

INTRODUCTION

National Character, Exemplarity, and World Literature

For all that has ever been written on the subject of China's early 20th century complex embrace of the modern discourse of national character, the question of how and why the very definition of "truly creative art" in the May Fourth era would have so much invested in that discourse remains, as yet, unanswered.¹ It hardly helps matters that the very concept of national character assaults our contemporary critical sensibility as a particularly troubling relic of 19th century European colonial ideology, having enabled virulent assertions of the colonizer's moral superiority and, in the same stroke, relegating the colonized to the condition of moral abjection. In the case of modern China, we are further compromised by the clear recognition that one of its most broadly revered intellectual figures, Lu Xun 鲁迅, took to his grave a faith that a critical reflection on and transformation of China's own *guominxing* 国民性 was as vital to a brighter Chinese future as a proletarian revolution.² The well-known history of Arthur K. Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* and its circulation in China from the late-19th century on seems as well an especially inhospitable terrain upon which to determine precisely what "truly creative art" was meant to be and what May Fourth era writers and critics meant by so reverential an epithet.³ Even before the publication of Lu Xun's "True Story of Ah

¹ Mao Dun 茅盾, "Da Yun Ming xian sheng 答允明先生," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (小说月报) 13, no. 13 (Oct. 13, 1922): 3.

² Lydia Liu quotes Lu Xun: "I still have hopes that someone will eventually start translating Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, because this book offers insights that would lead us to analyze, question, improve, and transform ourselves. Rather than clamoring for recognition and praise from others, we must struggle with ourselves and find out what it means to be Chinese." *Lu Xu Quanjì* 鲁迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1991) 6: 623. Quoted in Lydia Liu. *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 53.

³ For a comprehensive discussion of the Chinese discourse of national character, especially as regards the Chinese and international reception of Lu Xun's "True Story of Ah Q," see Paul B. Foster's *Ah Q Archeology: Lu Xun, Ah Q, Ah Q Progeny and National Charter Discourse in Twentieth-century China* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

Q” (阿Q 正传), Mao Dun had also claimed modern Chinese literature’s successful encounter with the discourse of national character was to be the standard of true art according to which Chinese literature might be granted entry to “world literature.”⁴

What I would like to call attention to here is not the thematic import of national character for modern Chinese literature. Rather, what interests me is the problem of what I will term the rhetoric of exemplarity which haunts as much the discourse of national character as it does practically the whole of modern Chinese aesthetics itself. In his *Phantom Formations*, Marc Redfield speaks of the continuing need

to explain the provenance, power, and instability of the aesthetic terminology—the language of type and stereotype, model and imitation, beauty and ugliness, prefiguration and exemplarity—that saturates the various discourses with which the post-Enlightenment Western cultures have construed themselves as historical narratives, which is to say as aesthetic narratives of racial, sexual, and class identities and differences.⁵

What Redfield claims here of modern “Western” cultures, it will be the task of this book to show obtains consistently throughout 20th century China. As I will show in the pages that follow, Mao Dun and Lu Xun’s interest in national character is fully inscribed within this logic of exemplarity. Precisely because this is the case, it is hardly surprising that Lu Xun would produce China’s first literary type (*wenxue dianxing* 文学典型). Even more germane to the argument of this book, which seeks to understand the formation of the modern concept of literature, Lu Xun was likewise the first to deploy the term *dianxing* 典型 in what can best be described as its literary critical sense.

Mao Dun’s statement above also affirms prospectively the terms of a canon-in-emergence of modern Chinese literature, comprised of works whose canonical status determines their potential for inclusion in the larger canon of world literature. The exemplary nature of a modern Chinese literature of national character serves as the principle that decides participation in such a cosmopolitan literary order. Nicholas Brown in his *Utopian Generations* notes two crucial references to the concept of world literature, each of which speaks directly to the links between our modern concept of literature and an emerging global

⁴ Mao Dun, *Mao Dun Wenyi zalunji, shangji* 茅盾文艺杂论集, 上集 (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1981), 21.

⁵ Marc Redfield, *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), x.

modernity impelled by the movement of capital.⁶ The first of these references comes from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who is credited with having coined the concept *Weltliteratur*; and the second from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, in which, Brown notes, literature puts in a “surprise appearance.” In his conversations with Johann Peter Eckerman in 1827, Goethe urges that “National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.”⁷ Marx and Engels situate Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* in relation to capital:

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, and establish connections everywhere.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of the Reactionists, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. . . . And as in material, so in intellectual production. . . . [F]rom the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.⁸

Brown underscores just how fully Goethe’s prediction of a world literature has been realized for us in the form of contemporary multiculturalism, while at the same time insisting that “it is just as clear that the Marxian narrative, where particular cultural forms colonize territory along with economic ones, represents the truth of Goethe’s metaphor.”⁹

Exactly forty years separates Mao Dun’s initial articulation of the principles that would guide the formation of the modern Chinese literary canon from the publication of C. T. Hsia’s retrospective establishment of his own canon. Hsia’s *History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (hereafter

⁶ Nicholas Brown, *Utopian Generations: The Political Horizon of Twentieth Century Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 5–6.

⁷ Quoted in David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1.

⁸ Quoted in Brown, *Utopian Generations*, 6. I would note as well Brown’s guiding conviction that the concept of totality be taken seriously in examining the relationship between the global movement of capital and the formation of modern literature. “What the concept of totality gives us is, paradoxically, access to the radical incompleteness of what appears spontaneously as solid and whole. Complete, self-evident things (say a commodity, a democracy, a novel) are in fact incomplete and always derive their being from something else (the production cycle, the world economy, the concept and institution of literature). . . . [T]he refusal to take account of these larger processes gives the phenomenon its innocence and in do so utterly deforms it” (10–11).

⁹ Brown, *Utopian Generations*, 6.

History) would be based just as surely on a precise sense of what true art could be. For both Mao Dun and then later Hsia, this canon derives its significance from the aspirations toward the universality *Weltliteratur* affirms. Of course, Mao Dun and C. T. Hsia are not only at opposite ends of this four-decade temporal spectrum, since the political gulf that separates the leftist Chinese writer and critic from the anti-communist and Yale-educated New Critic is familiar to every student of modern Chinese literature. As surely as Mao Dun's leftist literary activism would include the vocations of novelist and literary critic alongside those of propagandist, political activist and cultural minister, Hsia's New Critical convictions meant that he would necessarily abhor any instrumentalist literary practice as much as he would disdain all those other activities into which Mao Dun's conception of art and the role of the artist would lead him.

And yet the politics of the problem has a way of obscuring other equally important differences between the two. Those differences, which are the function of radically distinct literary critical genealogies, are one of the main subjects of this book. The principles of Mao Dun's proto-canon are so far removed from those that govern C. T. Hsia's own (now canonical) canon that they are barely registered in the latter's work. The bulk of my attention in this book will thus be devoted to piecing together the complex critical and literary trajectory of which Mao Dun himself is a part, while at the same time examining some of the most decisive reasons Hsia's work remains so distant from the former.

I have noted that what both Mao Dun and C. T. Hsia share is the conviction that the modern Chinese writer's task is the creation of true art. We could remain content to let this otherwise unremarkable fact be explained by virtue of either a different set of literary critical standards of excellence or varying degrees of cultivated aesthetic sensibility.¹⁰

¹⁰ We can hardly remain oblivious to the inevitable bias toward Hsia as the one who honed his critical tastes first in English literature and under the tutelage of one of New Criticism's most important institutional figures, Cleanth Brooks at the elite, first-world institution, Yale University. Despite the obvious political divisions that have governed this history of the institution of modern Chinese literature, and the fact that the Cold War produced two almost entirely separate fields of modern Chinese literary studies, if we conceive of the field as a whole, beginning not with C. T. Hsia but with figures such as Mao Dun, then we must address the problem of what Etienne Balibar terms intellectual difference (Etienne Balibar, "Man and Citizen: Who's Who?" *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 2, no. 2 [1994]: 94–114). By this, I mean only that the theoretical and political nature of New Criticism aside, Hsia's access to a first-world university should be seen as highly relevant to the geopolitical and institutional reception of his

As will become apparent below, my interest lies less in pitting one set of critical claims against the other, than with assessing each in terms of what they tell us about what I will refer to as the assimilation and formation of the modern concept of literature in 20th century China.

But it is likewise the case that Mao Dun's determination of a modern literature of national character as the sole road to the true art and the promise of entry into the ranks of a properly world literature would later find its negative corollary in C. T. Hsia's notion of the Chinese writer's central failing, namely, her/his "obsession with China."¹¹ My interest lies in providing a more comprehensive account of what Mao Dun's claim signifies both in terms of his immediate cultural milieu of the May Fourth period and what it explains of China's engagement with modern literature in the 20th century. Lu Xun, I argue in the first chapter, is a vital point of departure for my analysis in this regard, not only because his novella "The True Story of Ah Q" takes seriously the problem of national character as a problem of modern Chinese literature. On this count, few critics have made a more important contribution to our understanding of Lu Xun's engagement with Arthur K. Smith's book than Lydia Liu. Her deft analysis of the problem should have permanently dispelled any remnant conviction that the "True Story of Ah Q" emerged as the product of Lu Xun's wholly uncritical encounter with the American missionary's vision of China and "the" Chinese. I will have occasion to examine Liu's superb reading of Lu Xun, Smith and *Ah Q* in chapter two. But the 2003 republication of *Chinese Characteristics*, as well as Liu's own introduction to that edition also testifies to what will likewise remain a central premise of all that follows, namely that the actual import of the discourse Smith's book

work. This applies as much to the republication of his *History* in 1999 and its translation and dissemination in mainland China in the 1980s as it would to both Balibar's analysis and the current work. For a probing analysis of Liu Xiaobo and hierarchies of intellectual difference both within China and in China's relation to the West, see Jon Solomon, "The Sovereign Police and Knowledgeable Bodies: Liu Xiaobo's Exilic Critique of Politics and Knowledge," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 10, no. 2 (2002): 399–429.

¹¹ By the same token, David Wang is correct to note that Frederic Jameson's concept of national allegory corresponds to some degree with Hsia's notion of a "China-obsession." But if anything is uncanny about such a relationship, it is simply that Jameson was able to intuit with remarkable precision precisely what Mao Dun claims without Hsia's obvious advantage of knowledge about the history of modern Chinese literature. See Wang's introduction to C. T. Hsia, *History of Modern Chinese Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), vii–xxxvi, xxxiii.

figures in so exemplary a manner for Lu Xun and so many that followed him continues to remain cloaked in obscurity. Such obscurity has rendered it all the more difficult for us to properly conceive how what was understood as the modern fate of true art in China could have first found itself so tightly bound to the stakes of national character discourse.

That this peculiar conjugation of national character and art that preoccupied the critical work of figures such as Mao Dun seems to so thoroughly misconstrue all we take art to be is perhaps symptomatic of a larger blind spot we (post-)post-moderns share about how the modern conception of literature emerged in China. Indeed, the link between true literature and a *guominxing* seems to us now almost as far-fetched as Xu Shoushang's 许寿裳 claim in 1945 that all of Lu Xun's "six million words" were addressed solely to the problem of China's national character.¹² My purpose here will be less to reaffirm this connection between literature and national character than to carefully examine the discursive conditions that enabled such claims, especially since there is ample evidence that those conditions remain very much our own as scholars of literature.¹³ Further, I will argue that both claims capture something fundamentally true about both modern literature and Lu Xun's specific literary and critical practice. But if this is the case, it is also because much of the literature and criticism from May Fourth on that would broadly come under the heading of realism (and then socialist realism) was itself the product of a process of making ever more explicit what I will show was implicit, though powerfully so, in the work of Lu Xun. What inhabits his "True Story of Ah Q" as a possibility regarding the modern concept of literature will take several decades before it is rendered fully explicit.

¹² Quoted in Paul Foster, *Ah Q Archeology*, 92. Foster quite understandably finds such a view an exaggeration. He is certainly correct as well that Xu was participating in a "discourse of legitimization of Lu Xun as a national hero and intellectual (175)."

¹³ Rey Chow is no doubt largely correct that "apart from the convention of Hegelian intellectual history, New Criticism is arguably still the predominant mode of analysis in modern Chinese literary studies today." While I am broadly in agreement with this claim, the conditions I refer to are those that govern the formation of the institution of modern literary studies, as such. I discuss this in more detail below. Rey Chow, "Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem," *Modern Chinese Literary and Cultural Studies in the Age of Theory: Reimagining a Field*, ed. Rey Chow (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 24.

Figuring a Literary Humanity in (and through) Theory

It is vital as well to make clear at the outset that a guiding interest in the notion of “true art” in modern Chinese criticism must be carefully distinguished from an exercise in personal literary taste. The task I set for myself most certainly does not include what would likely be a futile effort to install (or restore) the modern canon of socialist realist classics to their presumably rightful seat of literary honor alongside *Water Margin*, *Journey to the West*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. After all, the reason why no literary work’s stature will ever be secure has less to do with the impossible vagaries of literary tastes and canonical fashions centuries hence, though that is obvious enough. Rather, it has far more to do with the fact that the very (modern) concept of literature which serves to organize those critical tastes is no less immune to the corrosive action of historicity. A comparison between the modern figure of “man” as genealogically isolated by Michel Foucault in the *Order of Things* and our modern conception of literature is by no means arbitrary, for as we shall see in what follows, the one is inconceivable without the other.¹⁴

In much of what follows I will seek to underscore the fact that not only is it generally (indeed, globally) the case that there is an intimate and precise connection between the modern determination of literature and the modern figure of the human, but also that specifically in the case of modern China this connection is abundantly manifest in the gradual emergence of socialist realist literary and aesthetic theory. That it is especially apparent in this particular “period” of modern Chinese literature may help us account for why this connection is so little remarked. After all, socialist realist literature—to say nothing of the theoretical work composed by such figures as Cai Yi 蔡仪—an analysis of whose work on aesthetics I examine in later chapters—has received the least critical attention of probably all phases of modern Chinese literature.¹⁵ It is likewise the form of modern Chinese literature

¹⁴ I refer to Foucault’s well-known remark “man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.” Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 387.

¹⁵ The “period” I am referring to is the one in which the majority of the “Red Classics” were written, namely what Kirk Denton’s excellent resource on modern Chinese literature and culture labels “1950s–1960s,” or more precisely, 1948 to 1965. As Denton’s invaluable bibliography affirms, this particular period has received the least critical attention of all the periods in modern Chinese literature. *MCLC Resource*

that weathered the longest critical embargo due perhaps most of all to the Cold War and its impact upon the formation of modern Chinese literary studies in North America.

My purpose is not, however, to extend the containment of socialist realism as a distinct Chinese literary historical period into the present in a merely more contemporary critical idiom. Quite the contrary, as will become clear in much of what follows, if Chinese socialist realism realizes a form of literary modernity in an especially consequent and trenchant manner, its predominant features are practically everywhere in evidence throughout the course of modern (and contemporary) Chinese literature, if in less compulsively self-reflexive forms. Moreover, socialist realist literature and theory offer in exemplary fashion the very image of our own predicament as scholars of Asian literatures, especially when we are beset with anxieties about the limits of (Western) theory when it comes to a critical analysis of modern (Asian) literary texts. If I offer no prescriptions—and just as surely no proscriptions—on the role of “theory” in the study of Chinese literature it is simply because, as I will show, what we call contemporary theory—from all varieties of “poststructuralism,” “psychoanalytic feminist criticism,” and of course, all manner of “(post-)Marxist criticism” was present, albeit in implicit form, in modern Chinese criticism and theory from its very beginnings.

The current work is guided in part by the conviction that there is nothing remarkably “foreign,” “Western,” and hence “extraneous” to contemporary literary theory when it comes to 20th century Chinese literature and criticism. Thus, much of what constitutes the theoretical armature of socialist realism makes it almost impossible to delimit the phenomenon historically to the post-liberation period and requires us to look much further afield in both historical time and geographical space if we are to begin mapping its contours properly.

Given modern China’s well-known (and, no doubt for many, still notorious) embrace of a decidedly German philosophical idiom (Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche) since as early as Wang Guowei, one could quite plausibly argue that nothing of what would ultimately come to comprise poststructuralist thought—and by extension North American versions of literary theory derived from it—would have been utterly unfamiliar within much of

Center, (Modern Chinese Literature and Culture Resource Center). <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/studbib.htm#F1>.

the 20th century Chinese intellectual milieu. When, for example, in chapter two I make critical use of Gilles Deleuze's *Nietzsche and Philosophy* in my reading of "The True Story of Ah Q," it is in part because not only would we be justified in asserting that Lu Xun would have found Deleuze's remarkable study of Nietzsche particularly hospitable to his own critical interests and values, but also Lu Xun would have had little difficulty grasping much of what was at stake in Deleuze's reading of Nietzsche. It is significant that to precisely the degree that the same could well be said of Mao Dun as well, in 1921, it is just as likely that Hsia would have found nothing of this sort of critical affinity in Deleuze. And this most of all because Deleuze affirms categorically what Hsia's critical approach could never have countenanced.¹⁶

Admittedly, there is no way to prove that Deleuze's book would have been received in this way by Lu Xun, Mao Dun, or Hsia. But at least pondering such a probability allows us to consider what might be gained by posing certain modern and contemporary theoretical texts in a relation to the Chinese texts I examine and do so in a manner that works to explore their deeper affinities. As much as possible, I would like to show that in the cases I examine below the anxieties that are provoked by what is deemed the instrumental imposition of "contemporary Western theory" on the modern Chinese literary text are the inevitable product of a simple failure to grasp just how fully two such texts—both the "Western" one and the "Chinese" one—are animated by the very same modern problematics. Indeed, by working toward a better understanding of what is truly at stake in his work, I ask whether this applies just as much to the case of the New Criticism of C. T. Hsia.

I will take up this problem in chapter four in which I show that, remarkably, New Criticism shares a critical ethos with the work of no less a party Marxist theorist than Cai Yi. But the intention to conceive of the relations between the different texts as grounded first and foremost in the discourses of modernity and hence as a relation between simply

¹⁶ "Firstly, art is the opposite of a 'disinterested' operation." As we will see below, this single feature of what Gilles Deleuze recovers from Nietzsche strikes at the (Kantian) heart of the New Critical canon. But that is only one feature of what Deleuze affirms and what we have good reason to imagine Lu Xun in his own encounter with Nietzsche realized as well. Hsia would have been just as little inclined to admit the following series of equations into his critical apparatus. In Nietzsche, "we the artists" = "we the seekers of truth" = "we the inventors of new possibilities of life" (Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1983], 103).

modern texts means also that *some* contemporary theoretical works are far better suited to sustaining such a dialogue with the particular texts which in the case of the present work, happen to be written by Chinese writers or theorists.¹⁷ Despite the preoccupation with China and the Chinese that so clearly animates the latter texts, what is of decisive importance is less the cultural difference and far more the shared temporal location of the more recent critical work and the Chinese texts. Privileging first the sheer modernity of *all* of these texts as an ensemble does not mean bracketing as irrelevant the central concern for China in the Chinese ones, since even such widely divergent political and critical points of view as Mao Dun's and C. T. Hsia's agree that much of modern Chinese literature takes China as its predominant thematic focus. However, while for C. T. Hsia this represents modern Chinese literature's most important failing, my interest lies in contributing to a deeper understanding of what makes the China-preoccupation of China's writers exemplary of the vocation of modern literature. In doing so, we may also find our way clear to explaining not simply what is missing in Hsia's account, but more productively what we might term the ideological unsaid of his critical procedure by showing that its faith in what I will term his onto-theological (a term I will shortly explain) conception of literary art situates his *History* in relation to modern Chinese Marxist aesthetics in important ways.

I have claimed above that what generally comprises "Western theory" forms itself out of a critical tradition of which China was an extremely active consumer and producer. It is, as Marx reminds us above, the "cosmopolitan character" of that production that we must keep well in mind. By the very same token, save for a few exceptions, it was for both political and institutional reasons that post-war North American East Asian Area Studies in general and modern Chinese literature in

¹⁷ Of course, the discourses of modernity are multiple and lack both uniformity of content and a unified telos. I pluralize Jürgen Habermas's term and the title of his book *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Thomas Lamarre cautions against too facile an opposition between a single modernity and multiple modernities. "[I]t may no longer be enough to say that 'modernity is not one *but* multiple' but rather 'modernity is one *and* multiple.' But then this may be to think the world beyond modernity, and that transformative rather than the new." See Lamarre's introduction to *Impacts of Modernities*, ed. Lamarre and Kang Nae-hui (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press; London: Eurospan, 2004), 34.

particular was at the furthest critical remove from the multiple, complex claims of poststructuralist thought.¹⁸

That modern continental philosophy began to be translated and discussed in the late 19th century in China is now very well documented. That process has continued literally unabated since then. Yet few discussions of the role of “theory” in China studies ever pause to consider the very profound and lasting impact the Cold War absence of continental thought in the North American academy after the Second World War had not only upon North American sinologists, but also perhaps more importantly, on their relation to what they took to be their object of study. In short, modern philosophical thought remained very much part of the textual warp and woof of the broader modern Chinese intellectual milieu in a way that especially a postwar American sinologist was for institutional reasons least well equipped to recognize. There is thus no small irony in the fact that one place in the North American academy where several key elements of continental philosophy remained was in fact New Criticism itself, though in a form cloaked most of all for readers of Hsia’s *History*.¹⁹ In other words, New Criticism itself participates fully in what Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have carefully analyzed under the rubric of what they term the “romantico-modern concept of literature,” through its conscious and unconscious appropriation of philosophical categories taken, in this case, from Kant and Hegel.²⁰

¹⁸ John McCumber’s 2001 book *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), details what he describes as the role of McCarthyism in the effective banishment of continental philosophy from American universities in the postwar period. While some have questioned the causal relation McCumber asserts between McCarthyism and the rise of analytical philosophy, none dispute the fact that the late forties in the United States signaled an embargo on modern (European) philosophy in the American academy. For a critical review of McCumber’s book, see Richard Hudelson and Robert Evans, “McCarthyism and Philosophy in the United States,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 33 (2003): 242–260, 242.

¹⁹ This is also to say that I strongly suspect that Hsia was well aware of the degree to which leading figures in New Criticism owed much to Kant and Hegel. If he felt no scholarly compunction to address this connection, it was largely because the ontological reading of the Chinese writer’s (absent) relation to “Original Sin” was quite enough metaphysics. I examine this problem in detail below. Hsia Chih-ting, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, intro. by David D. W. Wang (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

²⁰ I take this subject up in chapter three. For the time being we can make an initial foray into the general problem of modern literature’s relationship to philosophy via Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester’s introduction to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Luc-Nancy’s important study of German romanticism, *The Literary Absolute*: “Thus

One of the guiding aspirations of this book is to show that the failure to provide an adequate critical account of Chinese socialist realism's emergence during the last half century is very much a consequence of the vast gulf that separates the intellectual orientations of China and North America, most especially in the post-war period. But I would argue as well, the anxieties regarding the role of "theory" in the study of modern Chinese literature follow the logic of Sigmund Freud's uncanny as the return of the repressed. This has less to do with a simple North American Cold War ideological hostility toward Marxism. Rather, what I am attempting to describe is the institutionally enforced oblivion in North America of nearly all the theoretical resources that had long animated the critical scene in China since the beginning of the century, but with particular intensity after 1949. More importantly, those resources were in no way confined to Marx-Engels and Lenin.²¹ For the most part, the only exception to this was that element of North American China studies that sought to take seriously Marxism and even Maoism, rather than understand both as mere ideological mechanisms for totalitarian domination.²²

one of the notable virtues of *The Literary Absolute* is that it raises and insists on the question of literature as such. As the authors' analyses show, literature as it is most often understood, i.e., the romantic-modern concept of literature, literature as the object of a duly legitimated and institutionalized discipline, is thoroughly determined as a response to a certain philosophical 'crisis'" (Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, "Translator's Introduction: The Presentation of Romantic Literature," in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester [Buffalo: State University of New York Press, 1988], vii–xx, xiv).

²¹ Certainly the works of Marx-Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao remained the texts of primary importance. But as I have argued elsewhere, Chinese academic philosophy as early as 1949 clearly recognized the need to work carefully through Hegel's works on logic in particular, in order to better grasp the nature of the dialectic. See Peter Button, "Negativity and Dialectical Materialism: Zhang Shiyong's Reading of Hegel's Dialectical Logic," *Philosophy East and West*, 57, no. 1 (January 2007): 63–82.

²² This would include such works as Benjamin Schwartz's *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), as well as Maurice Meisner's *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). But it is equally important to add that by the late 1960s Western studies of China became far more hospitable to the claims of Asian Marxist thought. On this count, Nicholas Brown makes what may seem a remarkable claim. "But I would like to suggest that *all theory is postcolonial theory*: it owes its very existence to the struggle against colonial domination and its echo in the political urgency of the first world 1960s" (Brown, *Utopian Generations*, 24). Brown argues that "theory" (Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Bourdieu, Fanon, etc.) emerges as a postwar response to colonialism. While North American philosophy remained almost completely insulated from the theoretical claims of Marxism and post-structuralism, Brown's point helps us to

Aesthetics and the Institution of Modern Chinese Literature

A fundamental aim of this book is to explore the way Chinese socialist realism needs to be understood as the culmination of the decades-long process by means of which the central premises of this concept of literature are rendered more completely explicit. That socialist realism offers the most explicit development of that concept means also that this notion of literature is by no means its own. Very much to the contrary, it is present in the very institutional formation of modern (Chinese) literature as an object of study in both Chinese and Western institutions of higher learning. Marc Redfield has addressed this issue with remarkable clarity.

One may thus claim in the abstract what the historical record confirms; not only is there no literature without criticism, but the history of the idea of literature is the history of its institutionalization. It may also be noted, however, that a contradiction highly productive of discourse labors at the institution's heart. "Literature" is both infinitely populist and irreducibly elitist in its aspirations, and at once avant-gardist and archival in nature. . . . The critical endeavor, however, is as irreducible as it is conflicted, since it embodies the very self-consciousness of the "literary" text. Indeed, criticism has so thoroughly displaced philology in the twentieth-century academy partly because criticism's appeal to the "opacity" and "inexhaustibility" of the literary text results in the full integration of the literary absolute as an institutional rationale.²³

It is vital here at the outset to clarify precisely what is meant by the modern determination of literature, as I have referred to it above. To begin with, as is well known to students of comparative literature, the modern usage of the term literature as designating creative, imaginative works emerges only toward the late-18th century.²⁴ What is crucial for our purposes is the broad consensus that the concept of literature

better understand and appreciate the pivotal role played by organizations such as the Concerned Asian Scholars in challenging the failure of postwar Asian studies to address the theoretical components of anti-colonial struggles around the globe.

²³ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 45.

²⁴ For a good discussion of the scholarship devoted to the emergence of the concept of literature, see Richard G. Terry's *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past, 1660–1781* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Among the works Terry discusses are Alvin B. Kernan, "The Idea of Literature," *New Literary History* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1973): 31–40, Douglas Lane Patey, "The Eighteenth Century Invents the Canon," *Modern Language Studies*, 18, no. 1 (Winter 1988): 17–37, and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

emerges in relation to the modern discourse of aesthetics. The connection between literature and aesthetics has been elaborated by a number of modern scholars, from René Wellek and Raymond Williams to Roland Barthes, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe.²⁵ As Wellek phrases this relation,

[t]o speak sweepingly one can say, summarizing, that in antiquity and in the Renaissance, literature or letters were understood to include all writing of quality with any pretense to permanence. The view that there is an art of literature, which includes both poetry and prose insofar as it is imaginative fiction, and excludes information or even rhetorical persuasion, didactic argumentation or historical narration, emerged only slowly in the eighteenth century. The discussion of taste, the rise of the virtuoso, the invention of the term aesthetic by Baumgarten in 1735—all this and much more led to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), his treatise which gave clear formulas for distinguishing between the beautiful, the good, the true, and the useful. The slow rise in the prestige of the novel, long frowned upon as frivolous, collaborated in establishing a concept of literature parallel to the plastic arts and to music which is still with us today.²⁶

For Raymond Williams, literature becomes marked out as a space of human creative imagination, decisively removed from the instrumentalized sphere of emerging industrial economy and the “socially repressive and intellectually mechanical forms of a new social order.”²⁷ Terry Eagleton's oft-quoted *Ideology of the Aesthetics* analyzes the importance of aesthetics in the formation of 18th-century middle class hegemony.²⁸

²⁵ We should note in passing the remarkably broad range of theoretical diversity represented by these figures, whom we can provisionally gloss under the headings Yale New Criticism, English cultural materialism, structuralist semiotics, and Derridean deconstruction.

²⁶ René Wellek, “What is Literature?,” in *What is Literature?*, ed. Paul Hernadi (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 16–23, 21.

²⁷ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 7.

²⁸ “If the aesthetic comes in the eighteenth century to assume the significance it does, it is because the word is shorthand for a whole project of hegemony, the massive introjection of abstract reason by the life of the senses. What matters is not in the first place art, but this process of refashioning the human subject from the inside, informing its subtlest affections and bodily responses with this law which is not a law. It would thus be as inconceivable for the subject to violate the injunctions of power as it would be to go find a putrid odour enchanting. The understanding knows well enough that we live in conformity with impersonal laws; but in the aesthetic it is as though we can forget about all that—as though it is we who freely fashion the laws to

For our purposes, it is essential to recall just how consistently the discourse of modern aesthetics saturates Chinese critical discourse from the late 19th-century through to the “aesthetics fever” (*meixuere* 美学热) in the 1980s. Even more remarkable, in the particular sphere of the aesthetic, the Cultural Revolution itself offers nothing of the kind of sudden and sustained hiatus in this process that characterized so many other endeavors. Indeed, one clearly senses in the best critical work on Chinese aesthetics the recognition that the Cultural Revolution itself merely amplified and radicalized many of the problems Chinese aesthetic discourse had been grappling with for nearly a century.

As I will show in much of what follows, modern China offers an especially compelling example of the mutual imbrications of literature and aesthetics. More importantly, the relationship between these two discourses is figured in China specifically in terms of the legacy of post-romantic thought. What Wellek and Williams describe generally concerning our modern conception of literature, I will delineate in terms of what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy have termed its “romanticomodern” variant—at once more precise than either Wellek or Williams and more generalized in the sense that it remains with us today. Their analysis of modern literature is formed with reference to early German romanticism. For the two analysts, “romanticism” does not signify simply a period or style of literature. Rather, the conceptual vocabulary that informs the installation of the modern concept of literature in China draws heavily upon 19th-century German philosophy.

For contemporary scholars of comparative literature such as Nicholas Brown, the precise geographical location of the modern concept of literature’s appearance is of far less importance than the historical fact that the concept was globalized in the wake of capitalism. In his *Utopian Generations*, Brown discusses the work of Paulin Hountondji, the Benin philosopher and student of both Althusser and Derrida. Brown writes,

Hountondji’s argument, however, refuses to remain at the level of culture, ultimately referring this movement to the total functioning of the “worldwide capitalist system” in which it is caught up and which determines the circulation of knowledge at every point. This step is absolutely

which we subject ourselves” (Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990], 42–43).

indispensable. For it cannot, then, simply be a matter of altering the circulation of knowledge without first taking account of that other thing that determines this circulation.²⁹

For Brown, Hountondji offers the sort of materialist account of the global circulation of knowledge that renders the very notion of cultural imperialism via especially the so-called “West” deeply problematic. The conflation of capitalism with something called the “West” fails fundamentally to account for the systemic nature of the former.

It is precisely for this reason that I will refer to the modern concept or determination of literature, rather than qualifying it as specifically Western in some essential sense. That May Fourth-era Chinese writers and critics would speak of “Western” literary criticism should not suggest that they were not primarily interested in what they perceived to be the modernity of that body of critical thought. Indeed, it was this generation of (post-)(semi-)colonial Chinese intellectuals that was most acutely sensitive to immediate cultural origins of Western literary criticism and philosophy. In short, it was only of secondary importance that so much of what would become the critical armature of modern Chinese literature often came with the descriptor “Western” attached. Had they needed only to negotiate their relationship to the West as a site of cultural origin, the scale of China’s immediate dilemma would have been vastly reduced. Instead, the pressing exigencies of capital’s globalization fundamentally transformed the conditions for China’s late-19th and early-20th century engagement of all elements of the project of modernity, including the formation of the modern concept of literature.

Marc Redfield helps to align literature and aesthetics in a manner that speaks more directly to the way these two discourses would find fusion in 20th-century China. Redfield writes,

Few narratives are more familiar to scholars of modern literature and culture than the story of the appearance of aesthetics, both as a new philosophical category and as a massively diffuse and influential discourse—one that provided the post-Romantic Western world with the meanings for words such as ‘culture’ and ‘art’ that we now consider primary. The topic of beauty is as old as philosophy itself, but the notion of the aesthetic as a particular sort of experience or judgment or class of objects does not begin to appear regularly until the eighteenth century. At the same time, large-scale historical developments were permitting, as is

²⁹ Brown, *Utopian Generations*, 5.

well known, the emergence of art and literature in their modern sense, and the transformation of the artist into a genius, the representative of universal humanity whose productions transcend the system of commodity exchange which enables them. Aesthetics partakes of the emergence of the universal subject of bourgeois ideology.³⁰

What is essential to consider at this stage is the precise way in which the general features of the modern concept of literature and its connection to aesthetics are formed in Chinese critical discourse. As Redfield suggests, what features prominently in the modern relation between literature and aesthetics, is the fact that the latter is conceived largely in philosophical terms. In other words, the problem is no longer simply one of beauty, but of grasping the specific nature of the experience of beauty and judgments about it in a language that draws heavily from modern philosophy.

It is not my intention to dispute the importance of English literature and literary criticism in this process in China.³¹ Rather, what is essential is simply sensitivity to the way the problem of literary realism in China becomes increasingly formulated in a critical language drawn from philosophy. But what is even more decisive is that the very notion of a specifically “romantico-modern” notion of literature is linked on the one hand to philosophy and criticism/theory on the other. As Brown insists in his own discussion of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s book *The Literary Absolute*,

Literature here emerges as the middle term in a temporal and logical series, sandwiched between two apparently extraliterary discourses as it *takes up* philosophy on the one hand, and *opens up* the space for theory on the other.³²

How and in precisely which ways this occurs in modern China will be the subject of the subsequent chapters. At this point, it is important to consider Brown’s use of italics since they are meant clearly to underscore that as regards the modern conception of literature, the relationship between the disciplines of philosophy, literature, and literary criticism is anything but extrinsic. Here, at least in this precise determination of

³⁰ (Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, viii.)

³¹ See Bonnie McDougall’s excellent inventory of the rich diversity of literary criticism in the May Fourth period, *The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919–1925* (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971).

³² Brown, *Utopian Generations*, 13.

literature, an “organicity” governs the three.³³ In the case of literature and theory, such a bond seems at least plausible, earlier protests against theory’s value in the study of Chinese literature notwithstanding. That such an organic connection would govern the discipline of philosophy’s relation to the other two may seem a good deal less likely, depending on one’s institutional, historical, and national position. For the purposes of what follows, my task is to show that such is genuinely the case with the gradual formation of modern Chinese socialist realism.

That this image of the three disciplines may appear not only quite unfamiliar, but also intuitively suspect should come as little surprise. For if, as I will show below, this tripartite relationship not only characterized the post-liberation period in which socialist realism came very much into its own, but also is apparent as early as the late teens in China, albeit in quite different form, it is by no means the case that the institution of post-war North American Chinese (or for that matter East Asian) literary studies was prepared to recognize it as such. In fact, I believe this has more to do with the way C. T. Hsia’s *History* has been received, largely one must admit, because of the way his New Critical conception of the literary work of art *appeared* to abjure recourse to philosophical discourse of any sort. But as I noted above, I am reasonably certain that C. T. Hsia as a student of Cleanth Brooks was well aware of the way the very same elements of modern philosophy that so heavily informed the Chinese critical milieu were likewise drawn upon as a resource by New Criticism. Nonetheless, I doubt very much Hsia himself was as fully aware of the modern Chinese appropriation of philosophical aesthetics as he was of New Criticism’s.

The manner in which modern Chinese literature itself will have occasion to “take up” philosophy and in doing so “open up” the space of criticism is especially marked in the case of socialist realism. My point here is only that there are institutional and historical reasons why the philosophy-literature-criticism triad has so rarely been addressed in the field of modern Chinese literature in North America.³⁴

³³ Brown, *Utopian Generations*, 14.

³⁴ For many of the same reasons, the critical vitality of the problem of modern aesthetics, as the field out of which this triad emerges, has often been most compellingly addressed by scholars who were educated in China and who did their graduate degrees in North America or Europe, often in comparative literature departments.

The Location(s) of Theory in Modern Chinese Literary Studies

In his introduction to *Modern China's* collection of articles examining the status of "Theory" in Chinese literary studies, Perry Link provides an encapsulated history of the field.

But beginning in the 1970s, and accelerating in the 1980s, the inadequacy of viewing literary texts only as historical source materials became ever more widely recognized... People who took the new positions [in the 1980s and 1990s] found themselves not in area studies centers but in language and literature departments, where disciplinary approaches were dominant. At the same time, in American academe as a whole, area studies were generally declining as all the disciplines, including those of the social sciences, were ascendant. Hence, in order to communicate with their colleagues in the literary discipline, scholars of modern Chinese literature began increasingly to read Western criticism and theory, as well as to approach the field of comparative literature.³⁵

As Link's description makes clear, the encounter with "Western criticism and theory" came late and only after an earlier encounter with actual "disciplinary approaches," already in service in literature departments.³⁶ While Link does not say precisely what those approaches might have been, it is important to keep in mind that almost nowhere in North American literature departments from the post-war period through to the present were literary texts treated as sources of simple historical knowledge. Indeed, from the Russian formalist criticism of the 1920s, to the rise and institutionalization of New Criticism from the 1930s, through to the early 1970s when "continental" phenomenological and hermeneutics approaches began slowly to take hold, to finally the emergence of what are generally termed poststructuralist, feminist, psychoanalytic, and post-Marxist criticism, in the late 1970s and 1980s, literary texts were rarely treated as simple sources of historical knowledge.

What is consistent throughout post-war North American literary criticism is its anti-mimetic bias, a residue of New Criticism's lasting

³⁵ Perry Link, "Ideology and Theory in the Study of Modern Chinese Literature: An Introduction." *Modern China—Symposium: Ideology and Theory in the Study of Modern Chinese Literature*, 19, no. 1 (January, 1993): 4–12, 5.

³⁶ Needless to say, if the study of English or European literatures were already disciplinarized, for reasons noted above, it was hardly the case that those departments welcomed the importation of what was for them continental European criticism, especially from France.

and profound impact in North American literary studies. It is therefore not surprising that it would be the lingering effects of New Criticism's cordoning off the literary work from any reference to the world that would inform the treatments of Chinese realism that I examine in detail in chapter one. Especially in the case of both Marston Anderson and David Wang, the largely oblique references to poststructuralist theory obscure the fact that their treatments of the emergence of realism in China with Lu Xun bespeak much more a New Critical conviction about the autotelic nature of the literary work. My concern will be less to question this approach than to suggest that the kind of snug fit that existed between T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound's modernist poetics and the critical ethos of I. A. Richards is very hard to come by in the case of Anderson and Wang's Lu Xun. Where Eliot's own creative practice fully endorsed (and was fully endorsed by) the radically anti-realist bent of New Criticism, Lu Xun's literary oeuvre, and so much of the modern Chinese literature that followed, militates very strongly against it.

But what is crucial for our purposes is that when Michael Duke³⁷ pens his lengthy defense of C. T. Hsia's *History* against Liu Kang's criticisms of the latter, he ends up misaligning him with the humanist strain of New Criticism with which Hsia was least sympathetic. This misalignment ironically succeeds in further underscoring precisely the critical distance that separates Liu Kang from Hsia that provoked Liu Kang's critique in the first instance. In other words, Hsia's far more profound critical affinities with the "Southern Agrarian" intellectual origins of New Criticism as a whole have served only to render the concept of modern literature's formation in China all the more obscure, a problem I examine in detail in chapter three.

Duke is by no means alone on this count, and one suspects it represents a pervasive view of C. T. Hsia. Indeed, one of Hsia's keenest admirers, David Wang identifies Hsia with the "humanist tradition" shared by "T. S. Eliot, Lionel Trilling, Philip Rahv, Irving Howe, Allen Tate and George Steiner." Adding Tate to this list of "humanists" is a critical error for reasons I make clear in chapter three.³⁸ As I will show,

³⁷ Michael S. Duke, "Thoughts on Politics and Critical Paradigms in Modern Chinese Literature Studies," *Modern China*. Paradigmatic Issues in Chinese Studies, II. 19, no. 1 (January 1993): 41–70, 49.

³⁸ Allen Tate and Hsia were temperamentally, philosophically and especially politically as distant from Irving Howe and Philip Rahv—and no doubt George Steiner as well—as was possible for New Critics to be from one another. Howe was a socialist

the liberal, secular humanist strain of New Criticism associated with such figures as Irving Babbitt, I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis is quite far removed from the form of New Criticism that powerfully informs Hsia's *History*. The differences between these figures and Tate, Ransom, and Hsia, are not only substantial, but they are also of decisive importance for the overall argument of this book. My hope is that by subjecting Hsia's method to a more precise genealogical analysis I will be able to shed further light on how the modern concept of literature formed in China.

One essential element of this problem is alluded to in Duke's essay in the following passage, whose ambivalence bears considerable post-colonial resonances. I quote Hsia at length from Duke's article, including the latter's bracketed retort to Liu Kang's assertion that Hsia was "anti-modern."

*In view of the cultural milieu of the modern Chinese writer; this was perhaps as it should be: until social justice, scientific and technological competence, and a measure of national strength were achieved, he had little choice but to serve his ideals. [So much for his being "adamantly opposed to modernization, industrialization, and technological progress.] In fact, his ideals came to him in the insidious shape of the Holy Ghost. Not merely in the literary context, the success of Communism was mainly due to its dazzling ability to identify itself with these ideals. It can be said categorically that, with two or three exceptions, no modern Chinese writer possessed enough compelling genius and imagination to carve his own path in defiance of the *Zeitgeist*; but the writers of talent and integrity, while espousing those ideals, also serve in their fashion, often reluctantly and in spite of themselves, the Holy Ghost. The work of these writers does not evince great imaginative power or technical brilliance; the intrusive presence of utilitarian ideals precluded the disinterested search for excellence; but it does have the quality of honesty, disturbing and illuminating enough in its depiction of the contemporary Chinese scene to deserve the attention of posterity [p. 499, emphasis added].³⁹*

Hsia's legendary antipathy to the cause of Chinese communism can too easily obscure the degree to which his literary critical convictions are ones that he came by quite independently of his political views.

and in the sense I explore in detail in this book very much a "humanist." But of Tate, Rahv wrote to Irving Howe, addressing him in mock Yiddish-inflected English, "Oiving, why don't you smash ... this Tate." Quoted in *Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 98.

³⁹ Quoted in Duke, "Thoughts," 49.

For reasons that I will underscore below, Chinese communist writers were deficient by methodological default, simply by virtue of their *engagé* embrace of a mimetic role for literature. What Liu Kang deplors as Hsia's "veritable canon of a non-leftist Chinese tradition of satirical and humanitarian realism" of course includes writers who suffer from the same deficiency, only considerably less so than their more avowedly socialist colleagues. Hsia's New Critical standards of "disinterestedness," absence of "intention," refusal of "utilitarian ideals," leave "Zhang Ailing 张爱玲, Zhang Tianyi 张天翼, Qian Zhongshu 钱钟书 and Shen Congwen 沈从文," with what amounts to a special token status that grants them, as Duke phrases it, "admission into the house of world literature" (Duke, "Thoughts," 51). What especially the latter formulation indicates is the subtle, though no less apparent, necessary collusion between Hsia's New Critical convictions and his status as (Western) world literature gatekeeper for Chinese literature.

As the italicized opening line in the quote above reveals, Hsia very clearly recognized that what he terms China's "cultural milieu," (a symptomatically anodyne gloss for what was broadly and well understood by nearly every writer, thinker, and critic in China at the time as the twin modern historical emergencies of "semi-feudalism, semi-colonialism") imposed demands upon Chinese writers that made it very unlikely any of them would ever fulfill the aesthetic criteria the North American New Critical establishment demanded of modern literary works. The reason was simply that those criteria were formed via a radical exclusion of precisely "modernization, industrialization, and technological progress" and especially any work of art, literary or otherwise, that posed the realization of any element of even one of those things as its *raison d'être*. For any such instrumentalization of artistic practice could not have been more completely proscribed than in the work of figures such as John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, and, of course, Hsia's mentor, Cleanth Brooks. The New Critical disdain for any artistic "utility" in one fell swoop excluded not only 20th-century Chinese literature, up to and including by Hsia's own admission Zhang Ailing, but also nearly all of the extraordinary variety of postcolonial national literatures around the globe.

Since its publication, readers of Hsia's text have had to grapple with a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, Hsia offered by far the most knowledgeable, thorough, and sensitive readings of the broad scope of modern Chinese literature produced up until the time of its

publication.⁴⁰ On the other hand, his critical standards were clearly of such a nature that no Chinese writer ever managed to measure completely up to them. That Hsia never found what he went looking for in modern Chinese literature is beyond doubt, a fact admired by some for its disinterested, objective honesty and decried by others for its “Eurocentric” exclusion of modern Chinese writers from the ranks of world literature. This book will also consider whether Hsia necessarily had to overlook key features of what constituted modern Chinese literature as a complex whole. This was not simply because of his political differences with leftist writers, though politics surely played a part in this. For as I will show in chapter three, in the same stroke Hsia’s New Critical institutional training was brought to bear in the *History*, vital elements of it were just as surely disavowed in decisive ways. Suffice it here to say that this act of disavowal affects the whole of the *History* to the degree that Hsia was simply never able to fully grasp how his leftist counterparts conceived of literature.

One suspects that Liu Kang objects not to Hsia’s “admiration” for Chinese “humanitarian realists” but to the fact that such a sentiment is largely moral rather than aesthetic. Hsia’s quote above seems for Duke to acknowledge the pressing necessity for China to engage in social, technological, and political modernization, but it is historically and institutionally naïve not to also recognize that the New Critical ethos was forged in direct opposition to all such values and the corrosive and diremptive effect they were deemed to have upon the “whole soul of man.”⁴¹ To whatever inevitable degree Hsia may have felt at a certain remove from New Criticism’s antipathy to “science,” his literary tastes were powerfully shaped by an equally strong rejection of a certain kind of modern humanism.⁴² Such sentiments are rife throughout Hsia’s *History* and have roots in the deeply conservative politics of New Criticism’s founders. I will explore the problem of the “soul” and the problem of “humanism” in more detail in chapter three. But I note for the time

⁴⁰ Both the 1961 and 1970 editions.

⁴¹ This was a basic tenet of New Critical faith, as numerous studies have shown, including Gerald Graff’s *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (Chicago: Dee Publishers, 1995), 137. The quote is originally from Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria* who wrote that poetry “brings the whole soul of man into activity.”

⁴² As Graff phrases it: “The New Critics saw scientific objectivity as a symptom of that arrogant ‘humanism’ which trusted in the natural goodness of man and the inevitability of progress” (Graff, *Literature against Itself*, 131).

being that Liu Kang's judgment is amply supported by the historical record of New Criticism's complex formation in North America and Hsia's idiosyncratic appropriation of it in his work.

As will become increasingly apparent, I am not simply arguing in favor of the use of theory, whatever its geographical or disciplinary origins, in Chinese studies. Rather, my point is that the role of theory was a given at the very outset of the emergence of modern Chinese literature, if in manifestly different form. Furthermore, it is hardly remarkable that even in those moments when the faculties of modern sinology objected most vociferously to the practice of theory in modern Chinese literary studies; they did so in terms which are no less indebted to the modern determination of literature than modern Chinese literature as a whole, including very much Chinese socialist realism. And yet I would go much further and argue that the remarkably wooden dual reification of "Western theory," that can only teach us what "Western academics think" and "modern and contemporary Chinese literature" that teaches us what "modern and contemporary Chinese are" is, itself, eminently theoretical—even philosophical.⁴³ I quote Michael Duke in full:

Literature is no science. Literature is not a form of cumulative knowledge in which the older understanding or conception of something becomes obsolete once the new conception replaces it. Literature is art. Literature is repetitive. Literature is always involved with archetypal human situations in the family and in society. Literature is always concerned with abiding moral problems and value conflicts that arise between and within individual human beings in their living experience of the universal human emotion of love and hate, the universal human conflicts between self and other, humanity and nature, and the universal human predicament of good and evil. Literature is primary. Theory is secondary. Theory is the servant of literature. We always learn more about ourselves and others as individual human beings from literature than from theory. Theories are fine as long as we recognize that literature is finer. If we study Western theory, we will learn a great deal about what Western academics think.

⁴³ Again, as Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester note in their introduction to *The Literary Absolute*: "The received notion of literature, in other words, which assumes in particular that literature is different from and external to philosophy in various ways (and can thus perennially bemoan 'external' incursions on the part of philosophy or 'theory' into properly literary problems), is in fact philosophical through and through" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, xiv).

But only if we read modern and contemporary Chinese literature itself will we know what modern and contemporary Chinese people are.⁴⁴

In later chapters, I will have occasion to show just how remarkably Duke's above description repeats the central critical operations of social-realist realist thought. The emphasis upon universality, archetypality, and especially the diremption of artistic from scientific knowledge, aligns Duke's effort to properly delimit ("Western") theory's role in Chinese literary studies with Cai Yi's Marxist philosophical aesthetics in ways that will become clearer in chapters three and four. At this point, I would like only to underscore just how precisely Duke has delineated in fundamental features of what I have been referring to as the modern determination or concept of literature.

As the above should at least suggest, there is a good deal more at stake in Duke's defense of C. T. Hsia as a New Critic and founder of the North American canon of modern Chinese literature. It is symptomatic that Duke skirts the problem of New Criticism, much less anything of its complex cultural and political history, and seems more intent on simply dispensing completely with the problem once and for all. Content to "discard the New Critic's theory of the aesthetic object" (65), Duke makes the somewhat anodyne affirmation of the necessity of a "close reading."⁴⁵ But in doing so, we would deprive ourselves of the possibility of critically examining the nature of this particular canon's formation. For Duke, the problem is reduced to the purely practical issue of deciding which texts graduate students should read. The question remains, however, what would authorize us to strip Hsia's canon of the very theoretical premises that played so important a role in its formation in the first instance. If this particular modern canon can be shown to be the product of a specific conception of what a proper literary text is—and by necessary extension, the proper method for reading such a text—then it seems notably unhelpful to assert the essential irrelevance of New Critical conceptions of the "aesthetic object."

⁴⁴ Duke, "Thoughts," 63–64.

⁴⁵ It is essential to distinguish between the institutional practice of "close reading" of literary texts, especially as that practice characterizes modern Chinese literary studies and the commitment to read all texts closely. As may be now be clear, this book is organized around the conviction that we are still in need of a better understanding how to situate the practice of "close readings" institutionally and historically in modern Chinese literary studies.

My point is not simply that modern Chinese literary studies owes to New Criticism a far larger and more complex debt than has generally been acknowledged.⁴⁶ More importantly, a more careful examination of the “cultural politics” of North American New Criticism such as Jancovich and especially Gerald Graff provide enables, quite remarkably, a much clearer insight into what becomes in China in the early 1940s socialist realist aesthetics itself. There will, of course, be no mistaking the differences between New Criticism and Marxist aesthetics. But both share a similar origin in what each understood as a modern cultural crisis brought on by the rampant cultural predations of positivist science, which threatened the fundamental integrity of human being.

In a real sense, the issue has long been less the need for modern Chinese literary studies to engage in a future-oriented and anxiety fraught effort to break with its New Critical foundations and “catch up” with the work of colleagues in the Western literature departments than to take much more seriously its own past.⁴⁷ As I will show in my discussion of Cai Yi, the failure to provide a critical account of modern Chinese literary studies’ relation to New Criticism meant that it would be all the more difficult to register what was at stake in the problem of modern Chinese aesthetics. The reduction of New Criticism to the practice of “close reading” only made it more difficult to provide a merely adequate genealogy of Chinese socialist realism. This also means that as uncomfortable Wang and Duke may be with the criticisms that have been registered against C. T. Hsia, it clarifies little to argue that Hsia’s *History* was not in some profound sense “a product of Cold War cultural politics.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ David Wang’s introduction to the 1999 edition of Hsia’s *History* discusses the latter’s relation to New Criticism, though apart from a brief and general mention of some of the cultural values associated with New Criticism, his discussion is more biographical than genealogical. But further, as I will show in subsequent chapters, the actual cultural values Hsia derived from New Criticism are quite far removed from the ones Wang mentions.

⁴⁷ Perry Link writes: “At first, this effort felt like ‘catching up,’ and some even resented their graduate training in Chinese departments for having failed to prepare them in the techniques of literary analysis. But the most common response was fresh excitement: we can now look at the whole field anew, analyzing texts as works of art rather than reports on history; we can use Western literary theory to reexamine the assumptions that undergird both Chinese writing and our own approaches to it; through comparative literature, we can broaden our own horizons as well as those of our Europeanist colleagues” (Perry Link, “Ideology and Theory,” 5).

⁴⁸ Wang, “Introduction to *History*,” ix.

I will argue in my discussion of Cai Yi that New Criticism and Chinese socialist realist aesthetics provide widely divergent responses to a shared set of problems and do so with a clear eye to the problem of capital. For this reason, claiming Hsia's book was not powerfully informed by postwar geopolitics is problematic, since it risks mistakenly imagining the New Critical methodological premise of "disinterestedness" did not itself have a very specific modern theoretical provenance. Furthermore, the very history of the concept of disinterestedness itself speaks to yet another focus of the present work, namely that the concept was by no means unique to North American New Critics but in fact profoundly shaped the formation of the modern concept of literature in China.⁴⁹ Our inability to not only acknowledge and provide a critical account for the notion of disinterestedness in Hsia's New Critical Chinese canon, renders us wholly incapable of recognizing the vast degree to which this concept informs so much of the development of modern Chinese literature and aesthetics.

This accounts as well for the anxiety prone references to what are ritualistically invoked as "Western theory's" problematic relation to modern Chinese literature. It is part of the aim of this book to suggest not only that the qualification of theory as "Western" introduces a false and ahistorical distinction that is highly misleading. As I mentioned above, I want to show how the essential relationship between literature, theory/criticism, and philosophy which would come to generate everything from New Criticism and socialist realist theory to all varieties of poststructuralist literary theory was no less powerfully operative in modern Chinese literature than it was in the West.

It is all the more important to keep in mind that when I claim that those premises were operative in China throughout the 20th century, I am not limiting myself to the sphere of Chinese literary criticism, but including the production of Chinese literature itself. In other words, the modern concept of literature refers not simply to the way literary criticism understands its object, but also to how that object as literature is formed in relation to criticism. That the latter issue is clearest in the case of the Chinese socialist realist *Bildungsroman* provides only the limit instance of this fact and should not obscure the fact that it obtains as well with Lu Xun decades earlier.

⁴⁹ As I show in my chapter on *Song of Youth*, this ultimately Kantian notion plays a decisive role in the heroine Lin Daojing's 林道静 ideological *Bildung* (formation).

I have argued above that what comprises most of the familiar critical moves and tropes in contemporary literary theory would not have appeared nearly as alien to Chinese intellectuals who had been critically active since the May Fourth period. Elsewhere, I have examined the Hegelian turn in studies of a materialist dialectic in the early 1950s, showing that the work of Zhang Shiyong 张世英 should be seen as the inevitable consequence not simply of a desire to better clarify Chinese Marxism's debt to Hegel.⁵⁰ Rather, it should also be seen as a necessary element in the broader need to better understand the scope of philosophical aesthetics and its practical/political consequences. Above, I described the degree to which the resistance of "Western" theory in the study of Chinese literature was symptomatic of the near total absence of continental philosophy in North American universities. My point was that the complex relationship between literature, theory/criticism, and modern philosophy was one that Chinese writers and critics had been negotiating in an astonishing variety of different forms from the beginning of the century. It was thus a relationship that reflected more than anything else a specifically modern conception of literature in the Chinese intellectual milieu, even if one does not find the conception articulated in China in quite the same explicit fashion as René Wellek and Raymond Williams, much less Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy.

The field of modern Chinese literary studies in North America, such as it was initially organized around the New Critical impulses of C. T. Hsia, would inevitably suffer from a combination of bewilderment and frustration at the encroachment of what it took to be especially continental literary theory into the disciplinary ranks of modern Chinese literature. But it is salutary to consider just how different the case was in China. Scholars of Chinese literature who are understandably sensitive to the Chinese literary bureaucratic interventions of censorship may not recognize the degree to which the stifling of debate in literary circles simply did not obtain in quite the same way in the study of aesthetics and philosophy. While in the North American academy, continental philosophy was forcefully purged beginning especially after the war, translations of Hegel's work appeared in China on a nearly annual basis from 1950 through to 1966 on the eve of the Cultural

⁵⁰ Button, "Zhang Shiyong," 63–68.

Revolution.⁵¹ This is all the more remarkable given the fact that Hegel was deemed no less ideologically suspect by Chinese Marxism than he was anathema to Canadian and US philosophy departments.⁵² Furthermore, throughout the same period, Hegel scholarship continued, including at least two works on Hegel published in the early 1970s during the Cultural Revolution, one of which was written by one of China's foremost Hegel scholars, Zhang Shiyong.

The example of Hegel is significant in terms of our understanding of how the literature/theory relation compares in 20th-century China on the one hand and 20th-century North America on the other. Given the degree to which continental philosophy vanished from the North American philosophy curricula after World War II and the opposite degree to which Hegel had remained a vital, if bitterly contested, presence in critical circles from the 1930s through to the present in China, one hardly need wonder why the intellectual backgrounds in China and the North American faculties of modern Chinese literature differed so vastly. At precisely the time modern Chinese literary studies in the West were pondering anxiously how to “catch up” with their colleagues in Western literature departments, China's New Period intellectuals were reacquainting themselves with elements of modern (continental) philosophical thought that had been the norm in China since the turn of the century. As has been well documented, the late seventies and early eighties witnessed a surge of interest in Kant and Hegel that has continued unabated until today.

Had that phenomenon been recognized by Western China studies at the time, it would like have been perceived as part of a “post-Mao” rehabilitation of philosophy departments in Chinese universities after a 40-year ban on any reading, public discussion, or publication of anything but Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Mao. Nor would it necessarily have been immediately apparent why a lengthy study of Kant by a

⁵¹ As Wang Ban notes, “The study of aesthetics has been and remains a major intellectual and cultural activity in twentieth-century China. In the People's Republic, aesthetics as a discipline has been a university course with standard textbooks. The aesthetics curriculum was officially launched in 1960, when the country was experiencing natural disasters, famine and political instability.” He further shows that aesthetics was part of the Party School curriculum beginning in 1962. Zong Baihua's 1964 translation of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* and Zhu Guangqian's translation of the first volume of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* in 1959 were both the result of the “aesthetics debate” that took place between 1956 and 1962. Wang Ban, *Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 17–18.

⁵² See McCumber, *Time in the Ditch*, 1–57.

Chinese Marxist philosopher in 1979, Li Zehou's 李泽厚 *A Critique of the Critical Philosophy: A Commentary on Kant* 批判哲学的批判:康德述评 would have sated the “intellectual hunger” of a scholar of literature such as Liu Kang.⁵³ After all, why in the period immediately following the Cultural Revolution, when Western scholars were noting the emergence of Scar Literature, would young Chinese intellectuals who had endured all the deprivations described so effectively in that literature flock to bookstores to read the ponderous and “repetitive” critical reflections of a Chinese Marxist theoretician on Immanuel Kant? But as Liu Kang reminds us:

But, surprisingly, the first edition of 30,000 copies sold out quickly, and the second edition of some 40,000 was as popular as the first edition on the market. The book indeed induced “Kant Fever” of no small scale in China’s intellectual circles.⁵⁴

At precisely the same time, the remaining volumes of Zhu Guangqian's 朱光潜 translation of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* were being published marking the advent of an “aesthetics fever” (*meixuere*) that would spread throughout the very same New Period intellectual community. As readers of Liu Kang's essay quoted above well know, very much unlike the situation in the Western China studies for whom “Western theory” appeared not only alien but also as part of the field's belated methodological upgrade, Liu Kang speaks overwhelmingly in terms of a *return* to an engagement with what since Wang Guowei 王国维 had been central philosophemes of 20th century Chinese thought.⁵⁵ By the same token, if Western students of modern and contemporary Chinese literature in 1996 were perhaps somewhat better prepared to understand what was conceptually at stake in Zhang Xudong's confession that he began his book on Chinese modernism as an “Hegelian,” it was not because of any context the field of Chinese literature formed under the New Critical orientation of C. T. Hsia could ever have provided. No doubt for many, Zhang was simply picking up and working with more of the

⁵³ Liu Kang, “Subjectivity, Marxism and Cultural Theory,” in *Politics, Ideology and Literary Discourse in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 23–55, 33.

⁵⁴ Liu Kang, “Subjectivity, Marxism and Cultural Theory,” 32.

⁵⁵ Jing Wang in her article “‘Who Am I?’—The Question of Voluntarism in the Paradigm of ‘Socialist Alienation,’” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 3, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 448–480, notes “repressed memory of early history of Marx.”

same “Western theory” the rest of his North American colleagues in Chinese literary studies felt compelled to contend with.⁵⁶

The Two (post-) Metaphysical Trajectories in the Formation of Modern Chinese Literature: Toward a Clear Definition of “Man”

At the beginning of this chapter, I identified two separate trajectories for the formation of a canon of modern Chinese literature: Mao Dun’s prospective one based upon national character and C. T. Hsia’s retrospective one from 1961. I would like here to further adumbrate in broad strokes the contours of the argument I propose for this book based on the way each of those trajectories appeals to and draws upon different (post-)metaphysical conceptions of human being. In each case, for both Chinese realism (and socialist realism) as well as C. T. Hsia, the figure of the human is of decisive importance. As we will see, Hsia and Lu Xun participate equally in the much vaster modern project that seeks to affirm and realize the essence of the human, if in different ways.

In the case of Hsia’s New Critical method, I argue that this problem is registered as onto-theology. Inevitably as well, even for readers who have found themselves pondering precisely what Hsia meant when he wrote that since they lacked a concept of Original Sin, modern Chinese writers were constitutionally incapable of thinking deeply about the human condition, this invocation of Heidegger’s concept of onto-theology in reference to Hsia, may well appear unsettling, if not gratuitous.⁵⁷ But as subsequent chapters will show, the onto-theologies

⁵⁶ Perry Link’s claim that for some PRC students in the 1980s and 1990s “[c]ritical theory was, first, undeniably and purely a Western thing” is somewhat misleading precisely on this count. No doubt for some such students, the theory they encountered in the West, translated from French into English, seemed to them entirely foreign, and surely the names Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida and Mikhail Bakhtin were unfamiliar. But if the intellectual deprivations of the Cultural Revolution had left such students with little sense of critical currents in the West, for precisely the same reason, such students likely knew equally little about the critical orientations of multiple generations of modern Chinese intellectuals educated up until the Cultural Revolution. Vera Schwarcz, as is well known, argues that already two entire generations of Chinese intellectuals who had “challenged the Confucian imperial system” preceded that of May Fourth students who were born in the 1890s. Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 24.

⁵⁷ In his conclusion to the *History*, Hsia writes, “The superficiality of modern Chinese literature is ultimately seen in its intellectual unawareness of Original Sin

of Arthur K. Smith's "soul" and C. T. Hsia's Original Sin, have remarkable corollaries in what becomes in 20th-century China a (post-) metaphysical discourse of onto-typology: first, in "Ah Q" as the initial modern Chinese instance of the "type" (*dianxing*) and then in Cai Yi's critical philosophical aesthetic grounding of the "type" in socialist realist theory. Indeed, as I will also show in chapter four, Cai Yi's treatment of the problem can best be understood in relation to Heidegger himself, who was writing at exactly the same time in the early 1940s. Thus, it should be clear that my reference to onto-theology in Hsia's critical discourse is not meant as a North American liberal, secular humanist term of opprobrium. Rather, I want only to underscore the fact that neither Hsia's *History* nor the New Criticism that undergirds it escape what Peter Carravetta has termed the "metaphysical moralizing" such figures as William Spanos and Frank Lentricchia have shown pervades New Criticism.⁵⁸

Hsia's linkage of what he finds to be the overall shallowness of modern Chinese literature to not only a congenital inability to grasp the true nature of human evil, but also more pointedly to the naïve rationalist/materialist conviction that human moral weakness can be overcome through human effort is, to be sure, precisely "metaphysical moralizing." What is surprising is that Hsia's diagnosis is so little remarked upon, save occasionally by Chinese wondering, quite legitimately, what he could have possibly meant. Liu Kang questions Hsia's claim, but perhaps does not go far enough in asking what role it plays in his critical inventory of modern Chinese fiction as a whole. What Liu Kang's engagement with this issue attests to is the inevitable sense that Hsia's belief that, absent the specifically Christian conception of

or some comparable religious interpretation of evil. When evil is seen as something that can be overcome by sheer human effort and determination, one is no longer able to encompass the domain of tragic experience. In view of the absence of tragedy in traditional Chinese drama and of the strong satiric tradition in Ming and Ch'ing fiction (the distinguished exception is the tragic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber*), one may legitimately wonder whether the study of Western literature has in any significant manner enriched the spiritual life of the Chinese" (Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 504). The term ontotheology is originally Kant's and was meant to describe proofs of God's existence based on concepts that do not require recourse to experience. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan Company, 1933), 525. I discuss Heidegger's specific inflection of the term in more detail in later chapters.

⁵⁸ Peter Carravetta, *Prefaces to the Diaphora: Rhetorics, Allegory, and the Interpretation of Postmodernity* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991), 272.

Original Sin, neither Chinese nor Western writers could produce great works of literature.⁵⁹ For Heidegger, the concept of onto-theology is meant to answer the question of how “God” enters modern metaphysics in such a way as to complete the system as a whole.⁶⁰ In a similar way, the theological doctrines of evil and Original Sin serve a similar function for Hsia’s New Criticism. It is difficult not to conclude that Hsia was first introduced to the problem of Original Sin as a literary critical problem in a graduate seminar with Brooks during the course of which the latter had included in the semester’s readings works by Tate and Ransom that addressed the relationship between modern literature and (Christian) humanity’s fallen condition. Jancovich addresses this issue in his treatment of Allen Tate:

The literary text was seen as capable of reasserting the limits of positivism and of emphasizing the historical and material contexts of human activity. These were seen by Tate in specifically religious terms as Original Sin, or the presence and limits of human nature, of the past, and of history. His critique of modern society was that it had not come to terms with the presence of human nature, but saw it merely as something to be rationalized, controlled and used.⁶¹

The New Critical presence of the concept of Original Sin located decisively in the conclusion of Hsia’s *History*, where the reader’s attention is drawn to the author’s final critical judgments on the course of modern Chinese literature up to that historical point in time, is by no means accidental, nor would we be well advised to dismiss it as an idiosyncratic irruption in what has no doubt otherwise been viewed as a consistently secular humanist work of modern North American literary scholarship. My interest here has little to do with Hsia’s own religious convictions, but rather with the way the concept of Original Sin serves a supplementary, onto-theological purpose in his criticism. More importantly, I am also interested in the genealogy of this notion with respect to modern China. It is just as vital to keep in mind that my aim is to situate more accurately Hsia’s work in relation to the

⁵⁹ Except when the term is used in quotation, I will preserve Hsia’s capitalization of Original Sin throughout.

⁶⁰ See Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Modern Metaphysics,” in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1969) 42–74. I discuss this problem in more detail below.

⁶¹ Mark Jancovich, *The Cultural Politics of the New Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 143.

much broader currents of a literary modernity heavily invested in a philosophical/theological conception of being.

There are, for example, several versions of the concern for the lack of a belief in China in the doctrine of Original Sin. As Eric Jozef Ziolkowski shows in his discussion of Anthony Yu, there is a more contemporary Protestant version of this notion. Discussing one of Yu's earlier essays, Ziolkowski notes the role of the "tragic" in Yu's article on Confucianism. The first of these tragic elements is the "moral dilemma imposed upon sons and fathers by Analects [*Lunyu* 论语] 13.18; and secondly the abyss that Confucius, lacking the notion of original sin, ignored between the dimensions of obligation [Reinhold Niebuhr's] ("I ought") and ability ("I can") in the moral self."⁶²

This version of China's absent conception of "original sin" is noteworthy not only for its contemporary Protestant provenance. For our purposes, as I will show in chapter two, the more distant origin of this doctrine is, significantly, the 19th century work of Protestant missionaries/sinologists living in China. When Arthur K. Smith takes up the problem of "Polytheism" in a late chapter in his *Chinese Characteristics*, he draws on the authority of Ernst Faber, the German Protestant missionary and sinologist, who in a tract entitled *A Systematical Digest of the Doctrines of Confucius According to the Analects, Great Learning, and Doctrine of the Mean*, listed twenty-four "defects and errors of Confucianism." I list four of the first six.

1. Confucianism recognizes no relation to a living God.
2. There is no distinction made between the human soul and the body, nor is there any clear definition of man, either from a physical or from a psychological point of view.
5. There is wanting in Confucianism a decided and serious tone in its treatment of the doctrine of sin, for with the exception of moral retribution in social life it mentions no punishment for sin.
6. Confucianism is generally devoid of a deeper insight into sin and evil.⁶³

⁶² Anthony Yu and Eric Jozef Ziolkowski, *Literature, Religion, And East/West Comparison: Essays in Honor of Anthony C. Yu* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 8.

⁶³ Arthur Henderson Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (Safety Harbor, FL: Simon Publications, 2001; originally published in Shanghai: North-China Herald, 1890). Smith quoted from Ernst Faber, *A Systematical Digest of the Doctrines of Confucius, According to the Analects, Great Learning, and Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. P. G. von Moellendorff. Boston:

What interests me here is the constellation of symptoms that collectively point to the incapacity to ponder human evil with any true, inward depth of understanding. Quite clearly, this particular 19th century European Protestant form of “metaphysical moralizing” about the godless state of the Chinese soul differs substantially in tenor from the form in which we encounter it in C. T. Hsia, tempered as his critical ethos is with a superficial measure of a more secularized humanism characteristic of postwar Yale.⁶⁴ As I will show in chapter two, Arthur Smith has generally been misread as offering merely a long list of odious Chinese habits, many of them admittedly moral. But what readers of Smith sometimes fail to recognize is that his critique of the Chinese national character was premised entirely on the conviction that lacking any “relation to the living God,” Chinese (and for Smith, not just Confucian Chinese, but Chinese as such) likewise lacked a conception of a human soul. For Smith, no reform of the Chinese character could ever be possible unless these two metaphysical voids were first met with a properly Christian sense of transcendence—one capable of lifting the Chinese soul into the spiritual reaches denied it by the earthbound nature of its indigenous metaphysical systems. Smith ends his introduction with a quote from an address by Lord Elgin to a group of Shanghai merchants:

In the rivalry which will then ensue [between China and West], Christian civilization will have to win its way among a skeptical and ingenious people, by making it manifest that a faith which reaches to heaven furnishes better guarantees for public and private morality than one which does not rise above the earth.⁶⁵

Jon Solomon is the very first to have analyzed the “deeply politicized question of an onto-theo-logical judgment upon nothing less—and nothing more—than China’s soul” which, he shows continues to profoundly shape intellectual discourse in China. Solomon’s analysis ties together the multiple concerns of the West’s onto-theo-logical diagnosis of China’s spiritual deficiency, the formation of the “private” moral Chinese subject (such as Elgin notes is finally possible only with Christian civilization) with a keen awareness of what amounts to “China’s

Adamant Media Corporation, 2004) 124–125. For a brief biography of Faber, see <http://ricci.rt.usfca.edu/biography/view.aspx?biographyID=1527>.

⁶⁴ Faber’s digest was delivered in July 1872 as a lecture to a gathering conference of German Rhenish missionaries Missionaries in Hong Kong (Faber, “Preface,” 1).

⁶⁵ Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, 15.

inscription...into the equally ideological figure of onto-theo-logical aesthetics.”⁶⁶ As I have suggested above and will show in what follows, the discourse of aesthetics in the twentieth century is the site of a transformation from the onto-theological into the (post-)metaphysical onto-typological, of which the literary figure of the type (*dianxing*) is the clearest expression in China. In other words, it is vital that we confront the way the discourse of Chinese national character is initially saturated by theology.

For literary figures such as Lu Xun and Mao Dun, it is hardly surprising that the specifically Christian theological grounding of Smith’s national character critique was not something they could ever endorse—and nothing could be clearer on this count than their separate endorsements of Nietzsche. But their intellectual refusal of Smith’s Christianity did not mean that they were incapable of transforming that ground in a manner that they felt was better suited to the needs of the properly human. As I will argue, both Lu Xun and Mao Dun will never fail to endorse Smith’s (Faberian) national-character critique of Confucianism for its congenital failure to provide a “clear definition of man [*sic*].”⁶⁷ The discourse of national character, as the explicitly literary (and aesthetic) problem Mao Dun affirmed at the beginning of this introduction, is thus decisively linked to a proper conception of the fully human. Modern Chinese literature’s task will therefore be to take up the problem of figuring typologically China’s national character precisely in light of a “clear” image of the human as such. To put it another way, to exactly the same degree that the possibility of Smith’s critique of a Chinese national character was conditioned wholly by an onto-theological investment in a clear image of the essence of the human as soul, Mao Dun and Lu Xun take up the literary problem of China’s national character in relation to what becomes the paramount problem of a progressive Marxist aesthetics throughout almost the entire course of 20th century China, namely this same human essence, though grounded ontoypologically.⁶⁸ As Solomon underscores in his reading of Liu Xiaobo, “[o]ne of the theological names for the objectivity of

⁶⁶ Jon Solomon, “The Sovereign Police and Knowledgeable Bodies: Liu Xiaobo’s Exilic Critique of Politics and Knowledge,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 10, no. 2 (2002): 399–429, 400.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Chinese Characteristics*, 307–8.

⁶⁸ I examine this problem in more detail in chapter two in relationship to Lu Xun and then again in chapter four, in relationship to Cai Yi.

human essence is the ‘soul’.”⁶⁹ In short, what the following chapters will affirm is the necessity of properly mooring our reading of national character discourse in China in relation to the (post-)metaphysical conception of human species-being that grounds it.

I would like to return to the problem with which I began, namely the need to provide an account of why the discourse of national character would find itself inscribed within the spheres of literature, art, and aesthetics in modern China. The problem of the modern conception of literature in China must address what I have termed the peculiar conjugation of national character and (the) true (essence of) art. The sphere of the aesthetic in China thus becomes the space of a continuous oscillation between exemplary literary figurations of modern Chinese subjects-in-formation and the fully realized human as such. At the risk of redundancy, in very much the same way that for Smith the Confucian Chinese failure to recognize a soul accounted for the absence of a clear conception of the human figure in China, 20th-century progressive Chinese intellectuals and writers looked increasing to the concept of “human species-being” as vital to the formation of modern Chinese subjects. As Marc Redfield insists,

Because aesthetic education is at once the universal history “of man” and the specific history of acculturation of certain groups and individuals, aesthetics provides a powerful self-validating mechanism for the representativeness of the social groups which can claim to have achieved and inherited this understanding of acculturation. The solely empirical qualities of being European, white, middle-class, male and so on become either tacitly or overtly essentialized as privileged sites in the unfolding of an irreversible aesthetic history. Thus from the sober precincts of philosophy one is led with disconcerting speed to the large reaches of ideology; indeed, ideology then becomes a limit-term difficult to control. For this aesthetic logic of exemplarity subtends powerful Western ideas and discourses of the self, the nation, the race, historical process, literary canon, and the function of criticism; it informs the role of the cultural sphere in modern Western societies, and the mission of the humanities in the modern university.⁷⁰

What Redfield argues about the emergence of aesthetic ideology in “Western societies,” I will show, powerfully informs not only the emergence of modern literature in China. Having done so, we may find

⁶⁹ Solomon, “Sovereign Police,” 400.

⁷⁰ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, ix.

ourselves in a position to better account for some of the countless and seemingly intractable political and ideological issues that have dominated that process since the early 20th century. It is vital to emphasize the fact that what Redfield describes above as the “aesthetic logic of exemplarity” is precisely what governs the formation of a post-Smith and hence post-onto-theological, May Fourth discourse of national character, as well as the modern conception of “human essence” that serves as its ground and point of orientation. The reason why this problem becomes so central in China is simply because this human essence is what Marx termed “species-being of man” (*Gattungswesen des Menschen*).⁷¹ In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx writes, “Man is a species being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species as his object... but also... because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore free being.”⁷² In other words, human species-being exists by virtue of the fact the humans recognize not simply their own individuality, but that they also recognize their participation with others in the same species.⁷³ To “actuali[ze] the genre of the human” would be to realize this universality as freedom.⁷⁴ As I will later show, this conception offers an important clue to the reading of Luo Guangbin and Yang Yiyan’s novel *Hongyan*, which I take up in my conclusion.

But we should also take care to note that this set of issues in Redfield’s careful study of the problematic literary genre of the *Bildungsroman* is linked directly to the problems of the formation of the literary canon and literary criticism. For Redfield emphasizes that it is in especially the case of the *Bildungsroman* that the tripartite relationship noted above

⁷¹ For an excellent account of the debates in China in the 1950s and the early 1960s, see Liu Kang, *Aesthetics and Marxism: Chinese Aesthetic Marxists and their Western Contemporaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁷² Marx and Engels, *Reader*, 75.

⁷³ Robert C. Tucker provides a helpful gloss. “Man is not only conscious of himself as a member of the human species, and so he apprehends a ‘human essence’ which is the same in himself and other men. According to Feuerbach this ability to conceive of ‘species’ is the fundamental element in the human power of reasoning: ‘Science is the consciousness of species.’ Marx, while not departing from this meaning of the terms, employs them in other contexts; and insists more strongly than Feuerbach that since this ‘species-consciousness’ defines the nature of man, man is only living and acting authentically (i.e. in accordance with his nature) when he lives and acts deliberately as a ‘species-being,’ that is as a *social being*” (*The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed., Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. [New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 1978], 33–34 n9).

⁷⁴ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, trans. and ed. Simon Sparks (London: Routledge, 1997), 111.

in the modern conception of literature, namely philosophy, literature, and criticism, realizes itself most fully. This is because the modern discourse of aesthetics is preoccupied with the formation (*Bildung*) of the human subject in a manner that Chinese critical discourse takes up with increasing urgency in the early-20th century and pursues nearly without interruption, in particular via literary production and criticism. This will lead, finally and with a certain historical inevitability to the creation of Chinese socialist realist *Bildungsroman(e)*, such as *Song of Youth*, the novel I discuss in chapter five. For as is very well known, it is the cultivation of exemplary Chinese subjects that very quickly comes to dominate both literary creation and literary criticism, powerfully shaping discourses of subjectivity in the political and social spheres of post-liberation China. It is precisely for this reason that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy insist that what they term the literary absolute “aggravates and radicalizes the thinking of totality and the Subject.”⁷⁵ Redfield notes two dimensions of this problem that I will examine in the case of the two novels, *Song of Youth* and *Red Crag*. First, the Subject, in the “full metaphysical sense” I have spoken of in terms of onto-theology and onto-typology, discovers in literature “its most immediate self-image.” Second, the modern Subject emerges as “*Bildung*, ‘the putting-into-form of form,’ the elaboration of the Subject in the specifically aesthetic terms of phenomenal or sensory realization.”⁷⁶ It is in light of this problem of the Subject and its relation to the discourse of literary exemplarity that we can best understand what has with remarkable consistency shaped the formation of modern Chinese literature.

⁷⁵ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *Literary Absolute*, 15.

⁷⁶ Redfield, *Phantom Formations*, 46.

