

New Intellectual Ferment In China—Part I

By C. Y. W. MENG (孟長泳)*

CHINA is undergoing momentous changes. The most marked changes are in China's intellectual and artistic life.

Walking around the thoroughfare of any of the big Chinese cities and towns today, observers will be surprised to find that public reading rooms and bookstores are always crowded with people. The explanation is that the Chinese nowadays regard books and magazines as their "Spiritual Food." In spite of the prohibitive cost, publications continue to grow rapidly. The demand for "Spiritual Food" is no less great than that of the other. Those who could not afford to buy any copies, prefer to spend more hours in reading rooms and bookstores.

Chinese "Spiritual Food":—I am one of these people who used to spend part of my time in bookstores. My observation is that most popular are books on current topics, fiction, plays, novels, collections of short stories and books on literary subjects. Most popular among the Chinese reading public are *The Central Weekly*, *The Masses*, *The Time and Tide Literature*, *The Middle School Student Monthly*, *The Eastern Miscellany*, *The New China Monthly*, *The Contemporary Review*, *The National News*, *The Economic Reconstruction Quarterly* and *The New Economic Fortnightly* (all in Chinese).

With the exception of *The Central Weekly* which is affiliated with *The Central Daily News*, the organ of the Kuomintang, and *The Masses*, affiliated with *Hsin Hua Jen Pao*, the organ of the Chinese Communist Party, the rest are all non-partisan and independent journals. They attract a considerable number of such readers as college professors and students, scholars and other intellectuals. Included in these magazines are articles on all sorts of subjects, such as international relations, war, social problems, economic changes and literary works.

Most of the well known books in the world have several Chinese translations. Wendell L. Willkie's *One World* has two translations. The first edition of one of the translations was entirely subscribed before its publication. Joseph Davies' *Mission to Moscow* also has two translations, one of them having gone to its third edition in less than two months. Like his *Inside Europe* and *Inside Asia*, John Gunther's *Inside Latin America* has found a welcome market in China.

New fiction books from America and England are precious among the Chinese intellectuals, of which translations are many. John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down* has six to seven translations coming out about the same time. *His Grapes of Wrath* is also read by many. There are already two translations of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind*. Works of such old masters as Shakespeare and Dickens have been translated and retranslated during the last few years.

The Chinese are also most interested in the biographies of such international figures as the late President Roosevelt and Mr. Winston Churchill and others. Chinese readers also love the works of Tolstoy, Turgenev, Gorky and other Russian writers.

The study of English is becoming very popular among the Chinese. It is now difficult to buy English-Chinese dictionaries

and grammar and conversation books. It is not because of the demand for "Interpreters" for the Allied army in China, but because of one distinct reason—the world-mindedness of the Chinese youths.

The Democratic Tide in China:—Since President Chiang Kai-shek made a promise in his New Year Message to the nation to end the Period of Political Tutelage, to enter the Period of Constitutionalism and to convoke the National Assembly on November 12, 1945, I can count another dozen of new magazines, such as *The Democracy Weekly*, *Democracy and Science*, *The Democratic Critic*, *The China Forum*, *The Renaissance*, *The Literary Magazine*, *The People's Constitution*, *Fighting China*, *Scientific World*, *The Observatory Weekly*, *The Literary Scenery* and *True News* (all in Chinese).

I am a subscriber of nearly all these magazines. Some of them are monthly magazines, and others are bi-monthly and weekly reviews. Some of the publishers and editors are non-partisans, and some are the leaders and promoters of the minority parties in the country. Most of the editors and contributors, I find, are known and competent writers.

There is no doubt that the publishers of these magazines must have carried on publication under the most difficult conditions which would have discouraged many publishers in the West. Besides the high cost of publication which is most prohibitive, difficulties with the Chinese censors are many and discouraging. It is not infrequent for readers to read editorials and articles in the magazines and papers in the most mutilated form due to having been "Deleted by Censors." Principally, for this reason, the *Chungking Edition of The Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*, the only American paper in Chungking was short-lived and suspended its publication on June 24, 1945, much to the surprise and disappointment of the Chinese reading public. But the significant fact is that in spite of all these appalling hardships and financial difficulties, publication of the Chinese magazines in wartime China is growing fast like bamboo shoots after the spring rain. Their circulation is also increasing.

Kuo Mo-jo:—In the mind of the reading Chinese, Pa Chin, Kuo Mo-jo and Mao Tun are the best writers in China. Pa Chin's *Home*, *Spring* and *Autumn*—all pre-war novels—and his recent *Fire* continue to be the best sellers throughout China. Kuo Mo-jo's *Chu Yuan* had a circulation of over 10,000 copies within only a few weeks of its publication.

Kuo Mo-jo and Ting Hsuen-ling, Head of the Physics Department of the Academic Sinica, were both invited to attend the celebration of the 220th Anniversary of the Soviet Scientific Academy in Moscow and Leningrad from June 15 to 28. The giving of this honor to a Chinese writer has greatly enhanced the reputation and prestige of the Chinese writers whose life is usually hard in China.

Mao Tun:—June 24, 1945, marked the 50th birthday of Mao Tun, another famous writer in China. This writer does not like the people to call him by his real name (Shen Yen-pin), but prefers to have a pen name—Mao Tun which means literally "Repugnance." What strikes me most is that there is almost

*The author has taken the first opportunity to send this article from Chungking. We hope more contributions will come from inland China.—Editor.

a nationwide celebration of his birthday this year. All leading papers in the country flared up with editorials eulogizing him as "a glory to the Chinese intellectuals." In the supplement sections of many leading papers in Chungking, almost a full page was devoted to give accounts on the "Life of Mao Tun" written by other writers. Many bookstores offered discount sales for three days for Mao Tun's books. Some people even took the long journey to Chungking for no other purpose except attending the celebration of his birthday. Dr. Ma Yin-chu, one of the foremost economists in China, also attended the occasion, and in his speech, he said that he came from Kaoloshan, about 34 kilometers from Chungking, because of Mao Tun's "strong personality."

Mao Tun is not a high official, nor an industrial magnate, nor a proprietor of any big financial syndicate. He is only a writer who has no bank pass book and who earns his living by his "pen" alone. Nevertheless, there was an unusual enthusiastic gathering of large attendance to celebrate his birthday in June. What is the reason for this, and what does this signify?

The celebration in Chungking was attended by no less than 600 people, some Chinese officials and foreign diplomatic officers, but mostly, well known Chinese writers, professors and "liberals" in the country. The whole audience rose to welcome this happy half-centenarian couple when Mao Tun and his wife entered the social hall. He was asked to give a speech, and, in his speech, he said most emphatically that "I want to see the liberation of the Chinese masses; I want to see the emerging of a Democratic China. . . . Without seeing all these, my eyes would not close if I die."

I read the full list of his books. He is the author of almost just as many books as his age (48 books in all). He started to write books by the middle of his twenties. That is, during the past a quarter of a century, he finished almost two books a year. His writings ranged from fiction, novels, short and long stories to translations of foreign fiction and novels. Those who read his books all know that they are all very fascinating, lively, resourceful, thoughtful and meaningful. These books are all intended to describe and depict the true picture of Chinese society and the plight of the Chinese masses.

His *Eclipse* describes the rise of the Chinese intellectuals in the liberation of the Chinese masses both before and after the Chinese People's Revolution of 1925-27 (i.e. the famous "Northern Punitive Expedition" under the command of President Chiang Kai-shek). His *Rainbow* reflects the Chinese reactions of the "May 30 Incident" in Shanghai (when some Chinese were killed by the British police). His *Mid-Night* (or *Before Dawn*) depicts the chaotic conditions in the country and the rampancy of the clandestine speculation and stock exchange activities in financial circles in big cities during the period of the civil war. His *Spring Silk Worm* also depicts the untold sufferings of the Chinese farmers and the rural bankruptcy under both the foreign

imperialistic economic exploitation and the internal feudalistic ravage. His *The First Stage of the Story* explains the popular sentiment as well as the rise of the Chinese masses during the early stage of the present War against Japan. His *Decay* describes the sudden setback to the Chinese Mass Resistance Movement in the spring of 1941. His latest *The Autumn Leaf Is Just As Red As The February Flower* also depicts the miserable living conditions of the Chinese farmers in some districts in the Provinces of Kiangsu and Chekiang under the exploitation and oppression of local gentry who struggled among themselves for power and money some years ago.

In one leading article entitled "Some Impressions of Our Literary Festival" (i.e. May 4th of the year), published in *Ta Kung Pao* (independent) of May 4, 1945, Mao Tun urged most emphatically the Chinese writers "to follow the present democratic tide in the country," "to go deep into Chinese society and to mingle themselves with the Chinese masses," and "to write something on them," so that "we can perform the important mission of the time." He liked the system of self-criticism, but he is strongly opposed to the "slavery literary."

These books written by Mao Tun, together with many others by other writers, describe and depict well one great "Repugnance" in the Chinese society. Indeed, there is every truth in it. Indeed, we are as a people badly fed, badly clothed, badly housed and badly educated. Indeed, we are badly equipped with medical facilities. Indeed, the contrast between rich and poor, capital and labor, and higher rank and lower rank officials is most pronounced. Indeed, it is gross social injustice to see sons and daughters of rich families being carried to schools and home again by private cars or sedan chairs, while far many other children have no chance to receive education and have to be child laborers if they wish to live. Indeed, it is another social injustice to see almost every government office maintaining medical staff to serve staff members and their families, while millions on the rural side of the country have no medical facilities. Indeed, such social tragedy and injustice is existing not only in China but also in many other countries in the world.

Apparently, as an expression of his opposition to the present state of the Chinese society, Mao Tun names himself the "Repugnance." From his utterances and writings, Mao Tun is dedicating his whole life to bring about reform in Chinese society, and he intends to be a Robert Owen of China. He is quite determined to do so during his life time (now already fifty years of age) as he said that "I am most unwilling of die before I see the inauguration of democracy in China."

From writings of other Chinese writers, I also read such articles as "War on Vicious Influences in Our Society," while other writers further propose "We should not compromise with vicious influences," meaning that the war must go on until the total reform of the Chinese society is achieved.

Encourage the Cultural Worker

By WEI YUNG (✻)

WITH the annihilation of Fascist militarism and the rebirth of world peace after years of horrible carnage and indescribable sufferings, the hope is cherished anew by all liberal minded people that "the pen shall supersede the sword, and

Right, not Might, shall be the lord" in the generations to come. In the colossal post-war rehabilitation program of the National Government of China there is no doubt that the promotion and development of cultural undertakings will occupy a very