

**Dates of Meeting:**

23-09-1953 – 6-10-1953

**Type of Meeting:**

2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of writers and artists

**Place of Meeting:**

Beijing

**Attendance:**

Zhou Enlai, Zhou Yang , Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Guo Moruo

**Major Agenda Items:**

new goals of raising the level of artistic training and improving the quality of art

**Speeches/Reports:**

**Guo Moruo** stated in his opening speech, was that “the glorious vision of a socialist society” had presented itself concretely, but the field of literature and art was failing to meet the demands of the times and of the nation. “Our literary and artistic work, frankly put, has fallen behind reality.”

**Zhou Enlai** outlined new goals of raising the level of artistic training and improving the quality of art Shen Yanbing's talk(Mao Dun ) would have been the start signal for renewed nation-wide efforts to translate works of foreign authors had it not been for the frequent interruptions of political campaigns that would throw the translators off-balance once again.

He urges “to cast wide their nets in selecting themes and styles to satisfy the diversified needs of the people”

**Zhou Yang** “Struggle to create even more excellent works of literature and art” September 24, 1953, “Of course, works of literature and art should express the Party's policy; for literature and art to leave Party and government policy is for them to leave the leadership of the Party and the government. Policy is set according to the objective laws of social development, and it reflects and represents the people's basic interests in a concentrated way. When observing and describing life, writers must take Party and government policy as their guide and must evaluate any phenomenon of social life from the viewpoint of policy. Writers must express the great strength produced by policy in the lives of the masses. Our policy ultimately depends on the masses and the cadres for implementation; once policy is grasped by millions of the masses, it becomes an irresistible force changing and directing the lives of the people and deciding the fate of the whole country and people. Therefore, policy expressed in works of literature and art is, most basically, the expression of the flesh and blood relation between the Party and the people and of the Party's leadership of the masses, the expression of the struggle between the advanced and the backward among the people, the expression of the model role of the Communist Party as a vanguard, and the expression of the superiority of the people's democratic system. Therefore, correctly expressing policy and truthfully describing life are completely united. And the truthful description of life is the highest principle of realistic art ”

“. . . what is the situation in our leadership work with respect to literature and art? It has to be said that it is most unsatisfactory. This is one of the serious reasons creating the present backward state in literary and artistic work. . . .

We are comparatively accustomed to using simple administrative methods and are not good at using social methods in leading activities of artistic creation. When arranging creative assignments, some offices leading literary and artistic work often do not inquire about the backgrounds and writing abilities of each writer but arbitrarily, as if setting topics for grammar school students, set writing deadlines, and even prescribe artistic form. And when the work is written, they often simply and lightly reject it, not taking seriously the success or failure of a work, and so they also rarely do conscientious study or summarising of this kind of successful or unsuccessful experience with a view to helping writers. This kind of administrative leadership method is a manifestation of a leadership without ideology or politics; at the same time it promotes the incorrect tendencies towards generalism and formulism.”

Zhou mentions visual art infrequently, but the references are important. Filled with quotes from Mao Zedong, the speech in its general tone implies that Zhou Yang did not speak for himself alone: "The principle of Comrade Mao Zedong's directive on dramatic activities, 'Let one hundred flowers bloom,' should become the policy for development of all literary and arts professions. If we need figure painting, we also need landscape [*fengjing*] painting .... If we need comparatively high-class, complex artistic forms, we also need large quantities of comparatively simple and easy artistic forms," Although his invoking of the hundred flowers might seem to loosen the screws on some artists, the new freedom was to be highly qualified. "We take socialist realist methods as the highest creative and critical standard for all our literature and arts." Socialist realism, a term attributed to Stalin and first

mentioned in print in 1932, may be defined as a "means of reflecting life in art peculiar to socialist society. It demands the true portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development.

"Comrade Mao Zedong has given a very high evaluation to the achievements of the new literature and art movement that began on May Fourth [1919], of which Lu Xun is representative .... But the May Fourth Movement has not correctly resolved the duty of continuing the national literary and artistic heritage. At the time, there were people who had a completely negative and erroneous attitude toward the national heritage. This kind of attitude, when joined with a blind reverence for culture of the Western capitalist class, was a harmful influence on the subsequent development of new literature and art .... Many writers and artists often see only the feudal and backward side of the national heritage and have not recognized that the legacies are the treasury of our great national spirit .... Their understanding of the legacies' value is often narrow and one-sided. For example... [the idea that] painting is only "single-line and flat-color."

"Organizing and researching the national artistic legacies should become focal points for the teaching and research of arts schools .... First we must take the democratic and progressive aspects of our heritage and distinguish them from the feudal and backward parts, take the realistic parts and distinguish them from the antirealistic parts .... In national painting, for example, that which does not stress description of real life, that which does not stress artistic creation, such as making a specialty of purely imitating the brush and ink of the ancients..., must be opposed"

One important purpose of the 1953 congress was to reorganize the various associations administered by the Federation of Literary and Arts Circles. Zhou Yang explained that they would now be voluntary organizations for professional writers and artists, which is to say that they are not groups for ordinary literature and art lovers. The important duty of the associations is to organize writers' and artists' creative work and study .... After reorganizing, the associations should absorb classical literature researchers, national dramatists, *national artists*, and national musicians as members and as participants in the governing structure .... Leading popular work in literature and art and training young writers and artists are among the important duties of the associations

**Shao Quanlin** linked Hu Shi with a negative trend that had developed in Chinese literature since the May Fourth Movement, which was characterized by anti-realism, decadence, aestheticism and reformism

**Jiang Feng** speech on the situation of art work during the first four years of the PRC and on the mission of the newly founded Chinese Artists Association. September 25, 1953 .. stated, first, that the Chinese art world had established a strong popular base of support. Over 180 million nianhua, lianhuanhua, and propaganda pictures were published during the four-year period 1949-1953 (including, according to incomplete statistics, 6,800 different paintings and 6,490 stories in serial illustration form), in addition to pictorial magazines (huabao), of which thirty-six titles were in print in 1952. According to Jiang, guohua, oil painting, and sculpture production had increased. Art progressed and became useful as it began to have a closer relationship with the lives of the people, to inspire enthusiasm for labor, and to work in concert with every organized movement to reform society. Jiang stated that the quality of art had improved, with creativity in form and style demonstrated by particular artists and works. Beyond its usefulness to China, Jiang praised recent art for its contributions to the international peace and friendship movement. Via exhibitions, exchanges, and other foreign contacts, people of the socialist countries and of the capitalist countries could now gain knowledge of the lives of Chinese people. Chinese art was exhibited in thirty-five nations, and such art books as Gu Yuan's prints and political cartoon anthologies were reprinted in many socialist countries. Amateur artists in factories and elsewhere were encouraged to create art, and many professional artists, such as those at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, spent time working in factories. Thought reform was deemed to have succeeded, especially by means of the "Three Antis" Movement and the arts and literature rectification campaign. The former, directed against corruption, waste, and bureaucratism, targeted officials. The latter was part of a nationwide campaign to remold the thought of China's intellectuals based, according to Jiang Feng, on Mao's principle of serving the peasants, workers, and soldiers. The second section of Jiang's report detailed remaining inadequacies in art. These included a continued deficiency in the quality as well as the quantity of work produced, a failure to correct conservative ideas that had hindered the improvement of guohua, and artists' resistance to the study of political treatises. We will return to his criticisms of guohua shortly. The last part of the report outlined the planned reorganization of the artists association, henceforth to be known as the Chinese Artists Association, as an effort to solve such problems. Jiang announced that the new national organization would consist of five sections. The first was the creation committee, which

encouraged and oversaw the making of art. This committee was divided into six subcommittees by specialty: painting, national painting, printmaking, cartoons, sculpture, and applied arts. The CAA's other four sections were the national arts research committee, the popularization work section, the editorial section, and the exhibition section.

#### **Other Decisions and/or Actions:**

- Whereas previously people had belonged to the Federation by virtue of their membership in some other organisation, such as one of the professional associations, this was to be changed to an individual membership system.
- Professional standards for joining were to be put in place, which resulted in some decrease in membership numbers. The professional associations were to become organisations of professionals only and membership standards were to become more strict.
- Local branches of the professional associations, but not of the Federations, were to be eliminated.
- The AWA was renamed the Chinese Artists Association. The new charter of the CAA was published in early 1954. Like many CCP statements, beginning with Mao's Yan'an Talks, it incorporated seemingly incompatible goals. It stipulated that the association would uphold the Marxist-Leninist literary and artistic principles of the Chinese Communist party and would adopt socialist realist creative methods. In contradiction to this socialist realist mandate, one of its lesser duties was to promote study of the heritage of visual art (meishu) so as to develop China's excellent national artistic (yishu) tradition. 28 Just as the incongruity between popularization and the raising of standards in the Yan'an Talks was resolved by giving primacy to first one then the other in each succeeding period,29 the CAA charter provides for the possibility of the alternation of socialist realism and traditional art. Nevertheless, it was clear until 1956 that the party art bureaucracy intended socialist realism to be primary.
- The Second Congress stressed socialist realism as the highest norm for literary composition and criticism, and raised the issue of how to portray the typical image of the new hero. The Congress pointed out the problems resulting from using crude bureaucratic methods and the limitations this placed on literary and artistic creation, and the fact that many literary works were formulaic and over-generalised. The criticism of formulism and over-generalisation achieved very little under the political situation prevailing at the time
- Chairman: Guo Moruo Vice Chairman: Mao Dun, Zhou Yang
- Members Ding Ling\*, Ba Jing\*, Lao She\*, Ke Zhongping\*, Hong Shen\*, Xia Yan\*, Ma Dicong, Yuan Muzhi, Mel Lanfang, Chen Yi, Yang Hansheng\*, Qi Baishi, Sheng Zhenduo\*, Ouyang Ytjz Ian, Cai Chusheng, Lu Maji \* Member of the Management Committee of the Chinese Writers' Union

#### **Remarks:**

1. Each constituent group, including the Art Workers Association, held separate meetings at which they reorganized in accordance with the directives calling for new, higher professional standards in art.
2. Ba Jin (Pa Chin) [real name Li Feigan] was elected vice-chairman of China Writers' Association while working as chief editor of Shanghai-based literary magazines of "Literary and Art Monthly", "Harvest" and "Shanghai Literature".  
President: Guo Moruo  
Vice Presidents: Mao Dun, Zhou Yang
3. See Andrews, Julia Frances. Painters and politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979
4. In September 1954, hardly a year after the reorganization that brought forth the CAA, a national print exhibition opened in Beijing, presenting almost 200 works by eighty-five printmakers.