

Maxim Gorky in China: 1920s Commentary and Shen Congwen's "Three Men and One Woman"

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This essay examines the Chinese reception of Maxim Gorky before he was enshrined as the founding father of socialist realism. During the 1920s, aesthetic and political assessments of his fiction were checkered. These varied assessments gave rise to varied thematic and formal appropriations in Chinese literature, such as in Shen Congwen's 沈從文 1930 *Sange nanren he yige nuren* 三個男人和一個女人 ("Three Men and One Woman"), which presents a bleak interpretation of the tension between individual and collective in Gorky's 1899 "Dvadtsat' shest' i odna" ("Twenty-six and one").

The tremendous popularity of Maxim Gorky Максим Горький (1868-1936) in China during the twentieth century is well known, particularly after the Russian writer became enshrined as the progenitor of socialist realism. Born Aleksei Maximovich Peshkov Алексей Максимович Пешков, he began publishing fiction in the 1890s under the pseudonym "Gorky," meaning "bitter," and was soon an international sensation. In the Soviet Union, his 1906 novel *Mat'* Мать (*Mother*) was retroactively designated as the foundational text of socialist realism, an aesthetic paradigm that was not canonically formulated until the early 1930s.¹ During the 1930s and 40s, Gorky's popularity in China soared, and he was fêted as the representative writer par excellence of the proletariat.² The events of his life, as narrated in his celebrated autobiographical trilogy, *Detstvo* Детство (*My Childhood*, 1913-4), *V liudiakh* В людях (*In the World*, 1916), and *Moi universitety* Мои университеты (*My Universities*, 1923), contributed in no small part to this reputation. Born after the death of his father, a carpenter, he was orphaned by the age of eleven and raised by his grandmother and abusive grandfather, who owned a dye-works. The family fortunes declined, and Peshkov worked from a young

¹ See Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 27, 52.

² Gorky's reputation in China grew despite the Nationalist regime's official prohibition of his work between 1929 and 1936. See Mark Gamsa, *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 138.

age in a shoe store, an icon workshop, a bakery, and so on; he also spent years wandering throughout Russia among *bosiaki* босяки (tramps) and workers from the lowest social strata, whom he would go on to describe in his fiction. A longtime associate of Lenin, he worked tirelessly to support other writers, even coming into conflict at times with the Bolsheviks as a consequence. He lived alternately in Russia and in exile abroad. In 1928, Stalin invited Gorky home on the occasion of the latter's sixtieth birthday, and he returned permanently in 1933. In 1934 he was made chairman of the *Soiuz pisatelei SSSR* Союз писателей СССР (Union of Soviet Writers). By then he was thought of as the "father" of Soviet literature. Gorky died two years thereafter from causes which may have been natural: it remains an enigma whether or not Stalin had anything to do with his death.³

As even this brief biographical sketch indicates, the relationship between the man Peshkov and the socialist ideology as well as the socialist realist form with which the figure Gorky became so intimately associated was not always straightforward: he was sometimes critical of the Bolshevik cause, and his relationship with Lenin sometimes fraught.⁴ Scholars have contended that in the 1930s and 40s Chinese readers only focused on some characteristics of Gorky's writing (his revolutionary ideology, his devotion to the struggles of the masses, his humanism, his realism), creating a one-dimensional portrait that lasted for a long time.⁵

This article examines Chinese writers' understandings of Gorky before he was idolized as the founding father of socialist realism, and before *Mother* became a revolutionary textbook. I first examine Chinese commentaries on his life and work prior

³ See Barry P. Scherr, *Maxim Gorky* (Boston: Twayne, 1988), 19-22; Donald Fanger, "Introduction: The Singularity of M. Gorky," 1-12 in *Gorky's Tolstoy & Other Reminiscences: Key Writings by and about Maxim Gorky*, ed. Donald Fanger (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 10; L. A. Spiridonova, M. A. Semashkina and L. N. Smirnova, eds., *Vokrug Smerti Gor'kogo: Dokumenty, Fakty, Versii* (Moscow: IMLI RAN, "Nasledie," 2001).

⁴ Vitalii Shentalinskii, *Arrested Voices: Resurrecting the Disappeared Writers of the Soviet Regime* (New York: Martin Kessler Books, 1996), 226-235. In 1921 Lenin advised him to go abroad ostensibly for reasons of health, but perhaps Gorky was becoming too pesky a thorn in the side. See Scherr, *Maxim Gorky*, 12, 15; Lidia Spiridonova, "Gorky and Stalin (According to New Materials from A. M. Gorky's Archive)," *The Russian Review* 54.3 (1995): 413-423; Spiridonova, "Tvorchestvo Gor'kogo i Vozniknovenie Sotsialisticheskogo Realizma," *Studia Litterarum* 3.1 (2018): 212-33, esp. 227-229; and E. A. Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Writer: Social and Aesthetic Origins of Soviet Literary Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 350.

⁵ See Wang Jiezhong 汪介之, *Xuanze yu shiluo: Zhong-E wenxue guanxi de wenhua guanzhao* 选择与失落: 中俄文学关系的文化关照 (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1995), 202, 204. Wendy Larson has observed that "Gorky, who once lambasted Lenin and the Bolsheviks for restricting free speech and betraying the ideals of the reformers, in the Soviet Union and in China came to stand for a narrow vision that zeroed in on the writer's role in developing, representing, and projecting the utopian vision inherent in present policies": "Curing Unhappiness in Revolutionary China: Optimism Under Socialism and Capitalism," 55-89 in *Discourses of Disease: Writing Illness, the Mind and the Body in Modern China*, ed. Howard Y. F. Choy (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 77.

to 1928, a relatively sparse selection of writings. These aesthetic and political assessments of his fiction were checkered. In the 1920s, some critics were dissatisfied with his long fiction, including *Mother*.⁶ Others questioned Gorky's proletarian theory and practice. Early Chinese opinions of Gorky were tied to his contemporary reputation abroad, and the varied assessments of his oeuvre gave rise to varied thematic and formal appropriations in the work of Chinese writers during the early 1930s.⁷ I dwell at length on Shen Congwen's 沈從文 (1902-1988) 1930 story *Sange nanren he yige nüren* 三個男人和一個女人 ("Three Men and One Woman"), and Shen's interpretation of the tension between individual and collective in Gorky's 1899 "Dvadtsat' shest' i odna" Двадцать шесть и одна ("Twenty-six and one"). Shen's literary appropriations from Gorky form a counterpoint to more politically engaged appropriations in the 1930s by writers such as Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) and Ai Wu 艾蕪 (1904-1992), whose redeployments from Gorky's oeuvre nevertheless present a notable formal diversity.

Early Chinese Commentaries

The first translation of Gorky's work into Chinese appeared in 1907, when *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 (*The Eastern Miscellany*) published his 1898 story "Cain i Artem" Кайн и Артём ("Cain and Artem"). Translations remained relatively sparse, and even after the May Fourth Movement in 1919 he was not as widely translated or highly regarded as other Russian writers. In 1933, Lu Xun, who would himself be known as the Chinese Gorky, remarked that previously Turgenev and Chekhov received much more notice than Gorky.⁸ When the British philosopher Bertrand Russell visited China in 1920-1921, he brought with him tidings from the Soviet Union, where he had just been, and where

⁶ Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 182-91, gives an account of these early assessments, which I flesh out with further findings of my own.

⁷ See Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 185. For anthologies of responses to Gorky from his contemporaries, see D. K. Burlaka and Iu. V. Zobnin et al., eds., *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro Et Contra: Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Maksima Gor'kogo v otsenke Russkikh myslitelei i issledovatelei: 1890-1910-e gg.: Antologiya* (Saint Petersburg: Izd-vo Russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 1997) and O. V. Bogdanova, L. A. Spiridonova, M. G. Urtmintseva and V. T. Zakharova, eds., *Maksim Gor'kii: Pro Et Contra: Sovremennyyi Diskurs: Antologiya* (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkoi khristianskoi gumanitarnoi akademii, 2018). The Chinese critics I discuss largely did not read Russian. They relied upon Russian-language commentaries that had been translated into English, or alternatively upon evaluations from Japanese and English language writers. See Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 182-91 for an account of Chinese translations of Gorky's work prior to 1929.

⁸ See Lu Xun, 魯迅 "Yiben Gaoerji 'Yiyue jiuri' xiaoyin" 譯本高爾基《一月九日》小引, *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1981), 7:417; Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 185; and Li Jin 李今, "Zhongguo zuoyi wenzue yundong de Gaoerji" 中國左翼文學運動的高爾基, *Zhongguo xiandai wenzue yanjiu congkan* 4 (2000): pp. 13-14. Direct unmediated translations from Russian did not appear until the work of translators like Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 in the 20s and 30s: Mark Evseevich Shneider, *Russkaia klassika v Kitae: perevody, otsenky, tvorcheskoe osvoenie* (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 190-191.

he had met Gorky himself. As a result of Russell's evident esteem for Gorky, there was a small boost in interest in the latter's life and work in China, with about thirty translations of his writings published in the first half of the decade.⁹ In the *Xiaoshuo yuebao's* 小說月報 (*Short Story Monthly*) special edition on Russian literature published in 1921, for instance, there were two translations of Gorky's work. But it is worth noting that there were no essays especially devoted to him, as there were about Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Kropotkin, Sologub, Artsybashev, and other more obscure writers.

That year also saw some critical discussion of Gorky's work among Chinese luminaries, with variegated responses to his oeuvre. Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958), an organizer of the *Wenxue yanjiu hui* 文學研究會 (Literary Research Association), published a biography of Gorky preceding his translation of the 1896 story *Na plotakh* На плотях ("On the Raft") in the *Short Story Monthly*. Zheng suggested that Gorky's short fiction was better than his longer works such as *Mother*, an opinion that he would reiterate in his *Eguo wenxue shilue* 俄國文學史略 (*An Outline of Russian Literary History*).¹⁰ This stance ran counter to Qu Qiubai's preference for the longer novels, as expressed in the 1921-22 *Eguo wenxue shi* 俄國文學史 (*Russian Literary History*).¹¹

Zheng's low opinion of *Mother* was in consonance with that of "most Party, proletarian, fellow-traveler, and *avant-garde* critics—in short, most critics and writers" in the Soviet Union prior to 1928.¹² Even Gorky himself did not particularly like the novel.¹³ Negative opinions from abroad trickled into China in the 1920s. One Chinese critic's 1926 assessment of Gorky's autobiographical trilogy—which also denigrates the randomness of description (*tai suosui de miaoxie* 太瑣碎的描寫) in his early work—cites as an incisive source of analysis D. S. Mirsky's Д. С. Мирский (1890-1939) 1925 *Sovremennaiia Russkaia literatura* Современная Русская литература (*Contemporary Russian Literature*), which had been published in English translation in 1926.¹⁴ Mirsky did not admire Gorky's novels, including *Mother*.¹⁵ In 1928, Qian Xingcun 錢杏村 (1900-1977), a member of the *Taiyang she* 太陽社 (Sun Society) and famous proponent of proletarian realism, cites Mirsky as a reliable critic in the *Short Story Monthly*.¹⁶ A year

⁹ See Wang Dan 王丹 and Liu Peng 刘鹏, "Luosu fanghua yu Gaoerji zai 20 shiji 20 niandai Zhongguo de chuanbo" 罗素访华与高尔基在 20 世纪 20 年代中国的传播, *Wenyi zhengming* 8 (2017): 90-5.

¹⁰ Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎, "Preface to Mufa zhi Shang 木筏之上," *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 12.2 (1921): 10-2; see also Zheng, *Eguo Wenxue Shilue* 俄国文学史略 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1924), 96-97.

¹¹ See Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白, *Eguo wenxue shi ji qita* 俄国文学史及其他 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 5; see also Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 185-186.

¹² See Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 28.

¹³ Richard Freeborn, *The Russian Revolutionary Novel: Turgenyev to Pasternak* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

¹⁴ You Xiong 有熊, "Gaoergai de zixu de sanbu zuo" 高爾該的自敘的三部作, *Shenzhong* 4: 227-228.

¹⁵ D. S. Mirsky, *Contemporary Russian Literature, 1881-1925* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 115.

¹⁶ Qian Xingcun 錢杏邨, "'Cengjin weiren de dongwu': wei Gaoerji chuanguo sanshiwu zhounian jinian zuo" 《曾今為人的動物》為高爾基創作三十五週年紀念作, *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 19.6 (1928): 763-773, p. 773.

later, translator Zhao Jingshen's 趙景深 (1902-1985) "Gaoerji pingzhuan" 高爾基評傳 ("A Critical Biography of Gorky") comments that Gorky's social problem novels such as *Mother* are sound in terms of sociological thinking but aesthetically problematic in their structure and superabundance of abstract philosophizing. Zhao goes on to note that he copied some of Mirsky's observations in writing his own assessment.¹⁷ In an otherwise laudatory article, another prolific translator, Geng Jizhi 耿濟之 (1899-1947), expressed a similar opinion, that *Mother* is much weaker than Gorky's other work because it is too involved in political discourse.¹⁸ Contrary views from abroad also trickled into China in the 1920s, for instance, the *Chenbao fukan's* 晨報副刊 (*Literary Supplement to the Morning Post*) August 1923 serialized translation of Serge Persky's (1870-1938) 1912 French-language overview of Gorky, which considers *Mother* to be a work of great merit.

Chinese attentiveness to evaluations of Gorky from abroad sharpened after the failed revolution of 1927 and especially in 1928.¹⁹ In this year, prior to his return to the Soviet Union, there was considerable debate there about whether he could truly be considered a proletarian writer. The debate was eventually resolved in Gorky's favor, but the list of objections cited first was lengthy: his focus on prerevolutionary themes, his romanticism, his non-working-class origins, his philosophy of *bogostroitel'stvo* богостроительство (God-building) which directly opposed Lenin and seemed to have roots in *Mother*.²⁰ Li Chuli 李初梨 (1900-1994), proponent of revolutionary literature, translated Aleksander Serafimovich's (1863-1949) ruminations on the matter in *Chuangzuo yuekan* 創造月刊 (*Creation Monthly*). Gorky is a complex figure, the piece declares, and he calls out not just to workers and proletariats, but to all mankind—even capitalists. Li Chuli agrees, stating that Gorky's thinking about the proletariat leaves a lot to be desired.²¹

¹⁷ Zhao Jingshen 趙景深, "Gaoerji pingzhuan" 高爾基評傳, *Beixin* 3.1 (1929): 108-17, at 114, 117; see also Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 188.

¹⁸ Geng Jizhi 耿濟之, "Gaoerji: Wei jinian ta sanshiwu nian chuanguzuo he liushi nian shengchen er zuo" 高爾基: 為紀念他三十五年創作和六十年生辰而作, *The Eastern Miscellany* 25.8 (1928): 73-7, p. 75.

¹⁹ Wang Qinren 王欽人, "Gaoerji zuopin zai Zhongguo de chuanbo" 高爾基作品在中國的傳播, *Waiguo wenxue* 1 (1997): 120-2, p. 121.

²⁰ See Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 55; Scherr, *Maxim Gorky*, 17, and "God-Building or God-Seeking? Gorky's *Confession* as Confession," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 44.3 (2000): 448-469; Spiridonova, "Tvorchestvo Gor'kogo," 219-220; and Nina Gourfinkel, *Gorky* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 87-8.

²¹ Li Chuli 李初梨, "Preface to 'Gaoerji shi tong women yidao de ma' 高爾基是同我們一道的嗎," *The Creation Monthly* 2.1 (1928): 127. See also Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 187. Li Jin points out that Chinese leftist opinion on Gorky was influenced by the stance held by the Rossiiskaia assotsiatsiia proletarskikh pisatelei Российская ассоциация пролетарских писателей (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers, RAPP), that he was not a proletarian writer but only a poputchik попутчик (fellow traveler) ("Zhongguo zuoyi wenxue," 14).

Reservations about Gorky's understanding of revolutionary principles appeared even in positive assessments of his commitment to the proletarian revolution. The Japanese translator Shomu Nobori 升曙夢 (1878-1958) wrote that Gorky departed from revolutionary tenets at times because as an artist rather than a theorist, he simply did not understand fully. This generally laudatory article on Gorky was translated more than once into Chinese in 1928.²² So in this period Gorky was not yet treated universally and unequivocally as an icon of the revolution; there were blemishes in his image that could be acknowledged and critiqued, and the 1920s reception of Gorky in China was that of a multifaceted figure.²³ The events of 1928 marked a turning point in Chinese attentiveness toward Gorky: interest in his work skyrocketed, and between 1928 and 1930 he was the most popular Soviet writer in China.²⁴ After Gorky's triumphant return to the fold in the Soviet Union, the attitude toward him and his work in China became increasingly reverent.²⁵

Gorky's "Twenty-Six and One" and Shen Congwen's "Three Men and One Woman"

The reception of Gorky as a multifaceted figure would give rise to variegated appropriations of his work, politically and aesthetically, in Chinese literature of the early 1930s. Here I want to focus on one of the earliest Chinese appropriations, which presents an ideologically surprising way of interpreting Gorky's portrayal of the collective downtrodden. Shen Congwen, the *xiangtu* 鄉土 (native soil) writer famous for his depictions of West Hunan and "noted for his nonmembership in left-wing groups,"²⁶ published in 1930 a story called "Three Men and One Woman" that exhibits unmistakable thematic and formal similarities to Gorky's 1899 "Twenty-Six and One,"

²² See Shomu Nobori 升曙夢, *Zuijin de Gaoerji* 最近的高爾基, *Dangdai* 1.3 (1928): 203-223, and *Zuijin zhi Gaoerji* 最近之高爾基, *Xiaoshuo yuebao* 8.19 (1928): 925-932.

²³ See also *Luosu yu Geerji* 羅素與哥爾基, *Xin qingnian* 8.5 (1921):1-2. The preface to the 1921 translation of *Maiguozei de muqin* 賣國賊的母親 (The Traitor's Mother) acknowledges that Gorky articulated views counter to Bolshevik principles; see Zhong Chi 仲持, "'Maiguozei de muqin': Eguo Gaoerji yuanzhu 《賣國賊的母親》: 俄國高爾基原著, *Funiu zazhi* 7.2 (1921): 47. Additionally, one reader of Gorky quips in 1929 that Gorky is perhaps making anti-Bolshevik comments (Liu Bo 劉波, "Gaoerji 'Lun wuchan zuojia'" 高爾基《論無產作家》, *Qunzhong yuekan* 5 (1929): 18-19).

²⁴ Viktor V. Petrov, "Sovetskaia Literatura v Kitae v 1928-1930," *Literatura Stran Zarubezhnogo Vostoka i Sovetskaia Literatura: Sbornik Statei*, edited by A. I. Borshchukov (Moscow: Nauka, 1977), 218-222.

²⁵ Chen Jianhua points out Mao Dun's praise for Gorky's work in the 1930 essay *Guanyu Gaoerji* 關於高爾基 ("On Gorky"), noting that in China, especially among leftist writers, Gorky became almost deified; see *Ershi shiji Zhong-E wenxue guanxi* 二十世紀中俄文學關係 (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 142-144.

²⁶ Jeffrey C. Kinkley, "Echoes of Maxim Gorky in the Works of Ding Ling and Shen Congwen," *Republican China* 15.1 (1990): 57. See also Chih-tsing Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 195-6.

which had been translated multiple times by the time Shen Congwen wrote his story.²⁷ In what follows I tease out the narrative strategies that Shen Congwen appropriates from Gorky and develops further in ways that underscore the impotence and (self-)destructiveness of the collective—not, as we might expect from Gorky’s later identity as the father of socialist realism, the power of the collective vis-à-vis the unruly individual.

“Twenty-Six and One” is a short piece describing a group of twenty-six overworked, underpaid bakers who slave away in a basement workshop, with little more to sustain them spiritually than the daily visits of Tania, a pretty young chambermaid who works in an embroidery shop upstairs. The bakers’ collective adoration for Tania borders on veneration. However, they are dismayed when a new baker hired by a better-paid branch of the bakery located elsewhere in the same building wagers that he can seduce Tania—and succeeds. The twenty-six men gather in a circle around her to revile and insult her. The story ends with Tania marching out of their circle; she never visits the subterranean bakers again.

Shen Congwen’s story is also about a group of men who worship an unattainable woman from afar. The narrator of the story, who recounts the events long after the fact, was once a lowly squad leader in a company stationed in a village where the only gentry family’s youngest daughter became the object of his erotic fixation. He is joined in this hopeless obsession by two friends, a bugler whose feet had been disabled permanently on the job, and the owner of a tofu shop across the street from the girl’s home. Here the three men gather daily in hopes of catching a glimpse of her, or at least of her two dogs. One day the narrator learns that the girl has for unexplained reasons committed suicide by swallowing gold. The three men are distraught, and then vaguely happy, since if they can never win her then at least no man will. A few days later, the narrator discovers that the girl’s grave has been robbed, and her body found naked in a nearby cave, bestrewn with blue chrysanthemums on a stone ledge. The narrator and bugler are certain that the owner of the tofu shop, who has been missing for a few days, was the perpetrator of this necrophilic act,²⁸ though the bugler confesses that he visited

²⁷ Noted linguist Liu Bannong 劉半農 (1891-1934) had translated it in part in 1916, in the periodical *Xiaoshuo hai* 小說海. Lu Xun’s protégé, writer and editor Sun Fuyuan 孫伏園 (1894-1966), had translated Gorky’s story as *Women ershiliu ge he yige nüde* 我們二十六個和一個女的 (“We Twenty-Six and One Woman”) in *Short Story Monthly* in 1921. Two translations also appeared in 1928. Shen Congwen was in Shanghai and engaged extensively in publishing activities during the increasing Gorky fervor of 1928-9; see Kinkley, “Echoes,” 57. He was an avid reader of Russian literature; see David Wang, *Fictional Realism in Twentieth-Century China: Mao Dun, Lao She, Shen Congwen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 22. Kinkley has also conjectured about other possible resonances of Gorky’s work in Shen Congwen’s oeuvre; see “Echoes.”

²⁸ This is a phallic violation that is foreshadowed by a scene in which soldiers defile the bodies of recently executed men, “poking bamboo sticks into holes in the corpses where their throats had been. A pack of starving dogs had gathered around, sitting on their haunches to observe with concentration all the strange proceedings before them”; see Shen Congwen 沈從文, “Three Men

the grave with the intention of doing the same thing, only to discover that someone had beat him to it. So structurally Shen Congwen's beancurd vendor plays the same role as the new baker in Gorky's story: both men snatch away and sexually possess the venerated object of desire, doing what the other men deplore and yet wish to have accomplished themselves. And indeed, in both stories the tofu vendor and the new baker foreshadow their superior physical prowess before the other men by flexing the muscles on their arms. The new baker, a former soldier, declares in an early scene that women care about a man's physical strength, and raises his right arm to demonstrate: "The shirt sleeve was rolled up to his elbow. He showed his arm to us.... It was white, strong, covered with glossy, golden hair."²⁹ Shen Congwen, evidently a closer reader of Gorky's story, redeploys this detail: on a few occasions, the tofu vendor waits until the girl is in sight, and then begins to inspect the axle on his millstone, "showing his two arms, strong as steel" 露著強健如鐵的一雙臂膊.³⁰

Both stories draw upon autobiographical experience.³¹ Gorky at one point worked as just such a baker in Kazan. And Shen Congwen recalls in his 1930 autobiography that once as a soldier garrisoned in a small town, he spoke to a tofu vendor about to be executed for precisely this crime. The man smiles mysteriously (like the tofu vendor in the story) and expresses no contrition. Shen retells this story in a different form in the 1931 "Yisheng" 醫生 ("Doctor"), and he mentions the episode again in his 1938 travelogue *Xiangxi* 湘西 (West Hunan).³²

"Three Men and One Woman" is the only retelling of this incident that multiplies the male perpetrator into a collective of men who all in some way wish that they had done the deed. Shen Congwen has borrowed this narrative move from Gorky's story, whose title is structured to stress the power (or ironically, the powerlessness) of the many versus the one, pitting the multiplicity of the men against the solitariness of the woman. The Russian title of Gorky's story indicates the gender of the "one," since the numeral *odna* in Russia is feminine. Shen Congwen's title stresses the gender binary further by explicitly designating the "Three" as men and the "One" as a woman. By borrowing this storytelling strategy of multiplying the male desirers into a whole group, Shen Congwen is able to superimpose the gender binary onto a class binary, as Gorky does: the tale of masculine woe is not just about one man's troubles, but about the

and One Woman," *Modern Chinese Stories and Novellas 1919-1949*, edited by Joseph Lau et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 258. As we shall see, the eponymous three men are repeatedly associated with dogs and even refer to themselves as degraded and bestial like animals, so the hungrily watching dogs here further gesture at the fact that the salacious admirers of the young girl, appetites barely held at bay, will soon leap at the chance to prey upon her corpse.

²⁹ Gorky, "Twenty-Six and One," *Twenty-Six and One, and Other Stories from the Vagabond Series*, translated by Ivan Strannik (New York: J. F. Taylor & Company, 1902), 39. Translation modified.

³⁰ Shen, "Three Men," 260.

³¹ See Kinkley, "Echoes," 58, and Wang, *Fictional Realism*, 286.

³² See Wang, *Fictional Realism*, 285.

struggles of an entire group or class of people, the many who feel oppressed by the few. In Gorky's story, the upstairs/downstairs structure of the house physically maps out the class disparity between Tania and the subterranean bakers. Similarly, in Shen Congwen's story, the street dividing the tofu shop and the young girl's family compound topographically indicates the social chasm between them. Lydia Liu has explored how the deictics of personal pronouns plays out the narrative of social exclusion and inclusion: the narrator's first-person *wo* 我 (I) or *women* 我們 (we) versus the third-person *ta* 她 (her), a gendering that "lays the stylistic ground for the dynamic interplay of desire across class boundaries."³³ This usage of personal pronouns takes inspiration from Gorky's narration, which begins with the word *Nas* Мы (We) and continues in this vein.

As in Gorky's story, the three men in Shen Congwen's text desire the girl as much for the inaccessible, rarefied world of comfort, ease, privilege, and beauty for which she synecdochically stands as for her own person: a playing out of mimetic desire very much à la René Girard.³⁴ That the girl in both stories is a synecdoche for the unattainable is underscored by the fact that both writers refer frequently to the girls by means of synecdoche: the men perceive her as a part of a larger whole, as an embodiment of what they cannot have, therefore they tend to apprehend only the most synecdochically salient parts of her whole being, which symbolize what she stands for to them (femininity, beauty, grace, inaccessibility, cleanliness, wealth). For instance, both Tania and the nameless young woman in Shen Congwen's story are identified by means of their thick, long braid. Gorky's narrator draws particular attention to her *dlinnaia i tolstaia kosa kashtanovykh volos* Длинная и толстая коса каштановых волос (long and thick plait of chestnut hair). And Shen Congwen's bugler reports, "I heard people say the long-pigtail was buried at Lianyu Village" 我聽人說那大辮子埋在鱧魚庄.³⁵ The sounds of the two women's voices, as well as their articles of dress, are also frequent synecdoches or metonyms for their unattainable persons, as though the closest these lovestruck men can ever hope to come to the girl is the hem of her garment: Tania's *perednik* передник (apron) and a wisp of the young girl's clothing (*yijiao* 衣角). Shen Congwen in fact takes this use of alienating, objectifying synecdoche a step farther, for unlike Gorky, Shen never actually describes the physical appearance of the young girl, only the things that are associated with her or adjacent to her. The most prominent metonyms for her are her two white dogs, whom the three men attempt to lure over with treats. The dogs are named *Dabai* 大白 (Big White) and *Erbai* 二白 (Second White), so their color is continually foregrounded, just as the girl's clothes are either white or *conglü* 蔥綠 "scallion green." The brightness, cleanliness, and freshness of colors associated with her are, of course, further indicators of her social status, frequently

³³ *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 157.

³⁴ See *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

³⁵ Shen, *Sange nanren he yige nüren* 三個男人和一個女人, *Shen Congwen xiaoshuo xuan* 沈從文小說選 1 (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1982), 242. Translation mine.

contrasted with the mud and grime in which the three men live. In the very opening of the story, the narrator describes the rainy muck in which the soldiers march and with which they are inevitably coated. This runs as a motif throughout the tale, emphasizing the abjectness of the men's poverty and social exclusion. The men compare themselves to dogs, yet they are never as clean and pampered as the girl's pet dogs—an indication of their sense of inferiority and degradation.

These descriptions of light versus dark color, and cleanliness versus grime, are also a motif that Shen Congwen has appropriated from Gorky's story, in which the bakers are associated with underground grime, dirty dark colors in their sunless cave, whereas Tania is the only source of color in their world: her teeth are white, her lips are pink, and she arrives in their midst like a ray of heavenly sunlight. The only time she is described in unclean surroundings is the seduction scene, in which she falls from grace in the eyes of the watching bakers: the courtyard where this happens is covered in muddy snow under a gray sky. She has been seduced because the bakers themselves wagered with the newcomer that he would not be able to touch her, and the individual won the wager against the collective. So it is the twenty-six bakers' fervent veneration of Tania, and their desire to prove her sexual inaccessibility, which brings Tania to the seducer's attention and ironically brings about her "desecration." The twenty-six men's adoration is inadvertently destructive and self-destructive, and this is symbolized by the mud and dirty colors that spread from them to surround Tania herself. As Gorky's narrator philosophizes, "A human being always wants to bestow his love upon someone, although he may sometimes crush or sully her; he may poison the life of his neighbor with his love, because, loving, he does not respect the beloved."³⁶

However, at the end of Gorky's story Tania marches triumphantly away, leaving the twenty-six angry men "in the mud, under the rain and the gray, sunless sky..."³⁷ The ellipsis ending this statement suggests that the men will be stranded in this state indefinitely. And though the young woman in Shen Congwen's story is analogously sexually deflowered as a result of the men's obsession, in the end her body is discovered in an almost beatified state, as though on an altar, bedecked with wildflowers,³⁸ the subject of local mythology. Just as Gorky's story ends on a bleak note for the men, so too does Shen Congwen's tale end by describing the narrator and the bugler remaining mired indefinitely in their physical and mental abjection as a result of this incident.³⁹

³⁶ Gorky, "Twenty-Six and One," 33-34. I have amended the translation.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁸ See Ban Wang, "Nature and Critique of Modernity in Shen Congwen: An Eco-Critical Reading," *Remembering May Fourth: The Movement and Its Centennial Legacy*, edited by Victor H. Mair and Carlos Yu-Kai Lin (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 180.

³⁹ Haiyan Lee has read the necrophilic act as a moment of irrepressible humanity rather than pathology: "The Other Chinese: Romancing the Folk in May Fourth Native Soil Fiction," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 33.2 (2007): 9-34, pp. 24-26. The narrator and bugler's horror at the sexual act (and not just at their own inability to carry it out), combined with the implied beatification of the woman's corpse, hints at a multifaceted portrayal of the incident as

The narrator ends the story, after all, with an admission that he can never banish this story from his mind: "I am forever restless because the past returns to haunt me often" 我老不安定，因為我常常要記起那過去事情。⁴⁰ So Shen Congwen's story uses formal elements from Gorky's text such as synecdoche and metonymy, along with the motifs of color and dirt, in order to suggest the reasons why the collective of men venerate the individual woman. And curiously, in both stories the descriptions of the woman imply that she has somehow transcended any degradation at the hands of the men, whereas the latter are forever stuck in it. The individual has in both cases subtly won out over the collective group.

Shen Congwen has redeployed from Gorky's story the characterization of the men's initial adoration for the girl as bordering upon religious devotion. The bakers think of Tania as their *bozhka* божка (little goddess), deifying her repeatedly.⁴¹ Shen Congwen's narrator calls the object of his worship a *xianren* 仙人 (celestial being).⁴² Gorky's narrator stresses that the bakers' idolization of their goddess crystallizes the very best aspects of humanity within them, which nothing else in their sordid lives can draw out: "though our hard labor had turned us into dull oxen (*tupymi volami* тупыми волами), we nevertheless remained human beings, and like all human beings, we could not live without worshipping something."⁴³ (This characterization of miserable laboring men in bestial terms is something that Shen Congwen borrows from Gorky too, as we shall see.) The bakers are unfailingly polite, kind, and generous to her, never using the kind of degrading language that they use to insult other women (that is, until her fall from grace in their eyes at the end of the story). But in Shen Congwen's story, the three men's shared love for the unattainable girl continually brings out the worst in them: Shen's portrayal of the behavior of the collective unit is even bleaker than in Gorky's story. The three men get into fistfights out of self-loathing that turns into mutual loathing. In one scene, the narrator insults the bugler as a way of masochistically wallowing in his own degradation: "We're dogs and we're pigs, just lined up in formation. Why do we get such wild ideas about this girl? Why don't we face up to our limitations?" 我們只是一些排成隊伍的豬狗罷了，為什麼對於這姑娘有一種野心？為什麼這樣不自量？ He continues the diatribe until his friend "was suddenly transformed from his usual self into a mad beast swooping down on me" 完全象一只發瘋了的獸物，扑到我的身上來了。⁴⁴ The two men brawl. So even before their desire for the girl motivates them to perpetrate the acts of grave-robbing and necrophilia, it sets them at odds with one another and brings out their crudest, most violent and unruly selves.

simultaneously *weixie* 猥褻 (obscene) and *shenqi* 神奇 (mystical), as the narrator puts it (Shen, *Sange nanren*, 245).

⁴⁰ Shen, "Three Men," 265.

⁴¹ See C. J. G. Turner, "'Iconoclasm' as a Structural Device in Three of Gorky's Stories," *The Modern Language Review* 67: 1 (1972): 144.

⁴² Shen, "Sange nanren," 229.

⁴³ Gorky, "Twenty-Six," 32. I have amended the translation.

⁴⁴ Shen, "Three Men," 259.

Tellingly, whereas Gorky's twenty-six bakers are likened to oxen, dehumanized yet harmless, Shen Congwen's men are associated with dogs and vicious beasts: Shen borrows this motif of animals from Gorky and heightens it to stress the intrinsic vicious potential of these men when they come together as a group.

This is the element of Shen Congwen's appropriations from Gorky that I find most fascinating: namely, the insinuation that the collective can wreak terrible havoc upon themselves and others, and that the unity and strength of a collective identity are brittle and perhaps even weaker than that of a lone individual. Gorky's narrator affirms very early in the story that a group of people who see one another every day have very little to say to one another, other than mockery and insults: "We had nothing to talk about, we were used to this and were silent all the time, unless abusing one another—for there is always something for which to abuse a man, especially a companion."⁴⁵ Shen Congwen takes this statement and plays it out quite literally in his story, bringing his men to fisticuffs. Furthermore, Gorky's story ends with the bakers standing in the muck of the courtyard while Tanya easily pushes her way out of the circle in which they entrapped her; she has the last, triumphant word, even though the men have just cursed and insulted her vociferously for surrendering to her seducer. "Ah you, ra-ascals...ve-ermin!" "Ах вы, сво-олочь... га-ады..." she hurls at them, and then "left, standing straight, beautiful, proud."⁴⁶ *Gady* гады is literally "reptiles," continuing the association of the men with animals. Certainly, the story is narrated with a great deal of sympathy for the unhappy collective of laboring men, but it gives this lone individual, the "fallen" woman, the last laugh. By the same token, though Shen Congwen's story ends with the lone woman dead and the three men still alive to tell the tale, her death has driven the erstwhile companions apart. They never go near the tofu vendor again, and the narrator reveals that whereas the bugler remains in the same company, he himself has wandered off to the city, which "doesn't seem to suit me either, although now I don't know where next" 在都市裡又象不大合適，可不知再往哪兒跑。⁴⁷ They are all as lost and feckless as before, their fragile brotherhood irrevocably broken. The strength of the three men who joined forces together in a collective to commiserate about their deplorable social castration could not survive the death blow of the loss of their fixation.⁴⁸ In both stories, then, the viability of the collective identity is seriously undermined because of the men's own shared desires and actions.

⁴⁵ Gorky, "Twenty-Six," 25.

⁴⁶ Gorky, "Dvadsat' shest' i odna," *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* 5 (Moscow: Nauka, 1968), 21.

⁴⁷ Shen, "Three Men," 265.

⁴⁸ Jiwei Xiao writes that "although the male bonding is temporarily broken by the death of the girl, it is only cemented and symbolically reinforced by the men's common desire to repossess her body, whether in the form of action (the tofu-maker's necrophilic violation), temptation (the bugler's necrophilic attempt), or fantasy (the 'I'-narrator's story)" ("Something Rich and Strange: Lyricism, Violence and Woman in Shen Congwen's Fiction," *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 35.1 [2009]: 176). However, I would draw attention to the fact that the three men are henceforth physically separated and never have anything to do with one another again.

In Gorky's story, besides their shared adoration for Tania there is one other means by which the bakers attain the unity of the collective: singing. Though they labor most of the time in miserable reticence, sometimes one of the bakers launches into mournful song. By and by the rest join in, their voices swelling majestically in unison, "and the song bubbles up like a wave, growing stronger, louder, as though moving asunder the damp, heavy walls of our stony prison." This is their only way of transcending, together, the sorrows and humiliations of their lives, of articulating and even momentarily escaping their unhappiness: "Another mournfully exclaims, Eh! sings, his eyes closed, and it may be that the wide, heavy wave of sound appears to him like a road leading somewhere far away, like a wide road, lighted by the brilliant sun, and he seems himself walking there."⁴⁹

Music as an expression of collective harmony is a motif that Shen Congwen uses in his story, but he uses it to express, by contrast, the impossibility of this kind of transcendent unity. The figure most closely associated with music in his story is obviously the bugler, and it is precisely because of his musical duties that this bugler becomes handicapped for life. After a long day of marching, he is ordered to send a signal to regimental headquarters via his bugling. The message in the answering music is unclear, so the bugler is ordered to repeat this duty many times. Exhausted from the day's activity, he injures himself when jumping down from his elevated perch. So not only has music, the instrument of communication and connection among soldiers, been ineffectual, it is associated with injury.

This accident deprives the bugler of the usual means by which his music would draw people to him: ordinarily, the narrator explains, a nimble-footed bugler "would play it under moonlight in response to other buglers in the distance" 到了夜里, 還要在月光下奏他的曲子, 同遠遠的另一連互相唱和.⁵⁰ Some buglers would take advantage of market days to parade around with horn-blowers from neighboring companies. In other words, music would usually be a means of forming bonds among individuals, attracting companions and facilitating communication. A talented, able-bodied bugler might even attract a mate by playing before the local people: "lucky things might happen; one of those women with clean foreheads and shining black eyes, half hidden behind the side doors of their houses, just might take a liking to him" 說不定其中就有意外的幸運發生, 給那些藏在腰門后面, 露出一個白白額角同黑亮眼睛的婦女們注了意. But the bugler in this story is essentially castrated by his accident. What's more, the narrator tells us that ordinarily "many children would have gathered around him, somewhat fearfully, to admire and to be awed by the artistry of this great man. Then he would have been able to establish some sort of contact with them which gradually would lead to friendship" 會有多少小孩子, 帶著微微的害怕, 圍攏來欣賞這大人物的藝術, 他就可以同那些小孩子成立一種友誼. 慢慢地, 他就得到許多小朋友了.⁵¹ Music

⁴⁹ Gorky, "Twenty-Six," 26, 27.

⁵⁰ Shen, "Three Men," 255.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 256. The translation contains my emendations.

ought to draw collectives of people together and cement different kinds of relationships, but in this story, these possibilities are mentioned only to be negated. The bugler becomes an outcast, known as a *quezi* 瘸子 “cripple.” Other people look down upon him and even ape his moments for amusement.

Not only does music not bring people together in this story, it ultimately becomes associated with death: the only other time that music is described is when the three men hear, in the distance, the sounds of gong, drum, and other funereal instruments after the girl commits suicide. What I want to suggest, then, is that Shen Congwen has taken a prominent symbol of collective unity from Gorky’s story and turned it into a denial of unity, communion, and comradeship. It is in fact a symbol of death and devastation: a grim way, indeed, of reinterpreting and foreclosing upon the slim possibilities of the collective in “Twenty-Six and One.”

Conclusion: Plastic Gorky

Through my close readings of these two stories, I have highlighted the many resonances of Gorky’s “Twenty-Six and One” in Shen Congwen’s “Three Men and One Woman.” Furthermore, I have suggested that the latter augments the former’s hints of the fragility, futility, and destructiveness of the collective vis à vis the individual. Of course, both stories are invested in revealing the dehumanization of an invidious social structure, exhibiting sympathy for the groups of men mired in the misery of their lower-class drudgery – though as one scholar has noted, “Gorky’s emblematic casting of an ‘I’ that was identifiable with the working-class ‘we’ of ‘Twenty-six and One’ seemed to be authenticated retrospectively by the historical fact of the Revolution.”⁵² But my point is that in neither story does the bond of a collective help or save these men, or the women they adore; rather, both texts end on a note of hopelessness or forlornness when the *raison d’être* of the collective (an impossible object of fantasy to begin with) is taken away. “Twenty-Six and One” is a far cry, then, from the kinds of narratives that would later spring from a text like Gorky’s *Mother*, which plays out the “tension between individual interests and the collective good” in a wholly different tenor.⁵³

In the early 1930s, there certainly were Chinese texts that interpreted Gorky in ways that would be ideologically consonant with those later socialist realist works. Mao Dun 茅盾 (nom de plume of Shen Yanbing 沈雁冰), May Fourth luminary and one of the earliest members of the Chinese Communist Party, had begun praising Gorky as a writer of the lower classes as early as 1919,⁵⁴ though his interest ramped up

⁵² Martha Weitzel Hickey, “Recovering the Author’s Part: The Serapion Brothers in Petrograd,” *The Russian Review* 58.1 (1999): 107.

⁵³ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 62.

⁵⁴ See Mao Dun 茅盾, *Jindai xiju jia zhuan* 近代戲劇家傳, *Xuesheng* 6.8 (1919): 86-94. See also Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 190, 198-9.

considerably after 1928, matching the general trend among Chinese readers.⁵⁵ Mao Dun admired Gorky for his realism, but one particular text seems to have resonated with him for quite different formal reasons, as critics have noted.⁵⁶ In 1934 Mao Dun published a *sanwen* 散文 prose piece entitled “Leiyu qian” 雷雨前 (“Before the Thunderstorm”) that distinctly riffs on Gorky’s famous and wildly popular 1901 poem *Pesnia o burevestnike* Песня о буревестнике (“Song of the Stormy Petrel”), which had been translated into Chinese more than once by the time Mao Dun wrote “Leiyu qian.” One translation appeared the year prior in the periodical *Nü duo* 女鐸. The translator’s preface notes that the petrel is often the herald of a storm, hence its moniker “Stormy Petrel.”⁵⁷ He adds that in this piece, the storm symbolizes revolution, and the petrel symbolizes the poet of the revolution (Gorky himself). This had long been one of Gorky’s most famous and popular works, beloved of Lenin,⁵⁸ and celebrated as the battle hymn of the revolution.

Mao Dun’s “Leiyu qian” is written in prose rather than poetry, though it must be noted that when Gorky’s work is translated into Chinese, the original prose poem structure is lost and can readily be read as prose as well. In Mao Dun’s piece, the role of the petrel is played by a formidable giant who wields an enormous knife to split the stifling curtain of gray clouds shutting out the cleansing wind and rain (symbolic of revolutionary change).⁵⁹ And Gorky’s seagulls, loons, and penguins, the hapless winged creatures who cower before the storm—unlike the proud petrel who soars in the tempest—have become in Mao Dun’s rendition the flies, mosquitoes, and cicadas who plague the person—referred to in the second person *ni* 你 (you)—who awaits the coming storm that will whisk them away. The basic allegorical structure remains the same in both works. Mao Dun even deploys Gorky’s trick of indicating the crescendo of the storm with an increasingly liberal use of exclamation points.⁶⁰

For Mao Dun, then, Gorky’s work is of formal interest and, in terms of content, an inspiration in its inferred political orientation. The characteristics of appropriation for Ai Wu (penname of Tang Daogeng 湯道耕) are in general terms similar, though for him the draw of Gorky was the latter’s narratives based upon his experiences traipsing through southern Russia among tramps, beggars, and laborers. Ai Wu spent many years in the late 1920s wandering through Yunnan and Burma, and his early-1930s collection of stories, *Nanxing ji* 南行記 (*Journey to the South*), draws upon these

⁵⁵ Márian Gálik, *Milestones in Sino-Western Literary Confrontation, 1898-1979* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1986): 79-81.

⁵⁶ Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 206.

⁵⁷ Yi Xian 宜間, *Hai’ou de ge* 海鷗的歌, *Nüduo* 21.10 (1933): 72.

⁵⁸ Anthony D. Briggs, “Gorky’s *Burevestnik*: Problems of Definition and Origin,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* X 2 (1974): 147.

⁵⁹ Tonglu Li, “Modern Chinese Essays: Zhou Zuoren, Lin Yutang and Others,” *Routledge Handbook of Modern Chinese Literature*, ed. Ming Dong Gu (Milton Park: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 2:291.

⁶⁰ Mao Dun 茅盾, *Leiyu qian* 雷雨錢, *Manhua shenghuo* 1 (1934): 10.

experiences. Ai Wu was an avid reader of Gorky's work. Critics have pointed out the resonances between Ai Wu's writings and Gorky's stories about *liulanghan* 流浪漢 (vagabonds), thieves, and the flotsam and jetsam of marginalized social groups whom both writers depict with curiosity and sympathy,⁶¹ in collections that organize these experiences as a series of incidents, rather than as a unified narrative (such as a novel).⁶² The transience and intensity of contacts and impressions formed while traveling characterize both writers' narratives of itinerant life. Not only does Ai Wu draw inspiration from Gorky in terms of form and content, but also in terms of political bent: critics have discussed the narrator's alignment with leftist and anti-imperialist causes in *Journey to the South*.⁶³ Ai Wu was, in the early 1930s, a member of the *Zuoyi zuojia lianmeng* 左翼作家聯盟 (League of Left-Wing Writers), so the affinity for the downtrodden in Gorky's fiction would have suited Ai Wu's first-person narrator, who frequently assumes the perspective of the collective.⁶⁴ By the end of the collection, "Ai Wu the solitary traveler seems to have given himself a revolutionary purpose for future struggle."⁶⁵

That Shen Congwen, Ai Wu, and Mao Dun could have appropriated such diverse generic, stylistic, and thematic elements from Gorky's work within the span of a few years in the early 1930s testifies to the multifaceted nature of Chinese opinions about him in the prior decade, during which time the core value of his work had not yet been decisively articulated or codified, and critics and readers still disagreed as to what was

⁶¹ See Min Hou 侯敏, "Ai Wu yu Gaoerji liulanghan xiaoshuo bijiao lun" 艾蕪與高爾基流浪漢小說比較論, *Zhongguo wenxue yanjiu* 4 (2014), and Wang, *Xuanze yu shiluo*, 205.

⁶² See Scherr, "Impressions of a Transient: The Meandering of Gor'kij," *Russian Literature* 29 (1991): 455-470, and M. G. Urtmintseva, "Avtobiograficheskoe nachalo v khudozhestvennoi structure proizvedenii M. Gor'kogo 1890-x-1990-x godov," *Acta Eruditorum* 27 (2018): 90-95, for a discussion of the autobiographical characteristics of Gorky's itinerant narrator.

⁶³ Jie Guo, "Reportage, Ethnicity, and Feminine Subjectivities: Ai Wu's Journey to the South and its 'Sequels,'" *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* 31.2 (2019): 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5. Wenbin Peng remarks that Ai Wu writes "about his sympathy or identification with suffering, sorrow, and loss of the common people, a process of thematisation modelled upon Maksim Gorky, Ai Wu's favourite Russian writer, who was widely known for writing naturalistic and sympathetic stories of tramps and social outcasts in Russian society"; see "Allegorising the Local on the Borderland: Ai Wu's 'Nanxingji' and National Subjectivity," *Inner Asia* 4.1 (2002): 58. Marston Anderson observes that the identification between Ai Wu's narrator and the people he encounters is not perfect, but the former "attempts a complete identification with his lower-class protagonists"; see *The Limits of Realism: Chinese Fiction in the Revolutionary Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 194.

⁶⁵ Leo Ou-fan Lee, "The Solitary Traveler: Images of the Self in Modern Chinese Literature," *Expressions of the Self in Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 302. Comparing Ai Wu's *Journey to the South* to Shen Congwen's 1934 *Xiangxing sanji* 湘行散記 (*Random Sketches on Travels to Hunan*), Lee states that Ai Wu's pieces are "written in an angrier and more ideological tone" (299). We might make a similar observation when comparing Ai Wu's collection to Shen Congwen's "Three Men and One Woman."

successful or not in his widely varied oeuvre. Gorky's work was many things to many people, who were inspired by his poetry, his short fiction, his interest in vagabonds and wanderers, his use of allegory, symbolism, and metonymy, and his interrogations of gender, class, and the collective. In 1934, Lu Xun coined the term *nalai zhuyi* 拿來主義 (grabbism), urging Chinese writers to select what they needed from foreign models.⁶⁶ The evolving reception of Maxim Gorky in China provides a unique vantage point on how "grabbism" reshapes what it appropriates over time.

⁶⁶ Lu Xun, "Nalai zhuyi" 拿来主义, *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 6:38-40.