

Milestones on a Golden Road

Writing for Chinese Socialism, 1945-80

Richard King



UBC Press · Vancouver · Toronto.

Sample Material © 2013 UBC Press

Contemporary Chinese Studies

This series provides new scholarship and perspectives on modern and contemporary China, including China's contested borderlands and minority peoples; ongoing social, cultural, and political changes; and the varied histories that animate China today.

A list of titles in this series appears at the end of this book.

© UBC Press 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher, or, in Canada, in the case of photocopying or other reprographic copying, a licence from Access Copyright, www.accesscopyright.ca.

21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Canada on FSC-certified ancient-forest-free paper
(100% post-consumer recycled) that is processed chlorine- and acid-free.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

King, Richard, 1951-

Milestones on a golden road [electronic resource] : writing for Chinese socialism, 1945-80 / Richard King.

(Contemporary Chinese Studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Electronic monograph.

Issued also in print format.

ISBN 978-0-7748-2374-6 (PDF); ISBN 978-0-7748-2375-3 (EPUB)

1. Chinese literature – 20th century – History and criticism. 2. Socialism in literature.
3. China – In literature. I. Title. II. Series: Contemporary Chinese Studies (Online).

PL2303.K55 2013

895.1'090052

C2012-903640-4

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens

Set in Futura and Warnock by Artgraphica Design Co. Ltd.

Copy editor: Deborah Kerr

Proofreader: Jonathan Wilson

Indexer: Noeline Bridge

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

www.ubcpress.ca

Contents

List of Illustrations / vii

Acknowledgments / ix

Introduction: The Road and the Writer / 1

Part 1: The War Years and the Search for Form, 1945-48

- 1 Ma Feng and Xi Rong, *Heroes of Lüliang*, and “Revolutionary Popular Literature” / 15
- 2 Zhou Libo, *Hurricane*, and the Creation of a Chinese Socialist Realism / 46

Part 2: The Great Leap Forward and the Stuff of Heroism, 1959-62

- 3 Li Zhun’s “A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang”: A Fast-Talking Vixen Creates a Village Canteen / 71
- 4 Hu Wanchun’s “A Man of Outstanding Quality”: Pavel, but Not Rita, and Certainly Not Ingrid, in the Shanghai Dockyards / 93

Part 3: The Cultural Revolution and the Spirit of Struggle, 1972-76

- 5 Hao Ran on *The Golden Road*: Transformations in Rural China / 111
- 6 Zhang Kangkang at *The Dividing Line*: Urban Youth at War with Nature / 136

Part 4: After Mao: Reversing Judgments, 1979-80

- 7 Chen Guokai’s *The Price*: The Flood of Tears / 161
- 8 Zhang Yigong’s *The Story of the Criminal Li Tongzhong*: Work with the Spade / 180

Epilogue: A Golden Road to Nowhere / 198

Notes / 210

Bibliography / 253

Index / 266

Illustrations

- 1 Illustration from *Jinguang dadao* (The golden road), comic-book version / 3
- 2 “Old Liang’s three paintings,” illustration from Sanliwan / 7
- 3 Illustration from the comic-strip “Li Shuangshuang Xiaozhuan” / 88
- 4 Illustration from *Li Shuangshuang*, comic-book version / 89
- 5 Illustration from *Longjiang song* (Song of the Dragon River), comic-book version / 149
- 6 *Chairman Mao’s Red Guard – Study from Comrade Jin Xunhua* / 151
- 7 *What Have We to Fear with the Morning Sun in Our Hearts* / 152
- 8 Illustration from *Zhengtu* (The journey) / 154
- 9 Illustration from the comic-book *Zhang Zhixin* / 177

Acknowledgments

This is a manuscript that has been far too long in the writing, and over the years I have been indebted to many people for their help. The following authors discussed with me the works that are considered below: Hao Ran, Hu Wanchun, Li Zhun, and Ma Feng (all now deceased), Chen Guokai, Zhang Kangkang, and Zhang Yigong.

Colleagues and friends who provided assistance, information, advice, and inspiration include Daniel Bryant, Roy Chan, Tina Mai Chen, Paul Clark, Ralph Croizier, Gao Hua, Gao Wangling, Ted Hutters, Vivian Li, Kimberley Ens Manning, Bonnie McDougall, Pan Ling, Michael Schoenhals, Army Schweiger, Krista van Fliet Hang, Rudolf Wagner, Ban Wang, Yifan Wang, Felix Wemheuer, Philip Williams, Wu Guoguang, Yang Kuisong, Ye Jiaying, Serhy Yekelchyk, Shengtian Zheng, and Zhou Xiaoyi. I have learned much from all my graduate students; for this project in particular, from Sulan Dai, James Keefer, Yen-kuang Kuo, Kai Zhang, Zhang Hu, and Zhou Kefen. Three anonymous readers invited by UBC Press provided valuable comments on the manuscript.

I received library assistance from Jean Hung, Liu Jing, and Liu Ying; logistical support from Liu Zengyue; help with locating illustrations from Naomi Sawada and Annette Wooff; and in seeing this project through to publication, guidance from Emily Andrew, Megan Brand, and Deborah Kerr.

Translations from *Heroes of Lüliang* appear with the permission of the co-author Ma Feng's widow Duan Xingmian; translations from my interviews with Li Zhun appear with the permission of his widow Dong Bing and their son Li Kewei; translations from *The Dividing Line* and my interview with its author Zhang Kangkang appear with her permission; and the painting *Chairman Mao's Red Guard Jin Xunhua* appears with the permission of the co-artist Xu Chunzhong.

Translations from "A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang" and *The Story of the Criminal Li Tongzhong*, and commentary on those works, that appeared in Richard King ed., *Heroes of China's Great Leap Forward* (2010) are reproduced by permission of the University of Hawai'i Press; and a section revised

from my chapter in Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer ed., *Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and the Famine* (2011) is reproduced by permission of UBC Press. Chapter 5 is revised and updated from an article that appeared in the journal *Modern Chinese Literature* in 1993, and is reproduced by permission of the editor of that journal, Howard Goldblatt, and the editor of its successor publication, *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, Kirk Denton.

To all of the above, I offer my sincere thanks.

Milestones on a Golden Road

Introduction: The Road and the Writer

I thought; hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist.
It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads
to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made.

– Lu Xun, “Guxiang”

“Back in the days when we met in Tianmen hiding out from the
[Japanese] devils, Chairman Mao was already pointing out the Golden
Road that we are walking today. On we go, my friend!” Facing the sun,
shoulder to shoulder, the two friends strode along the great road east.

– Hao Ran, *Jingguang dadao*

It was the middle of an autumn day. Sun Fu sat beside a fruit stand,
squinting in the bright sunshine. He leaned forward, hands on his
knees, and his grizzled hair seemed gray in the sunlight, gray like the
road that lay before him, a wide road that extended from the far
distance and then stretched off in the other direction.

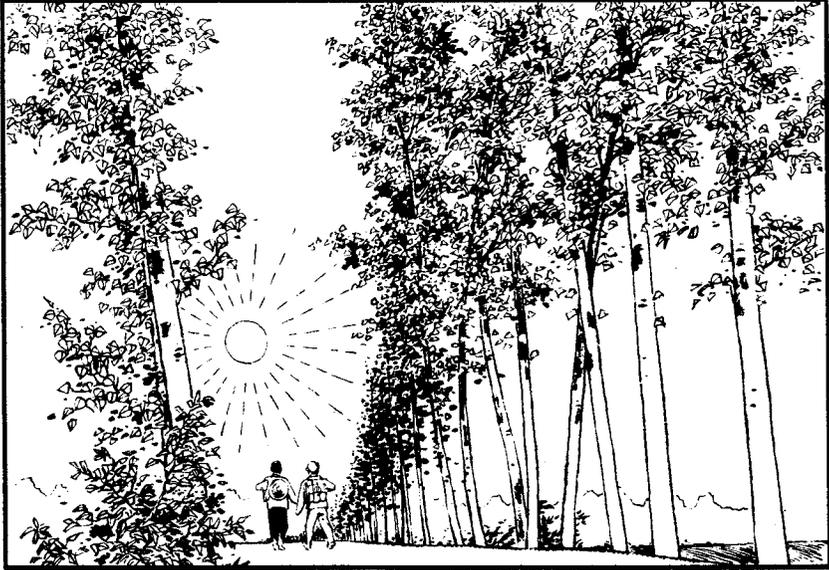
– Yu Hua, “Huanghun li de nanhai”

In a moment of visionary optimism as a boat carries him and what remains of his family from their ancestral home toward a new life in the city, the melancholic narrator of Lu Xun’s 1921 story “My Old Home” (*Guxiang*) permits himself to believe that future generations will transcend the divisions between social classes that have asserted themselves between childhood and maturity. His own childhood playmate Runtu, now beaten down by poverty, has shocked him by addressing him on his return as “master,” acknowledging the gulf between peasant and intellectual, but the narrator hopes that the gap can be narrowed in the next generation between the peasant’s son and his

own nephew. Lu Xun, a writer inclined to alienation and despair, may have appended this hopeful fragment, and others in his first collection of fiction, in deference to calls for activism by the leftist “commanders of those days.” Whatever his reasons, his words offered a ray of hope to readers at a time when the revolution that brought the Republic of China into being appeared to have stalled.¹

The metaphor chosen by Lu Xun for his narrator’s guarded optimism is that of the road trodden by many that would lead to a better place. Lu Xun’s cautious projection was turned into a triumphal teleology by the authors of the first three decades of the People’s Republic, following the determined and deterministic optimism learned from the Soviet Union. For them, the road symbolized a glorious journey, ideally eastward into the rising sun, toward the eventual goal of communism pointed out to them by the ruling Communist Party and its leader Mao Zedong. This image of the sunlit road into the future provides the title for the major fictional work of the Cultural Revolution, Hao Ran’s *The Golden Road* (*Jinguang dadao*). The novel’s title is mentioned for the first time in the passage quoted above, almost five hundred pages into the opening volume, and is charmingly illustrated by Figure 1, taken from the comic-book adaptation of the work. The moment comes after a pivotal meeting between the novel’s hero, Gao Daquan, and the speaker, one of his mentors in youth and adulthood, the soldier and later administrator Tian Yu. Their re-encounter, and its significance for the development of the era’s most celebrated (and subsequently most reviled) literary hero, will be discussed at length in Chapter 5 below.

The structuring device of the road to an ideal though unknown destination was abandoned, along with the social policies that were to be the means to reach it (in the case of *The Golden Road*, agricultural collectivization), in the free-market economy of the reform era and the more diverse and uncertain environment of late-twentieth-century Chinese culture. Thus, in his 1995 story “Boy in the Twilight” (*Huanghun li de nanhai*), Yu Hua, an author whose roads can lead in uncertain and unsettling directions, depicts a point on a road, grey this time, where a fruitseller has stayed for three years, on which dust raised by passing cars periodically plunges him into darkness.² Now the sun is setting, and the fruitseller, far from seeing the glimmer of hope offered by Lu Xun to the younger generation, takes out his pain and frustration on a young boy in a vindictive act of punitive justice, breaking his finger to punish him for the theft of an apple. The road no longer promises progress or a better life. It merely runs from a grey past to the equally grey future, through a present that is no more than a wretched existence in which the protagonist is stuck.



1 “Tian Yu said, ‘This road is one that Chairman Mao pointed out to us a long time ago. Let’s go, you can come with me to Yanshan, Secretary Liang is carrying out Chairman Mao’s directives there, guiding everyone in investigating the road to socialism.’ When he had spoken, the two friends walked due east towards the sun.”
Source: Hao Ran, Jinguang dadao [The golden road] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1975), 3:94, the comic-book retelling of Hao Ran’s novel by “Commune-member Zhang Youming,” illustrated collectively by the People’s Arts Publishers and the Revolutionary Committee of Shunyi County.

In this study, I follow the metaphor of the road through the second of the three phases outlined above, along the Golden Road destined eventually for the utopia of communism. This section of the road stretches from the imposition of Communist Party control in the revolutionary base areas centred on Yan’an to the years immediately following the Cultural Revolution, a period covering some four decades from the early 1940s to 1980. This is the age of a grand narrative of progress, of the Communist Party leading the Chinese people along the road to a prouder, more modern, and materially better future. Along this Golden Road, I have plotted a series of milestones, two significant works of fiction from each of four periods of particular political and ideological intensity. These are the civil war (1945-49), the Great Leap Forward (1958-60), the latter stages of the Cultural Revolution (1972-76), and the post-Mao catharsis (1979-80). An epilogue looks back at the Golden Road and its foremost chronicler through a reading of the final two volumes of Hao Ran’s masterwork, written in the mid-1970s but not published until 1994.

By focusing on these four key moments in the Chinese revolution, and eight texts selected to represent them, I am of necessity passing over many other significant examples of Chinese socialist fiction and other periods of momentous conflict reflected, however allusively, in literary works. Of the major novels written between the late 1940s and the early 1960s and now canonized as “red classics” (*hongse jingdian*), only the first two, written before the establishment of the People’s Republic in 1949, are considered at length. Works of the red classic canon are the objects of increasing attention from scholars in China and the West, and much of that scholarship is cited here. At the time of writing, however, the major English-language study of these novels as a group, written long before they were labelled “red classics,” remains Joe C. Huang’s 1973 *Heroes and Villains in Communist China*.³

Some significant moments of debate and contention between the arbiters of orthodoxy and the members of the managerial and intellectual classes likewise fall outside the main focus of this book. To give only the most obvious example, the Hundred Flowers movement of the mid-1950s, which is analyzed elsewhere, is mentioned briefly in Chapter 3, as a precursor to the backlash against those perceived as rightists and the launching of the Great Leap Forward later in that decade.⁴

Marking the Road

Each of the chapters that follow takes one work, viewed in the context of history and prevailing cultural policies, drawing on the intellectual biography and, where possible, the memory of its author. In the erection of literary milestones, each studied in the context of both history and literary influences, I am travelling the road forged by Marián Gálík in his *Milestones in Sino-Western Literary Confrontation (1898-1979)*.⁵ Like Gálík, I am interested in the sources of inspiration and models for modern Chinese writers in the creation and structuring of their works. In the case of the authors considered below, many of whom flourished during the gap left by Gálík between the mid-1950s and the late 1970s, I explore their creative confrontation with the West (which was less than that of the writers in Gálík’s study), with the Soviet Union, and with varying aspects of the Chinese literary tradition, influences that they themselves were often unable or unwilling to admit to at the time.

All the works considered below were officially published, the two novels first released during the civil war being republished after 1949 and gaining canonical status in the People’s Republic. All fall within the prevailing Communist Party historiography and literary policies of their days, though the two from the immediate post-Mao period can be seen to have stretched

the limits of both. None of the authors would have claimed to transgress the guidelines established for the arts under socialism by Mao Zedong in his Yan'an Talks of May 1942 (discussed in Chapter 1), which, albeit with varying interpretations, remained the official line on the arts until well after the period covered here.⁶ Thus, all the works discussed here were created in the service of socialism as perceived by the writer at the time. Not all can be said to adhere completely to the conventions of the socialist realism inherited from Stalin's Soviet Union (introduced in Chapter 2), or its Chinese successor, the combination of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism (discussed in Chapter 3), a formulation dating to the Great Leap Forward and in force when the works considered in Chapters 3 to 6 were being created. Nonetheless, they share many of the features of the Soviet canon: a view of history as the progression from the darkness of an earlier society toward the light of an eventual communist future and a concomitant "party-mindedness" (Russian: *partiinosť*; Chinese: *dangxing*), or belief in the capacity of the Communist Party and its leaders to guide the nation forward to better times.

The irony surrounding the enterprise, implicit throughout, is made explicit in the final parts of this book: once seen as the route to a communist future, the golden road of the titles (Hao Ran's and my own) is now a thing of the past, abandoned since the reforms initiated in the early 1980s, with subsequent leaderships guiding the nation on a very different path. The first three decades of Communist Party rule appear in subsequent historiography, literature, and film as a time not of progress toward shared goals, but of irrationality, arbitrary rule, and suffering. The literary works studied here that date from the civil war, the Great Leap, and the Cultural Revolution, with their unwavering faith and optimism, attempt to preclude a contrary reading, but to no avail. The sense of irony that pervades post-Cultural Revolution writing has simply intensified in later works that look back on the lurid images of joyful socialism. The Golden Road has led nowhere.

Creating the Glories of Future Past

Writing for a Communist Party leadership required an incorrigible, sometimes even perverse, optimism. "Communism," as George Steiner observed in 1961, "even where it has gone venomous, is a mythology of the human future, a vision of human possibility rich in moral demand."⁷ The communism Steiner was referring to was that of the Soviet Union, but his comments would have applied equally to communism in China, especially at the time of his writing, as wild ambition and excessive demands were leaving a legacy of exhaustion and starvation in China's countryside.⁸ The mythology of the future had drawn

Chinese intellectuals to the Communist Party in its earliest years, and those intellectuals were indispensable in perpetuating the mythology as the communists fought for and achieved power. Following communist victory in 1949, the task for China's writers and artists, as assigned by their rulers, was to reinvent the mythology, mapping the road to a glorious future. The socialist dream factory of the Mao era created a world as it should be, and would be, if the Chinese people would but trust in the wisdom of the Communist Party leadership, fulfill the often superhuman demands placed on them, and delay their expectation of the rewards of their labours. At times, most painfully as Steiner was writing the passage quoted above, socialism as it appeared in the official literature, film, and visual arts of China existed in a separate, if parallel, universe to the one we read of today in history and memoir, stubbornly inspirational at a period of desperation. The Great Leap and the fiction written about it are the subject of Chapters 3, 4, and 8.

In the chapters below, I deal with the theories that guided authors at various points along the road. Here, by way of introduction, I offer a brief but elegant demonstration from fiction of the "mythology of the human future" alluded to above as characteristic of the arts produced under communist rule. It is drawn from the work of the Communist Party's first "peasant writer," Zhao Shuli (of whom more in Chapters 1 and 3). Zhao had come to prominence in Yan'an during the early 1940s and was still a major literary figure in the late 1950s, before criticism of both him and his work led to a disastrous fall from grace, incarceration, and death during the Cultural Revolution, as one among many Chinese authors, artists, and intellectuals to suffer appallingly for their service to a mercurial and vindictive regime.⁹ In Zhao Shuli's 1959 novel *Sanliwan* (the title is the name of the place where the action occurs), the artist Liang, commissioned by the leaders of the newly formed cooperatives to paint a portrait of the village, produces a first version for inspection, to the delight of its residents (Figure 2).¹⁰

Then he is asked if it is possible to paint things that do not exist, in this case a planned canal and a network of irrigation ditches in Sanliwan. The artist says that this is certainly possible and proposes a second painting with these features added; he is then asked by the leaders of the cooperative for a third image, complete with a highway, agricultural machinery, electrification, and modern housing, to demonstrate the benefits of further collectivization. Comrade Liang completes his triptych; the paintings are titled *Sanliwan Now*, *Sanliwan Tomorrow*, and *Sanliwan in the Age of Socialism*. Looking at the second picture, set in a future almost close enough to touch, local women think of the convenience that a ready supply of water will bring them, and children make plans to catch frogs and fish; the third is perhaps too far away



2 “Old Liang’s three paintings.”

Source: Chao Shu-li [Zhao Shuli], *Sanliwan Village*, trans. Gladys Yang (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1964), facing 192. In the translated version, the artist’s name is given as Wu Ching-po. Reprinted in Zhao Shuli, *Zhao Shuli quanji* [Complete works of Zhao Shuli] (Beijing: Dazhong wenyi chubanshe, 2006), 4: facing 302.

for the ordinary villagers to grasp, though it is within the vision of their leaders.¹¹ It is easy to imagine these paintings: we have only to look back at the Cultural Revolution–era work of the peasant painters of Hu County in Shaanxi Province (adjoining Zhao Shuli’s native Shanxi Province) for an idealized image of life in the socialist countryside, as a place of harmony, abundance, and modernity.¹² The Hu County painters, like Comrade Liang in Sanliwan, depicted life as it should and would be, in line with the instructions given by Mao at Yan’an for all the arts, “even more lofty, even more

intense, even more concentrated, even more typical, even more ideal, and thus even more universal than actual everyday life.²¹³

The same injunction also guided the authors of the eight works considered in the chapters that follow. Although all drew on their own experiences in their work, the world they portrayed in their fiction was not quite the world as they observed it, but one rendered typical and adapted to accommodate the official version of the unfolding of history. Their task was to show the present, or in the case of Hao Ran as he wrote *The Golden Road*, the recent past, in its place on the trajectory from a dark past to a bright future. Where present reality was much less than ideal, in terms either of material conditions or popular concurrence with official policy, they were responsible for indicating a way to transcend hardships and reservations, and for encouraging the reader to trust in enlightened and concerned leadership to bring what they described to reality. As component parts in the machinery of the state, the role they implicitly accepted was to present the Communist Party's vision of the future in its development, suppressing any desire they may have felt to act independently, recount tragedies, or expose inequities. Their loyalty, and their inventiveness in promoting the policies of the state, might lead to official patronage and financial security, but their enjoyment of these was not uninterrupted. Most successful authors of Mao-era China, both those who had achieved fame in the Republican era and those who had risen to prominence during the seventeen years between the communist victory and the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, found themselves subjected to criticism or persecution, many in the anti-rightist campaign of the late 1950s and more, with authors considered in this study well represented, in the Cultural Revolution.

The Artist and the State

Authors' preparedness to offer such an optimistic portrayal of their society in return for publication and official support does not, in my view, make them hypocrites or quislings. The older writers among them, Ma Feng and Zhou Libo, whose works are considered in Chapters 1 and 2, were enthusiastic participants in the revolution that brought the communists to power, and they dedicated themselves to the success of that revolution, hoping, sometimes against hope, that it would deliver the new society it had promised. Those who were beneficiaries of the state's practice of nurturing new writers from village-dwellers and the industrial working class, a group that includes Li Zhun, Hu Wanchun, and Hao Ran, wrote works designed to entertain and inspire, even as the disaster of the Great Leap was under way, in the belief,

however ill-founded, that things would improve, at a time when the Communist Party could still claim to be the provider of stability and future prosperity. This does not mean that all were happy with the roles assigned to them. In conversation, both Li Zhun and Hu Wanchun asserted that, had they not been burdened by the constraints placed on them, they would have produced much finer works. Both, however, are best remembered for their Great Leap writings rather than for those produced in later life under much less limiting circumstances. By contrast, Hao Ran, who enjoyed official favour in the Cultural Revolution when most other writers were condemned and ostracized, remained unapologetic for works written during the mid-1970s at the behest of cultural authorities condemned soon afterward. Had he not written in those days, he argued, what would there have been to read?¹⁴ Of those represented in this study, only the neophyte Zhang Kangkang, now a successful author but in 1973 a city girl from Hangzhou languishing on a state farm close to the Soviet border, deliberately set out to create a world where the dominant attitudes ascribed to her generation were the opposite of her own and those of her contemporaries. She depicted the young urbanites in the northeast as resolved to continue their lives on the state farm, when what she and they most wanted was to return home. As is shown in Chapter 6, she used a later work of fiction as a recantation of that first heroic presentation.

The authors Chen Guokai and Zhang Yigong, who are considered in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively, were interviewed more than two decades after producing works in the sentimental genre of post-Mao writing that essentially exonerated the Communist Party and its leader from the most terrible misjudgments in the second half of the twentieth century. They ascribed the excesses of those days to an aberrant strain within the leadership, remained proud of works published with some difficulty in an uncertain environment, and expressed contentment with what they had been able to achieve within the limited freedoms of their day.

The Word of the Author

Except for Chapter 2, on Zhou Libo's novel *Hurricane* (*Baofeng zhouyu*), all chapters include material from conversations or more formal interviews with the authors (in the case of Zhou Libo, who died in 1979, the conversation was with his son, Professor Zhou Xiaoyi). I believe that authors can have useful things to say about what they have written, though such is not invariably the case. Even though several decades may have passed since the creation of a work (I interviewed Ma Feng almost sixty years after he co-wrote the

novel *Heroes of Lüliang*), they may still recall the context and conditions within which they wrote, recollections that can contribute to a reading of their work. Interviewing authors is often unproductive: some prefer to talk about the difficulties of publication, the obduracy of editors, and their dislike of the writings of others rather than discussing their own work or tolerating attempts at analysis of it. I am aware of the fallibilities of memory, the desire to present oneself in a positive light, the need to justify achievements that younger generations have forgotten or now belittle, and the courtesy of indulging a guest, all of which are familiar to practitioners of oral history for their potential to distort the record. There is the additional complication that authors of fiction have as their profession making things up, and authors of socialist fiction prospered to the extent they did by embellishing the heroic and placing unpalatable truths in a favourable light. These reservations notwithstanding, I have found it valuable to speak to authors, at greater or lesser length, and at varying levels of formality, while writing about their work. I confess to having been impressed, though I believe not seduced, by their openness and candour, and I regret that I was unable to pose additional questions, following further reading of their works, to the older writers among them, who died during the long process of completing this project. The readings of their fiction are mine and not theirs. To provide the reader with a sense of each work (inasmuch as this is possible in translation), I have provided extracts from them, longer where no satisfactory translation exists.

The Milestones

Following this introduction, the book is structured in four parts, each of which takes two works to explore different aspects of an issue prominent in each of four historical moments. Part 1 looks at two alternative ways of presenting a new mythology of nation building to a mass audience in the 1940s on the eve of communist victory. First, I explore the tradition of storyteller narratives enshrined in the vernacular fiction of late medieval China, which was updated in support of the communist cause and represented by *Heroes of Lüliang*, the serialized novel of guerrilla warfare by Ma Feng and Xi Rong. Second, I read a Chinese variant of the Soviet style of socialist realism, Zhou Libo's novel *Hurricane*, which describes in normative terms the process whereby peasants dispossess the landlord class and take ownership of the land. These two novels were written shortly after Mao's pronouncements on the arts in his 1942 Yan'an Forum Talks and are the two earliest red classics.

Part 2 takes two longish Great Leap short stories by celebrated authors, one of rural and the other of industrial fiction, to look at the different ways

of depicting heroes to be emulated in an age of mass endeavour. Of particular interest here are the sources from which the authors drew in creating these exemplary characters – not just from observation of meritorious citizens in contemporary society, as required by literary policy, but also from the Chinese tradition and the Soviet novel. The first of these Great Leap stories, with a heroine who emerges from a life of household drudgery to run a canteen and become a model for her village and beyond, is “A Brief Biography of Li Shuangshuang,” by the “village writer” Li Zhun, a work with antecedents in popular and literary traditions as well as the realities of the moment. The second – “A Man of Outstanding Quality,” by the “worker-writer” Hu Wanchun – features a Stakhanovite dock worker in Shanghai who achieves the impossible by feats of inspiration, persuasion, and management. Hu’s hero owes much to Pavel Korchagin, protagonist of the Soviet classic *How the Steel Was Tempered* and an officially sponsored model for Chinese youth in the 1950s.

Part 3 looks at the novel in the Cultural Revolution and offers analysis of the first two volumes of Hao Ran’s *The Golden Road*, and of another novel of the period, Zhang Kangkang’s *The Dividing Line*, both written and published during the early 1970s. Both *The Golden Road* and *The Dividing Line* are seen as exercises in transformation – transforming both the past and the present to accommodate changing orthodoxy, and, in the first case, transforming an earlier writing style and view of society insufficiently belligerent for sterner times. Hao Ran’s epic work redrafts the history of agricultural collectivization during the 1950s (already the subject of a substantial literary record) in the light of the revised historiography of the Cultural Revolution, presenting the past as an ongoing struggle between opposing lines on rural development. In the process of the hero’s journey along this road, everything is transformed: the land, its ownership, the people who farm it, and the fiction that dramatizes it. By contrast, *The Dividing Line* is set at the time of writing and transfers the political struggles at the centre of power to a state farm in the northeast, adding a thrilling battle against the forces of nature with an operatic climax and transforming, at least within the world of the novel, the attitudes of those who doubt the value of their rustication in the process.

Part 4, which examines two short novels published in 1980, shows that the view of history has reversed itself, albeit in a style that is highly reminiscent of the earlier heroic narratives, the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution now being seen not as triumphs for the Communist Party and its leader, but as disasters for the Chinese people. The political struggles are the same as those represented in Zhang Kangkang’s novel and other fiction of the mid-1970s, but the heroic activists of earlier literature are now portrayed as cynical

opportunists. By contrast, those whom the state condemns for resisting its initiatives are depicted as sympathetic figures. Both works are set at the time of writing but look back at past tragedies and exemplify the briefly prevalent tear-soaked genre known as “wounds” literature. Chen Guokai’s *The Price* laments the chaos caused to industry by the political upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. His heroes are research scientists, and his villain is the communist operative who persecutes them for spite and personal gain; the price of the title refers to the sacrifices made by the wife of a scientist to preserve his work. The final novel, *The Story of the Criminal Li Tongzhong*, by Li Zhun’s fellow provincial Zhang Yigong, looks back to the Great Leap. It focuses on the sacrifice made by a village official who is designated a criminal for leading peasants in a raid on a grain station to save them from a famine ignored by his superior. It can be read as a refutation of “Li Shuangshuang” and other Great Leap official writing. In both their content and style, these two short novels, written as the reform era was beginning, constitute a bridge between the writing of the first three decades of Communist Party rule and the more cosmopolitan and experimental literature that followed. They retain the former professions of faith that the Communist Party will provide enlightened leadership whatever the atrocities recently performed in its name but with a sentimentality and irony that had not existed in the austere writings of revolutionary realism and revolutionary romanticism.

The epilogue takes a last look at the final two volumes of *The Golden Road*, as they appeared in a new complete edition of the novel in the mid-1990s. I read them as historical anachronism: the most socialist of novels appearing in a post-socialist age, looking forward with absolute confidence to a future already long abandoned.