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predominant feature of the leftist men of letters. Although most of them embroiled themselves in repeated debates in order to separate love from revolution, it was obvious to the more perceptive Yü Ta-fu that the two in fact are inextricably linked by the same emotional denominator: the passion of love springs from the same source as the passion for revolution.

I think it would not really matter if poets were socialized. A truly revolutionary poem is not one which rattles with pistols and grenades or contains the word "revolution" repeated hundreds of times. But speak out your genuine sentiments under no disguise, emit your passion as if it were a lava from a volcano—this is the paramount duty of a poet. The emergence of a revolutionary career is possible only for that little passion, the cultivation of which is inseparable from the tender and pure love of a woman. That passion, if extended, is ardent enough to burn down the palaces of a despot and powerful enough to destroy the Bastille.³⁸

What Yü Ta-fu extolled as "that little passion" was, indeed, the stuff that fired the revolutionary zeal of Kuo Mo-jo, Chiang Kuang-tz'u, Hsiao Chün, and a host of other leftist writers. This revolutionary passion sprang from the very volcano of subjectivism which had emitted earlier the lava of love and sex in the early twenties. That our journey of subjective sentiment should end with a political twist is certainly the result of changes in the political environment. But political conditions had not affected the persistence of this subjectivist trend until the Yen-an era. Mao was ingenious enough to realize that while romantic passion might aid the destructive mob to storm the Bastille, it could only be destructive when the Communist revolution, at its low ebb in Yen-an, was in a stage of retrenchment and construction. After Mao delivered his famous *Talks*, individualism and subjectivism, which had been exalted in the twenties, began to take on purely negative connotations in the eyes of the party. The fall of Hsiao Chün illustrated the severance of the last link between the May Fourth legacy of subjectivism and the emergent literature of Socialist Realism.

Lee, Leo Ou-fan
The Romantic Generation of M.C.W.

Chapter 14

The Romantic Heritage

The trend of subjective sentiment in modern Chinese literature is partially of Chinese origin; the inspiration for its modern quality, however, is derived from the West. As noted in an earlier chapter, the urban literary scene in China in the 1920s was enveloped in the general phenomenon of *étrangerie*; even the term "modern" in its Chinese transliteration (*mo-teng*) conveys a thickly foreign flavor. The impact of Western literature on modern China will have to be gauged in this framework.

The Literary Étrangerie

The vogue of *étrangerie* in the May Fourth era may be compared to the "Western craze" of Meiji Japan in the 1870s. For both countries, the models came entirely from the West—predominantly Europe (including Russia) and to a lesser extent America. Japan served further as a go-between in this cultural borrowing, as many of the Chinese literary men were educated in Japan and many Western works were translated into Chinese from Japanese translations. Returned students from Japan, Europe, and America acted as the chief heralds

of this Western cult and the increasingly lucrative task of translation became its main channel. Aided by a thriving publishing industry, translations from Western literary works reached immense proportions within one decade after the Literary Revolution. The section on translations in Volume X of *Chung-kuo hsin wen-hsüeh ta-hsi* (A comprehensive compendium of modern Chinese literature) lists a grand total of 451 titles of individual works and collections which were published in the period from 1917 to 1927.¹ Translated poems, short stories, plays, and articles which appeared in the literary journals were too numerous to count. Tremendous energies were unleashed to introduce Western literature, which was received generally with tremendous enthusiasm.

The lists of translations in the 1920s readily reveal that the overwhelming majority of Western works introduced into China belong mainly to nineteenth century literature, with Russian, French, English, and German authors preponderant. The popularity of a Western author in China is hard to gauge. Sometimes the works of an author were extensively translated but his name did not become a household word: Haggard, Andreyev, Galsworthy, and Hauptmann belong to this category. Sometimes an author enjoyed immense popularity on the basis of a single work, such as Dumas fils and his *La Dame aux Camélias*. In most cases, however, the popularity of a Western author rested on a combination of his translations and his personal appeal. In general, it may be said that two major trends in nineteenth century Western literature held sway in China: realism and romanticism.

It might be argued that since a dominant number of Western works translated into Chinese belong to the tradition of nineteenth century realism, the keynote of this literary *étrangerie* in May Fourth China was realism (*hsieh-shih chu-i*). But this argument bears further examination. A recent study of the introduction of Western literary theories into China has demonstrated that the May Fourth writers were strongly influenced by a concept of literary evolutionism, which they borrowed from a host of secondary books in English and Japanese on Western literary history. European literature was seen as developing organically and deterministically through the stages of classicism, romanticism, realism, naturalism, and neo-romanticism.

This belief in the forward progress of literature led many Chinese followers not only to a general lack of interest in the classical, medieval, and neo-classical literature of the West but also to an over-eagerness to fit modern Chinese literature into these evolutionary categories.² Convinced that traditional Chinese literature stopped somewhere between the stages of classicism and romanticism, they decided that modern Chinese literature had to go through the stages of realism and naturalism, whether or not they might be personally attracted to neo-romanticism. Accordingly, Western works of realism and naturalism would be introduced in great quantities.

But a closer look at the Chinese reception of Western "realists" reveals some interesting phenomena. Two European favorites—Sienkiewicz and Tolstoy—were regarded as both realists and romanticists.³ Other realists like Turgenev, Gorky, and Anatole France have their romantic sides. Even the works of the most orthodox realists or naturalists like Maupassant, Flaubert, and Zola were often revered as "products of a crusading idealism."⁴ The emotional fervor with which these realistic authors were received in China in fact rendered them indistinguishable from such "neo-romantics" as Baudelaire and Roland. They were all worshiped as heroes of humanity. It seems that despite their theoretical espousal of realism or naturalism the Chinese writers were motivated by an emotional ethos more akin to romanticism. Their evolutionary uses of the word "neo-romanticism" served only to cause terminological confusion.

This emotional reaction to Western literature was best exemplified by the fetish of personal identification among Chinese literary men with their Western counterparts. Su Man-shu initiated the whole trend by consciously imitating Byron, although his admirers later likened him to Verlaine.⁵ Yü Ta-fu found a kindred soul in Ernest Dowson while professing his profound admiration for Rousseau. Hsü Chih-mo earned the title of poet-philosopher, an epithet which was applied also to Tagore. Kuo Mo-jo was identified with Shelley and Goethe. Chiang Kuang-tz'u compared himself to Byron in his poetry while assuming the role of Dostoevsky in his personal life. Kuo's friend T'ien Han claimed himself to be "a budding Ibsen in China."⁶ Another eminent Creationist, Wang Tu-ch'ing, was rumored to be

the second Hugo, but he preferred to call himself Armand, in memory of a French girl with whom he had fallen in love in France and whose name, naturally, was Marguerite.⁷ Dumas fils would have been pleased.

The imitation of and identification with one's favorite Western authors was the central facet of this vogue of *étrangérie*. The result was to aggrandize both oneself and one's favorite Western counterparts into heroic proportions. The decade of the 1920s was certainly an unprecedented epoch of heroes and hero worship in modern Chinese intellectual and literary history. To be modern on the literary scene required that a man of letters not only flaunt his new poem or short story but also display a pantheon of his masters. On Hsü Chih-mo's pantheon stand Byron, Shelley, Keats, Rolland, Mansfield, and Hardy. Kuo Mo-jo's gallery of heroes includes Whitman, Tagore, Goethe, Tolstoy, and Nietzsche, among many others. Yü Ta-fu would single out Turgenev, Dowson, and Rousseau. A list of common top favorites drawn from the individual favorites among the seven literary men of this study would at least include: Byron, Shelley, Goethe, Rolland, Rousseau, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Tagore, and Dumas fils. Most of these heroes are outstanding figures of European romanticism; even those who do not summarily fit into the romantic category—Tolstoy, Nietzsche, and Hardy, for instance—were worshiped by their adulators in a romantic perspective: as towering figures of superhuman love and vitality.

This panorama of nineteenth century European literature with a romantic gloss provided the background of modernity in Chinese literature. Few Chinese writers in the 1920s were aware of the beginning of a new trend in Europe. There were no significant traces of expressionism, futurism, formalism, or other forms of the avant-garde in the May Fourth literary scene.⁸ The influence of Eliot, Auden, Rilke, and Valéry was not felt until the thirties and forties among small circles of modern Chinese poets. Some major writers of Western fiction of the early twentieth century—James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, and Ernest Hemingway—were barely noticed by their Chinese contemporaries. Even a colorful figure like F. Scott Fitzgerald—a dandy of the Roaring Twenties in America and certainly a kin-

dred spirit of Hsü Chih-mo—escaped Hsü's attention. It may not be too far-fetched to remark that the Western craze in China represented a zestful effort to squeeze the entire nineteenth century into one decade and to embrace the entire romantic legacy in one volcanic outburst of youthful emotion and energy.

The seven literary men discussed in this study have been chosen to illustrate not only the development of a subjectivist trend in modern Chinese literature but also the impact of Western romanticism, which, I am convinced on the basis of extensive evidence, provided the prevalent ethos and dominated at least a decade of literary development in China. The general themes of this study, therefore, must be presented in a romantic framework. For our purposes, the personalities of the seven men could be recast in the two prototypical models of the romantic personality; the impact of their favorite Western heroes on them and their generation could also be summarized in the light of a case study of two popular Western novels and a leading romantic hero whom they all admired, Byron.

Two Romantic Prototypes

It has been shown in the analysis of Lin Shu's translations that he was enamored of two modes of Western fiction: the world of sentiment and ethics and the world of adventure. The heroines of the former are represented by the virtuous lady of the camellias and the filial girls in Dickens' novels, both of whom evince a profusion of human sentiments and emotions, which Lin attempted to justify in Confucian terms. The world of adventure is represented by the heroes of Haggard and Scott with their dominant features of energy, dynamism, struggle, and self-assertion. Lin's contemporary, Su Man-shu, was attracted to a similar duality in Western literature: he admired the "enthusiasm and straight-forwardness" of Byron who "sought action for love and in love," but he was equally impressed by the more pensive Shelley, the philosopher-lover who "sought nirvana in love." These two general hero-types, as introduced by our two precursors, may be regarded as the two dominant modes of the Western romantic legacy on the Chinese literary scene. The names of two most popular pro-

tagonists of Western romanticism may be used to designate these two types: Wertherian (passive-sentimental) and Promethean (dynamic-heroic).

In European romanticism, the Wertherian type of personality has been defined as a man of feeling or a hero of sensibility who is "deepened, perhaps, by a greater sense of fatality and of impending doom." He is often "passive and submissive, with a singularly feminine nature."⁹ He is characterized by his capacities for feeling, mostly tender emotions—gentle and tearful love, nostalgia, and a pervasive melancholy. He is also called a passive romanticist in that he seeks refuge in the realm of his inner life: the nuances of his emotion, the mysteries of his unconscious self, or the subjective world of imaginary passions.¹⁰ The other model type, the Promethean man or the active-romanticist, is not without sensibility; but the emphasis is not on his delicacy and sensitivity. He is the enthusiast, the passionate and dominant man whose ultimate desire is "to impose his personality on the world, to shape the world—even to create it, to be a new Prometheus."¹¹ This active romanticist does not take refuge from life and society in his inner self. "Instead of trying to escape from life, he goes back to it; only he does so not in order to come to terms with it, but in order to assert himself against it, to expose it by showing all its drabness, injustice and ugliness; to prove, in short, that it is unworthy to be accepted."¹² The interplay of these two types is also visible in the five outstanding men of letters covered in this study.

The Wertherian type easily suggests the Chinese literary prototype, *ts'ai-tzu*, although the surface elegance and bohemian abandon (*feng-liu*) of a *ts'ai-tzu* often overshadow his probings into the inner self. In Yü Ta-fu's search for the visions of the self, the Wertherian type seemed to loom constantly on his mental horizon. His two favorite heroes—Huang Chung-tse and Ernest Dowson—are both men of feeling and sensibility with a melancholy and fatalistic bent. His autobiographical works register the poignancy of his uprootedness and introspective egotism which recalls the more pensive side of Rousseau. In his *Rêveries du Promeneur Solitaire* which Yü admired and translated in part into Chinese, this spiritual father of European romanticism wrote the following: "Whatever I notice in the external world

brings to my heart only pain and affliction; whenever I cast my eyes upon things which surround me and are connected with me I always find in them some aspect or other which arouses my spite and indignation, or else gives me pain. Alone for the rest of my life—since I find the only solace, hope and peace within myself, I must not, and no longer want to, occupy myself with anything else except my own ego."¹³

While Rousseau's exaggerated sensitiveness rendered him "more and more helpless and morbid,"¹⁴ the sorrows and afflictions of Yü's "superfluous" existence seemed to be contagious to his contemporaries. Their emotional reception of Yü's works succeeded in stultifying Yü's power of introspection and in pampering his ego. A passive romanticist endowed with a moving Wertherian mentality thus degenerated into a pallid modern replica of the traditional *ts'ai-tzu*. Still, in his most creative years, Yü Ta-fu came closest to the Wertherian type of personality with a Rousseauian touch of sensitivity and sincerity.

From his physical appearance and demeanor, Hsü Chih-mo could easily be seen as another Wertherian type. But his works and activities exhibited more Promethean aspirations. He openly declared himself to be an incorrigible individualist¹⁵ in the sense that he asserted his individual personality and advocated personal experience. Never a cynic even in his last years, he called for positive action with frenzied enthusiasm so as to effect "a total overhaul" of his environment. But the measures he contemplated to reshape the social and political environment around him readily betrayed his naiveté as a social reformer and his impotence as a political activist. The hazy blueprint he drew from an isolated experiment in a chosen county of his home province—inspired by Tagore and supported financially by Elmhirst—was doomed to failure in the light of another illustrious case, the rural reconstruction programs of James Yen. Hsü's political credo lay in a self-defined notion of democracy which he equated with pan-individualism and which was imbedded in "self-consciousness and self-exertions of each individual."¹⁶ His ebullient vision of a future utopia with able-bodied youth singing and dancing in the vineyards—all permeated with that sense of Dionysian madness—gradually

gave way to a darkened plain of total despair on which he found only "the wild dances of death" and a "tower of death's victory built by imbecile mankind with their own bones and flesh."¹⁷ Hsü Chih-mo can therefore be regarded as a Promethean type who failed and who substituted the unreality of his exuberant imagination for the reality of his immediate environment.

Hsü Chih-mo is not fully qualified as what may be regarded as the active romanticist. For, although Hsü was "thirsting for the fullness of life through activity,"¹⁸ he did not become either a social outcast or a rebel. The pose of rebel was assumed by all three leftist writers discussed in this study, especially Kuo Mo-jo and Hsiao Chün. Fascinated with banditry as a boy, becoming a student leader in his adolescent years, Kuo Mo-jo represented the early spirit of the Creationists in viewing both the emerging literary scene and Chinese society as his enemies. His rejection of social reality was also projected into his pantheism. Although it does not manifest itself in a kind of "cosmic uprootedness" which culminates in "a spiritual rebellion against both the Universe and its Creator,"¹⁹ it aims at fashioning God in the human image. "Therefore I am God," Kuo proclaimed, "All nature is a manifestation of myself."²⁰ The act of literary creation, as Kuo conceived it and put it in the manifesto of the *Creation Quarterly*, is impregnated with Promethean aspirations: to impose the personality of the poet on the world and to shape it in his own image. The heroic and cosmic imageries of his poetry lead one to expect a degree of Satanic grandeur in Kuo's personality, but whatever traces of Satanism there may have been in Kuo proved ephemeral, chiefly because of his volatile mentality, which betrays the lack of sustained sincerity in his convictions. Especially after he had managed to ascend the ladder of prestige in Communist China, even his rebellious pose was gradually replaced by that of blind hero-worship—no longer of himself, but of the political masters above him. The voluntary servitude of a self-styled poet-hero thus divested Kuo of any true stature as a romantic hero.

Both Chiang Kuang-tz'u and Hsiao Chün suffered a more tragic fate than Kuo Mo-jo because they were not willing to subject themselves to a higher order whose ultimate goals they shared. For a true

romantic can never feel comfortable in any status quo, any established system; he aspires to, but can never realize, a utopia. The destiny of romantic genius, as Howard Hugo remarks, is that of a messiah who ultimately "becomes the outlaw, the scapegoat, the outsider."²¹ The really doomed aspect of his nature is that he will inevitably be annihilated by the very society whose goals he has helped achieve and whose hopes he has articulated. Although neither Chiang nor Hsiao is a writer of greater talents than Kuo, both can be viewed as truer active romanticists in that they posed their assertive and combative egos against their society, be it under the tutelage of the KMT or the CCP. Like Hsü Chih-mo, Chiang Kuang-tz'u died opportunely, whereas Hsiao Chün, who outlived them, had to go through a painful rebirth in order to emerge as a new positive man in Socialist Realism instead of a romantic rebel.

Werther and Jean-Christophe

The dominance of the two major prototypes of the romantic personality on the Chinese literary men is also reflected in their enthusiastic response to two of the most popular romantic novels: *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Goethe and *Jean-Christophe* by Romain Rolland. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* was first translated by Kuo Mo-jo in 1921. In his preface to this work, Kuo summarized Goethe's merits as revealed in this novel: 1. his emotionalism, 2. his pantheism, 3. his praise of nature, 4. his admiration of primitive life, and 5. his respect for the infant.²² It is obvious that, to Kuo Mo-jo, this novel represented the quintessence of all the virtues and values he had found in the best works of Western literature.

Soon after Kuo's translated version was published, *Young Werther* reaped such popularity as to become almost the bible of modern Chinese youth. Their emotional identification with this young German hero can be illustrated by a few examples. Hsieh Ping-ying, author of the best-selling autobiography, *I-ke nü-ping ti tzu-chuan* (Autobiography of a girl soldier), confessed that she had read Goethe's novel five times. As a girl soldier serving in an army medical unit during the Sino-Japanese War, she had a lover whose name was Wei-t'e, a Chi-

ample. Chang Ching-sheng, that notorious "Dr. Sex" and one-time professor at Peking University, declared in his own journals: "I wish to publish a 'Romantic Series' by my 'Beautiful Bookstore' which will contain Chinese works and translations from the West; I really hope that generations of classicists in our country will be shattered into pieces, to be replaced by the free, heroic, and emotional Romantic School."⁶⁵

Although Chang's promises were never realized, it was apparent, even to contemporary observers in the early twenties, that there indeed existed "a romantic trend with a tendency toward practically enveloping the youth of the entire country."⁶⁶ In a long article written in 1926 and titled, "The Romantic Tendencies in Modern Chinese Literature," Liang Shih-ch'iu discerned the following features in the New Literature Movement:⁶⁷

- (1) It is fundamentally under foreign influences.
- (2) It upholds emotion and disdains reason.
- (3) The general outlook it adopts toward life is "impressionistic" (that is, subjectivistic).
- (4) It advocates a return to nature and emphasizes originality.

These four traits are, according to Liang, characteristically romantic and, for a self-styled follower of Irving Babbitt, excessive. For Liang's contemporaries on the literary scene, however, the epithet romantic was often acknowledged with conscious pride, especially in the early twenties. The analogy with European romanticism was often invoked consciously. A group of young poets who gathered at West Lake near Hangchow and published a collection of love poetry christened themselves with the charming title—like the famous group of early English romanticists composed of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Leigh Hunt—the Lake Poets.⁶⁸ As if aware of the evolutionary sequence in French romanticism, another group of poets active in the late thirties—notably Li Chin-fa and Tai Wang-shu—began to write symbolist poetry by consciously imitating the French model.⁶⁹ A whole century of European romanticism—especially its French and English varieties—was swallowed up enthusiastically by one generation of Chinese literary men in one decade.⁷⁰ One is tempted, while cognizant of many

exceptions, to brand the entire May Fourth generation of Chinese men of letters as a romantic generation and the decade of the 1920s as a romantic decade.

To define romanticism in China in the 1920s runs the risk of oversimplification. The various categories and characteristics of Western romanticism proposed by Western scholars can be combined into an interminable list. What unites most of these artificially categorized romantic features is a fundamental outlook which our major protagonists also share. This outlook views life not as a given scheme revealing itself objectively in a rational order but rather as a process of individual and subjective experiences. Reality is conceived not as a pre-established structure or schema to be grasped by systematically applying the human intellect, but rather as a fragmented flow, never static, never totally comprehensible, only to be felt and glimpsed through intuition and intimation. Thus what is emphasized in this outlook is impulse, not result; motive, not objective; creative will, not retrospective analysis; feeling and sensitivity, not reason and ritualization. Society is seen as chaotic, to be destroyed or overhauled *in toto*, but not remedied piecemeal. Utopia, a haven of the shining future, is ultimately indescribable, though craved for. Thus the visions and images of a romantic utopia are often couched in such vague, albeit exuberant, terms as "total rebirth," "the whole of mankind," "eman-cipation," truth, beauty, goodness, freedom, happiness.

From a historical viewpoint, this kind of outlook often reflects a period of transition. "What is known as romanticism was, above all, an inner reaction to that transitional period which dislocated all former ways and values, mixed up all classes, destroyed all faith, all proper orientation."⁷¹ Such a period often produces a number of individuals who do not organically belong to any established class of society. Lacking an organic contact with life as a whole, this type of individual is compelled to fall back upon himself, and to oppose the value of his own ego to the rest of his society. His uprootedness and alienation become in his eyes a proof of his imaginary greatness. It is in this transitional context that the life stories of our romantic men of letters end in tragedy. In eulogizing love, glorifying individuality, celebrating emancipation, they seemed to have neither time nor mood

nese transliteration of Werther.²³ In Chang I-p'ing's best seller, *A Batch of Love Letters*, a young girl writes to her lover: "My dearest, to read that you have compared yourself to Werther in your last letter fills my eyes with bitter and hot tears. How pitiable is Werther's end! . . . Please be assured that I will never act like Charlotte in her devotion to Albert."²⁴ In Mao Tun's novel, *Tzu-yeh* (Midnight), Captain Lei, a former student and later a cadet of the Whampoa Academy, meets Mrs. Wu, his former love in student days and now the wife of a Shanghai industrialist: "Captain Lei lifted his head and drew out a book from his pocket. Opening it quickly, he extended it towards Mrs. Wu with both hands. It was an old, well-worn copy of *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*. The place at which it was open was marked with a pressed white rose . . . This book and this white rose are dearer to me than all else . . . I made my way over thousands, indeed tens of thousands of corpses. Innumerable times I escaped death by a hair's breadth, I lost everything. Only from this rose and book I never parted." ²⁵

The pervasive appeal of young Werther to Chinese youth is obvious. He is a well-educated German *ts'ai-tzu* with a charming affliction, unrequited love. His sorrows of love are expressed in the intensity of his emotions—a perfect source of inspiration to the emancipated love-hungry youth who had recently emerged on the literary scene by means of the cataclysmic Literary Revolution. But one important aspect of Werther was neglected by his Chinese worshipers. His sorrows are not only attributed simply to unrequited love but also contain some philosophic significance. Werther is a victim of the so-called romantic *Weltschmerz*, a passive and often pessimistic state of mind which arises from a disparity between a man's ideals and the reality of his environment.²⁶ In his "Reflections on Werther," Goethe himself described it as something close to a weariness of life under the most peaceful conditions. The culmination of *Weltschmerz* is often suicide, and Goethe himself once came very close to it early in his life. The novel can be read, therefore, as a study of suicide. In order to register faithfully the stages of his hero's mental disintegration, Goethe hit upon a most effective literary form—personal letters. Thus the rationale for the letter form is closely linked with the psycho-

logical build-up of the hero: "He is thrust upon by the very things that should serve to take him out of himself. If he ever does want to discuss it, then, surely only in letters, for a written effusion, whether it be joyous or morose, does not antagonize anyone directly."²⁷

In their effusion of subjective emotions, the May Fourth youth entirely ignored this pessimistic note and wept over Werther's suicide in the same way they bewailed the death of La Dame aux Camélias. They received the work just as the German youth in the 1770s had received it when it first appeared—as a sentimental sob story. Although the Chinese youth had not, like their German counterparts, "made a fad of wearing his blue frock coat and yellow waistcoat, and in many cases found in the hero's fate an invitation to suicide,"²⁸ some of them adopted the name of Werther and Charlotte, just as others had called themselves Armand. One also wonders whether the widespread use of the letter form as a fictional device was not due, at least partially, to the same influence. The sentimental and confessional temper in the early twenties was such that Goethe's Chinese readers would readily applaud the other side of Goethe's intention to write this book: "The decision to let my inner self rule me at will."²⁹ It was the plot—drawn from Goethe's personal experience—that appealed to the autobiographical mania of the Chinese audience. It was the profusion of emotions which the young Werther poured out in his letters, rather than the underlying *Weltschmerz*, which was reciprocated by a whole generation equally teeming with emotions.

In spite of Werther's overwhelming sentimentality, something was lacking in his personality. Liu Wu-chi noted perceptively that "although Werther was the embodiment of youth, he lacked an element of dynamism that youth should have. Accordingly, he could not but follow the inclinations of his heart and seek the path of self-destruction."³⁰ Liu made these comments in America in 1929, when a large number of his fellow literary men in China were already drifting toward the left. A sensitive writer like Mao Tun was able to observe that Werther's sentimentality and his lack of dynamism were no longer praiseworthy values. Mao Tun's usage of two images—"an old well-worn copy" of this novel and "a pressed white rose"—is both naturalistic and symbolic. He testified to the immense popularity of

the novel but suggested, by implication, that this bible of youthful love had been trampled by war and revolution. By 1930, when the story of *Tzu Yeh* supposedly took place, the book, like love itself, had become cherished memory. The appearance of other translations served to perpetuate this memory, but its immediate relevance was lost.

In January 1926, the *Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao* began to serialize a partial translation of *Jean-Christophe*. A letter from Romain Rolland himself under the title, "Jean-Christophe to his brethren in China" was reproduced in the same issue together with a translated Chinese text:

I know neither Europe nor Asia; I only know two races in the world: the race of the ascending soul and the race of the descending soul.

On the one hand, the patient, ardent, tenacious and intrepid impulse of men toward light—all the light: science, beauty, love of men, common progress.

On the other, oppressive forces: darkness, ignorance, apathy, fanatical prejudices and brutality.

I am with the former. Wherever they might come from, they are all my friends, my allies, and my brethren. My fatherland is a free humanity. The great people are its provinces and the common well-being is its Sun King.

January, 1925

Romain Rolland³¹

The letter, which was used as a kind of preface to the Chinese translation of *Jean-Christophe*, also sheds some light on Rolland's original intention in writing his *chef d'oeuvre*. Jean-Christophe Krafft was a German musician, a "Beethoven in the world of today." He was not Rolland himself but a projection of what he would like to have been: a great musician. The religious symbolism in his name ("Jean" from John the Baptist and "Christophe" from Christ) carries with it Rolland's own religious message. The function of Jean, the Precursor, is "to cry in the wilderness, to denounce the generation of vipers, to lay the axe to the root of the tree."³² But after the theme of revolt in the first part of the novel—*La Révolte*—is concluded, the hero embarks upon a new journey (*Nouvelle Journée*) and here justifies his second name. "When at the end Christophe emerges from the river, like Christ after his baptism, he leaves the Precursor behind and goes forward to preach the gospel of the New Day: Primal Energy, or

'Krafft.' "³³ The river Rhine, one of the key sources of inspiration for Rolland in this novel, has a symbolic and structural significance in linking, first of all, Jean-Christophe's own life journey and, second, the two cultures on both sides of the river: the civil restraint of French culture and the primitive force of Germanic culture. The river is enriched from both banks just as Rolland, through Jean-Christophe Krafft, draws his nature and the quality of his thought from both cultures. His final message is clear: "Brothers, let us draw close together, let us forget what separates us, let us think only of our common misery! There are no enemies, there are no evil men, there are only unfortunates, and the only lasting happiness is to understand each other in order to love one another."³⁴

This is the message that Rolland offered to his Chinese brethren. But in the heat of their nationalism the Chinese Rollandists conveniently overlooked the pacifist internationalism behind his advocacy of French-German cooperation and the brotherhood of men.³⁵ Kuo Mo-jo, in a memorial article on Rolland written in 1948, simply identified the people of the light with the Allies and the oppressive forces with the Nazis and Fascists.³⁶ Nor did Rolland's Chinese admirers pay enough attention to the symbolic, allegorical, and musical elements in the novel. They passed over Jean and Christophe and went straight to the final message of Krafft—force. The first Chinese translator of *Jean-Christophe*, Ching Yin-yü, who was also Rolland's friend by correspondence, summarized the French master's entire *Weltanschauung* in one word, "dynamism," which was imparted to his hero, Jean-Christophe.³⁷ Ching may indeed have read the most heroic biography of Rolland by Stefan Zweig, who asserted that "Jean-Christophe is an apostle of force."³⁸

The appeal of Romain Rolland to his Chinese brethren, like the appeal of Michelangelo and Beethoven to Rolland himself, lies in his larger-than-life heroic stature. The heroic streak in Rolland's mentality has been glowingly described by himself. "Our first duty," he declared, "is to be great, and to defend greatness on earth."³⁹ He shares a kindred spirit with Carlyle concerning heroes and hero worship. While Carlyle presents the hero as poet, Rolland exalts the hero as artist who, like himself, "aspires towards eternal forms" and

"strives to fashion the monumental."⁴⁰ In their mania of hero worship the Chinese men of letters at once seized upon Rolland's heroic aspirations by showering upon him all kinds of titanic epithets. Hsü Chih-mo called Rolland "the brave fighter for mankind," "the spiritual and intellectual leader of the whole of Europe," and "the fountain spring of inspiration for the entire world."⁴¹ Kuo Mo-jo eulogized him as "the great son of France, the navigator of truth," and "the great fighter for democracy."⁴² Hsiao Chün regarded Rolland, together with Gorky and Lu Hsün, as the three greatest "spiritual engines" of the modern age: "With his crystal soul, his golden heart, his sun-like light and warmth . . . he fights with sword or pen for human progress until he sheds his last drop of blood, and exhales his last whiff of breath."⁴³

It is interesting that Rolland's most fervent worshipers in China were also among the most dynamic personalities. The case of Kuo Mo-jo and Hsiao Chün is especially relevant. For Rolland's heroic philosophy sometimes does reach what Kuo Mo-jo would view as pantheistic proportions. One finds the following proclamation by Rolland which indicates clearly that he in fact joins hands with another of Kuo's favorite heroes, Walt Whitman: "What do you suppose that I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God? and that there is no God any more divine than yourself?"⁴⁴ For Hsiao Chün, there could be no better apostle of force than Rolland and his *Jean-Christophe*, a work Hsiao Chün loved as much as he did *Taras Bulba*.

Hsiao Chün's admiration for Rolland and *Jean-Christophe* was representative of the general reception of this French giant in China. The emphasis on force, energy, suffering and the triumph over suffering puts Rolland's hero in sharp contrast with Goethe's young Werther. Jean-Christophe and Werther are kindred spirits only in the exuberance of their emotionalism. Aside from this, they are miles apart. While Werther is slender, pensive, almost effeminate, Jean-Christophe is "tall and massive, almost uncouth, with large hands and brawny arms . . . liable to outbursts of turbulent passion."⁴⁵ While Werther is "cultivated, well-to-do, generous, talented, sensitive, observant but more inclined to reverie,"⁴⁶ one discerns in Jean-Christophe "some-

thing barbaric and elemental, the power of a storm or of a torrent . . . His outward aspect is that of a fighter."⁴⁷ The contrast between the two heroes, I suggest, reveals the general polarity between the Wertherian and the Promethean prototypes. The popularity of Rolland's work reflected a gradual process of dynamization in the romantic temper in China.⁴⁸ The appeal of Rolland even to the avowedly Marxist writers like Kuo Mo-jo and Hsiao Chün is another indication that the leftist tendency on the literary scene was due to the impact more of romanticism than of theoretical Marxism. A Rollandist sense of heroism and humanitarianism lay at the root of the leftist writers' social conscience and political stance.

Byron and the Byronic Hero

Whether the Chinese literary men preferred Werther or Jean-Christophe, they were uniform in their adulation of the epitome of Western romanticism: Byron. Ever since Su Man-shu had introduced this English romantic poet and initiated the fad of Byroniana by consciously modeling himself after his hero, Byron has become perhaps the most glorified author of Western romanticism in China, towering even above Rousseau, the father of European romanticism. Some consciously identified themselves with Byron, while others sang praises and carved heroic images of Byron in their works.

What the Chinese admired most in Byron—the central feature of the Chinese Byronic image—was that Byron was a great rebel. In a special issue of *Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao* devoted to Byron and published in 1924 (the centennial year of Byron's death), some of the leading members of the Association for Literary Studies propounded their variations on the theme of Byron as a rebel. Cheng Chen-to, founder of the association and editor of the magazine, wrote: "We love talented writers, particularly great rebels. Hence our adulation of Byron . . . His passionate actions of rebellion move us much more than his poetry."⁴⁹ Cheng followed his assertion with four lines of panegyrics which appeared on the front page of the special issue:

He is an extraordinarily great rebel in the modern age!
He rebels against the evil devils that oppress freedom;

He rebels against all false and hypocritical societies.
The immortality of poets rests with their works, but
Byron is a singular exception.⁵⁰

The novelist Wang T'ung-chao admired Byron's "fiery passion, intense and exuberant energy"⁵¹ and considered Byron second only to Shakespeare in literary achievements. The otherwise sedate Mao Tun registered an impassioned plea for Byron although warning against imitations of Byron's sensual indulgence: "What China needs now is exactly the kind of thunderous and stormy literature suffused with Byron's rebellious spirit."⁵² In similar "Byron special" issues of the *Creation Quarterly*, Liang Shih-ch'iu made a rare appearance before his Babbittian legacies overcame his youthful romanticism. "The kernel of Byronism," Liang wrote, "is his rebellious spirit."⁵³ This rebellious spirit, Liang asserted, was the prerequisite for any movement of "emancipation," which he regarded as "the kernel of romanticism." "The romantic spirit of rebellion can be found in every romantic poet, but it can be said to have reached the peak with Byron."⁵⁴ Another Creationist writer announced forcefully: "What is the Byronic spirit? It is the spirit of revolution."⁵⁵ It is needless to recapitulate the even more grandiloquent visions of Byron in the works of Hsü Chih-mo, Kuo Mo-jo, and Chiang Kuang-tz'u.

This Chinese reading of Byron yields some interesting contrasts with the Byronic images in the West. The Chinese adulators make little differentiation between Byron and his works; therefore, the Byronic hero is mainly represented by Byron himself. The Western image of the Byronic hero, however, presents a composite picture—a blending of Byron and the heroes in his works—which encompasses all the major hero-types of European romanticism: the child of nature, the hero of sensibility, the Gothic villain, the intellectual rebel like Faust, the moral outcast like Cain, or simply the rebel against society and even God, like Prometheus and Satan.⁵⁶ The Chinese writers paint their Byronic images in more positive colors. Thus they have overlooked both Don Juan and Cain, and stripped Prometheus of his Satanic aspects. In short, they have not observed the more devilish side of the Western image of Byron which presents him as an erotic, sadistic, and satanic dandy.⁵⁷ Moreover, in glorifying Byron's "rebel-

lious spirit," the Chinese Byronians also neglect the more Wertherian aspects: Byron as a tender lover and a man of sensitivity and sentimentality. Nor does the Chinese epithet of "rebellion" refer as much to the spiritual or cosmic rebellion of Faust or Prometheus as to the personal, social, and political rebellion of Byron himself, especially in his last years in Greece. This less intellectual but more emotional and positive interpretation of the Byronic image reveals the influence of the socio-political context of the May Fourth era. The growing nationalism which culminated in the student and worker demonstrations against foreign imperialism in the twenties and thirties prompted the Chinese men of letters to compare the plight of their homeland with that of Greece. Byron's last heroic act to help the Greek people regain their independence was regarded not only as an act of romantic rebellion but also a nationalistic act. The fact that Byron became an outcast from English society was received by his Chinese followers as another indication of Byron's rebellious heroism—a defiance of social conventions which fitted well into the iconoclastic and emancipational temper of the May Fourth generation.

A more subtle factor of Byron's popularity in China was psychological, in the context of the romantic personality. The Byronic hero in European romanticism represented in fact a combination of both the Wertherian and Promethean prototypes. Insofar as both types of the romantic personality had their equivalents in China, Byron's multifaceted glamor was obvious. But the dynamic interpretation of Byron reflected a general mood of exhilaration and increasing activism on the literary scene. The Wertherian type, which smacked more of the traditional *ts'ai-tzu*, became gradually outmoded as the sentimental trend turned political and leftist after the second half of the 1920s. The Wertherian temper of Yü Ta-fu had given way to the more Promethean aspirations of Kuo Mo-jo. The politicization of the Chinese men of letters had transformed Prometheus from a cosmic rebel into a social and political one. Even Lu Hsün had chosen this mythological figure as his alter ego while adding a cultural note: "I have stolen fire from other countries, intending to cook my own flesh. I think that if the taste is good, the other chewers on their part may get something out of it, and I shall not sacrifice my body in vain."⁵⁸ To be a Prome-

thean martyr, for Lu Hsün, was to attain the true stature of a revolutionary.

It can be concluded, therefore, that in the romantic framework the shift from Literary Revolution to Revolutionary Literature is epitomized by the dynamizing view of Byron—a progression from sentiment to force, from love to revolution, from Werther to Prometheus.

The Romantic Generation

Lecturing at the University of Chicago some thirty years ago, Hu Shih compared the Literary Revolution in China to the Renaissance in Europe.⁶⁰ Perhaps it would be more appropriate, if analogies are needed, to substitute the Romantic Movement for the Renaissance. Both the Romantic Movement in nineteenth century Europe (in spite of the wealth of scholastic debates on the exact nature and definition of Romanticism)⁶⁰ and the Literary Revolution in twentieth-century China represented a reaction against the classic tradition of order, reason, schematization, ritualization, and structuring of life. Both ushered in a new emphasis on sincerity, spontaneity, passion, imagination, and the release of individual energies—in short, the primacy of subjective human sentiments and energies.

It can be argued that much of this new tendency in both cases can be traced back to the sentimental tradition in classical literature, which may have predisposed some modern men of letters toward these romantic values. What distinguishes this romantic tendency inspired by the West from the sentimental strains in traditional Chinese literature—a distinction that renders the word "sentimental" insufficient as a keynote to the temper of this era—is a marked and increasing degree of dynamism, which, I suggest, is primarily the legacy of nineteenth-century European Romanticism. Two mythological concepts can be regarded as its dynamic manifestations: Prometheanism, as seen through Chinese lenses, glorifies individual bravery, self-conscious and self-assertive efforts at the realization of human potentialities in rebellion against past orthodoxy or tradition; and Dionysianism, with its motive force in both spiritual and physical love, demands total release from the restrictions of convention and plunges the individual

into the throes of subjective life experience in order to attain the state of frenzied, ecstatic abandon. The application of these two types of romantic ethos to the historical environment is found in Kuo Mo-jō's celebrated poem, "The Resurrection of the Phoenixes": the fire of individual and collective passion would burn up all the remnants of the past and, out of their ashes, the phoenix of New China would be reborn.

It is this dynamic ethos that overshadows the sentimental and Wertherian side of the modern Chinese man of letters, giving him a more positive stature and marking him off from the frail, effete *wen-jen* prototype of traditional times. One of the intriguing aspects of the personality of a modern Chinese man of letters lies in his inner dynamic cravings to transform his far from robust appearance. Hsü Chih-mo, with his old-style long gown and his dark-rimmed glasses framing a delicate face, would often come "in a whirlwind, sweeping across his companions," and utter words "amidst fits of shouting and jumping."⁶¹ Even an otherwise mature and restrained man like Mao Tun could not resist naming the hero in one part of his trilogy, *Eclipse*, Ch'iang Meng (strong and fierce), alias Wei-li (sole force). It is also in this dynamic context that the word romantic may be applied to describe the personalities and life-styles of some prominent members of the May Fourth literary intelligentsia. We would have to distinguish, with Jacques Barzun, "Romanticism as a historical movement and romanticism as a characteristic of human beings."⁶² In the latter category, Barzun has also noted that sentimentality, though commonly alleged to be a major facet of the romantic personality, is more of "a regrettable hangover from the past"⁶³ (as exemplified, in Europe, by the sentimental novels of Lawrence Sterne and Henry Fielding at the end of the neo-classical period and, in China, by the masters of *hsieh-ch'ing hsiao-shuo* and Butterfly fiction). In addition to sentiment, "energy is the distinguishing mark of romantic life."⁶⁴

Was there a conscious Romantic Movement in twentieth century China? The answer, on the superficial level, has to be negative, although a few extremists in the twenties were determined to unleash a conscious Romantic Movement following entirely the European ex-

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for analyzing the complexities of their time and their changed role as alienated intelligentsia. After having swept away tradition, they have left a cultural vacuum which they attempted to fill up with Western panaceas—science, democracy, anarchism, socialism, romanticism. Intoxicated with themselves and possessed with the wonders from the West, they never seriously pondered the problem of modern China's cultural identity. Their basic outlook, emerging perhaps in a historical context of transition and uncertainty, was anything but realistic. The clash between their idealized images and the increasingly somber realities incurred not a re-evaluation of the self but a reassertion of the self: thus a host of leftist heroes and heroines since the 1940s, from Wang Shih-wei, Hsiao Chün, Ting Ling, to Feng Hsüeh-feng and Ai Ch'ing, have fallen under the rigors of party discipline.⁷²

Has romanticism ceased to be the temper of post-1949 China? One finds, as late as 1958, in the pages of the official CCP journal, *Red Flag*, a slogan initiated by Kuo Mo-jo and Chou Yang advocating "revolutionary romanticism."⁷³ One also wonders whether the recent Cultural Revolution cannot be regarded as the resurgence of a kind of collective romantic spirit against the routinization of an established order and whether the release of human energies of a younger generation cannot be seen as the frenzied outburst of a collective will, guided by the thought of Mao Tse-tung, to destroy the old phoenix in order to hasten the rebirth of a new one. The problem of romanticism in a socialist setting will certainly be a most intriguing theme for another act in the drama. But the curtain for this act of our romantic drama has fallen.

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 31. Ting Ling, "I-chiu-san-ling nien ch'un Shanghai," in *Ting Ling tuan-p'ien hsiao-shuo chi* (Peking, 1954), p. 154; English translation revised from T. A. Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness*, p. 188.
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3. See, for instance, Mao Tun, "Chin-tai Po-lan wen-hsüeh t'ai-tou Hsien-k'e-wei-chih" (The master of modern Polish literature, Sienkiewicz), *Hsiao-shuo yüeh-pao* 12.2:1-4 (Feb. 10, 1921).
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45. Zweig, p. 190.
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64. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
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