BASIC PROBLEMS OF THE HISTORY OF MODERN CHINESE LITERATURE AND C. T. HSIA, A HISTORY OF MODERN CHINESE FICTION*)

BY

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I. General Remarks

Being myself opposed, in principle, to carrying on a discussion in the spirit of dogmatic intolerance and disregard for human dignity, I must, insofar as these qualities are present in the book by C. T. Hsia, first make clear my standpoint in regard to them. Only then will it be possible to treat objectively of those parts of the book worthy of serious comment.

Admittedly it is only natural that the attitude and approach of every scholar or scientist is determined in part by subjective factors, such as his social standing, the time he lives in, and so on — in short, by those idola mentis of which Francis Bacon spoke many centuries ago. Still, all scientificendeavour would be vain, should the investigator not aim at discovering objective truth, at trying to overcome his personal bias and prejudices, but, on the contrary, make use of a scientific work to indulge in them. This requirement is all the more necessary if the book is designed for a wider circle of readers and deals with a subject on which the reader himself cannot form a judgment and, over and above, one he is likely to approach with a certain bias. The author’s responsibility is then all the greater. There can be no doubt that a book treating of modern and the most recent Chinese literature demands a quite exceptional measure of objectivity, as the majority of readers—not excluding

professional sinologists—cannot correct the author's judgements independently, as they do not possess a sufficient knowledge of the material under discussion, and certainly there is here a much greater danger of judgments being coloured or even distorted by personal prejudice than if the author were to write of English, French or Russian literature.

The author of the book under review admits the need of making such demands, but only insofar as they apply to other authors than himself. Thus he censures Catholic authors of histories of modern Chinese literature for not complying with his postulate (p. 496): 'Yet a literary history, to be meaningful, has to be an essay in discrimination and not a biased survey to satisfy extrinsic political or religious standards.' Unfortunately, as we shall show in a number of examples, C. T. Hsia's work serves, for the most part, just the satisfying of extrinsic political standards.

It is sufficient to read the chapter headings, 'Leftists and Independents', 'Communist Fiction I', 'Conformity, Defiance and Achievement', and so on, to see at once that the criteria according to which C. T. Hsia evaluates and classifies authors, are first and foremost of a political nature and not based on artistic considerations, in other words, he commits the same sin as that for which he condemns Catholic writers. Indeed, the author himself tells us that he is not so much interested in the literary aspect of the work as in the political standpoint it embodies. On p. 498, he declares: 'In my survey of modern Chinese fiction, I have been principally guided by considerations of literary significance', but immediately adds: 'The writers towards whom I have shown critical approval or enthusiasm share by and large the same set of techniques, attitudes and fantasies with the other writers of their period, but by virtue of their talent and integrity, they have resisted and in some notable cases transformed the crude reformist and propagandist