

MAO DUN: A GREAT CHINESE LITTERATEUR WHO EXPOSED THE FLAWS OF CHINA'S COMPLEX SOCIAL SYSTEM AND HIS VIEW ON INDIAN POET RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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Abstract: "Literature is the mirror of society." By applying these realistic philosophical words, the attempt has been made to highlight the contribution of Chinese litterateur in Modern Chinese Literature. It will also help a little in analyzing the social and economic condition of today's China and the China of a few decades ago as well as the impact of Indian litterateur contribution in Chinese society in 1920s-30s. In today's environment, people seem eager to know and understand about the continuous development of China, but very few people are well acquainted with the contribution of Chinese litterateur in the social and political development of China. Some of the research papers offered some ethical perspective underlying the cultural response based on ancient history. This study will help us to understand how the modern litterateur has played an important role to highlight the issue and how the Modern Chinese Literature became an eye opener for the Society.

Index Terms - Contradiction, Cultural Revolution, Modern literature, Patriotism, Western Literature, Oriental Culture, foreign slavery and Spirituality.

INTRODUCTION: MAO DUN'S EARLY LIFE AND LITERARY CONTRIBUTION

Mao Dun, a Chinese writer who emerged during the twentieth century in China and established his identity as a novelist, essayist, literary and theoretical critic, was originally named Shen Yanbing. He was born on 4 July 1896 in Wu Zhen, Thungxiang County of Zhejiang Province near to Shanghai.

'Mao Dun' literally means 'contradiction'. Why did he choose his Pen name "Mao Dun"? When asked this question to him, he always replied in a funny way – "After the May 4th Movement, I found that many people in China had contradictions in their thoughts, words and actions, but those people thought that there was no contradiction, so I chose the word 'Mao Dun' as my pen name to show those contradictions. My friend 'Ye Shengtao' suggested embellishing the spelling of this name in a special way to make it a little more attractive, because there were a lot of people with this name. From then on, my pen name was "Mao Dun". Mao Dun's father (Shen Yongshi) was a famous scholar during the reign of the Qing Dynasty. He always supported the new ideas of the bourgeoisie and was also involved in natural sciences, but he passed away when Mao Dun was only 10 years old and the entire responsibility of his upbringing fell on his mother's shoulder. His mother (Chen Aichu) also had a good knowledge of literature.

Mao Dun's primary education was done at home and taught by his parents, as a result, his writing skills started developing from childhood. While studying in a secondary school in Hangzhou, he read many classic novels which left an indelible mark on his life and influenced his writing style forever.¹

In 1913, Mao Dun was enrolled in Peking University for a three-year bachelor's degree (basic course), where he has not only studied Chinese literature but also strengthened his hold on Western literature and philosophy. But, he had to leave his studies in 1916 just before the graduating due to financial problems and he got married a few months after leaving the university. His marriage was done actually according to a typical traditional Chinese customs, when he was just five years old; his family arranged his marriage with the daughter of the "Khung family" who were small merchants. Therefore, after leaving the university, on his mother's proposal, he married 'Khung Dejun' in 1918.² "Khung Dejun" was illiterate before marriage, but later she had not

¹使用汉语课本,第四册,子页-269-272,北京:商务印书馆出版社,初版1987.

²人际与性际之间——略论鲁迅与茅盾的交友与婚恋;李继凯,陕西师范大学文学院 陕西西安 710062;海南师范学院学报 (社会科学版),编辑部邮箱,2004年01期.

only made literate herself but also became active participants in political development while living in Shanghai. She died in the year 1970 due to complications of diabetes. They had two children, daughter Shen Xia and son Shen Lei.



(Photo courtesy: <https://images.app.goo.gl/pN41fHSMAdvTuk2X7>)

By virtue of having good command over Chinese and English and knowledge of Chinese and Western literature, Mao Dun got attracted towards Chinese journalism and literary field. Very soon, he got a job as an assistant editor of the “Student Magazine (xuésheng zázhi)” under the English editing and translation section of the Commercial Press, Shanghai Branch. This magazine was publishing many articles of the new ideologies emerging in China at that time. Mao Dun did not let go of this opportunity and he started publishing his social ideas and criticisms apart from the editing works. His articles “Students and Society (xuésheng yu shèhuì)” published in 1917 and 1918. This article had played an important role in awakening the political consciousness among the educated Chinese youth. In 1920, a literary article written by him “What should be the responsibility of a writer in the present time” was published in which he expressed the importance of literature for life.

By the twenty-fourth spring of his life, he had become well known in the community of Chinese novelists. During the May 4th Movement, Mao Dun actively participated in the movement and advocated the 'New Literary Movement' and founded the 'Literary Research Association' in 1921, which became the first influential literary association in the history of modern Chinese literature. Together with some young writers, he gave a completely foreign look to the monthly magazine "Fiction Literature (xiaoshuo yuèbào)" and began publishing western literature translated into Chinese. Serving as the chief editor, he made this monthly magazine not only the leading and most successful magazine of new literature, but also prepared it as a platform to continue the new cultural movement by introducing a new realistic perspective in the history of Chinese literature. But, he had to resign from the post of editor in chief in the year 1923 because of less coordination between the progressive and conservative sides in the press after change in the content of the monthly magazine. But by then, Mao Dun had become a leading figure of the movement in the southern province of China. As a literary creator, he made a great contribution to the modern literature of China and credited with bringing the first "change" in Chinese literature through the monthly magazine "Fiction (xiaoshuo yuèbào)". This monthly magazine had achieved such a position from where "New Literature" was propagated in Chinese society. Other famous Chinese writers like Lu Xun, Bingxin, Ye Shangtao and many more came forward and started publishing their literary works with it and supported movements like "New Literature" and "New Thinking" to set a position of Chinese literature in the world.

Mao Dun went to Japan in the year 1928 where he wrote "Miscellaneous Mythological Tales (shénhuà zálùn)" and "General Theory of Western Literature (xiyáng wénxué tonglùn)". After returning from Japan in 1930, he actively participated in the organization of the "Chinese Leftist Writers Association" and joined Lu Xun, a pioneer of China's modern cultural movement. In 1935, when the Chinese Red Army arrived in northern Shaanxi after the Long March, he and Lu Xun jointly sent a telegram of blessings addressed to them as "The hope of China and mankind are on you."³

When the People's Republic of China established by the Communist Party of China in 1949, he got the opportunity to actively participate in many committees. He participated in the first National Literary Conference and was elected vice president of the 'Literature and Art Association of China' and president of the 'Chinese Writers Association'. During this period, some of his major works are "Corrosion (fushí)", short stories "Complaint (weiqu)", etc. "Corrosion" is considered to be the most successful and influential novel among the works of this period. One of the characteristics of this well-known novel is that it maintains a close connection with the real struggle of society.

³使用汉语课本,第四册,子页-269-272,北京:商务印书馆出版社,初版1987.

He also worked as Mao Zedong's Secretary and Minister of Culture until 1965. Although, he was dismissed from the Minister in 1964 due to ideological differences, but with his wisdom he had always been remained away from the effects of the 'Cultural Revolution' in China.

MAO DUN AND IMPACT OF CULTURAL REVOLUTION

It is a little necessary to mention the 'Cultural Revolution' here so that it becomes easier for us to understand the impact of the Cultural Revolution on Chinese intellectuals.



(Picture courtesy: The Diplomat)

“The Great Leap Forward Movement was a five-year economic plan undertaken by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party, which began in 1958 and ended in 1961. It was an economic and social campaign to rebuild the country, aimed at transforming an agrarian economy into a communist society. The Chinese Communist Party decided that efforts should be increased to move industry into the countryside. Workers and peasants were ordered to work in the fields all day and sometimes into the night. Sleeping in the fields to save time, keeping children in nurseries, and women working shoulder to shoulder with men day and night in the fields were made compulsory. It was seen as a campaign to "catch the moon and the stars". During this campaign, emphasis was also placed on steel production from every household. This was a rural industrial revolution where millions of farmers built furnaces in their backyards to use their time not just growing crops but smelting steel. As a result, while China's forests were destroyed to collect the wood to fuel all these furnaces, people also melted down iron tools, equipment, utensils, and other everyday objects to make steel in order to meet the government's target. As a result, due to lack of experience, high quality steel could not be made, due to lack of time, grains could not be stored from the fields and due to indiscriminate cutting of forests, natural calamities like drought and flood occurred, small birds like sparrows were considered responsible for crop destruction and killed, after which due to lack of coordination in the natural food chain, crops were destroyed by locusts, all these together invited such an unexpected tragedy due to which millions of people died in China, which was seen as a big famine tragedy in the human history. The failure of the Great Leap Forward movement weakened the position of 'Mao Zedong' within the party and whispers started against him. By now, Mao Zedong had started realizing that it has become very important to identify and remove the enemies hidden within the party and the intellectual and ideological sections. This idea gradually brought China to such a revolution known today as the Cultural Revolution of China. The aim of the Cultural Revolution was to eliminate old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits in the fields of education and art, and to destroy literature and literary ideas that were not in line with communist ideology and could be an obstacle to Mao Zedong. In 1966, China's educational institutions were closed and students were asked to spend all their time to Red Guard activities. All young students were encouraged to criticize those who did not agree with Mao's ideas. During the Cultural Revolution, millions of educated youth (especially those who had begun to disagree with Mao's ideas) were sent away from home to work in the countryside and learn from the peasants and help them, in order to prevent the emergence of new ideas that did not agree with Mao or could criticize him. The party also believed that this was a concrete step that would create a new society where the differences between urban and rural, workers and intellectuals would be eliminated.”



(Photo Courtesy: Wang Liuying , Xin Liliang, Meng Muyi, Xu Jiping ,
 Zhang Biwu, Wu Shaoyun, Jin Zhaofang, Yu Weibo, Lu Zezhi,
 Publisher: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe. Chinese posters.net)

Mao Dun was successful in reconciling these developments during the Cultural Revolution. However, only the first quarter of 1981 could grace Mao Dun's life and eventually he died on 27th of March due to a serious illness arising in old age.

MAO DUN'S VIEW ON TAGORE AND INDIAN LITERATURE:

The May Fourth Movement began in 1919 as a spontaneous agitation by Chinese students against the decisions of Western Powers at the Paris Peace Conference, where China, despite receiving serious representation, was deeply humiliated. Returning from their studies in Berlin, Paris, London, New York and Moscow, young Chinese had already begun to introduce and discuss a range of ideas and theories, including communism, which could strengthen China against the West. By general consensus, they now rejected their country's Confucian traditions.

For many Chinese in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, India was the prototypical 'lost' country, one whose internal weakness, exploited by invaders, had forced it into a state of subjugation that was morally and psychologically shameful, as well as politically and economically catastrophic. As the Chinese saw it, foreigners had ruled the country continuously since the Mughals established their empire in the sixteenth century; there was no native ruling class capable of unifying the country. Thinkers from a generation younger than Liang's, those who participated in the May Fourth Movement in 1919, were particularly harsh on the uncritical Chinese admirers of Indian philosophy and religion.

On April 12, 1924, Rabindranath Tagore arrived in Shanghai for a lecture tour of China arranged by Liang Qichao, China's foremost modern intellectual. Soon after receiving the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913, Tagore had become an international literary celebrity; he was also the lone voice from Asia in an intellectual milieu that was almost entirely dominated by Western institutions and individuals. But when, travelling in China, Tagore expressed his doubts about Western civilization and exhorted Asians not to abandon their traditional culture, he ran into fierce opposition. "The poet-saint of India has arrived at last," the novelist Mao Dun wrote in a Shanghai periodical, and "welcomed with 'thunderous applause'".



Tagore and Liang qichao in Beijing 1924
 (Photo courtesy: Nicolas Idier & Liang family).

Lu Xun pointed out in 1927, “Let us see which the mute nations are. Can we hear the voice of Egypt? Can we hear the voice of Annam (modern-day Vietnam) and Korea? Except Tagore, what other voice of India can we hear?”

Mao Dun had once translated Tagore into Chinese; but in his incarnation as a bitter communist radical he was increasingly worried about the Indian poet’s likely deleterious effect on Chinese youth. “We are determined”, Mao Dun warned, “not to welcome the Tagore who loudly sings the praises of eastern civilisation. Oppressed as we are by militarists from within the country and by the imperialists from without, this is no time for dreaming.” Within days of his arrival in China, Tagore would face hecklers, shouting such slogans as “Go back, slave from a lost country!”⁴



Mao Dun
 (Courtesy: http://www.ezhejiang.gov.cn/2016-08/09/c_55450.htm)

⁴ A Poet Unwelcome (On Tagore’s unkind reception in China) “an essay on Tagore’s unkind reception in China, Pankaj Mishra”.
 {<https://www.outlookindia.com/books/a-poet-unwelcome-news-281819>}

It seems, Mao Dun was in favour of only realism and progressive writing in Indian literature. Because when the great writer and author of Indian literature Rabindranath Tagore visited China in 1924, a group of progressive writers of China at that time (including Mao Dun) described his (Tagore's) natural and supernatural consciousness, attachment to oriental culture as a threat to Chinese society. Mao Dun had warned the Chinese society by mentioning in his published article written on 12 April 1924, "In the context of hope from Tagore (duiyú tàigē'ěr de xīwàng)" which was as follows:

"At last, the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore has arrived! Dressed in a red cap and yellow robe, when he stepped into the port of Shanghai, the gateway of western imperialism, the welcome sounded like the thunder of spring lightning. As we listened carefully to the welcome sound and realized that there were at least two voices in it.

That's right! The master who criticizes western culture and praises eastern culture has arrived here. He will surely prove our way wrong. "The Chinese people have a way." These are the appropriate words to welcome all the metaphysicians and oriental intellectuals. But, in the words of hopeless young people who love literature, "He has created for us a splendid and peaceful spiritual paradise of poetry on a land which is full of thorns. In this paradise of souls, there live many 'angels of poetry' in white robes. When we are happy, they sing with us; when we are sad, they gently console us; when we have doubts, they show us the path of faith; when we despair, they rekindle the torch of hope for us." Therefore, we also relatively welcome Tagore. We will neither welcome Rabindranath Tagore singing of oriental culture nor the Tagore who created a spiritual paradise of poetry for our youth to go and get drunk and get relax. We would rather welcome the Tagore who tolerated and led the peasant movement (though we are against the way he led the peasant movement) and sang "Tabe Ekla Chalo Re"! ⁵

Our view is that when China is under the double oppression of the forces of internal and external pressures and suppression, foreign imperialism and the dictatorship of domestic warlords, the national revolution of the Chinese nation is the only way out; and the way to achieve this goal is, as Mr. Wu Chihui said, "When others lift up machine guns to fight, we should also lift up machine guns to respond". Talking about oriental culture is really like "reciting the five classics to repel enemy troops." And, we very much doubt that a term like "oriental culture" can even be created. This is why we do not welcome Rabindranath Tagore who extolled oriental culture. We also think that the minds of Chinese youths are too passive, their actions too impractical, their desires too weak, and they only want to sit on thorns with their eyes closed, looking for what they call the heaven of the spirit, so that they can hide themselves for a while; we firmly reject attempts to lead young people's thinking to "nothingness." This is why we do not welcome our youths going to Tagore's concept of the "heaven of the spirit."

Because we are so convinced, we hope that Tagore will have two things to say: First, I hope that Tagore will admit that the current weakness of Chinese youth is that they are tired of seeing reality and want to escape into the void. China's youth are in such a dire situation that someone must bring them back to the real world and encourage them to struggle. Second, I hope that Tagore will express his opposition to western imperialism and promote the patriotic spirit, and his bitter criticism of some Chinese people's "foreign slavery."

Forasmuch we are so convinced with the greatness of the poet's power and the honorability of Tagore's life and struggle. At the same time, the great poet deserves a loud welcome to propose what we expect from Tagore. But more importantly, the youth of the whole country should welcome that Tagore who is the Tagore of the peasant movement. The poet Tagore who encouraged the spirit of patriotism and awakened the youth of India to revolt against British imperialism. We also want to tell to our youth that the gift we expect to get it from Tagore is not the divine "feeling of life" but the hope of struggle filled with hope "Tabe Ekla Chalo Re".

What does this senior poet give us? We will wait, watch and listen. Let us sing his famous "Tabe Ekla Chalo Re" for the literature and art loving youth across the country."⁶

CONCLUSION:

Mao Dun's novels reflect social structure, complex themes and their excellent description. His short stories also focus on major themes to express the deep problems of social life. When we analysis, the characteristics found in his works are as follows - first, selection of themes based on social problems, attention to timeliness and its importance. Second, the choice of characters, sweetness of social relations and characterization of characters, which are generally of two types, one is the national capitalist image and the other is the image of intellectual women of that time. In short, his excellent works represents the most complex problems of Chinese society in a natural way and the widely influenced literary structures which can be considered as one of the characteristics of Modern Chinese Literature.

One of the greatest Chinese poet and essayist 'Chu Ziqing' expressed his opinion about Mao Dun and about his novella 'The shop of the Lin Family', and said "This story is written about a foreign good's shop in a small town, even if you remove layer after layer, you will not see the slightest leakage or any change in it and you will fall in love with it. In fact, it can be considered as a "rigorous analysis", personally I think it is his best work."⁷

⁵对于泰戈的希望" 矛盾文集, 作者: 矛盾, 卷八散文

⁶对于泰戈的希望" 矛盾文集, 作者: 矛盾, 卷八散文

⁷编后记, 林家铺子/矛盾著; 陆宗寅编选, 摄影-北京: 生活书店出版有限公司, 2016.7 (2017.3重印) ISBN978-7-80768-150-2

Mao Dun's influence on Chinese literature still remains in the form of the "Mao Dun Literature Scholarship"; he used his savings towards the end of his life to establish a scholarship fund so that literary writing could be encouraged forever. He wrote a letter to the Chinese Writers Association and donated his royalty savings to a fund –

To,
The Chinese Writers' Association (CWA) Executive Office:

Dear Colleagues,

I donate my royalty fees of 250,000 Yuan to the Writers' Association as a fund to encourage the writing of novels and establish a literary award to reward the best novels each year. I know that I will not recover from my illness, but I sincerely wish for a prosperous future for our country's socialist literature!

Mao Dun

March 14, 1981⁸

In accordance with his wish, the "Mao Dun Literature Award" was established to encourage excellent novel writing, which is still remains one of the most respected literary awards in China.

Realism and progressive writings have been the backbone of Modern Indian literature too. 1920's and 30's were the time when India and China both the countries were struggling to get the independence from Western Power and realistic writings have played a vital role in highlighting the dark side of society and awoken youths to fight back with them. Therefore, Seems Mao Dun was in favor of realism and progressive writing in Indian literature but not in favor of supernatural consciousness. Even he raised the concern on oriental culture as a threat to the Chinese Society.

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⁸封底, 长恨歌/王安忆著. – 北京: 人民文学出版社, 2005.1 (矛盾文学奖获奖作品全集) ISBN 7-02-004932-X