

fascination with dreams in "the Great Dark" and *The Mysterious Stranger* cluster is only one of numerous Freudian analogues in the American writer's exploration of consciousness and irrationality. Unfortunately, Mark Twain made no overt reference to Freud, but more fortunately Freud mentioned listening to Mark Twain and made overt and covert allusions to both humorous and polemical writings. It would be inconceivable for them to have missed meeting each other during Twain's two-year sojourn and in view of his wide spectrum of acquaintances and activities in Vienna.

Dolmetsch has produced a readable, informative, and intelligent book. With a cast of resident players that includes Freud, Mahler, Klimt, Herzl, Wittgenstein, and numerous political and journalistic personalities, the script seems made to order for the writers and producers of *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*, who could focus on the heretofore unrecorded meeting between an American humorist better known by his *nom de plume* and a Viennese housepainter who had not yet discovered his *nom de guerre*.

David Der-wei Wang

Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen
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Reviewed by Robert E. Hegel

By common consensus, the greatest modern Chinese writer was Lu Xun (or Lu Hsün, the penname of Zhou Shuren, 1881-1936): he not only pioneered a new vernacular fiction strongly influenced by European writers, he is also considered the most capable writer in the "critical realist" mode. Likewise, the depth of his engagement with the social and political issues of his day served both as model for Lu Xun's successors (many of whom perforce had to ignore his determined resistance to all authority, even from the Left); until fairly recently the politics of modern China also placed shackles on all interpretive readings of his work. Not that the artistry of his complex stories has gone unnoticed—recent studies by Marston Anderson (*The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990]) and Leo Ou-fan Lee (*Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987]) have penetrated ever farther into their convoluted meanings. David Wang's book builds on the solid basis of the latest scholarship to produce a significant new study of the other major narrative artists of the early twentieth century—the writers whose "voices [arose] within the discursive paradigm set by Lu Xun" (1) but who revised Lu Xun's conception of Realism (and of reality) to experiment with narrative modes in ways never explored by Lu Xun himself.

Professor Wang begins with a position paper: here he demonstrates the level of abstraction on which he works, his critical vocabulary, his facility with—and his lack of sympathy for—the political biases of most students of modern Chinese fiction. With deft strokes he exposes the literary artistry of one of Lu Xun's first and best-known short stories ("Kuangren riji," *Diary of a Madam*) in terms of his

manipulation of realistic narrative. "It invites a metafictional reading on the tension between the real as something immanent versus the real as something historically predetermined; on language as an arbitrary closure conditioning the real and so on. All these tensions testify to the eternal interplay between reality and vision/illusion, between realism and allegory. Contrary to conventional criticism, the charm of Lu Xun is not that he manages to smooth out these tensions but his tragic awareness of an inability to deal with them" (4).

Based on his readings of Lu Xun, David Wang proceeds to reinterpret many of the best-known fictional works of three of China's most important twentieth-century writers. For each he takes up all of the important works, demonstrating effortlessly his erudition in the field. Each reading is keyed to the others; every work of fiction is read in relation to the writer's corpus. Each writer is also read against the others, to demonstrate the range of literary experimentation these three writers represent. The reader might not fully agree with all of Wang's views, but one cannot but take careful notice of them: Professor Wang has established here a new standard for critical analysis of the *artistry* of modern Chinese fiction.

Readings of his sort are only now appearing. Until the end of China's insularity during the 1980s and the consequent lessening of military tension on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait, there was no opportunity for Chinese scholars to look beyond obvious and official political programs in the arts to see whether art did in fact exist. Scholars outside China were inevitably influenced to perceive ideological content as the most important element in Chinese writing. Likewise, only in recent years has the field of modern Chinese fiction studies become sophisticated enough in handling the tools of literary analysis to probe for the repeated patterns, the implied meanings, the literary games often conflict with the surface meaning of these texts.

This is precisely what David Wang achieves. He devotes two chapters to each of his three subjects. His is the authoritative voice of the sophisticated native reader who, by avoiding taking sides in past or present Chinese political struggles, perceives artistic complexities that have generally gone unnoticed in previous scholarship. Thus in many instances Wang takes up a dialogue with his predecessor, C.T. Hsia, whose *History of Modern Chinese Fiction 1917-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) virtually defined the field for most Western readers. But Professor Hsia wrote in a more politically charged time, and Wang can pass over without comment the relative involvement of each writer with particular political movements and groups that symbolized life and death struggles for Hsia's generation of intellectuals. Through Wang's book, and those mentioned above, one can easily perceive the maturation of the field, each building on the foundation laid by Hsia and a few others; in many ways this book is the culmination of Professor Hsia's attempt to make Chinese writing comprehensible to nonspecialists.

Of the three writers addressed here, Mao Dun (1896-1981) used fiction to probe the meaning of recent events in contrast to official versions; Lao She (1899-1966) trained his skeptical vision on his sentimental fiction to produce subversive humor; and Shen Congwen (1902-1988) developed a discordantly lyrical voice in developing the myth of the homeland in modern China through his tales of brutality and oppression. Together, Professor Wang convincingly demonstrates, the

three "define Chinese realism in the twentieth century" (24). To prove his point, his final chapter surveys the more interesting writers from both the mainland provinces and Taiwan to demonstrate how little they have been able to surpass the self-conscious artistry of these great writers of the 1930s and 1940s.

David Wang observes Mao Dun's ongoing defiance of authority in presenting the ironies inherent in "heroic" fiction; Mao Dun reacts against Zola's "scientific" and materialistic view of humanity in favor of a greater degree of humanism. Yet he assumes that his bourgeois intellectual readers would achieve a spiritual epiphany, typical of Tolstoy's characters, and thereby join the proletarian cause. Wang also deals more convincingly with the widely acknowledged humor of Lao She: his novels parody Fielding, echo Dickens; the "proletarian hero" of his *Luotuo Xiangzi* (Camel Xiangzi, 1936) becomes, to Wang, an absurd character through his excessive attachment to a material thing, a rickshaw. Wang also sees a deeply cynical strain in many of Lao She's later works that undercuts their ostensibly patriotic themes. Shen Congwen, an "austere stylist and a sophisticated pacifist" (203), used lyricism as a critique of contemporary "realistic" writing: by equivocally portraying love and death, natural purity and human barbarism, Shen refused to participate in the contemporary master narrative of suffering on the part of the masses; his subversive aim was to draw attention—apolitically—to the art of narration. Wang also convincingly identifies Shen's creation of "imaginary nostalgia" and "anticipatory nostalgia" in his native soil writing that lends his work a degree of authenticity unavailable to later, more politically cautious—or artistically insensitive—writers of the 1950s and 1960s.

In contrast to the earlier studies mentioned above, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China* is designed primarily for the specialist reader. To that end, Professor Wang's scholarship is spare, omitting all details that would not be needed by the initiate: references to general studies of the historical period, helpful secondary materials on the writers and their works, and, most importantly, translations into English. Most of Wang's sources are in Chinese; most translated passages are his own work. And for a scholar of David Wang's capacities this is only appropriate. But if one goal of literary scholarship is to interest the educated outsider and the comparatist critic, then this otherwise excellent study falls short in this regard. One does not find here any indication of the three English translations of each of Lao She's novels *Er Ma* and *Luotuo Xiangzi*, of the fact that most of Lao She's fiction is available in translation but little of Mao Dun's is (his *Rainbow* recently appeared), or that there has been a spate of Shen Congwen translations published during the last few years. This is particularly unfortunate, for this book could introduce scholars of other literatures to the best of Chinese fiction before the late 1970s. Lacking outside advice, they will have no way to know that the works Wang addresses with such enthusiasm and insight are also readily available to those who do not read Chinese as well as he. This shortcoming notwithstanding, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China* is a critical accomplishment of the first order. It will, like C.T. Hsia's pioneering study, build a new generation of scholarship and draw well-deserved critical attention to the sophisticated literary experimentation of China's early modern writers.