

Revisiting 'Seventeen-Year Literature' (1949-1966) in China from a Neocolonial Perspective

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**Tian Zhang,**

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**Abstract:** In her article "Revisiting 'Seventeen-Year Literature' (1949-1966) in China from a Neocolonial Perspective" Tian Zhang surveys the "Seventeen-Year Literature" (1949-1966) from a neocolonial perspective. It reviews the internal and external factors of anxiety faced by Chinese during the period of seventeen years since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The seventeen years witnessed a stress on and flourishing of the proletarian socialist literature of the people, by the people and for the people. The seventeen-year literature, on its way to smashing the old system, represents the trend of Chinese literature of the time and the extension of the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and the left-wing literature of the 1930s. It made a significant contribution to claiming Chineseness, heightening the salience of national identity, consolidating government centrality, and enhancing cultural tradition through its narrative patterns of history, ideology and everyday life.

**Tian ZHANG**

### **Revisiting 'Seventeen-Year Literature' (1949-1966) in China from a Neocolonial Perspective**

The seventeen-year literature in China refers to the literature created from the establishment of the socialist government in the year of 1949 to 1966, right before the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution. It is also referred to as early Maoist period literature and early Socialist literature. As the first period of post-revolution narrative, seventeen-year literature has left an unforgettable mark in the history of contemporary Chinese literature, bringing vigor and vitality into various themes and forms. As a type of literature in a special period, the seventeen-year literature is inevitably involved with the unprecedented social, cultural and political situations. Its responsibility, in particular, is to arouse people's sense of Chineseness and hence boost confidence in building the new republic.

Seventeen-year literature has been highly effective in its educational mission of uniting people and resisting the ideological invasion of foreign powers. The use of the term "neocolonialism" appeared right after WWII. It generally means the efforts by the former colonial powers to block the growth in developing countries, to exploit them as sources of cheap raw materials and cheap labors and to extend their economic, political and cultural influences in order to ensure subordination of underdeveloped countries under previous colonization. "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (Nkrumah ix). After 1949, China embarked on a long, hard road of socialism. The Sino-American confrontation of the 1950s and '60s and the Sino-Soviet polemics since 1958 had progressively isolated China from both superpowers. Mainland China was excluded from UN for a long time until its acceptance in 1971. Therefore, politically China had been an outsider from the international community; economically it was rather self-reliant, without being part of the global flows of economy.

During the period of political and economic hardships, the seventeen-year literature aimed at decolonizing the old system, confronting neocolonialism, and fulfilling national salvation. It tried to advance literarily through its highlights on Chineseness and the extension of the left-wing literature of the 1930s. The poetics and epics of the seventeen-year literature made a significant contribution to heightening the salience of national identity, consolidating the government centrality and defending cultural tradition. The relationship between the seventeen-year literature and neocolonialism manifests itself in three narrative focuses: historical narrative, ideological narrative and everyday life narrative.

The first narrative focus of seventeen-year literature and neocolonialism interaction is the historical narrative. The historical narrative focuses on the context of safeguarding the sovereignty through grand and epic narrations of wars. Literary writings of this type reflect Chinese leader Mao Zedong's ideology of using weapon to "unite people, educate people, fight against and wipe out enemies" (*Selected Works of Mao Zedong* 848). A typical narrative framework is composed of narratives threaded with two themes: victory and growth. The victories of Chinese revolution strengthened the brilliancy and power of collective memory. The accolades brought by victories against capitalism, imperialism and foreign invasions are reinforced in the legendary and heroic depictions of the Chinese revolution and class

struggle of the Chinese people. The communist warriors, in guarding the Communist cause, are remarkably brave and responsive. They have no fear of deaths or wounds, projecting the virtues and heroism of the Communists.

Du Pengchen's novel *Guarding Yan'an*, the first of this kind, is considered as a war epic with vivid description of the war in the northwestern battlefield in 1947. The sublimity and comradeship in arms shown in the heroic characters are not just the flesh and blood of the plotted stories, but on a larger scale shed light on confidence and determination of China in future wars. The main protagonist, Zhou Dayong, feels as if a knife were piercing his heart at the sight of his soldiers' struggling with injuries from a skirmish. He hates himself for being incapable of bearing all their tribulations to relieve their hunger, starvation, fatigue and pains.

Moreover, the theme of victory is inevitably interwoven with the theme of growth. The growth of an individual embodies the growth of China. Different from its traditional western counterpart, this type of bildungsroman is suffused with Chinese ideology and tradition. Without hesitation and bewilderment, the protagonist is always dramatically resolute on his way to becoming an unswerving socialist or a fearless soldier.

The representative character of this type is Lin Daojing in *Song of Youth* by Yang Mo. The novel tells the story of how young students were led by the CPC and how they initiated patriotic movements on the eve of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937-1945). Focusing on the different choices made by "the youth," Yang Mo explores the relationship among the youth and the nation. Lin's individual growth also symbolizes the growth of the new republic. During her process of maturity, songs of innocence turn into songs of experience. Chronological order is a frequent application in most of the historical narratives in that linear development facilitates the description of protagonist's psychological progress. The character usually follows the pattern of "departure-experience-test-rebirth," which is also a general feature of left-wing literature.

In fact, the defining role of historical consciousness in the literary works from 1949 to 1966 has drawn great attention. It is a key device for defining both national identity and literary presentation of the nation. Most of the works are testimonial, focusing on wars and revolutions in history. Some scholars think the literary atmosphere is tense, limited and too ideological. C. T. Hsia once used a phrase—"the obsession with China" (533-534)—to indicate spiritual disease of Chinese writers who are occupied by moral obligations and who fail to pay attention to humanistic problems. His stereotypical notion fails to grasp the social and historical significance of the periodical literary works. Hsia's viewpoint is hardly convincing in that literature can barely exist out of its interaction with society, culture and politics. Among tremendous challenges faced by the young republic, the guarding of young China is fundamental. It has to confront and resist potential neocolonial invasions. One fundamental way is to arouse the awareness of Chineseness among its people. Chineseness, in my view, refers to the ethnic loyalty and the pride of being Chinese presented in the language and the discourses of identity and incarnated in the mind the awareness of the Chinese roots and the identification with Chinese culture. No literature of other periods has aroused, as much as the seventeen-year literature has done, the awareness of Chineseness among the people.

Furthermore, Korean War literature within the scope of the historical narrative is another example in building up confidence among Chinese people. It was tremendously popular among readers in fulfilling its educational function of resisting neocolonial invasion. To avoid potential threats from the western world as well as to defend the nation, China had no choice but to send its voluntary troops to halt the advance of the US-led UN forces in Korea. This war provided powerful and inexhaustible resources for remarkable literary creations. Novels on Korean War show voices of the strength and determination of China, removing the stigmatized label of the "Sick Man of East Asia." Hence, Korean War literature became part of patriotic education for Chinese people as well as a reinforcement of belief in China's military strength, reflecting the outcome of the highly collective and political background. It also became the first large scale literary campaign in China with a full coverage of almost all the genres. For instance, *People's Literature*, the most popular national journal, published 185 literary pieces on Korean War, including forty novels during 1950-1959. Another journal, *Literature and Art of People's Liberation Army*, published 384 related works in the 1950s. Various publishing houses nationwide also published many novellas and novels, including Ba Jin's *Stories of Heroes* and Lu Zhuguo's *Shangganling* that depicts the Battle of Triangle Hill.

The shared feature in most of the Korean War novels is the images of soldiers of different types as a way of ideological construction. Idealism, heroism, collectivism and sacrifice are the fixed models in this group of literary creations. The war heroes and martyrs are usually flawless characters with unbending loyalty and faith to their Party and with responsibility and selflessness for their people. In the short story "The Fourteenth Task" by Zhang Jie, the protagonist deals with various difficulties, spots the location of enemy, and successfully finishes his fourteenth task assigned by CCP after over forty hours of hardship. In Ba Jin's *Li Dahai*, the title character Li captures 65 enemies in his lifetime. He serves as a godlike superhero while American soldiers act as morally corrupted and ill-disciplined men. Yang Shuo's *Country of Three Thousand Li* and Lu Zhuguo's *East Front in Storms* feature on American war prisoners. With rather traditional way of narration, innovation in forms is not salient in this type of works. Propaganda effects of these works on Chinese soldiers and general masses are tremendous and influential in the period of national defense. Yet, short stories about the Korean War are more effective than novels in their functions as weapons in the battlefield in that they are short to recall and easy to read.

Apart from Korean War literature, the literary works about the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and other domestic wars is another subgenre of the historical narrative in this period. Ma Feng and Xi Rong's *Chronicles of the Luliang Heroes*, Kong Jue's *New Heroic Sons and Daughters*, Liu Zhixia's *The Railway Guerrillas* are typical examples of this kind. In the 1950s, revolutionary popular novels, represented by the most famous novel *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* written by Qu Bo in 1957, draws remarkable attention from the readers. A retired veteran, Qu Bo, entertained his readers with stories of his military adventures, recounting the history of the revolution. A young yet skillful soldier Shao Jianbo (his troops refer to him as 203) lead a small detachment of PLA soldiers to eradicate bandits who have been terrorizing people in the Northeast. In their travels, the detachment wins consecutive victories, and usually destroys the heavily armed enemies. Throughout the whole journey, they are

warmly received by local brave peasants and their detachment is growing fast with more and more peasants join them and the CCP. The novel paints an exciting picture of the adventure as well as the history.

Besides the collective, historical, and epical narrative of communist strength in safeguarding the country and smashing semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism in the seventeen-year literature, the second type of narrative focuses on the consolidation of ideology strength for the communist leadership. It is extremely urgent for the new republic to promote its cultural leadership, to build up ideology strength in people's consciousness, and to alleviate the psychological trauma caused by the sense of inferiority from every aspect.

In 1949, with the power of the Communist growing remarkably across the mainland, the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan. The failure on the mainland inevitably cast physical and psychological trauma to thousands of the Nationalists. The nationalists could not reconcile themselves to surrender or to admit their failure. The anti-Communist fiction writers call for an active mobilization against the Communists. Consequently, 1950s witnessed the literary war between the mainland and Taiwan as an extension of the Civil War from 1945 to 1949. An ideological competition commenced as a continuation of military competition. Both parties took their ideology seriously and truly believed in its power to vitalize their own side and to demoralize the opposite. Intriguingly, the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists is far beyond a war among the Chinese, it is an international war of communism against imperialism since both sides have their own international supporters. This war continues after the founding of the PRC posing great potential threats to this young government.

Besides the threats from Taiwan and the US, Chinese people have long been suffering from the pressure of economic and cultural inferiority in modern era. It is of vital importance to boost people's confidence. Zhou Yang (1908-1989), Vice Minister of Culture, asserted that cultural inferiority had been rooted in the mind of Chinese people: "The long-term dark control of capitalism and feudalism over Chinese people has fostered tremendous revolutionary zeal and resolution among the Chinese; however, it has also brought national inferiority to some extent. This feeling of inferiority goes hand in hand with vacillation and limpness of Chinese bourgeois and petite bourgeois" (56). He also called for the task among writers that literary creations should be the tools to alleviate and mitigate this psychological burden related to the sense of cultural inferiority.

To build up its cultural leadership, CCP sought to three ways: 1) confirmation of its righteousness as heir to previous cultural movements; 2) institutionalization of literature; and 3) standardization of national identity. It is important to note that the central government faced unprecedented concerns for ideological consolidation and internal security, and such concerns are unique alongside the creation of a central power over China, as explained by John Fairbank, "at least two major features made China different: First was the strength of the Chinese tradition of comprehensive imperial rule. Second was the great size of the politically inert rural population – both its proportion relative to the urban and ruling elements of the society (say, 80 percent) and its absolute size (say, 325 million ca, 1900, 400 million ca. 1940). No other country had ever had so large and dense a rural population before the full onset of modern industrialization with its customary doubling or tripling of numbers." (22) What Fairbank

mentions about the factual situation in China helped to understand the policies put forward by CCP. As a matter of fact, it is of great necessity to analyze CCP's cultural policies that have long been the guidance for the seventeen-year literature.

This young republic initially tried to confirm its righteousness in its cultural leadership and to unite those supporters from May Fourth movement. In its defense against neocolonial invasion, PRC reiterates its inheritance of the democratic and cultural concepts of May Fourth movement so that it can unite as many supporters as possible. *People's Daily*, the most influential newspaper in China and the mouthpiece of CCP, published an article titled "Introduction to May Fourth Movement" on its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1949, which reviews the historical process of this movement and extends Mao's idea of new democracy as well, reaffirming the interconnected relationship between May Fourth movement and the proletarian revolution. "Judged from its nature, it (May Fourth Movement) is the event marking the beginning of the New Democratic revolution in China. It is the event of the Chinese revolutionary youth movement. It is the event for Chinese new cultural movement" ("Introduction to May Fourth Movement"). This introduction serves as the political and cultural confirmation of CCP's cultural leadership.

Literature has played an essential role in the history of China, and it proves to be more active and dynamic in contemporary China. To give emphasis to May Fourth cultural and literary tradition, Mao made comments repeatedly on the contribution of literature and art to revolution. He talked at a conference: "The revolutionary movement in literature and art, which developed considerably during the Civil War period, had the same general direction as the Red Army struggles of that time, but there was no coordination between them in their actual work and each fought as an independent army.... Our meeting today is to ensure that literature and art become a component part of the whole revolutionary machinery, so they can act as a powerful weapon in uniting and educating the people while attacking and annihilating the enemy, and help the people achieve solidarity in their struggle against the enemy." ("Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" 58) This talk becomes an ideological guideline for literary creations in the coming years.

Great impetus was passed on to the literary creativity among writers. Mao further stated that his theory of New Democracy followed the footprints of May Fourth with an aim at overthrowing feudalism and achieving independence from colonialism. According to Mao, "the culture in New Democracy, in one word, is the culture of anti-capitalism and anti-feudalism by the great masses under the leadership of proletarians" (*Selected Works*, 698). Its devotion and determination of reconstructing China is an unyielding continuation of May Fourth cultural tradition, and it manifests that PRC is the upright heir to the May Fourth New Culture. Mao's doctrine sought to transpose China's model of revolutionary struggle to other developing nations suffering from injustices of Western imperialism. Guided by his theory, literature thrived in the liberated areas and many important works emerged. Literary statements of May Fourth movement on realism, arts serving people, and absolute anti-feudalism had a full display in the seventeen-year literature, especially in novels like Liu Qing's *The Builders*, Zhou Libo's *Hurricane*, and Li Mantian's *White-Haired Girl*.

Seventeen-year literature, on its way to decolonizing the old system, represents literary advancement of the current nation. To understand literary advancement in China, it is necessary to view



it from a contextual approach in both of its historical and present circumstances. Hong Zicheng argues that "contemporary literature of 1950-1970 is essentially Chinese left-wing literature" (282). In other words, literature of this period is a contemporary form of Chinese revolutionary literature. The leading spokesman of Chinese left-wing literature Lu Xun voiced the rights for the repressed classes and nationalities and fought vigorously against national nihilism and national megalomania. Considering Lu's revolutionary zest and his contribution to Chinese culture, Mao praised Lu as "the main fighter of the Chinese cultural revolution," "unprecedented national hero," and "China's first-class saint." The evaluation of Lu Xun's contributions in Yan'an era continues to bring the same prestige in the seventeen-year period, maintaining his outstanding position as a great cultural fighter. As left-wing literature has enlightened people's awareness of fighting for the country, in this sense, the seventeen-year literature represents a continuity of left-wing literature of 1930s.

The second cultural task for the new republic is the institutionalization of literature along with the reaffirmation of CCP's leadership as a cultural heir to May Fourth movement and left-wing movement. Through political campaigns, historical practices of China's literature incorporated the construction of socialist country. The strategies of literary policies bore salient features of the nation state. Mao's "Yan'an Talks" was the milestone for the literary policies and creation. It laid down the foundation of Chinese Marxist literature, specifying that art and literature set roots in people's life and serves the people. He also clarified the methods and standards of artistic creation. In face of the harsh reality, the societal ideology should be putting any discourse under socialist rule, and then lead to the standardization of discourses in every field. Any discourse that is beyond the realm of Chinese people or against the will of Chinese people should be forbidden. Five years after the celebration of 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of May Fourth Movement, another important appeal from CCP's central government called for people's proletarian literary works in new China. "Our literary workers should speak for the unprecedented great pitch and moment of socialist construction and socialist transformation in Chinese history, for the grand fight against capitalist regime in the socialist and democratic camps. The literary works should depict the new workers, new farmers and new intellectuals. They should criticize and fight against the obsolete things and thoughts that stand in the way of the people's revolutionary process, leading people to the glorious course of socialist construction and socialist guardian. This very serious and honorable task is what is required for the literary workers by our fellow people" ("Advocating the Battling Tradition of May Fourth Literary Revolution" 3). All these thoughts provided motifs and themes for the post-1949 literature.

The particular constellation of political and cultural tendencies created favorable conditions for the revival of literature in new China. When the People's Republic of China was founded, numerous literature organizations or publishers such as Literary Workers Association, Literature Newspaper (*Wenyibao* 文艺报) decided to associate intellectuals with the course of socialization. The commencement of the First Congress of Literary and Art Workers was held from July second to July nineteenth in Beijing in 1949, with a hope to recruit as many elites as possible to contribute to the cultural construction of new China. However, there are contradictory policies towards intellectuals. As time went by, CCP's policies were under severe attacks by some intellectuals among whom some were participants and heirs to May Fourth



movement with the ambition of creating a new Westernized culture as a solution to China's social, economic and political plight. In order to cleanse the liberal idea and to consolidate the central power, CCP made changes to the policies towards intellectuals in order to achieve a unified attitude towards socialization.

Besides the unified identity and unified mindset, the appeal for a unique writing style of the writers is necessary to strengthen the cohesiveness among Chinese writers. Zhou Yang stated, "All of our creative writings should have its own form and feature of our nation. Nationalization is to transform the foreign forms with our local and national characteristics into a national form. In this way, it can be accepted by most people and can be used to enrich and develop our previously-owned form" (284). Marston Anderson, a western scholar, offers his understanding of the feature of Chinese writing. He says, "In calling for mass fiction and socialist realism, Chinese writers acknowledged a new imperative: they began erasing the distinction between 'I' and 'they'—between the self and the society—that had been an indispensable basis for the practice of critical realism, subsuming both in a collective 'we'" (202). Anderson's point is partially correct; however, the word "guideline," rather than "imperative," would be a more suitable term for the literary atmosphere at the time. Only by taking the real situation of new China into consideration, can we have an objective and full understanding of new China's policy toward literature.

The third way to confront neocolonialism and to affirm cultural leadership is to standardize the national identity and to construct class/nation community. Class/nation community is the concept of constructing a communal nation relied mainly on the working class. Under this ideological guideline, working class is the essential main body of the founders, pioneers and builders of a nation. The proletarian-centered policy has been welcomed by majority of the people. The role of the general masses was pivotal, as said by Mao, "Who are the general masses? The vastest reach of people, the people who take up 90 percent of Chinese population. They are the workers, farmers, soldiers, and urban petite bourgeois. ... These four groups of people constitute the majority of our great China. They are the most massive general masses" (*Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, 847). Mao's remarkable talk stimulated the nation to an unprecedented height of unification and paved the way for more creation of proletarian literature. Literary development of this period is saliently displayed in literature about lives of peasants and the commonplace. Vernacular language replaces classical language. New ideas and values transcend traditional ones. The general masses become the core or the fundamental components of the great socialist course. Many characters in the seventeen-year literature are the ordinary people but making unordinary contributions and devoting themselves to the course of socialization.

In the ideological narrative of the seventeen-year literature, the most common way to achieve national identity is the use of propaganda and mobilization. A combination of these two is a frequently used term in politics and culture of that period. After 1949, propaganda-mobilization moved into the domains of society and culture with direct impacts on how the masses are involved into the socialist construction and to what extent they accept CCP's policies and concepts. Zhou Libo's *Great Changes in a Mountain Village* is a novel themed with propaganda-mobilization. The novel begins with men and women departed enthusiastically for their mission of propaganda-mobilization after the rally of the CPC

county committee: "They walked along in groups of three or four or five, smoking, talking, and joking. At the crossroads, they shook hands, nodded, and exchanged good wishes or good-natured abuse to bid farewell to each other. Then some went north, some south across the river to the various districts and townships that were their destinations." (3) Deng Xiumei, the female protagonist and female cadre, is one among them. She is on her way to the countryside to carry out the task of propaganda-mobilization for the agricultural cooperative movement as proposed by PRC central government.

The same example of propaganda-mobilization can be found in Liu Qing's *The Builders*. Different from Deng, the female cadre, the mission operator Liang Baosheng is a local peasant and proletarian pioneer. Liang fought vigorously against the rivals and opponents and eventually won the respect and trust from the local peasants and other cadres. This mobilization system has been interpreted from the perspective of western scholars as follows. James Townsend and Brantly Womack make a parallel analysis on China and Soviet Union in their book *Politics in China* and argue that "China also corresponds to a system that appears in nearly all typologies of developing countries, variously referred to as mobilization system, movement regime, neo-Leninist mass party system, or radical or totalitarian single-party system. The type varies in its definition by different writers but contains the following core elements: a single political party that monopolizes political power and penetrates all other politically significant organizations; an explicit official ideology that legitimizes and sanctifies revolutionary goals; a determination to politicize and mobilize the citizenry, characteristically through party-led mass movements" (20). Their summary of these three elements are correct but they neglect the willingness and cooperation of the most citizenry. This fundamental part paves way for the everyday life narrative as the third narrative focus.

The third narrative pattern is the everyday life narrative to create the people's literature. By everyday life narrative, I mean the literary works focusing on the real life with issues concerning youth, love, and woman's rights of ordinary people, which are more appealing to the common readers. Contemporary Chinese fiction, marked with "socialist realism," received the influence from the Soviet Union, holding that a literary work should reflect reality and should be a mirror of life. In my view, everyday life narrative in the seventeen-year literature is salient and serves as a reasonable and sound way to popularize fiction. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), examines the ways in which people individualize daily experiences such as mass culture, from utilitarian objects to street plans, laws and language, in order to make them their own. Through depiction of everyday life in the seventeen years, lives of new peasants under the new regime are thus internalized as projection of all ordinary people and will be easily accepted by even more people. In order to reach a greater readership, a vernacular novel (zhanghui xiaoshuo 章回小说) is commonly applied, which is the most popular genre that can depict real life appropriately with an appeal to the ordinary masses. Further, "the reader was from the outset an important conceptual constraints on contemporary literature: on the one hand, readers needed to be educated; on the other, readers' reading preferences needed to be respected" (Cai 227).

The everyday life narrative advocates ideals and struggles of individuals, especially peasants. This is the continuation of May Fourth codes of individuality although socialist codes of collectivism were also

valued. In 1949, following two decades of protracted struggle, Mao successfully defeated Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. Thereby, he succeeded in providing the world with a new model of revolution based on the central role of the peasantry, a model that seemed well suited to an era of global anti-colonial struggle. Soon, the attraction of Chinese "peasant communism" was amplified through Castro's seizure of power in Cuba and Vietnam's heroic efforts to throw off the yoke of Imperialism. This gave voice to peasant literature, a fundamental component of the seventeen-year literature. Combining the form of vernacular novels with the contents about peasantry, everyday life narrative is far too true and touching to neglect.

In addition, the everyday life narrative is highly suggestive in the subject related to the subalterns (usually referred to as "ordinary people" in Chinese context). People's enthusiasm was highly raised and cheered in the post-revolutionary era. Socialist ethics of collective action and collective goal of salvation were highly esteemed. CCP was trying every means to unite the subaltern people. In critical theory and postcolonialism, the term "subaltern" coined by Antonio Gramsci designates the populations which are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial homeland. Usually this term identifies the poor people who were excluded from a society's established institutions and are denied voice. Peasant subalternity in China has a different story. Poor as they were, this group enjoyed high prestige in the Chinese revolution and was welcomed to be part of the constructive power under the new nation. Take love stories as an example. Love romances in the left-wing literature of 1930s highlight the sublime juxtaposition of love and revolution in which the priority is usually given to the latter, while love romances in the seventeen-year literature often give prominence to the freedom of love among peasants. In Zhao Shuli's short story "Xiao Erhei Gets Married," the issue of free love between two young peasant characters Xiao Erhei and Xiao Qin was discussed. It enjoyed remarkable reception among readers of that period.

Literature of this era also witnessed the progressive changes in women's social status as reflected in everyday life narrative. In the 1930s, there were already colleges and even middle schools where co-education was established. Some of the female graduates from Christian missionary schools and colleges were employed as teachers, medical doctors, and nurses. Soong Ching Ling pointed out in her article, "History has proved that women's liberation in China—women obtain equal status with men—began with the democratic revolution, but will be completed only in the socialist revolution" (6-7). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak also focuses on cultural differences between women in the "third world" and women in the "first world." She argues: "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third World woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (304).

The most noteworthy female character representing the shift in females' social role is the protagonist Li Shuangshuang in *A Little Biography of Li Shuangshuang*, a novel by Li Zhun. Vigorous and creative as she is, Li also embodies the ideals of a new peasant and the new look of the grass-root people. This new peasant image was particularly welcome by readers, typifying the successful combination of socialist

dream and traditional folk art that made a utopia out of the new China. The rural setting, vernacular language, and attachment to the land are contributive to the creation of this fascinating utopia.

In fact, the seventeen-year literature in China is extremely vibrant in its diversity with rich and varied themes and styles related to China's witnessing various movements in its post-revolution period. What is more, it encompasses a full range of ideological, cultural, and aesthetic aspects. Nationalism and collectivism were the two ideals sought to confront neocolonialism. Seamus Deane argues, "all nationalisms have a metaphysical dimension, for they are all driven by an ambition to realize their intrinsic essence in some specific and tangible form. The form may be a political structure or a literary tradition" (8). China, on the one hand, tried to establish a unique administrative organization. On the other, it attached great importance to the production of proletarian culture and literary works.

Through various political campaigns, historical practices of China's literature incorporated the socialist political structure. Literature of this period gained a label of "Red Romanticism," indicating the passion and revolutionary zeitgeist in China. It is also labeled "the People's Literature" by some scholars, referring to the voices of the people in new China. According to Krista Hang, most of the "cultural works in this period were mass-produced by the state for the entertainment and education of a broad audience of Chinese citizens and usually referred to as 'People's literature'" (7). Before 1949, China had suffered from over half a century's turmoil—menacing imperialism, eight-nation invasion of Peking, disorders of warlordism, revolution, Japanese invasion, and civil war between the Nationalistic Party and the Communist Party, all of which gave rise to the Chinese people's wish for peace and imposed extremely important tasks on the new and young Chinese government.

There is no doubt that the seventeen-year literature has exerted tremendous influences both within its era and in the era to come as a way to resist neocolonial invasion. Many amazing and fascinating works were produced at that time. They reflected the scale of readership and the amount of circulation of those literary works; they also enjoyed a large readership with many reprints of the popular fictions such as *Tracks in the Snowy Forest* and *Song of Youth*. Some popular novels were adapted to movies to satisfy the readers' need. The popularity of the literary works stimulated passion and boosted confidence of Chinese people. Many literary works were remarkably popular, as numbers of reprints, or memoirs tell. Thus, the enthusiastic reception and popularity of the seventeen-year literature made an unprecedented scenario of unity in new China.

To conclude, cleansing the cultural battlefield of the old system, establishing a basis for new culture, and reassuring the dominant leadership of proletarian culture makes the seventeen-year literature a necessity to reaffirm the importance of literary tradition and literary history. In my view, the seventeen-year literature is a fundamental part in contemporary Chinese literature. Its unique ideology-oriented style made a significant contribution to the early advancement of the nation, especially in its promotion of the consciousness of Chineseness, national identity, fighting against neocolonialism, consolidating the centrality of the government, and defending the cultural tradition. The seventeen-year literature is subordinated to politics and is reflective of the particular political situation, but it is also a poetic and epic period that projected people's passion for and confidence in the construction of a socialist nation.

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