WRITERS HEADING SOUTH AND THE NATIONAL REVOLUTION

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Abstract: For a long time, the reorganization and reform of the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) and the Kuomintang-Communist cooperation have been mainstream perspectives explaining the success of the Northern Expedition. In recent years, the academic field has sought deeper underpinnings for the National Revolution, grounded in this cooperation, by examining cultural disparities between the North and the South. The southward migration of numerous writers, such as Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, and Yu Dafu, served as validation of this logic. However, an examination of The Republican Daily News of Canton (Guang Zhou Min Guo Ri Bao) and its supplements reveals that the writers' migration was actually the fruit, not the seed, of the emerging "new" culture in the South. Concurrently, a "newness" more pivotal than the Kuomintang's reorganization has been overlooked: the re-creation of a "new nation" ("zaizao xinguo"). From the First National Congress of the Kuomintang, which established "re-creating a new nation" as its paramount agenda, to the establishment of a new National Government after the May Thirtieth Movement and, subsequently, the Northern Expedition, the South progressively advanced the National Revolution aimed at re-founding the Republic. The struggle between revolution and counter-revolution waged by the old and new Republics constitutes not only the internal logic for comprehending the Southern revolution's progression but also the primary factor for understanding the writers' southward migration. The intellectual upheaval triggered by the shifting principles and historical momentum (dao yu shi) between the old and new "Two Republics" from 1924 to 1928 represents a profoundly significant yet underexplored proposition.

Revolution was undoubtedly the most important "keyword" in 20th-century China, and the 1920s marked a "critical phase" in China's revolutionary trajectory. This decade witnessed the successive founding of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese Youth Party, alongside the reorganization and revitalization of the Chinese Nationalist Party. All three parties were actively engaged in revolutionary mobilization and practice. "Amidst the multi-party contest for revolutionary leadership, the National Revolution commanded the most powerful momentum" (Wang, 2013). It mobilized the broadest coalition of forces—encompassing writers and many others—and became the dominant revolutionary direction of the 1920s. A multitude of intellectuals journeyed south to join the revolutionary camp; among them were celebrated writers like Mao Dun (Shen Yanbing), Cheng Fangwu, Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu, Wang Duqing, and Lu Xun. Yet it is worth questioning: In the 1920s, an era where revolution was so widely championed, why did the National Revolution become the dominant direction among the many "revolutions"? What precisely were the revolutionary ideals in the South that attracted writers like Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, and Mao Dun? And why did Lu Xun later remark that Guangzhou "could serve as the 'birthplace of revolution,' and also as the 'birthplace of counter-revolution'" (Lu, 2005, p. 33)?

The Republican Daily News of Canton（广州国民日报), as the primary party newspaper established after the reorganization and revitalization of the Nationalist Party, preserved numerous accounts of the words, actions, and traces left by Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, and others during their time in Guangzhou. However, many of these writers later sought to downplay, reinterpret, or even deny these very records of their connections to the city. Zhong Jingwen compiled *Lu Xun in Guangdong* (Zhong, 1927) primarily based on materials from *The Republican Daily News of Canton* and other periodicals. Notably, Lu Xun later expressed consistent dissatisfaction with the book and repeatedly disavowed it. In a letter to a friend, he

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remarked that the work was "likely just a collection of press commentaries," adding, "but such commentaries were of their moment—what held true then differs greatly from what holds true now." (Lu, 2005, p. 68) Subsequent scholarship has largely followed Lu Xun's "present-oriented" perspective, thereby overlooking the complexities of the "past moment" during the revolutionary period in Guangzhou. To resolve this issue, the only way lies in re-excavating the materials from the time of Lu Xun's initial arrival in Guangdong and reconstructing the historical narrative based on them. Precisely for this reason, the speeches Lu Xun delivered upon his first arrival in Guangzhou, published in newspapers and journals and later compiled by Zhong Jingwen in *Lu Xun in Guangdong*, hold immense historical significance (Qiu, 2014). In fact, not only did Lu Xun disavow *Lu Xun in Guangdong* from the post-Party Purge perspective, but even after the "Party Purge," he remained connected with *The Republican Daily News of Canton*, which by then had become the vanguard of public opinion for the purge. His words and deeds continued to appear frequently on its main pages and in its supplements.

On July 23 and 26, 1927, Lu Xun was invited by the Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Education under the Nationalist Party (国民党) Administration to participate in the "Guangzhou Summer Academic Lecture Series." The content of his speech was the renowned lecture titled "Wei-Jin Demeanor and the Relationship between Literature, Medicine, and Wine." The original transcript of this speech was published in the supplement of *The Republican Daily News of Canton* from August 11 to 17, 1927. Similarly, his speech "Random Thoughts on Reading", delivered on July 16 at Guangzhou Zhiyong Middle School, was also published in the supplement of *The Republican Daily News of Canton* on August 18, 19, and 22 of the same year. These speeches, along with other related reports, were not included in the compilation *Lu Xun in Guangdong*. In a letter to his friend, Lu Xun wrote, "My discussion of the Wei-Jin matters in Guangzhou was indeed spoken with heartfelt indignation." (Lu, 2005, p. 143) However, apart from early Lu Xun scholars who roughly interpreted this text as an indictment of Chiang Kai-shek's April 12 Counter-Revolutionary Coup, few have since paid attention to the inherent correlation between Lu Xun's "heartfelt indignation" and the "turmoil" of the Guangzhou Revolution.

Lu Xun in Guangdong omitted many of Lu Xun's important remarks made after the Party Purge, making such a portrayal of "Lu Xun in Guangdong" clearly incomplete. The "Lu Xun in Guangdong" of the post-Purge period thus constitutes a topic worthy of further investigation. More importantly, when examining "Wei-Jin Demeanor and the Relationship Between Literature, Medicine, and Wine" through later compilations of "selected works" or "complete collections," we tend to analyze the connection between Lu Xun's spirit and Wei-Jin demeanor solely from a theoretical perspective. Yet, when placed back into its original generative context—*The Republican Daily News of Canton*—for contextual reading, the experience and understanding would be entirely different. The speech published in the newspaper retains many expressions that align with the linguistic context of Guangzhou at the time and the actual setting of the lecture, "with a total of 202 discrepancies compared to later versions (including the 'Complete Works' edition)." (Bao, 2016) Similarly, speeches and reports by figures such as Guo Moruo, Mao Dun, and Yu Dafu also frequently appeared in *The Republican Daily News of Canton*. Furthermore, Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu, and others were all embroiled in various controversies at National Guangdong University (later renamed Sun Yat-sen University), and these controversies were also key topics in *The Republican Daily News of Canton*. These seemingly peripheral materials and issues, in fact, offer greater insight into the more complex inner worlds of Lu Xun, Guo Moruo, and their contemporaries during that period, thereby illuminating the deeper and more intricate relationships between these writers and the Guangzhou revolution.

By examining relevant reports in *The Republican Daily News of Canton* around the time

of the First National Congress of the Nationalist Party, it becomes evident that the reorganization of the Nationalist Party was merely a means, while the ultimate goal was "re-creating a new nation". More than just bringing about a renewal of revolutionary ideology through party restructuring, the establishment of this objective—re-creating the nation—redefined the very meaning of the new revolution. In fact, it was precisely on the basis of this concept of "new revolution" that cooperation between the Nationalist and Communist Parties became possible. In late August 1922, following extensive coordination and communication, the West Lake Conference of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China formally decided to cooperate with the Nationalist Party. Communists were to join the Nationalist Party in their individual capacities and commit themselves to this great revolution of "re-creating the nation". Shortly after, Chen Duxiu published "On Nation-Building" in the recently launched weekly journal *The Guide*: "We believe that China is still in an era of 'nation-building' and of political warfare. Proposals such as restoring legitimate constitutional tradition, hastily drafting a constitution, implementing local decentralization, reorganizing finances, or purifying elections—with regard to the genuine demands of the current situation—are either entirely misplaced or merely scratch the surface. The real requirement of the times is to employ the means of political warfare to create a truly independent Republic of China." "The period for the 'national revolution' through the cooperation of the two parties has now ripened." (Chen, 1922)

The May Thirtieth Massacre, in turn, provided a crucial opportunity for the establishment of the new National Government in Guangdong, marking the full unfolding of the struggle between the old and the new Republic. Compared with the compromise shown by the northern government during the May Thirtieth incident, the firm stance of the Guangzhou National Government added weight to the moral legitimacy of the new Republic. Conversely, the March Eighteenth Massacre completely stripped the northern government of its remaining legitimacy. These gains and losses made the distinction between the two republics represented by the northern and southern governments unmistakable. The National Revolution and the Northern Expedition from the south truly embodied the fundamental meaning of revolution as encapsulated in the ancient phrase, "the revolutions of Tang and Wu, which obeyed Heaven and responded to the people"—that is, a revolution of the new Republic against the old Republic. Countless intellectuals were drawn precisely by such revolutionary ideals and the new Republic. They made their choice between the two republics with their feet and their pens, committing themselves to the revolutionary practice and literary expression of building the new Republic.

Lu Xun's journey south to Guangzhou allowed him to observe and experience the new Republic of China at close range. During this period, whether actively or "by assignment," he spoke frequently on topics related to the Republic. He was nearly always present at Guangzhou's important festivals commemorating the Republic and the revolution. In his opening address at Sun Yat-sen University, Lu Xun began by stating: "The greatest legacy of Mr. Sun Yat-sen's lifelong dedication to the National Revolution is the Republic of China." He followed immediately with the remark: "However, 'the revolution is not yet complete.'" (Lu, 2005, p. 194) In his early talks in Guangzhou about the Republic, Lu Xun also expressed dissatisfaction—a dissatisfaction born of the gap between ideal and reality, and aimed at improvement and at building a better new Republic.

Whether in Beijing, during his interim period in Xiamen, or after his move to Guangzhou, Lu Xun consistently identified himself with the new Republic and the revolution dedicated to building it. He closely followed every advance of the Northern Expeditionary Army, thrilled and excited by the capture of each major city. This is evident both from his correspondence with Xu Guangping exchanged from two places before his move to Guangzhou, and from his celebratory essay "Beyond the Celebration: Reflections on the Recovery of Shanghai and Nanjing".

However, what Lu Xun found unacceptable was that former supporters of the old Republic government and erstwhile opponents who had vehemently debated against him and others opposing the old regime—advocates for re-creating a new nation—had now transformed

themselves into members of the camp of the new Republic and the National Revolution. After the Northern Expeditionary Army captured Wuchang, Xu Guangping wrote to Lu Xun expressing her belief that the new National Government had "a world of possibilities before it." Although the Research Clique had regained influence in Beijing's educational circles, her attitude was, "To hell with them. Anyway, Wuchang has been taken; sooner or later （the revolution) will reach Beijing and scatter them in panic." (Lu & Jing, 1998, p. 501) As someone who had lived through the Xinhai Revolution, Lu Xun was not as optimistic as Xu Guangping. He felt deep concern for the Nationalist Party and the new Republic: "Those in the Research Clique are more cunning than foxes, while the Nationalist Party is naively honest. You'll see—once they gain substantial influence, they will turn around and try to co-opt it, and the Republic will come to think they are not so bad after all." He further observed, "When the Nationalist Party is strong, it treats other parties with tolerance and generosity. But once those other parties gain power, they oppress and sabotage the Nationalist Party by every means imaginable. Yet when the Nationalist Party rises again, it forgets all this—and naturally, those others will conceal their old attitude once more." (Lu & Jing, 1998, p. 508)

It is quite telling that when Lu Xun later edited and published *Letters Between Two*, he deleted this very passage. Clearly, the phrase "the Republic will come to think they are not so bad after all" referred to the new Republic born of the National Revolution. After arriving in Guangzhou, Lu Xun publicly expressed this view: "Once the revolutionary forces expand, the number of those calling themselves revolutionaries is bound to increase." He continued, "Didn't *The Contemporary Review* change its tune by the end of last year? Comparing its rhetoric now with that during the 'March Eighteenth Massacre,' I truly suspect they have all taken some elixir and suddenly undergone a complete transformation. I have long held a prejudice about Buddhism: I consider the austere Hinayana path to be genuine Buddhism. As for the wealthy elites who drink wine and eat meat, if they merely abstain from meat for a single meal, they can be called lay Buddhists and counted as followers. Though glorified as Mahayana and spread more widely, this teaching, because it is so easy to embrace, becomes superficial or even entirely meaningless. Revolution is much the same…" (Lu, 2005, pp. 197–198) As for "Beyond the Celebration: Reflections on the Recovery of Shanghai and Nanjing", what passed for Lu Xun's "celebration" was two instances of private joy, inwardly cherished but never publicly expressed. He felt excitement akin to what he had experienced during the Shaoxing restoration after the Xinhai Revolution. Yet the memory of what followed—" universal renewal"—remained vivid. In Guangzhou, he witnessed once again the phenomenon of "universal revolution" and "universal participation in the Republic." This was precisely what, beyond the initial excitement, left him deeply anguished and utterly disillusioned.

It is evident that the primary reason for Lu Xun's departure from Guangzhou was Gu Jiegang, not the "Party Purge." Yet, just as his decision to come to Guangzhou was by no means "for the sake of love" but rather a choice and identification with the new Republic, his stance of "if Gu comes, I leave" could not be reduced to mere personal animosity. It represented, instead, the struggle between revolution and counter-revolution waged by the two camps of the "two Republics"—Lu Xun, who identified with the new Republic, versus Gu Jiegang and the Modernist faction, who represented the old Republic. Lu Xun "saw Gu's arrival as linked to impending sweeping changes at the entire Sun Yat-sen University." (Shuo & Zhang, 1982) In fact, he saw it not merely as a university matter; he connected this development to the shifting situation of the entire National Revolution aimed at re-creating the nation. When those who had originally sided with the old Republic and opposed the Nationalist Party transformed themselves into supporters of the new Republic, while those who had truly belonged to the new Republic side were turned into dissenters for opposing such opportunists, this ineffable sense of tragedy and absurdity mirrored the view of orthodox morality depicted in "Wei-Jin Demeanor

and the Relationship between Literature, Medicine, and Wine". The very ones sincere in their commitment to orthodoxy were accused and killed by opportunists in the name of destroying that orthodoxy. Replacing "orthodox morality" with "the Republic" and "revolution" makes it readily understandable. Lu Xun indeed "spoke with heartfelt indignation." When addressing this part in his lecture, he deliberately ventured beyond the Wei-Jin analogy and used the northern warlords hoisting the Blue Sky and White Sun flag as "an easily comprehensible metaphor."

Like Lu Xun, Guo Moruo was also deeply drawn to the idea of "re-creating the nation", sincerely yearning for and championing the new Republic, immersing himself in the revolutionary struggle that distinguished the old Republic from the new. In early 1926, the lead article in a special enlarged issue of the Creation Society's journal *The Deluge* (Vol. 1, No. 8) was Guo Moruo's "The Creation of a New Nation". Many researchers have viewed it as a critique of statism. In reality, the article sought to integrate Marxism to forge a new state. To this end, Guo Moruo passionately appealed to his compatriots in the statist camp: "Let us practice a new statism," and proclaimed, "Oh, true patriots! Let us all awaken, unite, and dedicate ourselves to the creation of a new state!" (Guo, 1926) This piece, "The Creation of a New Nation", indeed marked the beginning of Guo Moruo's parting of ways with his comrades in the Lone Army Society and the Awakening Lion Society. Shortly after its publication, Guo received an invitation from the National Government in the south and proceeded to the National Guangdong University of the new Republic. Clearly, the divergence between the new and old statism was the reason for Guo's parting ways with the Lone Army and Awakening Lion groups. This distinction was less about demarcation along Marxist lines and more about whether one championed the newly created nation or the existing Republic. It is crucial to recall that in the autumn and winter of 1925, statists and Communists clashed violently during the anti-imperialist movement over whether to fly the Five-Colored Flag of the old Republic or the Blue Sky and White Sun flag of the new Republic. Later, when Guo Moruo joined the Northern Expedition, the Awakening Lion faction allied with other statist organizations to launch a "Defend the Five-Colored Flag" campaign. The stark divide between revolution and counter-revolution, embodied by the new and old Republics, was thus unmistakably clear.

In the post-May Fourth era, the trajectory from the proposal of "re-creating the nation" at the First National Congress of the Nationalist Party (marking the Kuomintang-Communist cooperation), to the establishment of the Guangzhou National Government in July 1925 representing the new Republic, and further to the launch of the Northern Expedition military campaign against the old Republic, culminated in the complete replacement of the old Republic by the new. This constituted a monumental transformation in modern Chinese history, whose significance and importance are no less than those of the earlier Xinhai Revolution and the founding of the Republic of China. Although the Guangzhou period of writers such as Lu Xun, Yu Dafu, and Guo Moruo was relatively brief, they witnessed and participated in this great nation-building revolution. By examining their relationships with both the government of the new Republic and with the Nationalist Party as a state-building party, we can not only gain insight into their more nuanced and rich inner journeys during this period but also understand the intrinsic logic behind their later joining of the Left-Wing Writers' Association. This also reminds us that when tracing the genealogy of proletarian revolutionary literature, the "nation" remains a crucial factor that cannot be overlooked.

The transformation in the legitimacy and political momentum of the "two Republics" between 1924 and 1928 triggered an upheaval within the intellectual community no less profound than that of 1949. While the latter has received considerable scholarly attention, the former has been largely overlooked. How intellectuals chose between the two Republics and how they accepted (or responded to) the new Republic of China and its new National Government constitute a significant yet underexplored proposition. Here, the author raises this issue to stimulate academic attention and discussion. The struggle between revolution and counter-revolution, embodied by the "two Republics," along with the shifting attitudes of the intelligentsia toward the new Republic, perhaps provided a more fundamental basis for the

renewed realignment of intellectual factions during and after this period than debates over doctrine or class theory. The experiences and lessons of the National Revolution aimed at "re-creating the nation" can serve as a key to understanding the subsequent trajectories of the Nationalist and Communist Parties. Furthermore, the renewed involvement of intellectuals and writers in the "revolution" to build a "new China" in the 1940s—whether by choice or by circumstance—highlights the crucial role of the nation and revolution in reshaping the landscape of modern literature and culture.

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