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A *haohan* in Yan'an: Xiao Jun Embattled, 1940–1942

ABSTRACT:

Drawing on Yan'an-period 延安 (1937–1947) writings published or reprinted only during the past two decades, this article illuminates the prominent role that Xiao Jun 蕭軍 (1907–1988) played during the relatively liberal period that preceded the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in May 1942. A complex picture unfolds, reflecting Xiao Jun's many contradictions. On the one hand, he comes across as the author who challenged the establishment line on literature and art most openly, who defended Wang Shiwei 王實味 (1906–1947) most vigorously, who insisted on his independence most doggedly. On the other hand, his cantankerous personality left him increasingly friendless and isolated. Though keen to make a positive impact on Yan'an society, by the end of 1942 Xiao Jun found himself marginalized and reduced entirely to spectator status.

KEYWORDS:

Xiao Jun, Ding Ling, Mao Zedong, Wang Shiwei, Yan'an Rectification Movement, Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art

Chen Yun: "On arrival in Yan'an, Xiao Jun said he'd come to help the Communist Party and help the revolution, but he proved to be more hindrance than help."¹

Among the Chinese writers who were born in the final years of the Qing dynasty and lived through to the post-Mao reform era, the Manchurian author Xiao Jun 蕭軍 (1907–1988) has attracted relatively little attention in English-language scholarship during the past few decades. In fact, apart from Marston Anderson's study of one of Xiao Jun's short stories, hardly any work has been done in English since Leo Ou-fan Lee's incisive critique of Xiao Jun's career over fifty years ago.²

This neglect is, to a certain degree, understandable and even fitting. Although Xiao Jun made a name for himself in China with his first novel, *Village in August* (*Bayue de xiangcun* 八月的鄉村), published in

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¹ Chen Yun 陳雲 (1905–1995), head of the CCP Organization Department (1937–1945), as quoted by Jin Yuliang 金玉良, "Luo Feng he Bai Lang de kankankeke" 羅峰和白朗的坎坎珂珂, *Zhongguo zuojia* 中國作家 (2007.6), p. 129.

² See Marston Anderson, "The Barred View: On the Enigmatic Narrator in Xiao Jun's 'Goats,'" in Theodore Hutters, ed., *Reading the Modern Chinese Short Story* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1990), pp. 37–50; Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1973), pp. 222–44.

Shanghai in 1934, he is seldom considered a first-rate author, and accounts of his egotistical and overbearing behavior have often shown him in a poor light. In Howard Goldblatt's biography of the woman writer Xiao Hong 蕭紅 (1911–1942), who lived with Xiao Jun from August 1932 until early 1938, a largely negative picture of his personality emerges: Xiao Hong is seen as much the more appealing member of this celebrated literary couple.³ In China, too, although Xiao Jun has his admirers, he is more often a target of criticism.⁴

At the same time, a good deal remains to be said about Xiao Jun, particularly regarding his life in the Communist stronghold of Yan'an during the early 1940s. When, decades ago, first Merle Goldman and then Leo Ou-fan Lee sought to take stock of Xiao Jun's Yan'an writings, only a limited amount of material was available to them, precluding a full understanding of his activities.⁵ Gao Hua 高華 was able to marshal a much broader range of relevant sources when he wrote *How the Red Sun Rose*, his magisterial study of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, but his book focuses heavily on Mao Zedong's 毛澤東 (1893–1976) struggle for supremacy within the Chinese Communist Party and mentions Xiao Jun only in passing.⁶ In the last two decades, further works from the Yan'an period that were once inaccessible have been published, illuminating the role that he played during the relatively liberal phase that preceded the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in May 1942.

The most notable of those materials is surely the diary that Xiao Jun kept throughout his Yan'an years. Confiscated during the Cultural Revolution, it miraculously survived and was returned to him later; after his death, his children painstakingly prepared the diary for publication and it appeared in book form – close to 1,500 pages of text – in 2013. Unlike reminiscences by Yan'an veterans, written late in life and often somewhat guarded, Xiao's diary is brimming with forthright opinion and vivid detail. Informed by a reading of the diary and other

³ Howard Goldblatt, *Hsiao Hung* (Boston: Twayne, 1976).

⁴ For two contrasting views, see Bi Yuan 畢苑, "Du Xiao Jun Yan'an riji" 讀蕭軍《延安日記》, *Yanhuang chunqiu* 炎黃春秋 (2014.4), pp. 87–93; Song Jianhua 宋劍華, "Kuangwang de 'chaoshengzhe': guanyu Xiao Jun zai Yan'an de jige wenti" 狂妄的「朝聖者」, 關於蕭軍在延安的幾個問題, *Qilu xuekan* 齊魯學刊 (2021.5), pp. 147–53.

⁵ Merle Goldman included a short section on Xiao Jun in her *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1967), pp. 27–29; Lee discusses Xiao Jun's Yan'an writings in *Romantic Generation*, pp. 236–40.

⁶ The Chinese edition of Gao Hua's book was published as *Hong taiyang shi zenyang shengqi de: Yan'an zhengfeng yundong de lailong qumai* 紅太陽是怎樣升起的, 延安整風運動的來龍去脈 (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 2000). See the English translation by Stacy Mosher and Guo Jian, *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origins and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1930–1945* (Hong Kong: Chinese U.P., 2018).

primary sources, the present study offers a new lens through which to view the eventful period of 1940-1942, revealing the prominence of a non-Party intellectual in Yan'an cultural life and laying bare the interventions that put him on a collision course with Mao and the Party leadership.⁷

A complex picture unfolds, reflecting Xiao Jun's many contradictions. On the one hand, Xiao Jun comes across as the author who challenged the establishment line on literature and art most openly, who defended Wang Shiwei 王實味 (1906-1947) most vigorously, who insisted on his independence most doggedly. On the other hand, his cantankerous personality left him increasingly friendless and isolated. Initially he commanded a certain respect as a favored disciple of Lu Xun, only to exasperate and alienate many members of Yan'an's intellectual community, including those who had once been close to him. He often made a spirited case for artistic freedom, but failed to persuade others to follow his lead. Though keen to make a positive impact on Yan'an society, by the end of 1942 he found himself marginalized and reduced entirely to spectator status.

XIAO JUN AND HIS "NEW HEROISM"

September 15, 1940: *I have a proud heart! It does not let me rest content with the status quo! It is domineering and greedy – it impels me to struggle!*⁸

One of Yan'an's most colorful figures, Xiao Jun left a strong impression on many of his contemporaries. One colleague recalled his sporting a self-designed Russian-style shirt and, as evening fell over the valley, singing lustily the "Prisoner's Song" from Maxim Gorky's play *The Lower Depths*.⁹ The artist Liu Xian 劉峴 (1915-1990) remembered often seeing Xiao Jun as he walked alone along the banks of the Yan

⁷ Xiao Jun's diary was published under the title *Yan'an riji* 延安日記 1940-1945 (Hong Kong: Oxford U.P., 2013; hereafter abbreviated as *YARJ*); all translations from the diary are by the author. Xiao Jun kept a diary throughout much of his life, intending it for his own private use; some entries include the texts of essays, poems, or letters he had just written. Other diaries of Xiao Jun's have also been published: *Dongbei riji* 東北日記 1946-1950 and *Xiao Jun riji buyi* 蕭軍日記補遺 (both from Hong Kong: Oxford U.P., 2014).

⁸ *YARJ*, vol. 1, p. 38.

⁹ See Gao Yang 高陽, "You wuci xunhui zuotanhui fengjing lu" 又五次巡迴座談會風景錄, rpt. in Yan'an wenyi congshu bianweihui 延安文藝叢書編委會, ed., *Yan'an wenyi congshu* 延安文藝叢書 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984; hereafter cited as *YAWY*), *sanwen juan* 散文卷, pp. 256-57. The lyrics of the song are as follows: "The sun rises and sets, but my prison is dark, dark. Day and night the wardens watch beneath my window. I long to be free, free. Alas! I cannot break my chains. Oh my chains, my heavy chains – you're my steely, clanking wardens, I cannot tear you, cannot break you."

River, cane in hand, his distinctive gait instantly recognizable as he strode forward, feet splayed, his torso swaying. He Fang 何方 (1922–2017), then just a student, had no personal contact with Xiao Jun but knew of him by reputation as one of Yan'an's "Four Oddballs," all too ready to settle a dispute with his bare fists and not averse to brandishing a knife to threaten his adversaries.¹⁰ Liu Xuewei 劉雪葦 (1912–1998), a witness to Xiao Jun's belligerence, would later characterize his temperament as that of the proverbial *haohan* 好漢 ("tough guy") – volatile and combative.¹¹

Xiao Jun was a great admirer of Nobel laureate Romain Rolland (1866–1944), as we see in his many laudatory references to the French author and the long tribute he wrote soon after Rolland's passing.¹² In character, Xiao Jun bore a certain resemblance to the subjects of Rolland's heroic biographies, who, as the Rolland scholar William Thomas Starr has put it, "were individuals, usually isolated, who developed in spite of society, who were in constant conflict with society."¹³ Starr's assessment of Rolland's life – "the long struggle of the one against the many" – could equally well apply to Xiao Jun's experiences in Yan'an: as Starr wrote, "It was a struggle of a man against himself, as well as against others. His defiance of the world is reflected in his own inability to cooperate closely with others... and in his desire to live by his pen, independently of others."¹⁴

Xiao Jun had grand ambitions, tied to his concept of a Rollandesque heroism that included among its central components "battle 戰鬥" and "striving to be first 爭取第一."¹⁵ In his often fevered imagination he required next to no help in achieving his visionary goals, only enemies

¹⁰ He Fang, "Xiao Jun zai Yan'an" 蕭軍在延安, *Yanhuang chunqiu* (2015.1), p. 80. On at least one occasion, by his own admission, Xiao Jun pulled out his knife in the middle of a meeting and stabbed it into a table, to show how he would deal with anyone who dared spread rumors about him; see *YARJ* 1, p. 182 (May 26, 1941).

¹¹ Liu Xuewei, "Ji Xiao Jun" 記蕭軍, *Xin wenxue shiliao* 新文學史料 (1989.2), p. 125. On depictions of the *haohan* in Chinese culture, see Robert Ruhlman, "Traditional Heroes in Chinese Popular Fiction," in Arthur F. Wright, ed., *Confucianism and Chinese Civilization* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1964), pp. 147–54; W.J.F. Jenner, "Tough Guys, Mateship and Honour: Another Chinese Tradition," *East Asian History* 12 (1996), pp. 1–34.

¹² See "Dayongzhe de jingshen" 大勇者的精神, *YARJ* 2, pp. 638–44 (January 27, 1945); *Jiefang ribao* 解放日報 (hereafter, *JFRB*), January 29, 1945, p. 4. See also Lee, *Romantic Generation*, pp. 287–89.

¹³ William Thomas Starr, *Romain Rolland: One Against All* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 161.

¹⁴ Starr, *Romain Rolland*, p. 248. On occasion, Xiao Jun put things in a similar way: "I am at war with myself, and equally at war with everyone and everything apart from myself. Whether or not I can defeat external enemies depends on whether first I can defeat my internal enemies." See *YARJ* 1, p. 215 (July 9, 1941).

¹⁵ See, for example, *YARJ* 1, p. 47 (September 23, 1940), p. 81 (October 10, 1940).

upon which to focus his energies: “I don’t need wife or friends or companions – or any other things that can weaken me. All I need is an enemy – I love an enemy, I want to kill it. Only in such a battle can I see the meaning and potency of life.”

Such a relish for confrontation is obviously not conducive to healthy and productive relationships, and Xiao Jun’s ties with other members of the Yan’an community suffered accordingly. Xiao Jun’s artist friend Zhang Ding 張汀 (1917–2010) noted in conversation how his abrasive manner was an obstacle to fruitful interaction: “It’s strange, no matter whether you’re completely right about something, it’s hard for you to win sympathy – you’re like a tiger cub, intimidating people even if you don’t plan to eat them.”¹⁶ Xiao Jun’s wife, Wang Defen 王德芬 (1919–2001), wearied by his continual falling-outs with erstwhile allies, lamented his tendency to convert friends into foes.¹⁷

But Xiao Jun was unable to reform, even when a person he respected a good deal more than Zhang Ding or his wife pointed out the errors of his ways. In August 1941, not long after their first one-on-one conversation, Mao Zedong wrote in a letter to Xiao Jun:

There are countless bad phenomena in Yan’an, and the problems that you raised with me need attention and ought to be corrected. But, at the same time, I would urge you to be mindful of a few shortcomings of your own and avoid seeing problems in absolute terms. You need to be patient, nurture your relationships with other people, and consciously address your own flaws. Only then will you be able to see a path forward and find some peace of mind. Otherwise, you’ll just be upset and unhappy the whole time.¹⁸

Although Mao couched this advice in a solicitous tone, giving the impression that Xiao Jun’s wellbeing was foremost in his mind, he surely had his eye on a much larger goal – upholding the interests of the revolution, which required solidarity and unity among its supporters. Ultimately, as we see, Xiao Jun’s refusal to toe the Party line on the Wang Shiwei case would so rankle Mao that he would summarily

¹⁶ *YARJ* 1, p. 305 (October 7, 1941).

¹⁷ *YARJ* 1, p. 435 (April 3, 1942).

¹⁸ *YARJ* 1, p. 251 (August 2, 1941). Xiao Jun’s friend Hu Feng 胡風 (1902–1985) expressed a similar concern in a letter: “Although you sincerely mean well, your outward manner often gives people the opposite impression. You need to be aware of this. Since our great cause is still at an early stage, you can’t expect the environment to be ideal, nor can you expect friends to show a full understanding. It will take time for our work to bear fruit, and it really does you no credit to get worked up about minor issues, like some village biddy.” See *YARJ* 2, p. 169 (July 7, 1943).

end all contact between them, in yet another case of a cordial relationship turned sour.

XIAO JUN AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY

October 8, 1940: *In the afternoon, when T and I went down to the river to wash clothes, you could have mistaken her for a fishwife. She seems now to avoid discussing political issues with me. Although we are advancing in the same direction, a line always separates us. She loves her Party, including the Party people I most disdain; I love my freedom, and I'm not ready to hand over to the Party what little of it I have left.*¹⁹

Earlier studies of the Yan'an period have tended to see Xiao Jun's reaction to Yan'an as part of a pattern whereby left-wing writers experienced "disillusionment at finding that life in the revolutionary base-area did not measure up to their cherished ideal."²⁰ But it is doubtful whether this description is appropriate in Xiao Jun's case, for when he arrived in Yan'an in June 1940 he did not at all have a naïve, starry-eyed view of life in the Communist base area. He had visited once before, and had come away with serious reservations about whether it was the right place for him. In February 1938, along with Xiao Hong and a number of other progressive intellectuals, Xiao Jun had traveled north to Shanxi to take up a teaching position in Linfen's newly-established National Revolution University, only to be forced to evacuate soon after, when Japanese forces advanced toward them. Xiao Hong and others in their circle made their way to Xi'an, while Xiao Jun opted to hike alone to Yan'an, arriving there on March 20, 1938.

One evening, along with several other visitors, he attended a dinner hosted by several Party luminaries, including Mao Zedong, Zhang Wentian 張聞天 (1900–1976), Zhang Guotao 張國燾 (1897–1979), and Kang Sheng 康生 (1898–1975). During the proceedings, the guests were asked to share their impressions of Yan'an, and when it was Xiao Jun's turn to speak he did not beat about the bush: he made it clear that he disagreed with the Yan'an practice of subordinating culture to a political agenda. Such a policy, he maintained, would simply lead to a debasement of literature and art. As Lu Xun's protégé, he explained, he followed in his teacher's footsteps, citing Lu Xun's 1927 remarks that "literature and art are constantly in conflict with politics" and arguing

¹⁹ *YARY* 1, p. 80. In Xiao Jun's diary, the uppercase "T" denotes the prominent woman author, Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904–1986).

²⁰ Goldman, *Literary Dissent*, p. 21; cf. Lee, *Romantic Generation*, p. 237.

that politicians and writers follow separate paths.²¹ When Kang Sheng embarked on a long speech elaborating on Party policy and rejecting Xiao Jun's criticism, Xiao Jun found this too much to take and walked out of the banquet in a huff.²² He did not stay more than a couple of weeks. Xiao Jun returned to Yan'an in June 1940, this time accompanied by his young wife Wang Defen (whom he had married after a lightning-quick courtship in Lanzhou) and their first child, born in Chengdu the year before. The move to Yan'an was an option forced on him by circumstances rather than something he was particularly eager to do: the Kuomintang authorities' crackdown on left-wing activity had made him fearful for his safety in the Nationalist zone. He would ultimately come to compare life in Yan'an to an extended stay in an air-raid shelter: although it offered security, it never felt like home.²³ Xiao Jun had not been in Yan'an long before he began yearning to leave, and he consoled himself with the thought that when the war with Japan was won he would be able to return to the big city and resume a free life.²⁴

Like many members of his generation, Xiao Jun identified with the values of communism. In a general sense, he was convinced that China needed a revolution and believed that the Communist Party was the natural organization to lead it. He held Lenin in high esteem and seems to have had a positive view of Stalin. His faith in the Chinese Communist Party was seldom seriously shaken, and for a man with an independent spirit he often remained gullible where the Party was concerned; this emerges clearly when the "Emergency Rescue" campaign began in 1943, and Xiao Jun for some time accepted without question official reports that many CCP members were disloyal to the Party.²⁵ But Xiao quite often grew discouraged, and he sometimes had a sinking feeling that the CCP was not much of an improvement on the Kuomintang, or might even be worse. "Distrust, dislike, pessimism – these are the emotions that the CCP currently stirs in me," he wrote at a particularly

²¹ He Qifang 何其芳 (1912–1977), "Mao Zedong zhi ge" 毛澤東之歌, in Lan Dizhi 藍棣之, ed., *He Qifang quanji* 何其芳全集 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2000), vol. 7, p. 424.

²² Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸 (1910–1977), *Xu Maoyong huiyi lu* 徐懋庸回憶錄 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1982), p. 99.

²³ On this point, see *YARJ* 2, p. 546 (Nov. 9, 1944). Cf. Xiao Jun, *Wode wen'ge jiancha: Xiao Jun zisong lu* 我的文革檢查, 蕭軍自訟錄 (Hong Kong: Oxford U.P., 2016), p. 66. The latter volume brings together statements and self-criticisms that Xiao Jun wrote between 1953 and 1975.

²⁴ See *YARJ* 1, p. 167, p. 174, p. 177 (May 4, 12, 16, respectively, 1941).

²⁵ See, for example, *YARJ* 2, p. 193 (July 27, 1943). For a detailed study of the "Emergency Rescue" campaign, see Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose*, pp. 471–660.

gloomy moment in December 1941.²⁶ An essay that he wrote in April 1942, entitled “What Will It Be Like after ‘Victory’?” (“‘Shengli’ yihou zenyangne” ‘勝利’以後怎樣呢), raised the possibility that Communists in power might throw their weight around just as much as Westerners in China had been accustomed to doing in the past.²⁷

It has sometimes been assumed that Xiao Jun was a Party member,²⁸ but this was not so. Xiao Jun’s default position on Communist Party membership was that he preferred to be independent and have no party affiliation. He had no great interest in mastering Marxist theory and felt quite rightly that he lacked the temperament and discipline to be a Party member. In his mind there was a clear distinction between Party authors (“As soon as they work their way into the Party they forget about art, being all too busy cementing their place within the organization”) and non-Party authors like himself (“they tend to react to politics with indifference or even distaste, adopt a stance of non-cooperation, and focus on self-fulfillment”).²⁹ His disputes, then, tended to be with individuals rather than the Party as a whole. As he put it, “Some Communist Party members injure me, insult me, and ignore me, but this cannot shake or diminish my faith in the Party itself. The more I am conscious of the ugliness and mediocrity and crisis within it, the more I seem unable to let it go.”³⁰

It was rather rare for a progressive intellectual who had made the long journey to Yan’an to not be interested in joining the Party. Chen Yun 陳雲, head of the CCP’s organization department, seems to have been taken aback to find that Party membership was not part of Xiao Jun’s plans; in his eyes, Xiao Jun was a “wild horse,” quite unlike the eager prospects he was accustomed to recruiting.³¹

Now and then, however, Xiao Jun’s resistance to Party membership began to waver. In Yan’an, as Chen Yun indicated, the expectation was that people would join the Party, and over time fewer and fewer intellectuals in Yan’an remained outside the Party.³² Xiao Jun

²⁶ *YARJ* 1, p. 359 (December 21, 1941).

²⁷ See Xiao Yun 蕭耘 and Wang Jianzhong 王建中, eds., *Xiao Jun quanji* 蕭軍全集 (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2008), vol. 11, pp. 524–25. This essay, unpublished in Yan’an, did not appear in print until 2008.

²⁸ See, for example, Ellen R. Judd, “Prelude to the Yan’an Talks: Problems in Transforming a Literary Intelligentsia,” *Modern China* 11:3 (1985), p. 397.

²⁹ *YARJ* 1, p. 189 (June 8, 1941).

³⁰ *YARJ* 1, p. 71 (October 2, 1940).

³¹ For early diary entries that touch on this issue, see *YARJ* 1, pp. 263, 267 (August 12 and 16, 1941).

³² By 1946, so many former independents had joined the Party that Xiao Jun, chatting with the theater director Sai Ke 塞克 (1906–1988), would joke that the two of them might well end

rather relished the sensation of being a leading figure in non-Party circles; when other members of that group joined the Party, he would accuse them of letting him down; when they were given positions of responsibility in Yan'an, Xiao felt unsettled.³³ His wife sensed that he would always feel frustrated by the limited opportunities open to him as a non-Party intellectual, and more than once she encouraged him to consider applying for Party membership. At times Xiao was tempted to follow her advice, but always in the end he drew back. As he put it to her, "I prefer to be the Monkey King on Flower Fruit Mountain. I have no real interest in escorting Tripitaka [on his mission] to collect sutras and achieve enlightenment."³⁴

Knowing that Xiao Jun was not a Party member helps us understand an aspect of his Yan'an career that has sometimes perplexed outside observers. In *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers*, Leo Ou-fan Lee writes with a tinge of bemusement that "Despite Hsiao Chün's obviously unorthodox and tangential views, no criticism against him appeared in print in 1942."³⁵ Given the clampdown on dissent in the late spring and summer of 1942, when Wang Shiwei was vilified for writing "Wild Lilies" and Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986) was compelled to denounce her "Thoughts on March 8, International Women's Day," it might seem surprising that Xiao Jun was let off so lightly. But Wang Shiwei and Ding Ling, as Party members, were expected to observe Party discipline; their criticisms were seen as a stab in the back, and they were raked over the coals accordingly.³⁶ Xiao, as a non-Party author, was accorded more lenient treatment.³⁷ As we will see shortly,

up being the only people who had not become Communists. See Xiao, *Dongbei riji*, p. 137 (December 4, 1946).

³³ In his diary entry of May 16, 1941, Xiao Jun writes: "Ouyang Shan has started work in the propaganda department: this has come as an emotional blow. I must stick to my own path, that of a wholly independent author." See *YARJ* 1, p. 177. Ouyang Shan 歐陽山 (1908-2000) was a fellow writer.

³⁴ *YARJ* 1, p. 644 (November 13, 1942); cf. p. 650 (November 21, 1942).

³⁵ Lee, *Romantic Generation*, p. 240.

³⁶ After the publication of "Wild Lilies," Wang Shiwei was accused of abdicating his duties as a Party member: see Chen Yung-fa 陳永發, *Yan'an de yinying 延安的陰影* (Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1990), p. 41; Dai Qing, *Wang Shiwei and "Wild Lilies": Rectification and Purges in the Chinese Communist Party, 1942-1944* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 38.

³⁷ It was a principle of the CCP's United Front work that progressive non-Party members should be cultivated patiently, "taking their concerns as our common concerns, and their victories and defeats as our own victories and defeats." See the November 1940 directive translated by Lyman P. Van Slyke in his *Enemies and Friends: The United Front in Chinese Communist History* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1967), p. 270. It is also likely that Party authorities wanted to avoid making a martyr out of Xiao Jun: see Dai, *Wang Shiwei and "Wild Lilies,"* p. 51, footnote.

he had also been careful – in his published work, at least – to avoid challenging the Party leadership directly.

THE UNDER-ACHIEVING AUTHOR

July 1, 1942: *I am younger and stronger than my mentor was; using zawen and other literary forms I will slowly but surely destroy these scoundrels.*³⁸

Commentary on Xiao Jun's literary output in Yan'an has often been colored by the seemingly authoritative judgment enshrined in an "Editor's Note" published in *Wenyi bao* 文藝報 in January 1958 at the height of the Anti-Rightist Movement. This note, reportedly penned by Mao Zedong himself, labeled as "poisonous weeds" a number of essays published in Yan'an in the first half of 1942 and lumped together their authors – Wang Shiwei, Ding Ling, Xiao Jun, Luo Feng 羅烽 (1909–1991), and Ai Qing 艾青 (1910–1996) – as partners in iniquity, all guilty of engaging in anti-Party activity.³⁹

Although English-language scholarship typically presents the liberal critique of Yan'an society in positive rather than negative terms, it has sometimes mirrored *Wenyi bao's* readings of events in two respects – accepting, firstly, that Xiao Jun was one of several like-minded authors who shared a common agenda and, secondly, that Wang Shiwei played the leading role in fomenting dissent, with Xiao Jun taking his cue from Wang.⁴⁰ In fact, however, these two assumptions are questionable, for Xiao Jun had strained relations with the authors whose names are often linked with his, and in adopting a contrarian stance he was actually quickest off the mark, emerging as a critic as early as October 1940.

Xiao Jun enjoyed a degree of celebrity in Yan'an as a favored disciple of the great left-wing writer Lu Xun, and he saw himself as

³⁸ *YARJ* 1, p. 519.

³⁹ The "Editor's Note" is reprinted in Yuan Liangjun 袁良駿, ed., *Ding Ling yanjiu ziliao* 丁玲研究資料 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1982), pp. 418–19.

⁴⁰ The influence of the *Wenyi bao* "Editor's Note" is evident in Merle Goldman's coverage of literary dissent in Yan'an: see *Literary Dissent*, pp. 20–29. Leo Ou-fan Lee, for his part, writes, "Wang Shih-wei led the attack [...]. Hsiao Chün soon followed suit." See *Romantic Generation*, p. 237. Both Goldman and Lee give prominent attention to Xiao Jun's essay "On Comrades' 'Love' and 'Patience'" ("Lun tongzhi zhi ai yu nai" 論同志之'愛'與'耐') – the piece that the *Wenyi bao* "Editor's Note" had singled out. This piece, however, seems to have provoked no controversy in Yan'an at the time; on this point, see Xiao, *Wode wen'ge jiancha*, p. 193. In his diary, Xiao Jun regularly notes occasions when his articles provoked negative comment, but he registers no such reaction following the appearance of "On Comrades' 'Love' and 'Patience'." Prior to publication, he shared the piece with both Mao Zedong and the editor of *Jiefang ribao*, so clearly it passed muster at the time; see *YARJ* 1, pp. 436, 438 (April 4 and 7, 1942).

uniquely placed to serve as Lu Xun's advocate and interpreter. Not long after his arrival in Yan'an, a commemorative event marking the fourth anniversary of Lu Xun's death offered him an opportunity to enumerate the lessons to be learned from such a mentor.

In August 1940, two months before the anniversary, Xiao Jun was already preparing his speech. In his diary he wrote, "My topic will be: although Lu Xun was not a Party member, he possessed the highest revolutionary quality and spirit. I mean to caution those vulgar and opportunistic Party members." Xiao Jun's message was clear: not having Party membership is no obstacle to maintaining revolutionary integrity, any more than Party membership guarantees it. Xiao Jun went on to assemble a list of Lu Xun's positive attributes, adding at the end a cocktail of behaviors contrary to the "Lu Xun spirit": "Superficiality, boastfulness, complacency – these are things that Lu Xun abhorred; clinging to other people's coattails, not depending on one's own ability – these, too, were things that he detested. Lu Xun wanted to help the Party, using his own abilities and assets; he absolutely refused to borrow the Party's authority to boost himself and advance a selfish personal agenda."⁴¹ The version of Xiao Jun's remarks published later in the Yan'an journal *Lu Xun yanjiu congkan* 鲁迅研究丛刊 contains none of these points, but the actual speech that he delivered at the meeting in October 1940 most likely followed his diary outline quite closely, for it seems to have offended a good number of his listeners.⁴²

It was not long before Xiao Jun further roiled the waters with a sardonic article entitled "Talking Of" ("Shuo qi" 說起), targeting one of his Yan'an neighbors, the poet and translator Xiao San 蕭三 (1896–1983). Xiao, a one-time classmate of Mao Zedong, had lived in the Soviet Union for more than ten years and acquired fluency in the Russian language; during that time he had joined both the Soviet Communist Party and the Soviet Writers Union. After his arrival in Yan'an in 1939, Xiao San served as a conduit for news about the Soviet cultural scene, and in November 1940 he published in the Yan'an literary magazine *Dazhong wenyi* 大眾文藝 an article entitled "An Important Decision in Soviet Literature: A Response to the Writers Union's Expulsion of Avdeenko."

⁴¹ *YARJ* 1, pp. 6–7 (August 19, 1940). Although Xiao Jun cautioned himself, "Of course, to avoid offending people, I should put this in a diplomatic way," it appears that he exercised very little tact.

⁴² For the official version of Xiao Jun's speech, entitled "Declaration at the Yan'an Joint Commemorative Meeting on the Fourth Anniversary of Mr. Lu Xun's Death," see *Lu Xun yanjiu congkan* 鲁迅研究丛刊, rpt. in *Hongse dang'an: Yan'an shiqi wenxian dang'an huibian* 紅色檔案, 延安時期文獻檔案彙編 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 2013), pp. 200–2. Xiao Jun cites reports by attendees at the meeting that he was "arrogant" and "unruly" in an essay entitled "My Attitude" ("Wode taidu" 我的態度), *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 424.

Aleksandr Avdeenko (1908–1996) had come to prominence in the world of Russian letters with the publication in 1933 of his first novel, *I Love*, winning praise from Maxim Gorky, and his career flourished in the years that followed. But in the summer of 1940, soon after the release of the film *The Law of Life*, for which Avdeenko had written the screenplay, the movie was denounced as slanderous to Soviet youth, and Stalin himself ordered that it be banned. Within a matter of weeks, in a dramatic reversal of fortune, Avdeenko was expelled from both the Writers Union and the Communist Party and packed off to a mine in the Donbas region of his native Ukraine.⁴³ In his article, Xiao San listed Avdeenko's alleged offenses at some length and warmly applauded the sanctions imposed on him; he even suggested that Chinese writers would do well to follow the example of the Soviet Writers Union if a similar outrage were to occur in China.

Xiao Xun's riposte to Xiao San's article, published in the inaugural issue of *Wenyi yuebao* 文藝月報 in January 1941, feigned horror at Avdeenko's misdeeds; it ironically echoed Xiao San's approval of the punishment, but ultimately it undermined Xiao San's position by opening up the possibility that Avdeenko might have been innocent of the charges leveled against him: "In short, I feel that the Soviet Writers Union's handling of the matter is perfectly correct – so long as it's not doing Avdeenko an injustice." This implicitly challenged Xiao San's faith in the infallibility of state authority. Xiao Jun argued against placing blind trust in other people's judgment: one should make up one's own mind after examining things carefully for oneself, he concluded.⁴⁴

Today we are likely to share Xiao Jun's sneaking sympathy for Avdeenko and his scorn for Xiao San's unquestioning deference to state diktat. But, at the time, Xiao Jun's article proved controversial. It was seen by many as gratuitously insulting to Xiao San, a respected member of the Yan'an community. Some readers sensed malice in Xiao Jun's comments and sent letters to the editors deploring his sarcastic language; they accused him of using the public forum of *Wenyi yuebao* to settle a personal score.⁴⁵ His essay was not at all conducive to the spirit of unity, they argued.⁴⁶

⁴³ On this episode, see Michel Niqueux, "Stalin and Soviet Writers: The Making and the Disgrace of Alexandre Avdeenko," *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d'histoire* 98.2 (2008), pp. 163–75.

⁴⁴ *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 423.

⁴⁵ Xiao Jun's diary shows that he did have a grudge against Xiao San. According to the entry of April 7, 1942, Xiao complained to Mao about the injuries he had suffered at the hands of Xiao San (here, as often in his diary, referred to as simply "S"; see *YARJ* 1, p. 438). His diary entries of September 9–10, 1940, indicate that he suspected Xiao San of having made overtures to his wife: *YARJ* 1, pp. 30–31.

⁴⁶ See, for example, the reader's letter cited in "Zai 'Shuoqi'" 再'說起', *Xiao Jun quanji* 11,

Ding Ling had for this first issue of the magazine written an essay entitled “Generosity, Tolerance and *Arts Monthly*” (“Dadu, kuanrong yu *Wenyi yuebao*” 大度、寬容與文藝月報), in which she urged contributors to “grasp the principle of struggle” and take aim at problems that needed to be addressed, but Xiao Jun’s essay was not at all the kind of thing she had in mind. As evidence of its poor reception, she shared with him one of the protest letters. To her dismay and embarrassment, Xiao Jun, always sensitive to any perceived slight, then insisted on writing a second article designed to rebut the reader’s objections. His stubbornness further widened an already emerging rift between him and Ding Ling, and for many months after this they were not on speaking terms.⁴⁷

Unfazed by all the negative commentary, Xiao Jun soon began to train his sights on the work of other Party authors. His next targets were two writers active in the Lu Xun Academy of Arts, which tended to follow closely the Party line and play a cheerleading function in Yan’an culture.

One object of Xiao Jun’s scorn was a short story by the Hunan author Zhou Libo 周立波 (1908–1979), “Ox” (“Niu” 牛), published in *Jiefang ribao* 解放日報 on June 6–7, 1941, which he found clumsy and over-emphatic.⁴⁸ Xiao Jun was equally unimpressed by He Qifang’s 何其芳 (1912–1977) strident and polemical poem, “Revolution – Advance on the Old World” (“Geming, xiang jiu shijie jinjun” 革命, 向舊世界進軍), published in *Jiefang ribao* on May 25, 1941. “I cannot find emotion, images, music, or mood,” Xiao Jun complained. “This piece is merely a collection of abstract phrases, and I don’t recognize it as poetry. ... Curses, yells, and declamations are not the same as song. Slogans, catch-phrases, and editorializing are not the same as poetry.”⁴⁹

In the wake of these sallies, Xiao Jun took stock of his growing unpopularity and noted in his diary “I know that in the future I will have

p. 437. Around this time in January 1941 came the grim news of the New Fourth Army’s defeat at the hands of Kuomintang forces in Jiangsu, stirring displeasure that Xiao Jun would engage in this kind of squabble when the revolution was suffering a setback. See Xiao Jun’s summary of readers’ complaints, in “You ‘Shuoqi’” 又說起, *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 449.

⁴⁷ See the entries for the period of January 14–28, 1941, in *YARJ* 1, pp. 96–109. Xiao Jun’s rebuttal of the reader’s letter is found in “You ‘Shuoqi,’” *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 449. Ding Ling makes a veiled reference to her dispute with Xiao Jun in her 1982 retrospective essay, “Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui de qianqian houhou” 延安文藝座談會的前前後後, included in Ai Ke’en 艾可恩, ed., *Yan’an wenyi huiyi lu* 延安文藝回憶錄 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1992), p. 52.

⁴⁸ *YARJ* 1, p. 188 (June 8, 1941).

⁴⁹ The poem, written on March 15, 1941, was criticized by Xiao Jun at a meeting on June 8. See *YARJ* 1, pp. 188–89. He also published his commentary in the seventh issue of *Wenyi yuebao*, in an article entitled “Gleanings from the Eighth Monthly Forum on Literature and

enemies all over Yan'an, but I'm not going to worry about that."⁵⁰ Soon he felt ready to take on Zhou Yang 周揚 (1908–1989), the de facto head of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts, who as the shaper of Party cultural policy in Shanghai had earlier locked horns with Lu Xun.

In July 1941 Zhou Yang published a long article in *Jiefang ribao*, “Informal Remarks on Literature and Life” (“Wenxue yu shenghuo mantan” 文學與生活漫談).⁵¹ In a patronizing tone, he chided unnamed Yan'an writers for not being sufficiently productive; according to him, they tended to attribute their difficulties to not having enough meat and vitamins in their diet. The real reason for their unimpressive showing, he suggested, was that they had failed to adjust to the new environment; the remedy was to get out and about and spend more time with working people.

In Xiao Jun's telling, Ai Qing, Shu Qun 舒群 (1913–1989), and Luo Feng all felt insulted by Zhou Yang's remarks,⁵² and out of sympathy Xiao himself assumed responsibility for drafting a rejoinder to Zhou Yang's insinuations.⁵³ Writers who come to Yan'an, he noted tartly, “definitely do not come here with the goal of eating meat or supplementing the vitamin C in their diet, any more than comrade Zhou Yang participates in the revolution so that he can act as dean, eat food from a superior kitchen, and have a horse to ride whenever he goes out.” To Xiao Jun's annoyance, *Jiefang ribao* – the most widely read publication in Yan'an – declined to carry his rebuttal, and he had to content himself with publishing it instead in *Wenyi yuebao*, which had a very limited circulation.

Although Xiao Jun was often outspoken in his criticisms of individuals and their work, he tended to be more restrained when commenting in writing about Party policy and Party institutions. This may have been partly because he was conscious that he and his growing family relied on the Party to deliver their basic needs, and he wanted to avoid biting the hand that fed them. As Chen Buwen 陳布文 (1920–1985), a close neighbor and herself a non-Party intellectual, put it to him one day, “Given that we are living in a place where the Communist Party

Art” (“Di baci wenyi yuehui zuotan shiling” 第八次文藝月會座談拾零), rpt. in *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, pp. 454–55.

⁵⁰ *YARJ* 1, p. 191 (June 13, 1941).

⁵¹ *JFRB* (July 17, 18, 19, 1941).

⁵² See *YARJ* 1, p. 227 (July 21, 1941).

⁵³ See “‘Wenxue yu shenghuo mantan’ duhou mantan jilu bing shangque yu Zhou Yang tongzhi” ‘文學與生活漫談’讀後漫談集錄並商榷於周揚同志 (“A Collection of Informal Remarks after Reading ‘Informal Remarks on Literature and Life’: A Discussion with Comrade Zhou Yang”), *YARJ* 1, pp. 236–37 (July 27, 1941).

is in charge, we shouldn't be too critical!"⁵⁴ Perhaps more importantly, Xiao Jun was conscious that sharp criticism might well render his writing unpublishable. Thus he limited himself to making jabs and digs rather than frontal attacks.

A case in point is Xiao Jun's essay "The Three Not Feareds and the Four Much Feareds" ("San bu pa' yu 'si kepa'" '三不怕'与'四可怕') written on June 12, 1941. By this time, Xiao had been in Yan'an for a full twelve months, and in this piece he weighs up the pros and cons of living there. The "Three Not Feareds" represent the positive side of life in this revolutionary community – aspects superior to conditions in the Kuomintang zone, obvious on arrival: in Yan'an he has no fear of Japanese air raids; he need not worry that he might starve; he can sleep easy, unconcerned that secret agents might burst in on him at dead of night. But the essay devotes more space to the disadvantages of living in Yan'an, as represented by the "Four Much Feareds": he has found access difficult – or service unsatisfactory – at four kinds of facility (government reception office, out-patient clinic, auditorium, and canteen cooperative), and money alone is no fix. "At times," as he puts it, "some other thing is required, otherwise there will be no happy outcome. What is that 'other thing'? I can explain: it is, believe it or not, 'status' in this society."⁵⁵ Xiao Jun leaves the matter there, without exploring more fully the question of elite privilege in Yan'an.

Xiao Jun's next essay, "Artists' Courage" ("Yishujia de yongqi" 藝術家的勇氣), written the following day, took its title from a line in a *Jiefang ribao* editorial entitled "We Welcome Scientific and Artistic Talent." The editorial writer had waxed lyrical over the freedoms supposedly enjoyed by cultural workers in Yan'an and went so far as to claim, "We especially prize true 'artists' courage."⁵⁶ Xiao found this disingenuous, and with obvious skepticism he copied into his diary a sentence that struck him as merely "high-sounding talk 冠冕話": "Only in the anti-Japan democratic base-areas in the border regions, and especially in Yan'an, have progressive cultural workers finally found the most favorable venue for their souls to exercise freely and boldly."⁵⁷

In this essay, Xiao Jun did not directly contradict the *Jiefang ribao* editorial, but he supplied a definition of "artists' courage" that was surely at variance with what the newspaper intended. In Xiao Jun's view,

⁵⁴ See *YARJ* 1, p. 339 (November 25, 1941). In this entry, as often in the diary, Chen Buren is referred to as "H."

⁵⁵ *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 457.

⁵⁶ *JFRB* (June 10, 1941), p. 1.

⁵⁷ *YARJ* 1, p. 191 (June 11, 1941).

true artists “have the courage to create and also the courage to wreck; not only do they dare to praise things that others dare not praise, all the more do they dare to abhor things that others dare not abhor....” Xiao Jun also asked: Should art defer to the revolution, or should the revolution defer to art? The answer, he suggested, would depend on which of the two was heading in the right direction – implying that revolutionaries were far from infallible.⁵⁸

Xiao Jun submitted both essays to *Jiefang ribao*, full knowing they would not go down well. In his cover letter to the editor he wrote, “I am not willing to have them censored; I will take sole responsibility for them, if that is feasible.”⁵⁹ The newspaper declined to publish either piece.⁶⁰

Although Xiao Jun had made his name as a writer of fiction, during his Yan’an years he accomplished little of note in this genre. It was not for lack of material: in his diary he often jotted down possibilities for new stories.⁶¹ Most such ideas are not fleshed out at all, but in one diary entry Xiao Jun sketched a fuller outline:

A high-ranking man, relying on his status and other perks, might offer incentives to some comrade’s female partner; and often, if she’s a vulgar type with a weak will and servile nature, she is stolen away; then her boyfriend sinks into endless misery. There are many such examples. I plan to write a story entitled “By the Grave,” to expose this kind of shameful episode. The plot: two young lovers, after overcoming many obstacles, arrive in Yan’an keen to serve the revolution. Sadly, the girl is induced to marry a leading official and the boy is sent to the front. In low spirits he later returns to Yan’an (injured or ill), and one day he sees the girl he loves going off on a horse to see a play: she is now a housewife. He feels that life is meaningless. One day an alarm sounds and everyone but him runs for cover; he is killed. The girl commits suicide at his graveside... I really want to write a compelling story about these revolutionary rogues!⁶²

⁵⁸ *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 460.

⁵⁹ *YARJ* 1, p. 194 (June 16, 1941).

⁶⁰ “Artists’ Courage” was later carried by *Wenyi yuebao*, but “The Three Not Feareds and the Four Much Feareds” did not appear in print until long after Xiao Jun’s death.

⁶¹ See, e.g., the following entries: *YARJ* 1, p. 9 (August 19, 1940); p. 40 (September 18, 1940); p. 376 (January 9, 1942); p. 492 (June 4, 1942); p. 495 (June 7, 1942).

⁶² *YARJ* 1, pp. 73–74 (October 2, 1940). For the larger context to which this outline is related, see my article, “From ‘Thoughts on March 8’ to ‘Gap’ and ‘The Sufferings of Liping’: Mate Choice and Marriage in the Work of Three Yan’an Authors,” *Nan Nü: Men, Women and Gender in China* 25, no. 1 (2023), pp. 103–51.

Nothing came of this – or any other of Xiao Jun’s projected stories. Such work, he must have realized, had no realistic hope of finding a publication outlet in Yan’an. The only real progress that Xiao made in his fiction writing was in developing parts of a long historical novel, *Di san dai* 第三代, set in northeast China during the years before and after the 1911 Revolution.

After the bitter dispute that followed his put-down of Xiao San, Xiao Jun and Ding Ling became estranged, and during her tenure as literature editor he published very little in *Jiefang ribao*.⁶³ In early March 1942, when Ding Ling invited a number of prominent authors to contribute pieces for the hundredth issue of *Jiefang ribao*’s culture column, it appears that she issued no such invitation to Xiao Jun; at any rate, no writing by him was included in that special feature.⁶⁴

The situation changed, however, when Xiao Jun’s friend and fellow northeasterner Shu Qun took over as editor of *Jiefang ribao*’s culture column in mid-March 1942. The prospect of a more sympathetic editor seems to have galvanized Xiao into action: on March 13, the very day that Shu Qun announced his new role at the paper, Xiao Jun wrote two essays; both were published later that month.⁶⁵

“The ‘Pit’ in Front of Authors” (“Zuojia mianqian de ‘keng’” 作家面前的‘坑’), the second of these pieces, shows once more that Xiao Jun, in his writing, was careful not to be too explicit in his criticisms, to talk around a sensitive issue rather than tackle it head-on. The essay draws attention to the choice between self-censorship and self-endangerment that faced writers in Yan’an, but it shies away from spelling out the dangerous political nature of the challenge that faced them:

Not long ago a feeling suddenly came over me – the feeling that in front of every author there lies a pit that must be crossed, a pit that cannot be seen, that everybody seems too embarrassed to mention. But everybody knows that sooner or later one is going to have to make that leap – there’s no getting around it. ... So, what kind

⁶³ In his April 14, 1942, diary entry Xiao Jun says he has had no contact with Ding Ling for a year. The only two pieces of note by Xiao Jun that were published in *Jiefang ribao* during Ding Ling’s tenure as culture editor were an essay for the fifth anniversary of Lu Xun’s death (October 17, 1941) and a piece reflecting his interest in “New Heroism” (January 1, 1942).

⁶⁴ The commemorative special issue appeared on three consecutive days, March 11, 12, and 13.

⁶⁵ “On Marriage” (“Lun ‘zhongshen dashi’” 論‘終身大事’) was published in *JFRB* on March 25, and “The ‘Pit’ in Front of Authors” five days later. Other essays followed: “On Comrades’ ‘Love’ and ‘Patience’” was published on May 8, a sequel to “On Marriage” on May 11, 1942, and “The ‘Bulba’ Spirit on the Literary Stage” (“Wentan shang de ‘Buerba’ jingshen” 文壇上的‘布爾巴’精神) on June 13. Xiao Jun’s last major piece was “Why *Zawen* Still Cannot Be Scrapped” (“Zawen hai feibude shuo” 雜文還廢不得說), published in *Guyu* 穀雨 5 (June 1942).

of pit is it? I don't think it's the "What does one write?" pit, but rather the "How does one write?" pit.⁶⁶

During the summer of 1942, despite his increasingly strained relations with other Yan'an intellectuals, Xiao Jun continued in his role as editor of *Wenyi yuebao*.⁶⁷ He had always been keen to encourage open discussion of literary works, in the hope of raising artistic standards, and in *Wenyi*'s seventeenth – and, it would turn out, final – issue, published at the end of September, he introduced a new feature, "Monthly Appraisal of Literature and Art," offering brief reviews of short stories published in *Jiefang ribao* in July.⁶⁸ Passing judgment on pieces carried in the Party newspaper would be a way, he perhaps thought, to assert his importance as an arbiter of literary taste. He also included a short essay of his own, "The Blind Gut and Poetry," which, without naming specific works, launched another withering attack on contemporary poems: "Having lost the special properties of poetry, they deploy only commonplace prose, or present effects that are like finger-taps on a bamboo tube – rhythm without charm. And what's worse – lacking real heart."⁶⁹ To Xiao Jun's critics, his derogatory comments served as further evidence of his inability to work productively with other members of the cultural community in Yan'an.⁷⁰

THE WOULD-BE MOVER AND SHAKER

July 8, 1941: *I'll play the Don Quixote. I'm going to see that justice is done for the little people – I alone can shoulder this task. Only through great actions can you create great works; only with a great spirit can you achieve great things. I must resolutely assume the role of guardian and overseer of humanity – and I can!*⁷¹

By the summer of 1941 Xiao Jun was so discontented with life in Yan'an that he was increasingly tempted to go somewhere else – perhaps to Chongqing, the Nationalist bastion, where some of his friends

⁶⁶ *JFRB* (May 30, 1942), p. 4.

⁶⁷ Xiao Jun had been chief editor of *Wenyi yuebao* beginning with the twelfth issue in December 1941: see "Wei benbao dansheng shi'er qi jinian xianci" 為本報誕生十二期紀念獻詞, in *Wenyi yuebao*, p. 73 (*Hongse dang'an* reprint).

⁶⁸ In an essay dated September 19, 1942 entitled "If Everyone Brings Firewood, the Flames Rise Higher" ("Dajia peng chai huoyan gao" 大家捧柴火焰高), Xiao Jun presented a forceful case for promoting literary criticism in Yan'an. See *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, pp. 557–59.

⁶⁹ *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 562.

⁷⁰ See, e.g., comments by Ouyang Shanzun 歐陽山尊 (1914–2009) in Zhang Junfeng 張軍鋒, ed., *Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui de taigian muhou* 延安文藝座談會的台前幕後 (Xi'an: Shaanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014), vol. 2, p. 74.

⁷¹ *YARJ* 1, p. 212.

were living. But before leaving he felt it was incumbent on him to communicate his concerns to Mao Zedong, the paramount leader of the Communist Party. He wrote to Mao on July 8, requesting a meeting, then waited with growing irritation as days passed and no appointment was set. Finally, on July 18, 1941, the summons came. As Xiao Jun walked up the hill past the party headquarters in Yangjialing and approached the row of cave homes where the top leaders lived, he saw Mao walking slowly back and forth outside, a blue army jacket on his shoulders and round-toe cotton shoes on his feet. The two men would end up talking for much of the afternoon and well into the evening, in the first of several freewheeling conversations that they would have during the next several months.

At this first encounter, one of Xiao Jun's most pressing questions had to do with the role of non-Party intellectuals like himself in Yan'an's Party-oriented culture. Just a few days earlier, he had written in his diary, "Here there is a huge gulf between Party people and non-Party people,"⁷² and he wanted to make Mao aware of the gravity of the problem.

After an initial exchange of pleasantries, Mao noticed that Xiao Jun had brought with him a copy of a policy document, "Administrative Program of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region" ("Shaan-Gan-Ning bianqu shizheng gangling" 陝甘寧邊區施政綱領), published with much fanfare in *Xin Zhonghua bao* 新中華報 (the precursor of *Jiefang ribao*) two months earlier.⁷³ Finding discrepancies between the document's high-minded sentiments and the actual practices followed, Xiao Jun had marked passages that seemed to him particularly suspect. One of them read as follows: "Communist Party members should engage in democratic cooperation with non-Party people; they cannot ride roughshod over others and monopolize control."⁷⁴ In Xiao Jun's experience, this principle was more honored in the breach than the observance.

Mao, the main architect of the "Administrative Program," was quick to concede the point. "Why did we need to put this program in place?" he asked rhetorically. "Precisely because conflicts have developed between Party and people – this has almost become a wide-

⁷² *YARJ* 1, p. 218 (July 12, 1941).

⁷³ *Xin Zhonghua bao* 新中華報 (May 1, 1941), p. 1. *Xin Zhonghua bao* ceased publication soon after, and the first issue of *Jiefang ribao* appeared on May 16. For a full translation of the "Administrative Program," see Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949, Vol. VII, New Democracy 1939-1941* (Armonk, N.Y., and London: M.E. Sharpe, 2005) pp. 727-30.

⁷⁴ *YARJ* 1, p. 225 (July 20, 1941).

spread phenomenon.”⁷⁵ Mao had no difficulty in acknowledging such problems, it seems, because he attributed them to the baleful influence of “sectarianism,” effectively a code word for the work style of his main rival in the leadership circle, Moscow-educated Wang Ming 王明 (1904–1974), whom he was keen to discredit.⁷⁶ In fact, he may rather have welcomed Xiao Jun’s criticisms, for they would prove useful in his campaign to undermine Wang.⁷⁷ In his keynote speech at an enlarged Politburo meeting two months later, Mao would blame “sectarianism” for the fact that “many scientists and men of letters are looked down upon,”⁷⁸ and in January 1942 he would deplore the “enormous estrangement” that existed between Party members and non-Party people, holding the former primarily responsible.⁷⁹ So on this issue, at this moment, Mao and Xiao Jun found common ground.

Mao counseled patience, arguing that democratization would be a gradual process: “You have to realize – in the past both the KMT and the CCP have acted as one-party dictatorships, and that can’t be changed overnight. At the very least it’s going to take three years, or five years, or twenty years.” On the role of non-Party individuals, Mao offered Xiao Jun a fuller assurance: “Non-Party individuals certainly can criticize the Party. You can criticize – and criticize everywhere, criticize with this political program in your hand.” This, of course, was music to Xiao Jun’s ears, but it simply represented Mao’s position at this point in time. By the following spring, Mao would see things very differently.

Another of Xiao Jun’s goals was to serve as a spokesman for writers and artists who since their arrival in Yan’an had been treated shabbily (some had been regarded with suspicion because of their complicated personal histories) or had suffered personal losses (Ai Qing’s infant son had died not long before, due to poor nutrition). Xiao raised some of these writers’ concerns in his first conversation with Mao on July 18, and at their second meeting, on August 10, he pressed Mao to meet with others in his circle – particularly Ai Qing, Luo Feng, and Shu Qun.

⁷⁵ *YARJ* 1, p. 225 (July 20, 1941).

⁷⁶ Xiao Jun himself had formed a negative opinion of Wang Ming, finding him unhelpful: see *YARJ* 1, pp. 122–23 (February 19, 1941), p. 129 (March 7, 1941).

⁷⁷ Pertinent here is Gao Hua’s shrewd comment that “Mao originally intended to use Xiao Jun’s forthright character for his own ends”; *How the Red Sun Rose*, p. 342, footnote.

⁷⁸ See Mao’s speech, “Oppose Subjectivism and Sectarianism,” in Schram, *Mao’s Road to Power* 7, p. 810; Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose*, p. 303.

⁷⁹ See “The Main Points of Propaganda of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee,” January 24, 1942, in Stuart R. Schram and Timothy Cheek, eds., *Mao’s Road to Power, Vol. VIII, From Rectification to Coalition Government 1942–July 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2015), pp. 9–10.

Mao came in person to visit these writers the very next evening,⁸⁰ and he followed up the morning after by inviting Xiao Jun, his friends, and their wives to a gathering at his home, attended also by Chen Yun and Kai Feng 凱豐 (1906–1955; then secretary of the Central Cultural Work Committee).⁸¹ There, Mao listened attentively to the attendees' complaints and boosted their spirits with conciliatory remarks; "Truth often lies outside the Party," he is reported as having said. By the end of the day Xiao Jun concluded that considerable progress had been made in righting wrongs and bridging the gap between leaders and led.⁸²

On that day, as at other times, however, Xiao Jun may have misjudged Mao's position. As Gao Hua noted in *How the Red Sun Rose*, "On public occasions and in encounters with all sorts of people, Mao invariably played the role of an enlightened ruler – courteous to the wise, cultivating the educated, and supremely open-minded."⁸³ Gratified by Mao's seeming receptiveness and prone to over-confidence, Xiao Jun would consistently take Mao to be an ally of sorts, when Mao's approval was, however, always predicated on Xiao Jun's willingness to defer to the Party's authority. Even as late as April 1942 Xiao Jun would tell himself that that their relationship was developing into a friendship, only to be rudely awakened in the months that followed.⁸⁴

Xiao Jun was initially on cordial terms with the poet Ai Qing, a relatively recent arrival in Yan'an, for whom he had fancied himself a spokesman. But over time Xiao came to see Ai as a rival, and in August 1941 Ai Qing's election, along with his, to the organizing council of the All-China [Anti-Japanese] Resistance Association of Writers and Artists seems to have stirred Xiao Jun's unease. Two months later, both men stood for election to the Assembly of Representatives of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region, and on October 30 Ai was elected by the Resistance Association as its delegate. Xiao Jun, convinced that he was much the more qualified and claiming procedural irregularities, was incensed by the result. He complained bitterly to Chen Yun and Kai Feng, and ultimately, to smooth his ruffled feathers, on November 4 he was appointed a delegate, too.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ *YARJ* 1, p. 260 (August 11, 1941).

⁸¹ Ai Qing's wife at the time, Wei Ying 韋瑛 (1922–2020), has left an account of his visit, "Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui de qianzouqu" 延安文藝座談會的前奏曲, in Zhang, *Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui* 2, pp. 106–15.

⁸² *YARJ* 1, p. 263 (August 12, 1941). See also Xiao Jun's remarks later that year, in *YARJ* 1, p. 365 (December 29, 1941).

⁸³ Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose*, "Preface," p. xviii.

⁸⁴ See *YARJ* 1, p. 438 (April 7, 1942).

⁸⁵ He is listed among representatives "invited by the border region government," unlike

Two days later, Xiao and Ai attended the opening session of the assembly. In his keynote speech, Mao Zedong, after stressing the need for solidarity among all Chinese people to resist Japan, highlighted the problems of narrow-minded “closed-doorism” and sectarianism that detracted from that effort.⁸⁶ Here he addressed the very point that Xiao Jun had raised in their first conversation the previous July: “Communists must listen attentively to the views of people outside the Party and give others the chance to speak. When others say things that are right, we should welcome that and learn from them. When others say things that are wrong, we should let them finish what they are saying, and then explain things in a measured way. Communists must not think themselves infallible and act in a domineering fashion as though everything they do is right and everything others do is wrong.”

Ai Qing found Mao’s speech so inspiring that on the spot he penned an adulatory poem, “Mao Zedong.”⁸⁷ Xiao Jun was equally heartened by Mao’s inclusive tone and – keen to make an impression in his new role as delegate – he decided to deliver a short address to the assembly. The text of the speech, recorded in his diary, reveals the flair for public presentations that would make him a popular speaker when he returned to Harbin in 1946. In a down-to-earth manner, he emphasized the importance of democracy and outlined his expectations of Yan’an’s government, closing with these words: “Finally, the main thing is – we need to criticize the government, monitor it, and also work with it, support it, and enable it to implement our proposals. Otherwise, what we say – to put it a little crudely – wouldn’t be worth a fart, would it? Let’s work together to accomplish the great cause of resisting aggression and building the nation.”⁸⁸

As a delegate, Xiao Jun now had an opportunity to press for action on an issue that had troubled him for some time: the neglect and exploitation that he felt were suffered by Yan’an’s so-called *xiao gui* 小鬼, the teenage orderlies who performed chores and ran errands for their elders. In Xiao Jun’s view, these children were not treated with

elected delegates such as Ai Qing, who was designated a representative for Zhidan 志丹 county. See *Shaan Gan Ning bianqu di'er jie canyihui huibian* 陝甘寧邊區第二屆參議會彙編, p. 307, in *Shaan Gan Ning bianqu canyihui shiliao huibian* 陝甘寧邊區參議會史料彙編, *Hongse dang'an* reprint.

⁸⁶ *Shaan Gan Ning bianqu di'er jie canyihui zhongyao wenxian* 陝甘寧邊區第二屆參議會重要文獻, pp. 393–94; trans. Schram, *Mao's Road to Power* 7, pp. 839–42.

⁸⁷ *YAWY, shige juan* 詩歌卷, pp. 129–30.

⁸⁸ *YARJ* 1, pp. 323–24 (November 6, 1941). According to Xiao Jun’s diary entry of November 15, 1941, his speech was later posted by *Qingqidui* 輕騎隊, the wall-newspaper known for its bold and lively commentaries on Yan’an affairs.

nearly enough kindness and consideration. He had made a point of talking to them and learning their stories, and developed a particular sympathy for a twelve-year-old *xiao gui* named Du Shihai 杜十海, whom he interviewed in February 1941.⁸⁹ Later that month, learning that the boy had been strung up from a beam for hours on end as a penalty for pilfering food, he protested the boy's mistreatment.⁹⁰ Xiao Jun argued that the boy had been given too much work and was being punished far too harshly; Party members paid lip service to caring about *xiao gui* but did not actually help them in any real way, he lamented.

In the autumn of 1941, Xiao Jun began to agitate publicly for policies to address the needs of *xiao gui*. In his article "Commemorating Lu Xun: We Must Use Real Achievements" ("Jinian Lu Xun: yao yong zhenzheng de yeji" 紀念魯迅, 要用真正的業績), written to mark the fifth anniversary of Lu Xun's death, he made a case for instituting proper education for these children.⁹¹ On November 19, 1941, as a delegate to the assembly, he proposed a motion that would ban child labor and regularize schooling for *xiao gui*. At the end of the year he listed this initiative as among his proudest achievements of 1941.⁹²

Press freedom was another issue close to Xiao Jun's heart, and when a meeting was held on March 31, 1942, to discuss the pending overhaul of *Jiefang ribao*, he made a point of attending and sharing his views with his customary vigor, hopeful that the Party would be genuinely interested in hearing from the paper's readers. He seems not to have realized that the meeting had been preceded by discussions at the highest levels, and a decision had already been made to tighten Party control of the paper.

Mao and other top officials had been appalled by *Jiefang ribao's* publication of Ding Ling's "Thoughts on March 8" (in the March 9 issue) and Wang Shiwei's "Wild Lilies" (published in two parts, on March 13 and 23), and as early as March 16 plans were afoot to overhaul the newspaper. On March 26 Shu Qun, editor of the culture section, was informed that what hitherto had been "not entirely a Party newspaper" was to be converted into "an entirely Party newspaper." A new plan for the paper had been agreed upon; the well-established half-page culture

⁸⁹ *YARJ* 1, p. 119 (February 11, 1941). Du Shihai's father had been pressganged into labor service by the Japanese and never come back. When the boy was later transferred to the clubhouse, Xiao Jun gave him a little money as a parting present; see *YARJ* 1, p. 176 (May 15, 1941).

⁹⁰ *YARJ* 1, pp. 125–26 (February 25, 1941).

⁹¹ *JFRB* (October 21, 1941), p. 4; *Xiao Jun quanji* 11, p. 494.

⁹² *YARJ* 1, p. 365 (December 31, 1941).

section, at Mao's bidding, was to be replaced by a full page that would include coverage of both social and natural sciences.⁹³

At that March 31 meeting editor-in-chief Bo Gu 博古 (1907–1946) first presented a self-criticism, acknowledging mistakes and confessing that the paper's "Party character 黨性" had been weak. When Xiao Jun stood up to share his views, he took issue with this point. On the contrary, he argued, the paper's Party character had been altogether too pronounced – so pronounced that the paper was like a locomotive running all by itself, pulling no carriages. *Jiefang ribao* had rejected multiple submissions by him, he noted with some asperity, and had failed to criticize a number of unhealthy phenomena in Yan'an; it had consistently refused to engage with different ideas or alternative recommendations. In short, the paper had become divorced from Party policy.

"What is Party policy?" Xiao Jun asked. Mindful that the Communist Party was formally committed to cooperating with the Nationalists in the war of resistance against Japan and uniting all forces in that effort, he went on: "It's the United Front, but this newspaper fails to follow the path of the United Front. I hope in the future the *Liberation Daily* will show greater boldness and a broader vision: only then can we continue to collaborate."⁹⁴ With his usual self-regard, Xiao Jun seems to have imagined that his threat to stop collaborating with the paper might prompt the editors to reconsider their position and adopt a more liberal stance. But things were moving in entirely the opposite direction. In November 1941, Mao had told the audience at the assembly of representatives, "Comrades, our principle of engaging in democratic cooperation with non-Party persons is unswerving and immutable."⁹⁵ Now, times had changed, and not only was cooperation with non-Party persons no longer quite the priority it had once been,⁹⁶

⁹³ See Li Xin 黎辛, "Mao Zedong yu *Jiefang ribao* fukan" 毛澤東與解放日報副刊, *Xin wenxue shiliao* (2002.3), p. 166, and "Shu Qun laoshi" 舒群老師, *Xin wenxue shiliao* (2008.4), p. 47.

⁹⁴ *YARJ* 1, p. 433 (March 31, 1942). Interviewed by a reporter, Xiao Jun granted that it was reasonable for the Chongqing paper *Xinhua ribao* 新華日報 to give weight to Party news, since other media in Chongqing offered alternative views. But *Jiefang ribao* was the only paper in Yan'an, and so, he argued, it should address everyone's needs, devoting only one-third of its space to Party news, and the rest to stories of interest to readers at large. See "Benbao gexin qianye fangxun gejie yijian" 本報革新前夜訪尋各界意見, *JFRB* (April 2, 1942), p. 3.

⁹⁵ *Canyihui shiliao huibian*, p. 140.

⁹⁶ In early March 1942, Mao had prepared a draft resolution for the Central Committee, "On the Relationship between Communist Party Members and Non-Party Persons"; it emphasized that the views of non-Party persons must be taken seriously and urged *Liberation Daily* and other newspapers in the border areas to recruit "vast numbers of non-Party persons" to publish their political views. The draft document was discussed within the Central Committee on March 19 but never formally issued, almost certainly because of the policy shift that month and the leadership's decision to exert more, not less, ideological control over the media. For

the United Front itself no longer figured so prominently in the leadership's thinking.⁹⁷ From now on, Xiao Jun's views would diverge more and more conspicuously from those of Mao Zedong.

XIAO JUN AT THE YAN'AN FORUM ON LITERATURE AND ART

May 2, 1942: *My speech, as usual, drew rapt attention and was warmly received. My language and delivery gripped the audience throughout.*⁹⁸

The Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art took place against a backdrop of continuing concern among many political and military leaders that writers and artists had been given too loose a rein. A particular source of outrage was the essay "Wild Lilies" by Wang Shiwei, an author and translator attached to the Central Research Institute. Wang's almost equally controversial essay, "Politicians, Artists," was published in *Grain Rain* (Gu Yu) in April.⁹⁹

Although Xiao Jun had no personal interactions with Wang Shiwei until later that year, he would no doubt have read Wang's essays soon after they were published. Nowhere in his diary does he comment on them, but it is fair to assume that some of Wang's concerns would have resonated with him. The issue of elite privileges, raised pointedly in "Wild Lilies," Xiao Jun had also touched on previously, in his "Three Not Feareds and Four Much Feareds." Moreover, the distinction between the political and the artistic realm, central to Wang's argument in "Politicians, Artists," was an article of faith for Xiao Jun. When speaking up for *xiao gui* at meetings of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Assembly, Xiao had been accused of advocating egalitarianism,¹⁰⁰ and he may well have felt a certain kinship with Wang Shiwei when he was charged with the same offense.

If Xiao Jun did not already know about the leaders' disapproval of "Wild Lilies," he certainly became aware of it on April 4, when he

the text of this draft resolution, see Schram and Cheek, *Mao's Road to Power* 8, pp. 72–76. Gao Hua comments on this document in *How the Red Sun Rose*, pp. 140–41.

⁹⁷ A few weeks later, at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art, when Wu Xiru 吳奚如 (1906–1985) suggested toning down Communist Party rhetoric in the interests of the common struggle against Japan, he was sharply rebuked by Zhu De, who accused him of abandoning a proletarian stand. See Zhang, *Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui* 2, pp. 180–81.

⁹⁸ *YARJ* 1, p. 456.

⁹⁹ For a fuller discussion of the Wang Shiwei incident, see Chen Yung-fa, *Yan'an de yinying*, pp. 39–54; Dai, *Wang Shiwei and "Wild Lilies"*; Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose*, pp. 343–63; Timothy Cheek, "Wang Shiwei's Rectification: Intellectuals and the Party in Yan'an," in Timothy Cheek, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Hans van de Ven, eds., *The Chinese Communist Party: A Century in Ten Lives* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2021), pp. 51–69.

¹⁰⁰ *YARJ* 1, p. 328 (November 13, 1941).

heard furious complaints from the army commander Wang Zhen 王震 (1908–1993). Reading between the lines of Xiao Jun’s diary entry for that day, one can infer that Wang Zhen favored firm disciplinary action to punish Wang Shiwei for his perceived errors. Xiao Jun viewed things differently; thus he told Wang Zhen that “one responds to a gun with a gun, and to a pen with a pen.”¹⁰¹ Military men should stay in their own lane: this seemed to be his message.

A week later, on April 12, Xiao Jun elaborated on this point in an essay that could not be published at the time, entitled “On the Civil and Martial Ways” (“Lun wen wu zhi dao” 論文武之道). Since the 1911 Revolution, he noted, military men had become dominant in Chinese society, with writers reduced to a subordinate role and widely regarded with disdain. “This tendency has continued right up to the present,” he wrote, “and it’s likely to carry on for some years yet, if our society fails to progress, or if it goes into reverse.”¹⁰²

In the essay’s final section, Xiao Jun compared the roles of writer and general. The two types are similar in some ways, he noted: each makes decisions, each may fail to achieve what he sets out to do. But in various respects the writer’s role is more difficult: he is on his own; he has more enemies, and more formidable ones; his weapon may be lighter, but it is more difficult to master. Xiao Jun closed with the following reflections:

Generals storm cities,
Writers storm hearts;
Spiritual combat involves tongue and pen,
Storming a city calls for gun and cannon.
As the *Art of War* puts it, “Storming hearts comes top, storming
cities second.”
Who should look down on whom?
Generals may fight for ideas,
But ideas don’t fight for generals.
Anyone who meddles with a general’s battle plan is a fool;
Anyone who scorns a writer’s independence has no brains.¹⁰³

While Xiao Jun was exploring ways to justify an author’s freedom of expression, the Party leadership was now intent on restricting it. On April 10, *Jiefang ribao* published a reprint of Mao’s 1937 essay “Combat Liberalism,” with its dire verdict on this type of thinking:

¹⁰¹ YARJ 1, p. 436 (April 4, 1942).

¹⁰² Xiao Jun *quanji* 11, p. 527.

¹⁰³ Xiao Jun *quanji* 11, p. 528.

“Liberalism is extremely harmful in a revolutionary collective. It is a corrosive which eats away unity, undermines cohesion, causes apathy, and creates dissension.”¹⁰⁴ Until this time, the focus of the Rectification Movement had been to correct the “Three Work Styles” (subjectivism, sectarianism, and Party formalism), but from now on liberalism would increasingly be seen as a problem of equal importance, as Mao indicated in a speech on April 20: “This person calls a matter black, and that one calls it white; one person says one thing, ten people say ten things, one hundred say one hundred things: each one has his own version. This is how it is in Yan’an, more or less. Liberalistic thinking [*ziyouzhuyi de sixiang*] is relatively deep here, and we can say there is pronounced liberalism in certain departments.”¹⁰⁵

As early as August 1941, in one of his exchanges with Mao, Xiao Jun had suggested that a policy be formulated to guide the production of literature and art. Naively, he seemed to have anticipated that such a policy, informed by the enlightened, democratic spirit of the 1941 “Administrative Program,” would allow for relatively more diverse opinions and open media.¹⁰⁶ In the spring of 1942 he welcomed the news that planning for a so-called forum on literature and art was now underway, still apparently hoping that such an event would help to improve the environment for writers like himself. On April 27, however, during Xiao Jun’s last conversation with Mao before the forum, there came a sign that the meeting would not turn out quite as he expected, because when Xiao complained that artists’ needs had been neglected, Mao, rather than responding sympathetically as he had at their very first meeting in the previous July, gave him a disapproving look.¹⁰⁷ The emerging consensus in the Party leadership was that writers and artists had actually been coddled all too much, and it was high time some discipline was imposed.

For the Forum’s opening statement, on May 2, Mao addressed a variety of issues relating to literature and art, but he attached special emphasis to the reorientation of values and emotions that he saw as critical to successful cultural production in a revolutionary society. Intellectuals must undergo “a transformation in feelings, changing over from one class to another,” he maintained. “If our workers in litera-

¹⁰⁴ *JFRB* (April 10, 1942), p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ “On the Rectification of the Three Styles,” in Schram and Cheek, *Mao’s Road to Power* 8, p. 84. For a fuller discussion of the April 1942 counterattack on liberalism, see Gao, *How the Red Sun Rose*, pp. 358–60.

¹⁰⁶ *YARJ* 1, p. 263 (August 12, 1941).

¹⁰⁷ *YARJ* 1, p. 451 (April 27, 1942).

ture and art who come from the intelligentsia want their work to be welcomed by the masses, they must see to it that their thoughts and feelings undergo transformation and reform. Otherwise, nothing they do will turn out well or be effective.”

Xiao Jun was the first to speak after Mao completed his opening remarks. No full text of his remarks survives; Xiao Jun’s formal statement, “My Views on Current Issues in Literature and Art” (“Duiyu dangqian wenyi zhu wenti de wo jian” 對於當前文藝諸問題的我見) written several days later and published in *Jiefang ribao* on May 14, is surely a much tamer document than the speech he actually delivered.¹⁰⁸

One view that Xiao Jun presented at the meeting but did not include in his written summary was recalled many years later by multiple attendees, so contrarian and discordant was it to the ears of his listeners. In “On the Civil and Martial Ways” (see above), Xiao Jun had cited a couplet said to have once hung in a Hangzhou temple: “Red Lotus Flower, White Lotus Root, Green Lotus Leaves – the Three Teachings are actually one family 紅蓮、白藕、青荷葉，三教原來是一家。” Now, drawing on this idea of a single organism having separate but complementary parts, Xiao Jun argued that politics, military affairs, and culture are related to each other in a similar way: though connected, they operate in different spheres and are equal partners. This being so, Xiao asserted, to say that literature and art are subservient to politics is not a viable proposition.¹⁰⁹

When, twelve days later, the *Jiefang ribao* editors published Xiao Jun’s “My Views on Current Issues in Literature and Art,” they did not intend for it to be seen in a positive light. Accordingly, in the page layout they placed in a commanding position immediately to the right of Xiao Jun’s essay a translation of Lenin’s 1905 pamphlet, *Party Organization and Party Literature*. The editors’ preamble drew attention to the contemporary relevance of Lenin’s essay, implicitly drawing a parallel between Xiao Jun’s views on literature and those of Konstantin Balmont (1867–1942), a Russian symbolist poet who prized his independence from political parties and went into exile after the 1917 Revolution. “This essay by Lenin was targeted at decadent authors of the Balmont ilk,” they wrote. “Authors like Balmont at the time tried to establish a nonpartisan literature transcending social classes, thinking themselves literati of noble mind and demanding literary freedom

¹⁰⁸ Xiao Jun’s article can be found in *JFRB* (May 14, 1942), p. 4; and *TARJ* 1, pp. 459–63 (May 4–6, 1942).

¹⁰⁹ Gao Jie 高傑, *Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui jishi* 延安文藝座談會紀實 (Xi’an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 2013), p. 46. *TARJ* 1, p. 456 (May 2, 1942); He, “Mao Zedong zhi ge,” p. 424.

from the proletariat. Lenin and the Bolsheviks resolutely opposed this kind of ‘superman’ literary theory.”

If Xiao Jun was a Chinese Balmont, then Mao would be China’s Lenin, and *Party Organization and Party Literature* served as his primer. The core idea in Mao’s closing speech at the Yan’an Forum can be traced back to Lenin’s words in the 1905 pamphlet: “Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, ‘a cog and a screw’ of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically conscious vanguard of the entire working class. Literature must become an organized, planned, and integrated part of Social-Democratic Party work.”¹¹⁰

When the forum reconvened for its final plenary session on May 22, Xiao Jun addressed the assembly for a second time.¹¹¹ His patience had been sorely tested by several speeches he had heard, some of which had far exceeded the allotted time, and he was in a state of high dudgeon. “I want to emulate Party members’ standards for observing discipline,” he remarked sarcastically at the outset.

Xiao was particularly exercised over a speech that He Qifang had delivered. In it, He had echoed Mao’s remarks about how intellectuals are “spiritually unclean,” saying, “The souls of petit bourgeois intellectuals are unclean. They are selfish, cowardly, weak, vacillating. Having heard Chairman Mao’s instruction, I feel an urgent need to transform.” He went on to deliver a harsh critique of Wang Shiwei and his “Wild Lilies.”¹¹²

Xiao Jun took umbrage at He Qifang’s remarks, objecting to the insinuation that intellectuals uniformly needed to repent their failings and remold themselves.¹¹³ Xiao Jun had stopped short of challenging this notion when Mao had presented it on the first day, but when it came from a fellow writer, Xiao Jun found it much less palatable. His teacher Lu Xun, he pointed out, had been consistently on the side of revolution without ever undergoing a transformation and embracing a proletarian identity.

¹¹⁰ *JFRB* (May 14, 1942), p. 4.

¹¹¹ The question of who said what at which session of the forum has often vexed scholars of the Yan’an period; on this point, see Gao Jie, *Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui jishi*, pp. 3–4. I follow Xiao Jun’s account, which was not available to Gao Jie when he was writing his book.

¹¹² He Qifang later recalled the disgust he felt on reading “Wild Lilies”: “After I read the paper that day, I was furious. I said to my students, ‘What “Wild Lilies”? It’s wild grass, it’s weeds!’” See his “Mao Zedong zhi ge,” p. 395.

¹¹³ Xiao Jun would continue to question Party intellectuals’ insistence on the need to transform, see *YARJ* 2, pp. 75–76 (April 2, 1943).

Xiao remarked further that as for himself he had no reason to feel penitent – he had nothing to repent. To him, He Qifang’s claim of penitence rang hollow – it was merely performative, lacking any real substance.¹¹⁴ The Communist Party’s Rectification Movement as a whole, he suggested, suffered from the same lack of credibility: if you put on a display but fail to take meaningful action, this is simply exhibitionism. Three unacceptable work styles among Party members were the focus of the current rectification, but given the way things were heading, he scoffed, in the future the Party might well have to launch a movement to rectify not Three Work Styles, but six!¹¹⁵

On the Wang Shiwei issue, Xiao Jun also disagreed profoundly with He Qifang. Xiao felt that Wang Shiwei was, at least in his own mind, taking a revolutionary stand. He was a comrade, not an enemy, and he should be treated accordingly, with respect and understanding.

After Xiao Jun finished speaking, two influential figures voiced disagreement. The first was Mao Zedong’s personal secretary, Hu Qiaomu 胡喬木 (1912–1992), who bristled at Xiao Jun’s disparaging characterization of the Party and its members. He rejected Xiao’s defense of Wang Shiwei, saying “An ideological error makes one an enemy.”¹¹⁶ He also claimed that Lu Xun’s career path did, indeed, show that he had transformed himself, and had not simply “developed,” as Xiao Jun claimed.¹¹⁷

The second critic was Zhu De 朱德 (1886–1976), commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He began by dismissing the idea that ideological transformation is not a prerequisite for genuine commitment to the revolution. In his own case, he said, not only had he transformed, he had capitulated – capitulated to the proletariat. He went on to deliver what was, in effect, a direct rebuke to Xiao Jun, who at one point in the proceedings had brashly shared with the assembly a grand ambition of his – one so fanciful he would have done better reserving it for his diary – to be not only the greatest writer in China, but the greatest author in the world. When he capitulated to the proletariat, Zhu De pointed out, it was not because he had set his sights on being commander-in-chief: promotion to that rank came much later, when he had achieved

¹¹⁴ Xiao Jun would later cast doubt on the claims by other Party intellectuals that they felt ashamed. See *YARJ* 2, p. 28 (February 9, 1943).

¹¹⁵ For Xiao Jun’s own account, see *YARJ* 1, p. 476 (May 25, 1942). For other reports, see Gao Jie, *Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui jishi* pp. 45–48; Zhang, *Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui*, vol. 2, p. 166.

¹¹⁶ *YARJ* 1, p. 476 (May 25, 1942).

¹¹⁷ For Hu Qiaomu’s recollection of what was said that day, see *Hu Qiaomu huiyi Mao Zedong: zengding ben* 胡喬木回憶毛澤東, 增訂本 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2014), p. 54.

good outcomes for the common people. “Being number one in China, or being number one in the world – that is just a wish. The real goal should be to do things for the people – having top place takes on meaning only when that position is awarded to you by them.”¹¹⁸

When Mao rose that evening to make his concluding remarks, he began by saying, “Actually, the commander-in-chief has already summed things up. My views are much the same as his.”¹¹⁹ The top two officials present, in other words, shared a common understanding of the key issues, leaving Mao’s listeners in no doubt as to where the Party now stood. When Mao went on to excoriate the “petit bourgeois individualist” who is interested only in “praising his own self,” he was reiterating one of Zhu’s points, in sharper language.

Xiao Jun, never one to admit defeat, put a brave face on things when he came to write his diary three days later: “This time I laid down a challenge, thereby coming to know other’s people’s strength, as well as my own. Facing these people who wield Marxist weaponry, I was still able to freely fight my way in and out, and the truth lies with me. I did what others would not dare do; this may have hurt me, but truth was served.”¹²⁰

Xiao Jun did not specify in what ways he had been hurt, but it is clear that he had done himself no favors by making such inflated projections of his future accomplishments. Some Yan’an cynics speculated that all the big talk was simply designed to make up for his lack of creative output,¹²¹ and in early June he learned that army commander He Long 賀龍 (1896–1969) had been asking people, “Just what has this Xiao Jun fellow actually written? What a blowhard he is, bragging that he’s going to be the world’s best author!”¹²² Xiao Jun’s egotism had made it easy for people to discount his more serious ideas.

¹¹⁸ He Qifang summarizes Zhu De’s remarks in “Zhu zongsiling de hua” 朱總司令的話, in *YAWY, baogao wenxue juan* 報告文學卷, pp. 66–67, and his “Mao Zedong zhi ge,” p. 429. Other witnesses recalled slightly different versions of Zhu De’s speech: see Gao, *Yan’an wenyi zuotanhui jishi*, p. 139.

¹¹⁹ He, “Zhu zongsiling de hua,” p. 68.

¹²⁰ *YARJ* 1, p. 477 (May 25, 1942).

¹²¹ *YARJ* 1, p. 478 (May 25, 1942).

¹²² *YARJ* 1, p. 496 (June 8, 1942). Chen Yung-fa has noted that He Long, at Mao’s prompting, worked to shape opinion on the Wang Shiwei case; see *Yan’an de yinying*, pp. 46–47. Here He Long seems to have played a similar role in painting Xiao Jun in a negative light. It soon became common to criticize Xiao Jun’s low productivity; Liu Zhiming 劉芝明 (1905–1968) would later assert, “In the whole period of the War of Resistance, Xiao Jun wrote nothing of consequence”; see Liu Zhiming, *Qingsuan Xiao Jun de fandong sixiang* 清算蕭軍的反動思想 (Hong Kong: Xin minzhu chubanshe, 1949), p. 15.

After the forum, a flurry of articles by Party authors elaborated on some of the points that Mao had made; without mentioning Xiao Jun by name, they rejected the positions with which he was associated. Liu Baiyu 劉白羽 (1916–2005) deplored the “isolated, onlooker attitude” of people with a bourgeois standpoint who “promote the individual and downgrade the collective.”¹²³ Ding Ling criticized the “fuzzy, half-baked arguments” put forward at the forum about politics being in a different category from literature and art and sometimes having to defer to them.¹²⁴ Ai Siqu 艾思奇 (1910–1966), soon to become a key editor at *Jiefang ribao*, emphasized the need to eliminate the mentality of individual heroism prevalent among petit-bourgeois intellectuals.¹²⁵ If there were some who agreed with Xiao Jun’s insistence on the writer’s autonomy, they made sure to keep those views to themselves.

XIAO JUN AND WANG SHIWEI

June 4, 1942: *In the end I decided to attend the meeting at the Research Institute this morning. Before it began, as I sat under a peach tree with [my wife De-] Fen, I saw a tall fellow with a pale face unsteadily making his way down the hill. Something told me this man would be the punching bag at today’s meeting – and sure enough, he was.*¹²⁶

On May 26, 1942, three days after the forum ended, an article by Jin Canran 金燦然 (1913–1972) critiquing Wang Shiwei’s “Politicians, Artists” was published in *Jiefang ribao*. Filling more than half of the newspaper’s fourth page, it was the longest and most scathing denunciation of Wang’s writings to appear in print up to that point. In Jin’s words, Wang had “sown the seeds of resentment within his own side, damaged solidarity among comrades, and indirectly aided the enemy.”¹²⁷ The article heralded a new phase in the campaign to reject and discredit Wang Shiwei’s ideas.

Xiao Jun, at the behest of his friend Li Youran 李又然 (1906–1984) and somewhat against his better judgment, visited Mao late in the eve-

¹²³ Liu Baiyu, “Dui dangqian wenyi shang zhu wenti de yijian” 對當前文藝上諸問題的意見, *Guyu* 5 (June 1942), rpt. in *YAWY, wenyi lilun juan* 文藝理論卷, p. 298.

¹²⁴ Ding Ling 丁玲, “Guanyu lichang wenti wojian” 關於立場問題我見, *Guyu* 5 (June 1942), rpt. in *YAWY, wenyi lilun juan*, p. 237.

¹²⁵ Ai Siqu, “Tan Yan’an wenyi gongzuo de lichang, taidu he renwu” 談延安文藝工作的立場、態度和任務, *Guyu* 5 (June 1942), rpt. in *YAWY, wenyi lilun juan*, p. 232. Xiao Jun noted the implicit attacks on him in *YARJ* 1, p. 520 (July 4, 1942).

¹²⁶ *YARJ* 1, p. 490.

¹²⁷ See Zhu Hongzhao 朱鴻召, ed., *Wang Shiwei wencun* 王實味文存 (Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian, 1998), p. 163.

ning of June 2 and reiterated his opposition to the methods of criticism being employed.¹²⁸ Mao, who seemed tired and annoyed, told him not to get involved: “This man [Wang] has Trotskyite issues,” he said, ominously.¹²⁹ Although later their conversation became less strained, Xiao Jun noticed for the first time a distinct chilliness in Mao’s attitude. In his diary, he brushed this off as a matter of no great consequence, but it signaled a fundamental shift, and it would be years before the two men talked again.

At the Central Research Institute’s forum on Wang Shiwei on June 4, Xiao Jun again objected to the way things were being done, arguing that Wang should be allowed to speak. As Xiao Jun’s wife, Wang Defen, recalled:

Lots of people were badgering Wang Shiwei with questions, but as soon as he began to speak they would heckle him; whenever he tried to answer they would shout him down. They were all haranguing him simultaneously, and it was complete bedlam.

Xiao Jun could not contain himself. “Can’t you all pipe down? I can’t hear a thing he says! What are his views, exactly? Let him explain! After he’s finished, you can criticize all you want, no? If you’re so convinced you’re right, what’s the harm in letting him speak?”

There were others who felt the same way, so then Wang Shiwei did start to make his case: he said he wasn’t a Trotskyite, he wasn’t anti-Party.... But once again people interrupted his remarks, and the meeting was adjourned with nobody satisfied.¹³⁰

Xiao Jun himself was more than dissatisfied – he was disgusted by what he had seen, and as the attendees drifted away he shared his reaction with his wife, in his usual emphatic language. “What a shambles of a meeting!” he was heard to say. “It was more like a dogfight, or a bunch of people emptying their chamber pots all at once.”¹³¹

A Party loyalist, stung by Xiao Jun’s scorn, promptly reported these remarks to her superiors, and soon the campaign against Wang Shiwei broadened its scope to include an indictment of Xiao Jun. One week later, a delegation of four Party activists called on Xiao and delivered a letter of complaint. Signed by no fewer than eight Yan’an organiza-

¹²⁸ *YARJ* 1, p. 488 (June 2, 1942).

¹²⁹ Xiao, *Wode wen’ge jiancha*, p. 68.

¹³⁰ Wang Defen 王德芬, *Wo he Xiao Jun wushi nian* 我和蕭軍五十年 (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 2008), p. 84.

¹³¹ Wang, *Wo he Xiao Jun*, p. 84; Xiao, *Wode wen’ge jiancha*, p. 68.

tions and 108 individuals, it accused Xiao of disrupting the struggle session and slandering the proceedings.

Enraged, Xiao shooed his visitors away, then resolved to retaliate in kind. Over the next few days he busied himself writing a very long, three-thousand-character, complaint of his own, a presentation of his views on the struggle meeting and its aftermath loftily entitled “Memorandum” (“Beiwang lu” 備忘錄), which he hand-delivered to the office of the Central Committee. In the weeks that followed he waited impatiently for a response, and only gradually did it dawn on him that he would never be favored with a reply.¹³²

Meanwhile, the Party media published an indirect attack on Xiao Jun in the form of an essay by Zhou Wen 周文 (1907–1952) entitled “Mr. Lu Xun’s ‘Party Character’” (“Lu Xun xiansheng de ‘dangxing’ 魯迅先生的‘黨性’”).¹³³ Zhou Wen extolled Lu Xun for standing solidly with the Communist Party even if he did not see eye-to-eye with certain Party members, implicitly contrasting Lu Xun’s firm position with Xiao Jun’s wavering allegiance.

Xiao Jun and Wang Shiwei lived some distance apart and previously had not had any direct contact, but Xiao’s spirited intervention at the struggle meeting in early June won Wang’s gratitude and may have led him to believe that they were kindred spirits. Thus, in the final months of 1942, Xiao Jun found himself visited by Wang on no fewer than three occasions.

In the first instance, on October 2, Xiao Jun was just finishing breakfast when Wang Shiwei came down the hill toward him, clutching a piece of paper and calling his name. Xiao Jun later noted in his diary that Wang’s eyes were watery and bloodshot, his hair in a tangle, his face drained of color. “Xiao Jun,” he cried, “You’re a counterrevolutionary, and I’m a counterrevolutionary too – let’s have a chat.”¹³⁴

Xiao, irked by this unwelcome form of greeting, conscious that they were being observed by neighbors, and concerned that rumors would spread, initially adopted a harsh, unfriendly tone and threatened to give Wang a beating if he came any closer. But when Wang asked Xiao to deliver a letter to Mao Zedong, curiosity got the better of him, and after picking up the letter and reading it he agreed to exchange a few words with his visitor.

¹³² *YARJ* 1, p. 524 (July 7, 1942).

¹³³ *JFRB* (June 22, 1942), p. 4. Xiao Jun notes Zhou Wen’s essay in *YARJ* 1, p. 511 (June 23, 1942).

¹³⁴ *YARJ* 1, p. 597.

This change of heart elicited some further gallows humor. “You’re not afraid to get your head cut off?” Wang asked, chopping down on his neck with one hand.

Xiao Jun would later pass Wang’s letter on to Hu Qiaomu, but not before copying it into his diary. This missive is the last known piece of writing by Wang Shiwei: nothing else survives from his long years of purgatory after the publication of his final article in April 1942 and before his execution in 1947. Signed with hyperbolic self-abasement (“Counter-revolutionary Wang Shiwei extends a hundred – no, a thousand, ten thousand – respectful greetings”), the letter consisted mainly of a series of rhetorical questions, such as:

Why are there so many “great, great ones” who “act on behalf of the workers and peasants,” when peasants and workers themselves feel like they’re a “third-class revolution,” “don’t count as human,” and “have no future”?

Why is “first-class revolution” materialism, while “third-class revolution” has to be metaphysics?

Why are liars capable functionaries, and honest people counter-revolutionaries?

Judging from these provocative paradoxes, Wang had resisted demands that he recant his views, and the pressure he must have been under is chillingly evoked in the plaintive appeal with which he ended his letter: “Rescue me, take me to a quiet place – I need to be somewhere quiet! It doesn’t have to be the Summer Palace or Beidaihe or Moganshan – could you just see whether there might be a little space in Wu Manyou’s home? I must get out of the Central Research Institute – I really must!”¹³⁵

It was now just over two weeks before the annual commemoration of Lu Xun’s death. Xiao Jun, by dint of his prominent role in promoting the study of Lu Xun’s work, was one of the scheduled speakers, and in the days before the event he began to plan what he was going to say. Still smarting from the insults he had suffered at the hands of his critics in June, he gained a grim satisfaction from reading a speech by Liu Shaoqi 劉少奇 (1898–1969) entitled “On Inner-Party Struggle,” published in *Jiefang ribao* on October 9. It criticized the Party’s tendency to

¹³⁵ *YARJ* 1, p. 600. Wu Manyou 吳滿有 (1893–1959), who is said to have arrived in Yan’an in 1938 as a poverty-stricken migrant, had a few months earlier been hailed as a labor hero: see Mo Ai 莫艾, “Mofan yingxiong Wu Manyou shi zenyang faxian de” 模範英雄吳蠻有是怎樣發現的, *JFRB* (April 30, 1942), p. 2. Wu would continue to be lionized in the Communist press for several years, only to renounce his allegiance to the Communists after his capture by Kuomintang forces in 1948.

indulge in over-the-top criticism and frenzied struggle meetings. Liu's argument would serve as good ammunition for his own speech, Xiao Jun thought.¹³⁶

On October 18 the meeting to commemorate the sixth anniversary of Lu Xun's death was held in the Central Auditorium, presided over by Wu Yuzhang 吳玉章 (1878–1966), the widely respected principal of Lu Xun College of Arts. When it was Xiao Jun's turn to speak, Xiao took out a copy of his *Memorandum* and read it out to the whole assembly, defiantly relitigating the June struggle forum that had criticized Wang Shiwei.

Party authors Ding Ling, Zhou Yang, Liu Baiyu, Ke Zhongping 柯仲平 (1902–1964), and Li Bozhao 李伯釗 (1911–1985), along with Party-authors-to-be Ai Qing and Chen Xuezhao 陳學昭 (1906–1991), took turns to challenge Xiao Jun, disparaging him and dismissing his arguments.

Chen Xuezhao questioned Xiao Jun's credentials: "He says he's Lu Xun's student, but I don't know whether Mr. Lu Xun would recognize him as such."

Li Bozhao rejected Xiao Jun's claim that he had been mistreated: "Our Party has never given Xiao Jun any cause for complaint."

Ai Qing sought to dismiss one of Xiao's key concerns: "Xiao Jun tells us not to wash our hands in the blood of comrades," he noted. Insisting on a literal reading of Xiao Jun's injunction, Ai Qing argued that it had no substance: "I have only seen people washing their hands in water, never in blood."¹³⁷

According to his wife's account, Xiao Jun gave as good as he got, and the debate carried on well into the early hours. This is how she recalled the conclusion to the marathon:

All of a sudden, Wu Yuzhang, chair of the meeting, rose to his feet. Seeing that neither side was willing to give way, he tried to make peace. "Comrade Xiao Jun is a good friend to us in the Communist Party, and we must have done something wrong to make him so angry. Let's all strive for unity and be first to take responsibility for our faults."

This mollified Xiao Jun considerably. He stood up: "I appreciate Mr. Wu's remarks. How about I first admit *my* faults? I am ninety-nine percent wrong, how does that sound? But what about

¹³⁶ *YARJ* 1, p. 613 (October 13, 1942).

¹³⁷ Wang, *Wo he Xiao Jun*, p. 85.

the other one percent? Maybe you should all think about whether you've been entirely correct?"

Ding Ling leapt to her feet, ignoring Mr. Wu's efforts at mediation. "No, we're not accepting that one percent! We have done nothing wrong at all – the fault is a hundred per cent yours. We in the Communist Party have friends all over the world, and you're nothing more than a single hair on nine oxen – whether or not we have you as a friend is of no consequence at all."

This got Xiao Jun fired up once more. "I've taken on ninety-nine per cent of the blame, and you still won't admit even the slightest fault! If the world is so full of your friends, then this hair of mine clearly has no need to cling to that ox hide of yours. I came to Yan'an with nothing apart from my own head, and just fifteen cents will take care of that! What the hell, from now on we'll forget the whole damn thing!"

Xiao Jun pounded the table three times with his fist, then beckoned me furiously. "Let's go!"¹³⁸

This October 18 faceoff demonstrated most dramatically Xiao's isolation. As he put it in a letter to Hu Feng, "It was a battle of one against a thousand."¹³⁹ The following day, October 19, a *Jiefang ribao* editorial entitled "Commemorate Mr. Lu Xun" sought to further diminish him. Without naming names, it clearly implied that Xiao Jun had forfeited the right to present himself as Lu Xun's standard-bearer: "Only if you stand with the advanced classes, only if you are willing to follow their orders, only if you engage in resolute struggle with the odious bourgeois vestiges and counterrevolutionary Trotskyite activities are you then qualified to be a disciple of Lu Xun and a progressive literary figure and author."¹⁴⁰

On October 21 Xiao Jun dashed off an essay in response entitled "On 'Following Orders'" ("Tan 'Zun ming'" 談'遵命') and submitted it to *Jiefang ribao*, though he knew there was not the remotest chance of it being published. The essay is lost, and one can only guess how strenuously Xiao Jun must have rejected the notion that writers needed to follow orders – an idea that was anathema to him.

¹³⁸ Ibid. Wang Defen explained that fifteen cents was the cost of a bullet in Yan'an. Hu Qiaomu may well have had this incident in mind when he recalled, late in life, "inappropriate" struggle against Xiao Jun; see *Hu Qiaomu huiyi Mao Zedong*, p. 55.

¹³⁹ *YARJ* 1, p. 624 (October 22, 1942).

¹⁴⁰ *JFRB* (October 19, 1942), p. 1.

Alarmed by the October 19 editorial, Wang Shiwei paid another visit to Xiao Jun on the night of the 22nd, and he called once more in mid-December. Xiao Jun did not relish the prospect of further visits, and soon he wrote Wang a letter, telling him not to come around again. He did not really like Wang's personality, he told himself – he found Wang “morbid and doleful 邪氣鬼氣.”¹⁴¹ But, more importantly, he must have wanted to put some distance between himself and Wang Shiwei to avoid the appearance of being his confidant.

To Party loyalists, however, Xiao Jun had already compromised himself by standing up for Wang, and some years later, when Xiao became the target of attacks in northeast China, one of the charges against him was that he had displayed conspicuous sympathy for “the counterrevolutionary activities of Wang Shiwei, a Kuomintang spy and Trotskyite element.”¹⁴²

On October 23 Xiao Jun received a letter from the Central Publication Bureau: it curtly informed him that *Wenyi yuebao* was to stop publication forthwith. Two days later, the submissions that Xiao Jun had already approved for inclusion in the next issue and passed on to the printer were returned to him.¹⁴³

In his diary Xiao attempted to shrug off the humiliation: “This was to be expected – it doesn't bother me,” he wrote. But it clearly bothered him a great deal. Five days later he wrote to protest the closing of the magazine and the lack of any explanation for the shutdown. The closure violated freedom of expression and ran counter to the Party's political program, he complained. In a gesture of defiance, he announced that he would soon publish a wall-poster newspaper at his own expense, as an outlet for alternative views.¹⁴⁴ But this was just bluster; he knew that uncensored expression was now a thing of the past, and the poster plan withered on the vine.

¹⁴¹ *YARJ* 1, p. 671 (December 17, 1942).

¹⁴² See Liu, *Qingsuan Xiao Jun de fandong sixiang*, p. 66.

¹⁴³ *YARJ* 1, pp. 625–27 (October 23–25, 1942).

¹⁴⁴ *YARJ* 1, pp. 630–31 (October 30, 1942).

DISGRACE, AND ITS AFTERMATH

December 27, 1942:

The district court announced its sentence: a six-month jail term, suspended for two years.

[De]Fen shed tears of rage – she feels I've been wronged.

I consoled her: "There's nothing else they can do, and I'm the only person in Yan'an qualified to enjoy this kind of 'honor' – it's perfectly fitting. Jesus tried to save the Jews, only for them to sell him onto the cross, so this is no big deal. And I did beat someone up."¹⁴⁵

At the end of October 1942, Xiao Jun was still seething over his critics' attacks at the Lu Xun commemoration event and fuming over the shutdown of *Wenyi yuebao*. He told himself to maintain composure, but also to be ready to stand up for himself when necessary.¹⁴⁶ The next confrontation, however, did not involve any of his familiar adversaries and had a different trigger altogether. This incident would cast another shadow over Xiao's life in Yan'an and ultimately erode his position even more.

As we saw earlier, Xiao Jun had shown an avuncular concern for Yan'an's *xiao gui*, the young orderlies who ran errands and provided domestic labor for the adult members of the revolutionary base area. On November 8, 1942, according to Xiao's account, on witnessing a supervisor named Cheng Zhui 程追 cursing and beating a *xiao gui*, he admonished Cheng, but was cursed in return. Xiao Jun retaliated by punching and kicking Cheng and beating him with a stick. Cheng Zhui had to be packed off to a hospital, having suffered broken ribs.¹⁴⁷

Reaction was swift. On November 11, a meeting of the Resistance Association was convened; in it a motion was passed overwhelmingly to strip Xiao Jun of his position on the leadership committee.¹⁴⁸ Friends urged Xiao Jun to apologize, warning him of grim consequences if he did not, but Xiao refused to back down, insisting he had done nothing wrong and even declaring that it was sometimes necessary to teach

¹⁴⁵ *YARJ* 1, p. 679.

¹⁴⁶ *YARJ* 1, p. 636 (November 5, 1942).

¹⁴⁷ Cheng Zhui was the penname used at the time by Luo Shiheng 羅士桓 (1911–1995), a writer from Guangdong who had arrived in Yan'an in April 1938 and joined the CCP later that year. Xiao Jun would encounter Luo again in northeast China in January 1949, when Luo's penname was Luo Dan 羅丹, which he used for his publications thereafter. According to Xiao Jun, the two men greeted each other cordially and no grudges were held. See Xiao, *Dongbei riji*, p. 549 (January 5, 1949).

¹⁴⁸ *YARJ* 1, pp. 638–39 (November 10, 1942); 2, pp. 87–88 (April 18, 1943).

Party members a lesson.¹⁴⁹ He declined to pay Cheng Zhui's medical expenses and rejected all offers of mediation.¹⁵⁰ A suspended prison sentence was announced in late December: it was the price he had to pay for his recalcitrance.

Xiao Jun's beating of Cheng Zhui served to cement his image as a latter-day Lu Zhishen 魯智深, the fierce, quick-tempered "Tattooed Monk" in the Ming-era bandit saga *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳.¹⁵¹ Dozens of *haohan* populate that classic novel, but Xiao's Yan'an peers would have been particularly struck by his resemblance to Lu Zhishen. A former soldier adept in martial arts, Lu is introduced in the novel's chapter 6 as a "crude, direct fellow 愚鹵直人." He soon runs afoul of the law and to escape arrest takes refuge in a mountain monastery in north China. There he goes through the motions of being ordained as a Buddhist monk, but he stubbornly refuses to abide by the rules of the monastic community that hosts him, wreaking havoc so often that he acquires notoriety as a "wildcat 野貓." The parallels between this legendary troublemaker and the unruly Xiao Jun were too obvious to miss.

In the wake of the Cheng Zhui incident, Xiao Jun was treated with noticeably less respect: Chen Yun, for example, snubbed him by withholding the "Comrade" appellation at the beginning of a letter.¹⁵² Xiao Jun resigned himself to a much lower profile: "I have decided during this period in Yan'an to keep silent, observing, collecting material, working, enduring everything, in the spirit of 'serving time in prison.'"¹⁵³ Now chafing all the more at his dependence on handouts from the Party, in an effort to demonstrate his self-sufficiency he moved with his family to an outlying rural area in late 1943 and did not return to Yan'an until March 1944.

Although Xiao Jun felt the sting of the Party's disapproval earlier than most of his colleagues, the brusque treatment meted out to him after the Cheng Zhui incident was symptomatic of a harsher attitude toward Yan'an writers and artists that became the norm across the board in the spring of 1943. In an important speech published in March 1943, Chen Yun identified two problems in cultural workers' thinking: "considering themselves special 特殊," and "inflating their

¹⁴⁹ For his friends' pleas, see *YARJ* 1, pp. 638-40 (November 10, 1942); pp. 645-46 (November 15, 1942). In a later diary entry Xiao Jun notes that he had been quoted as saying "One needs to teach Party members a lesson." He did not deny it; see *YARJ* 2, p. 74 (March 31, 1943).

¹⁵⁰ *YARJ* 1, p. 652 (November 26, 1942).

¹⁵¹ Xiao, *Dongbei riji*, p. 26 (March 9, 1946).

¹⁵² *YARJ* 2, p. 95 (April 27, 1943).

¹⁵³ *YARJ* 2, p. 8 (January 12, 1943).

own importance 自大。”¹⁵⁴ According to Chen, they now needed to disperse and engage in practical work.

A Party document issued the following month adopted much the same censorious tone in its justification for a new approach to intellectuals.¹⁵⁵ Writers in Yan'an had been pampered too much, it concluded; in the past the Party had been too polite, too tactful, and too mild in its interactions with writers and artists. A liberalistic attitude had been adopted toward them, allowing disputes to proliferate and unhealthy attitudes to fester. Intellectuals had failed to understand properly Mao's remarks in his January 1940 speech on the culture of New Democracy, overlooking a key sentence: "This culture can be led only by the culture and ideology of the proletariat, by the ideology of communism, and not by the culture and ideology of any other class." It had been a mistake to group writers and artists all together and let them organize their own affairs.

As the "Emergency Rescue" campaign picked up steam in the summer of 1943, Xiao Jun's non-Party status proved to be a blessing, for it was the dedicated Party members who now found themselves accused of being traitors, of being Kuomintang agents, in a witch-hunt atmosphere that prevailed for many months before the campaign was finally abandoned.¹⁵⁶

Ultimately, just as the alleged spies were almost without exception exonerated and rehabilitated, regaining some measure of normality, so too Xiao Jun would be welcomed back into the fold in 1945 and given a teaching position in the Lu Xun Academy of Arts. By its very excesses the Emergency Rescue Campaign paved the way for a return to a relatively more liberal phase that in the late-1940s would allow Xiao Jun to recover something of the influence he had enjoyed as editor of *Wenyi yuebao* and experience a brief heyday as editor of Harbin's *Cultural Gazette* (*Wenhua bao* 文化報) before his second – and this time total – fall from grace in early-1949.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Chen Yun, "Guanyu dang de wenyi gongzuozhe de liangge qiangxiang wenti" 關於黨的文藝工作者的兩個傾向問題, *JFRB* (March 29, 1943), rpt. in *YAWY, wenyi lilun juan*, pp. 108–15.

¹⁵⁵ See Tang Tianran 唐天然, "Youguan Yan'an wenyi yundong de 'dangwu guangbo' gao, jianji youci yinqi de kaocha" 有關延安文藝運動的'黨務廣播'稿, 兼及由此引起的考查, *Xin wenxue shiliao* (1991.2), pp. 184–88.

¹⁵⁶ For a candid account of the "Emergency Rescue" campaign and its impact on young Party members in Yan'an, see Wei Junyi 韋君宜 (1917–2002), *Sitong lu: zengding, jinian ban* 思痛錄, 增訂·紀念版 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2013), pp. 7–21.

¹⁵⁷ This phase of Xiao Jun's career is summarized in Lee, *Romantic Generation*, pp. 240–44.

