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The Political Formation and Poetic Construction of Russian and Soviet Images in China (1917-1949)

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Abstract

The Russian October Revolution of 1917 exerted a profound influence on early twenty-century China, which was then grappling with the question of its future direction. As the aggression of the Western powers shattered the Chinese people's hopes of following the Western model of modernization, and the diplomatic failure at the Paris Peace Conference dispelled their illusions about Western democracy, the October Revolution, with its dual opposition to capitalism and imperialism, offered China's progressive intellectuals – then searching for a way forward – an entirely new vision of national development. Soviet Russia's first declaration on China pledged to renounce the privileges that Tsarist Russia had wrested from China and to treat China as an equal. In sharp contrast to the policies of the other imperialist powers, this greatly enhanced Soviet Russia's appeal and won widespread recognition from political figures across the spectrum, including Sun Yat-sen. This political choice to "take Russia as a model" directly shaped the development of modern Chinese poetry. Beginning with the conception linking literature and revolution advanced by Li Dazhao and Zheng Zhenduo, continuing with Jiang Guangci, Tian Jian, and Guo Moruo's imitation of Russian and Soviet poetry in both its themes and artistic forms such as "staircase poetry (ladder verse)", and culminating in the Chinese Poetry Society's advocacy of "grasping reality", poetry came to be conceived as a political weapon for disseminating revolutionary ideals and mobilizing the masses, while the poet was recast as the voice of the people. This orientation was subsequently institutionalized through Mao Zedong's Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, which established the principles that literature and art should serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers, with political criteria taking precedence over artistic ones. During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the translation and dissemination of Soviet Great Patriotic War poetry stimulated a wave of the creation of national narrative poetry. From the October Revolution to the founding of the People's Republic of China, the image of Russia and the Soviet Union underwent a profound transformation: shifting from an external point of reference to an object of identification, and from a source of cultural influence to the political choice of "following the Soviet road." In doing so, it responded to China's political anxieties and became a vital spiritual resource for the country's modern political transformation and the construction of poetic modernity.

Keywords: Image of Russia and the Soviet Union, Politicization of poetry, Chinese imaginaries of modernity, Literature and revolution, Revolutionary poetry

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1. The October Revolution and the Reconstruction of Chinese Imaginaries of Modernity

The guns of the 1917 Russian October Revolution not only shook the Europe but also reverberated across Asia,

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finding an unprecedented resonance in China. The significance of the October Revolution for China extended far beyond changes in the international political order; it addressed one of the fundamental political anxieties that had long preoccupied modern China: the question of the country's future path. China's progressive intellectuals were plunged into unprecedented bewilderment as the military superiority of Western powers shattered the illusion of the Celestial Empire, as the gunfire of the 1911 Xinhai Revolution failed to truly awaken a slumbering nation, and as the diplomatic failure at the Paris Peace Conference finally dispelled their faith in Western democracy. It was at this historical juncture that the success of the Russian Revolution, through its powerful demonstration effect, opened up an entirely new vision of China's future path. The image of Russia and the Soviet Union thus became an important symbolic vehicle through which China's political ideals were articulated.

News of the October Revolution's victory reached China just as the May Fourth Movement was in the making. The significance of the revolution lay primarily in the shattering the myth that the capitalism offered the only viable path to modernization. For a long time, despite their differing approaches, both reformists and revolutionaries in China took the Western capitalist powers as their principal reference point for modernization. However, World War I exposed the profound crisis of capitalist civilization. Moreover, the betrayal of China by Western powers at the Paris Peace Conference brought home to the Chinese people that, in an international order dominated by imperialism, weak nations have no real voice in international affairs. At this juncture, a fundamentally new social system emerged in Russia, one that opposed both capitalist exploitation and imperialist aggression. This dual revolutionary stance resonated with China's historical mission of resisting imperialism and overthrowing feudalism. During the May Fourth era, although Chinese poets had only a limited understanding of the October Revolution's full implications, it nevertheless quickly attracted their keen interest and enthusiastic response. This attitude was rooted in modern China's dual historical predicament: first, the invasion by foreign powers had thoroughly dismantled the Chinese intelligentsia's blind faith in the Western model of modernization; second, the grim reality of China's semi-colonial condition had made national independence and the liberation of the people the pressing historical imperatives of the age. Against this backdrop, the alternative path to modernization offered by the October Revolution thus became a model for progressive intellectuals to emulate. Its influence extended far beyond the mere dissemination of ideas; at a critical moment in China's political transformation, it provided a politically anxious China with a revolutionary model from which to draw inspiration.

Even more crucially, the new stance adopted by the Soviet Russian government in its policy toward China greatly enhanced its political image. On July 25, 1919, the Soviet government issued its first declaration on China, signed by Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Karakhan. Adopting an unprecedented stance of equality, it declared that everything the Tsarist government had seized from the Chinese people, either on its own or jointly with Japan and the Allied Powers, would be returned to China. This declaration provided "a powerful new impetus for the further dissemination of Marxism in China." At a time when the other imperialist powers were striving to preserve their privileges in China, Soviet Russia's declaration that it would renounce all the privileges acquired during the Tsarist era stood in sharp contrast to their policies, helping to forge a positive image of the Soviet Russia in China. Jiang Menglin observed: "Soviet Russia repeatedly declared its readiness to return the Chinese Eastern Railway in northern Manchuria to China and expressed the hope that China would successfully rid itself of the warlords and drive out the foreign imperialist powers. This goodwill shown by Soviet Russia toward China was welcomed by intellectuals and the general public alike. One consequence of these outward displays of friendship was that they paved the way for Soviet-style communism in China" (Jiang, 2000).

The political significance of the Karakhan Declaration lay not merely in the fact that it was a diplomatic document, but in its symbolic expression of political commitment. After it reached Shanghai, this proclamation issued by the Soviet Workers' and Peasants' Government had a profound psychological impact on the Chinese people. A synthesis of the views expressed by various newspapers and organizations reveals five main points: (1) recognizing Soviet Russia's action as an unprecedented initiative in world history undertaken for the well-being of all humanity; (2) advocating for the expression of profound gratitude toward the Russian people and the justice embodied in Russia's actions; (3) recovering the rights restored by the Workers' and Peasants' Government in accordance with its declaration; (4) refusing to recognize the officials sent to China during the

eras of the Russian Empire and the Kerensky government, while formally establishing friendly relations with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic; and (5) cooperating with the Russian people to work toward the abolition of international oppression and of national, racial, and class-based distinctions (Xue, 1993). This enthusiastic response demonstrated that the Karakhan Declaration resonated with the deepest aspirations of the Chinese people: equality and dignity. After a century of humiliation, the Chinese people witnessed, for the first time, a major power treating them as equals – an experience that had a profound psychological impact. A particularly insightful observation appears in Sun Yat-sen (1949) on the October Revolution and the Soviet Union (Documentary Materials): he regarded Russia's overthrow of the monarchy, the establishment of a socialist state, and the adoption of a policy of peace – characterized by “curbing the strong and aiding the weak” and upholding justice over might – as “a great hope for humanity.” He also regarded the Soviet Union as a good friend of oppressed nations, one that voluntarily abolished the unequal treaties with China, relinquished its special privileges, and treated China as a friend rather than a slave. He hailed Lenin as a “saint of the revolution,” praised the workers', peasants', and soldier' regime for realizing genuine equality and ensuring the people's well-being, and insisted that the Chinese revolution “could never succeed without taking Russia as a model,” urging the adoption of Soviet methods of party-building, military-building, and political organization. He believed that China and Soviet Russia shared the same revolutionary goals, famously declaring that “China and Russia are truly one family.” Even in his final *Letter to the Soviet Union*, he urged the Kuomintang to maintain its alliance with the Soviet Union and work together for the freedom of oppressed nations. Taken as a whole, the text reflects Sun Yat-sen's unequivocally positive attitude toward the Soviet Union, marked by a strong sense of affinity and reliance.

2. From Literary Thought to Revolutionary Poetry

This political choice to “take Russia as a model” and “befriend Russia” had a direct and profound impact on the Chinese poetry community. In December 1920, the poet Zhu Ziqing wrote the poem *Seeing Off Han Bohua to Russia* (Zhu, 2017), vividly expressing the political aspirations of intellectuals at the time toward Soviet Russia: “He has indeed run openly along the broad road toward the red clouds!/ Blessings to you, apprentice of painting!/ Amidst those red clouds/you shall steal the hidden meaning of the universe/and put it into your painting;/ know that we are all waiting!” The poet likened Soviet Russia to “red clouds” and viewed the journey to Russia for study as an act of “stealing the hidden meaning of the universe”; beneath this poetic imagery lay a yearning for the revolutionary experience of Soviet Russia and a vision for China's future path. Like many progressive Chinese intellectuals at the time, the poet had only a limited understanding of the Russian October Revolution. Yet the fact that “imperialist aggression shattered the Chinese people's illusion of learning from the West” drove the Chinese people, living under semi-colonial conditions, to desperately seek a path toward national independence and people's liberation. Consequently, when the October Revolution broke out, the Chinese people responded with jubilation, excitement, and intense fascination.

This expression of political sentiment in poetry was by no means an isolated instance. In his 1918 essay *Russian Literature and Revolution*, Li Dazhao (1979) established a distinctive mode of thought that derived revolutionary meaning from literature and interpreted politics through literature. He argued: “The success of the Russian Revolution is the victory of Russian youth – and, by extension, the victory of the poetic soul of Russian society. Oh, the youth of Russia! How will you console that Muse, stained with blood and pallid in hue? How will you repay those poets who sacrificed themselves for society?” Li Dazhao regarded Russian poets as spiritual pioneers of the revolution, believing that the critical spirit and social conscience found in Russian poetry had cultivated the spiritual soil for the revolution. This approach – directly linking literature with revolution – laid a crucial cognitive foundation for Chinese intellectuals to subsequently understand and accept the image of Russia and the Soviet Union. In Li Dazhao's view, the success of the Russian Revolution was intrinsically connected to the flourishing of Russian literature, whose poets' social conscience and critical spirit helped create the intellectual and moral conditions for revolution.

Zheng Zhenduo further systematically elaborated this view in his article *Literature and Revolution* (Xi, 1921), published in 1921. He quoted a letter from his friend Fei Juetian, who wrote that today's youth were “not only passive, but had also become pessimistic,” and that social reform “must start with the emotional dimension”; “For example, in the Russian Revolution, if there has been no tragic and realistic literature by

Tolstoy other writers of his kind to expose to the world, through literary means, the evils produced by the existing social system and evoke a particular emotional response of the people, the so-called 'Bolzaviks' might never have known what to do." Fei Juetian further proposed: "In today's stifling age, what is most needed is to bring forth a few revolutionary writers who can stir the public's emotions, rouse the cold hearts, and drive them into frenzy and agitation; only then can revolution become possible." Zheng Zhenduo "expressed great sympathy" for this view. Although this line of reasoning simplifies the complex relationship between revolution and literature, it reflects how Chinese intellectuals at that time understood the reasons for the success of the Russian Revolution and also reveals the political purpose behind their adoption of the image of Russia and the Soviet Union: to arouse revolutionary sentiment through the study of Russian literature, especially Russian poetry, and ultimately bring about social revolution in China.

In the 1920s, a large body of revolutionary poetry influenced by Russian and Soviet verse emerged on the Chinese poetry scene. In 1925, Jiang Guangci published his first poetry collection, *New Dreams (Xin Meng)* (Jiang, 1925), the creative fruit of his three years in Russia. In the "Author's Preface," the poet clearly articulated his views on literature and art: "I believe that a poet's greatness is determined by how they portray life and the extent of their compassion for humanity. ... As for myself? I am young, and my work is naturally immature. Yet I happen to have been born in an age when the tide of revolution was surging; a boundless crimson fire has long burned within my soul. I aspire to be a singer of the East Asian revolution! The Russian poet Blok said: 'With your whole body, whole heart, and whole consciousness – listen intently to the revolution!' I say: 'With your whole body, whole heart, and whole consciousness – sing aloud of the revolution!'" By positioning himself as a 'singer of the East Asian revolution,' Jiang Guangci directly echoed the Russian Symbolist poet Blok's attitude toward revolution. His citation of and identification with Russian and Soviet poets vividly expressed the political stance of Chinese revolutionary poets, who regarded Russian and Soviet poetry as a model for revolutionary literature.

New Dreams comprises forty-two poems, including six translated poems. With the exception of a few pieces such as "After Receiving the First Letter from Home," the collection is devoted almost entirely to praising the October Revolution, denouncing imperialism, and lamenting the plight of the fallen homeland. Anger, resistance, revolution, and idealism form the soaring spirit of these verses. In his preface to the collection, Gao Yuhan outlined its contents, including advocating revolution; promoting the struggle against imperialism and capitalism; urging the dedication of love to the suffering masses; extolling the utopian bliss of communism; calling for the eradication of counter-revolutionary ideologies; and advocating freedom for the proletariat and rejecting the pursuit of personal gain, and so forth. He assessed the collection as follows: "Its ideology is that of a thoroughly proletarian revolution – a revolutionary ideology imbued with an active spirit of resistance; its sentiment is as fervent and chivalrous as the sun, embodying the voice of the proletariat. Only such an ideology can sweep away the listless and complacent mentality of Chinese youth and enable the enfeebled Chinese nation to lift its head from under the oppression of international imperialism. Only such sentiment can stir the courage of the destitute and helpless proletariat, enabling them to fight their way out of the encirclement of foreign capitalism and tyrannical domestic warlords!" (Fang, 1983). While this assessment – directly equating poetry with revolution and literature with politics – may seem somewhat hyperbolic, it accurately reflects the political function of Russian and Soviet revolutionary poetry in China: disseminating revolutionary ideals and mobilizing the masses to participate in the revolution.

3. The Imitation of Poetic Forms and the Reshaping of the Poet's Identity

Chinese revolutionary poets' study and emulation of Russian and Soviet poets were reflected not only in ideological content but also in artistic form. The "staircase verse" of the Russian Futurist poet Mayakovsky profoundly influenced the work of Chinese revolutionary poets. Characterized by its distinctive layout and strong sense of rhythm, this form became a hallmark of revolutionary poetry. Tian Jian, known as the "drummer of the era," was celebrated for the militant spirit and driving rhythm of his verse. In his work, he adopted Mayakovsky's "staircase verse", using a rapid rhythm and a stirring, impassioned tone to galvanize a collective sense of solidarity in the defense of the homeland.

The reception of Russian and Soviet poetry in China has always been closely linked to the political imperatives of the Chinese revolution. In 1926, Guo Moruo explicitly stated in *Revolution and Literature* (Guo,

1926): "You must recognize the mainstream of literature and art! You must go among the troops, the masses, and the factory workers; you must plunge into the vortex of the revolution. You must understand that the literature we demand is socialist realist literature that sympathizes with the proletariat; our demands are already in accord with those of the world, and we proclaim them as we strive to forge ahead!" This call was not merely a directive regarding the creative direction of writers but also a demand for a redefinition of the poet's identity: poets were expected to adopt the standpoint of the proletariat, view themselves as members of the revolutionary ranks, and align their creative work with the surging tide of the global proletarian revolution. In essence, this demand required poets to relinquish their identity as intellectuals, identify with workers, peasants, and soldiers, and become part of "the people."

During the revolutionary literary movement, Russian and Soviet poetry provided not only subject matter and themes but also a model for the relationships between poetry and politics, the poet and the people, and literature and revolution. This model posited that poetry is not merely an expression of personal emotion but a clarion call for the spirit of the times; the poet is not a solitary artist but a spokesperson for the people; and literature is not a trivial craft confined to an ivory tower but a weapon for transforming society. In *Our New Literary Movement* (Guo, 1923), Guo Moruo declared: "We rebel against the poisonous dragon of capitalism. We rebel against established moralities not rooted in individuality. We rebel against established religions that negate life itself. We rebel against the irrational boundaries that hem in human existence. We rebel against the literary sensibilities derived from all the aforementioned. We rebel against literature that embodies the servile mentality of such sensibilities. Our movement seeks to ignite the proletarian spirit and raw, unadorned human nature within literature. Our aim is to shatter the demon-lair of this poisonous dragon with the explosive power of life itself."

The emergence of this literary conception effectively reflected the political function of the image of Russia and the Soviet Union in the cultural sphere. Through the medium of poetry, it disseminated socialist ideology to broader segments of society, particularly intellectuals and young students. When a young reader encountered Mayakovsky's *March of the Left* or was moved by the heroism depicted in poetry about the Great Patriotic War, they were not merely experiencing the artistic appeal of the verse, they were also being imbued with a particular set of political values. They came to identify with the collectivism, heroism, and revolutionary idealism celebrated in the poems, to link their personal destinies to national liberation and social revolution, and to consciously shape themselves into "a brick in the revolution." This politicization of poetry and poeticization of politics served as a crucial mechanism for the dissemination of the image of Russia and the Soviet Union in China and was a key reason why this image resonated so deeply and exerted such a lasting influence.

In the early 1930s, the founding of the Chinese Poetry Society marked a new stage in the revolutionary poetry movement. In the "Inaugural Poem" published in the first issue of *New Poetry* (Xin Shige), the group explicitly declared: "We do not mourn the wreckage of history / for that belongs to the past / we seek to grasp reality / and sing of the consciousness of the new century." This creative principle of "grasping reality" entailed promptly and directly reflecting social realities and human life, as well as engaging in the anti-imperialist and anti-Japanese struggle. Poets associated with the society produced a vast body of work embodying these poetic tenets; the writings of Pu Feng, Mu Mutian, Ren Jun, and Yang Sao were particularly influential. Pu Feng's poetry collection *Boundless Night* (Mangmang Ye) drew largely from rural life, revealing the root causes of rural suffering while depicting the awakening and resistance of the younger generation. Although these poems may appear somewhat unrefined artistically, their creative spirit of "grasping reality" and their effort to forge a close bond between poetry and revolution, and between the poet and the people, clearly reflect the influence of Russian and Soviet revolutionary poetry.

4. From the Talks at Yan'an to "Following the Soviet Russia Path"

It is worth noting that this politicized conception of poetry was institutionally affirmed and reinforced during the Yan'an period. In May 1942, Mao Zedong delivered his "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art," explicitly proposing that literature and art must serve the workers, peasants, and soldiers; that literary and artistic workers must go deep among the masses and into real life; and that they must transform their thinking and change their standpoint. Although these propositions were formulated in response to the practical conditions of literary and artistic work in China's revolutionary base areas, their theoretical origins can

nevertheless be traced back to Soviet literary and artistic policies. In the preface to his book *Marxism and Literature and Art*, Zhou Yang explicitly stated: “Comrade Mao Zedong’s ‘Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art’ charted a new course for revolutionary literature and art. This speech is a landmark document in the history of Chinese revolutionary literature and thought; it represents the most accessible and concrete summary of Marxist literary theory and policy; and, as such, it serves as the finest textbook on the subject.” Zhou Yang further elaborated: “Marx and Engels demonstrated that literature and art are ‘created by the labor of the masses,’ while Lenin proposed that ‘art should directly serve the working masses’ as the overall guiding principle of the artistic movement – a formulation that ‘was not possible in the era of Marx and Engels, because that was not yet the age of proletarian revolution, and the proletariat had not yet seized state power.’ Thus, it can be said that ‘China’s revolutionary literary and artistic movement has been conducted under the guidance of Lenin’s principles.’”

The political significance of the *Talks* lies not only in establishing literature and art as serving workers, peasants, and soldiers, but also – and more importantly – in institutionalizing and legitimizing the relationship between literature and art and politics. Mao Zedong explicitly stated: “In any class society, every class invariably places political criteria first and artistic criteria second.” This assertion established the absolute primacy of politics over literature and art. While this political dominance had a certain rationale within a specific historical context, it also paved the way for the subsequent instrumentalization and politicization of poetry.

During the Yan’an period, guided by the spirit of the *Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art*, poets in the Liberated Areas began experimenting with a “new folk-song style.” Poets such as Tian Jian, Li Ji, and Ruan Zhangjing ventured deep into the countryside to learn from folk songs, producing a wealth of works imbued with distinctive national character. Li Ji’s *Wang Gui* and Li Xiangxiang, Ruan Zhangjing’s *Waters of the Zhanghe River*, and Tian Jian’s *The Story of the Cart Driver* stand as outstanding examples of this “new folk-song style.” While these works returned to the forms of traditional Chinese folk songs, their core spirit was revolutionary and political, and they aimed to propagate revolutionary ideas and mobilize the masses to participate in the revolution through poetry. After immersing himself in rural life, Tian Jian remarked with deep feeling: “These Xintianyou songs, Zou Xikou ballads, Wugeng songs, and Xi Yingying tunes truly captivated us. They made us loath to leave – to part with these simple, lively, and fresh songs, or to leave the countryside that held such an inexhaustible wealth of song.” This high regard for folk songs, while seemingly distancing this poetic practice from Russian and Soviet poetic forms, actually upheld the core tenets of Russian and Soviet revolutionary poetry: that poetry should serve the people and express revolutionary ideas through forms accessible and appealing to the people.

After Japan’s surrender in 1945, China once again faced a choice regarding its future direction. In this struggle over China’s future, which would determine the nation’s destiny, the image of Russia and the Soviet Union played an important role in shaping China’s political direction. In *On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship*, Mao Zedong explicitly stated: “A single cannon shot from the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism. The October Revolution helped progressives the world over – and in China – to adopt the proletarian worldview as an instrument for examining the nation’s destiny and reconsidering our own problems. To follow the path of the Russians – that was the conclusion.” Mao further emphasized: “China shared many similarities – or close parallels – with pre-October Revolution Russia. Feudal oppression was a shared feature; economic and cultural backwardness were comparable conditions. Both nations were backward, though China was even more so. Progressives in both countries strove arduously to seek the truth of revolution in order to revitalize the nation – this, too, was a shared characteristic.” Thus, the myth of “Sino-Russian similarity” evolved from the subjective perceptions and aspirations of certain intellectuals into a seemingly self-evident objective fact; through the articulation of political leaders, it subsequently acquired unquestionable legitimacy and political authority.

This perspective elevates the relationship between the Russian and Chinese revolutions to the level of a fundamental choice concerning China’s revolutionary path; the image of Russia and the Soviet Union ceased to be merely an external point of reference and instead became internalized as part of the intrinsic logic of the Chinese revolution. Mao Zedong’s call to “follow the path of the Russians” did not entail a simple replication of the Soviet model; rather, it meant studying the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism and the essential

experiences of proletarian revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and then creatively applying them to China's specific realities. This is clearly evident in the practical evolution of the Chinese revolutionary path: from the establishment of armed base areas in the Jinggang Mountains to the theory of New Democracy in Yan'an, and from the experiences of the Agrarian Revolution to the strategies of the united front, the Communist Party of China forged a revolutionary path distinct from that of the Soviet Union. Yet the theoretical foundation of this path remained Marxism-Leninism, its political goal remained the establishment of a socialist system, and its international orientation remained that of a member of the socialist camp. In this sense, the political significance of the image of Russia and the Soviet Union in China lay not in providing a template for mechanical replication, but in establishing the legitimacy and inevitability of the socialist path.

During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the political function of Russian and Soviet poetry in China was further reinforced. Following the outbreak of full-scale war in 1937, and faced with a dire national crisis, Chinese poets urgently sought a poetic paradigm capable of boosting national morale and igniting enthusiasm for the resistance. It was against this backdrop that Soviet revolutionary and anti-fascist poetry was translated and introduced into China on a large scale; following the outbreak of the Soviet Great Patriotic War in 1941, the translation and introduction of Soviet poetry of the Great Patriotic War reached a peak, providing vital spiritual resources for Chinese wartime poetry. During this period, Mao Dun published an article titled "*Poetry of This Era*" (Mao, 1938) in the *Jiawang Ribao* (National Salvation Daily). He noted that the reality of the Chinese nation creating an unprecedented "epic" with its own blood and flesh not only transformed poets, as "drummers of this great era," into singers of the "heroic and tragic struggle of the entire nation," with their "personal emotions" merging into the collective emotions of the nation's great struggle, but also gave the poetry of the era its most distinctive characteristics through a style in which "technique arises naturally without being deliberately pursued" and "the lyrical and the narrative are fused into one." Its defining quality, he concluded, was a "stripping away of all ornament – refreshingly direct and exhilarating."

Under the creative slogan of the "era of national narrative poetry," Chinese poets embarked on the large-scale composition of long-form narrative poems. Mu Mutian proposed that the "establishment of national revolutionary narrative poetry" required, first and foremost, that "our poets meticulously study the characteristics of the epic genre and the evolution of those characteristics, so as to understand the difficulties they would encounter and how to overcome them; above all, they must surmount every obstacle through the creation of authentic national revolutionary epics." While this pursuit of "national revolutionary epics" emphasized "national" characteristics in its theoretical formulation, its spiritual core remained in direct continuity with the tradition of Russian and Soviet revolutionary poetry: the conviction that poetry should reflect the struggle for national liberation, portray heroic figures from among the people, and inspire national morale.

During this period, a large number of narrative poems depicting the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression emerged, such as Pu Feng's *Scorching June* and Wang Yaping's *The Wind of December*. In terms of subject matter, thematic expression, and characterization, these works were clearly influenced by Soviet revolutionary poetry and narrative verse. Through coherent storylines, stark class antagonisms, and the celebration of heroes drawn from among the people, they conveyed powerful political ideals of national and class liberation. Although these works may have suffered from artistic flaws such as conceptualized and formulaic writing, their role in wartime political mobilization cannot be overlooked.

From 1917 to 1949 – spanning the period from the salvos of the October Revolution to the founding of the People's Republic of China – the image of Russia and the Soviet Union underwent a complex evolution in China: shifting from an external point of reference to an internalized identification, from a revolutionary mentor to a chosen revolutionary path, and from a cultural influence to a political orientation. This process was the result of both China's proactive choices and prevailing historical conditions; it reflected the external impetus of Russian and Soviet policies while simultaneously embodying the intrinsic needs of the Chinese revolution. Throughout this process, the image of Russia and the Soviet Union not only provided a successful model for the socialist path, thereby establishing its political legitimacy, but also, through its dissemination in literary forms such as poetry, helped transform this political ideal into a shared value among Chinese intellectuals and the general public. Russian and Soviet poetry, in particular, played a dual role as both political mentor and artistic exemplar in the development of modern Chinese poetry. Through the systematic

translation and introduction of Russian and Soviet poetry in journals such as Shi Chuangzuo (Poetry Creation), Shi Chuangzao (Poetry Creation), and Xinshi (New Poetry); through its study and emulation by poets such as Jiang Guangci, Tian Jian, and Ai Qing; and through its interpretation and promotion by theorists such as Zheng Zhenduo and Zhou Yang, the spirit and forms of Russian and Soviet revolutionary poetry became deeply embedded in the fabric of modern Chinese poetry. This served as a vital driving force in moving Chinese poetry toward greater people-centeredness and bringing the poet's voice into alignment with that of the people. In this sense, the emergence and dissemination of the image of Russia and the Soviet Union in China addressed the nation's political anxiety regarding its future direction, provided an idealized vision of the path of Chinese revolution and national reconstruction, and served as a crucial spiritual resource for China's modern political transformation and the construction of poetic modernity.

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