Yu Pingbo and explicitly stated for the first time within a textbook that the Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign of 1954/55 had been the start of the removal of “bourgeois idealism” in P.R.C. academia (Ibid., II, 390) (Fudan University 1958/59, III, 299).

Already in 1959, however, the initial severing of ties between the generations that was extreme in the initial phase of the Great Leap was somehow revised. Thus, while the first edition of the Peking University Literary History had still criticized as “bourgeois” almost all of the department's professors – Lin Geng, You Guo'en, Wu Zuxiang, etc. – a revised and expanded, four-volume edition of that book appeared in mid-1959 which was the result of a renewed cooperation between students and those exact same teachers at Peking University (Peking University 1959). While the new preface composed by the students attributed their cooperation with the older generation to a lack of experience and knowledge on their part, it would be wrong to assume that this return of relations signified the return of a second, academic “Hundred Flowers” after the initial failure of the “Great



1955 collection 红楼梦问题讨论集. Photo: M.-T. Strauss.

Leap". In fact, the process of rewriting which in the case of the Peking University book had already begun in March, 1959, was carefully supervised by members and organs of the CCP, as the preface relates, granting a rare insight into the hierarchies at work in late-1950s academic publication practices:

The Party and the state created beneficial working conditions for us, and gave us much concrete support. The CCPCC propaganda department, the Party group of the Chinese Writers' Union, and the Literature Institute at the Chinese Academy of Sciences all showed their loving concern throughout our entire working process, organizing many meetings for us where we sought their opinions on the revision; Guo Moruo, Zhou Yang, Shao Quanlin, He Qifang and other responsible comrades all provided us with many valuable guiding opinions; the university Party committee and administration also arranged the time that we needed for scientific research. Our work was developed all the way under the direct supervision of the general [Chinese] department Party branch. The broad readership also cared for and supported our work, many readers wrote us letters glowing with enthusiasm. Among them were young workers, old teachers, and cadres from governmental organs or people's organizations; [my insertion] (Peking University 1959, I, 3)

Of course, the process of rewriting and republishing the first student-authored literary history of the country coincided with the perhaps most sensitive and devastating moment of the early P.R.C.: the gradual realization that the Great Leap Forward had largely failed in the first half of 1959 and the breaking down of the people's communes system led to Peng Dehuai's open criticism of Mao's economic policies at the Lushan conference in the summer of that year. By the end of 1959, Mao was forced to resign as the Chairman of the P.R.C., and though he retained his post as Chairman of the CCP, he was basically ousted from the daily management of both the Party and the state and remained on the sidelines until 1965. Until then, the idea of the "permanent revolution" receded somewhat into the background – also in academic contexts – and the Party bureaucrats once again gained the upper hand in the running of the P.R.C. (Karl 2010, 101-109).

The most immediate result of these developments in the academic field was that the students were called back to order, and those professors who had not been removed from their office during the Anti-Rightist-Campaigns were let back into the picture. Thus, by late 1959 and early 1960, what had begun as a movement exclusive of the teaching faction had turned into a more collaborative and inclusive effort, and the authors of the new collective histories would be credited as, for example, "written and compiled by a part of the students and teachers at XX University's Chinese department".

LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY, 1949-1959 – SOME (IN)CONCLUSIVE THOUGHTS

Literary historiography in first decade of the P.R.C. was characterized by a series of shifts and transformative processes that at first appeared to somewhat publicly open the field for exegetic efforts that went beyond mere philological studies of texts. In this, the results of early 1950s scholarship to some extent stood in the tradition of the May Fourth-inspired research of what had previously not been considered "proper literature", i.e., vernacular poetry, prose and drama. That Jiang Zuyi, the author of the first literary history compiled in the P.R.C., could focus his attention on the popular origins of complex literary genres, for example, was certainly a gesture of defiance against the crust of the philological tradition. At the same time, he (perhaps unwittingly and for lack of alternative models) followed in the tradition of such scholars as Hu Shi, who also had tried to make the literary heritage more accessible to people from lower social and educational strata by concentrating his efforts on what was linguistically understandable.

As time progressed and the atmosphere of the early P.R.C. became increasingly dominated by campaign efforts to "reform the thought" of the intelligentsia, to topple former intellectual authorities (i.e., in the Anti-Hu Shi-Campaign), and to silence a large part of the generation educated under these authorities (i.e., Yu Pingbo and other scholars of his age group, especially during the Anti-Rightist-Campaign), the focus of literary historiography was again somewhat narrowed down to largely conform to the standards set by mainstream cultural policy with little room left for novel or original research. In a second, even more radical step, the first generation of P.R.C.-educated students took charge at the start of the Great Leap Forward and attempted to prove that with enough "red" effort,



1958 students' literary history published by the Beida students. Photo: M.-T. Strauss.

the “bourgeois expertise” of an outdated generation could be rendered obsolete. It was, however, an attempt without long-term consequences, as the generational clash would only become definitive nearly a decade later, at the start of the Cultural Revolution.

What did remain from these attempts was a certain formal standard: by the late fifties, when former student-authored textbooks were re-edited with the help of the re-instated professors of classical literature, the form of collective textbook authorship became the standard model that largely remained intact until the Cultural Revolution (and again after that). Some of the literary histories collectively authored in the early 1960s, such as the one written under the supervision of prominent scholar You Guo'en (at Peking University) in 1962/63, are even still used as textbooks in university courses of the P.R.C. today (albeit in revised and expanded versions) (You 2002-2004).

As it happens, so far the role and impact of classical literary history on P.R.C. intellectual history has not been a main priority among modern researchers. Rather, when talking about literary efforts in the P.R.C., attention is generally paid to active authors and writers formed by Yan'an traditions or Soviet socialist realism. What remains largely in the dark, however, is the cultural legacy that forms the literary consciousness of these active authors, the standards of the critics and scholars who judge their works, and, last but not least, the tastes and preferences of the readers for whom the literary production is mainly

targeted. In the 1950s, this cultural legacy – what to discard, what to preserve, how to interpret and how to present it – was primarily negotiated in the field of literary history. Accordingly, Chinese literary historians of the early P.R.C. were not per se opposed to tradition – quite on the contrary, they sought to carve out for themselves a linear narrative that was firmly rooted in myths and oral traditions of the pre-Qin and led up through centuries and constantly evolving genres to the method of socialist realism and, later, the “combination of active realism and active romanticism” that defined their attempts at constructing a new national culture. In the 21st century, these negotiations continue, producing constant changes and revisions as far as the literary canon is concerned. Though the tone of voice and the ideological outlook may have changed, they build on and still refer to the debates that were discussed in the present paper.

RDEČA DISCIPLINA – TRANSFORMACIJA LITERARNE HISTORIOGRAFIJE
V ZAČETNEM OBDOBJU LJUDSKE REPUBLIKE KITAJSKJE

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POVZETEK

V prvem desetletju so v Ljudski republiki Kitajski izpeljali niz radikalnih preobrazb na vseh ravneh visokega šolstva, pri čemer je reforma univerz in učnih programov sledila sovjetskemu modelu. Sočasno so si javne kampanje, ki naj bi »reformirale mišljenje« cele generacije starejših univerzitetnih izobražencev in intelektualcev, prizadevale prilagoditi »zastarele« načine mišljenja novim standardom v politiki in izobraževanju. Članek predstavi študijo primera, ki pokaže, kako so se univerzitetne reforme in javne kampanje spojile z znanstveno produkcijo iz obdobja pred 1949 in skupaj ponovno definirale vsebino in obliko humanistike in družboslovja v zgodnjem obdobju LRK. To so izpeljale tako, da so se osredotočile na eno od osrednjih in bolj občutljivih tem kitajskega akademskega sveta: na klasično kitajsko literaturo.

Petdeseta leta so se začela z več optimističnimi pristopi k novi metodi »dialektičnega in historičnega materializma« pri preučevanju literarne tradicije. Kampanja o pravilni interpretaciji enega najbolj priljubljenih romanov kitajske književnosti, *Sanj v rdeči sobi*, pa je nato opravila z vso zapuščino preučevanja te teme pred letom 1949. Članek zastopa stališče, da je bila kampanja za ponovno interpretacijo romana *Sanje v rdeči sobi* prva obsežna javna demonstracija prekinitve intelektualnih vezi s preteklostjo in je hkrati predstavljala pomemben korak v okviru splošne politične agende standardizacije učbenikov in poenotenja akademskih stališč o klasični kitajski literaturi. V poznih petdesetih letih je tako nova, komunistično izobražena generacija literarnih zgodovinarjev prvič poskusila pregaziti avtoriteto starejše generacije in četudi pri tem poskusu niso bili povsem uspešni, je dogajanje že napovedovalo radikalnejši upor mladine proti uveljavljenim intelektualcem v času kulturne revolucije.

Članek sledi nekaterim dogodkom, tematikam in protagonistom, ki so bili ključni za proces revizije literarne zgodovine v prvem desetletju Ljudske republike Kitajske. S tem, da pobliže predstavi literarno zgodovinopisje v kontekstu prestrukturiranja univerze, kampanj in reforme mišljenja, želi pojasniti, kako so akademski diskurz oblikovali številni, tako notranji kot zunanji vplivi, in kako je ta proces postal del večjega maoističnega projekta definiranja nove kitajske nacionalne kulture.

Ključne besede: Ljudska republika Kitajska, post-1949, klasični roman, *Sanje v rdeči sobi*, izobraževanje

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