Our revolutionary work has two aspects: to reform society and to reform people—people's souls. The politician is the strategist and tactician of the revolution. He is the unifier, organizer, promoter, and leader of the revolutionary force; his duty is primarily to reform the social system. The artist is the "engineer of the soul" (linghun de gongchengshi) whose duty is primarily to reform people's souls (mind, spirit, thought, consciousness—here all one thing).

The darkness and filth in people's souls is the product of the inequity (bu heli) of the social system; before the social system has been fundamentally changed, a fundamental change in the human soul is impossible. The process of reforming the social system is also the process of reforming the human soul. The former expands the sphere of the latter, the latter speeds the completion of the former. The work of the politician and the work of the artist are mutually supplementary and interdependent.

The politician is primarily the commander of the material force of the revolution; the artist is primarily the instigator of its spiritual force. The former often is a sober and cool-headed person good at carrying out the actual struggle to eliminate filth and darkness and to realize purity and brightness; the latter, how-

*This document was translated by Timothy Cheek, who notes: We know from the May 26, 1942, denunciation of "Politicians, Artists" that this essay was written in the journal of Yan'an's Literary Resistance Association, Spring Rain (Gu Yu), Vol. 1:4. Until recently, the full text has not been available. It was reprinted in a set of documents on Chinese literary debates, History of Thought Struggles in Contemporary Chinese Literature (Zhongguo xiandai wenyi sixiang douzheng shi) (Sichuan, n.p., 1976), pp. 467–71, which dated Wang's article to February 17, 1942, and in Li Zhengjie et al., Historical Materials on the Literary Movement During the Anti-Japanese War in Yan'an and Various Other Democratic Base Areas) (Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Yan'an jige Kangri minzhu genzhudi wenxue yundong ziliao), Vol. 1 (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 348–57. All of the documents composed by Wang Shiwei and included in Dai Qing's text (except Document I:1, the Lenin Preface) come from Li Zhengjie's collection, pp. 348–55. In the absence of the original publication the absolute authenticity of these reprints (which are identical) cannot be determined, but half of the present text already existed in the lengthy selections reprinted in the textual analyses attacking it on May 26 and June 16 in the Liberation Daily. There are no discrepancies between the overlapping sections, save a few typographical errors. Thus we assume the text is authentic.
ever, is often more passionate and sensitive, good at exposing filth and darkness and indicating purity and brightness and so, from a spiritual level, replenishing the revolution’s fighting power.

The politician understands that in the revolutionary process the people of his camp are not faultless and that affairs can hardly be 100 percent perfect. Looking in terms of the big picture, he wants to assure that as the wheels of history progress light will prevail. The artist from a greater passion and sensitivity inevitably longs for people to become more loveable and for affairs to become more pleasant. Working from concrete details, the artist tries as much as possible to eliminate darkness and thus to make the wheels of history move forward with the greatest possible speed.

As the actual reformer of the social system, the politician emphasizes affairs; as the engineer of the soul, the artist demands perfection of the individual.

On how to unite, organize, and lead the revolutionary force and on how to carry out the actual struggle—the politician is superior to the artist. But the artist, too, has a superiority and that is: by entering the innermost soul of humanity freely he reforms it—reforms himself in order to strengthen himself, reforms the enemy in order to disintegrate the enemy.

The politician and the artist each have defects. For the sake of successfully attacking the enemy, uniting with friendly armies and strengthening himself, the politician must be worldly wise, have an excellent command of cunning methods and be good at dealing with both enemies and friends. His defects come from just these merits. When these skills are used in revolutionary tasks, they become the most beautiful and glorious “arts of revolution.” But apart from the truly great politician, none can avoid some desire to use these skills for their own reputation, position, and profit and thus to harm the revolution. Here we demand that the sharp claws of the cat will only be used to catch the rat and not to grab the chickens. Here is drawn the dividing line between the good politician and the self-seeking one. We must especially guard against the cat that cannot catch rats, but is expert at snatching chickens.

As for the defects of artists in general, the most important are arrogance, partiality (pianxia), unsociability, and eccentricity; they are poor at uniting with their own ranks to the point of mutual disdain and in-fighting. Here we demand that the engineers of the soul first reform their own souls to become pure and bright. To purge one’s soul of the filth and darkness within is a difficult and bitter process, but it takes us along a great road that must be traveled.

The Chinese revolution is especially hard. On the one hand, everyone understands the difficulty of reforming social systems, but on the other not many understand the reason why it is so hard to reform people’s souls. “The further one goes east, the darker society becomes.” Old China is a pus-covered bloody society full of filth and darkness. Those Chinese who have long lived in that society have naturally become corrupted in it. Even ourselves—the revolutionary warriors creating a new China—cannot be an exception. This is a cruel fact. Only if
we bravely face up to it will we be able to understand that in the process of reforming the social system we must at the same time seriously and deeply reform our souls in order to speed up the accomplishment of the first task and to guarantee its success.

Lu Xun fought all his life. But even those who have the slightest insight into him certainly can comprehend that in the midst of his fighting he was very lonely. He fought because he recognized the laws of social development and he believed the future would certainly be brighter than the present. He felt alone because he could see that the souls of his battle companions contained much filth and darkness. He could not help but understand this truth: the task of reforming old China will be only carried out by old China’s children—who carry filth and darkness. But that great heart of his could not help but have some loneliness, because he so longed to see his battle companions be a bit more loveable, a bit more loveable!

The revolutionary camp exists in old China, and the revolutionary warriors are born out of old China; thus our souls cannot but carry filth and darkness. The nature of the current revolution also determines that aside from allying with the peasants and urban petty-bourgeois classes we must further carry other even more backward class strata (jieji jieceng) along the same road. Moreover since we must make a certain amount of compromise for them we must necessarily be contaminated by even more filth and darkness. Thus, the artist’s work of reforming the soul is even more important, more difficult, more urgent. Bravely but appropriately we should expose all filth and darkness; wash them out. This is just as important as praising brightness: even more important. The work of exposure and cleansing is not just negative work, because as darkness decreases light will naturally increase. Some people think revolutionary artists should “close ranks,” that if we expose our own defects this will provide the enemy with an opening for attack. This is a short-sighted view; our camp today has already grown so strong that it is not afraid to expose its own defects, though it still has not strengthened itself enough. Correct use of self and mutual criticism is the necessary method for consolidating its strength. As for those national pests in the anticommunist secret service, even if we really had no defects whatsoever they would still be able to start rumors to slander us. Actually, they hope we will conceal our faults for fear of criticism and so cause darkness to expand.

There are a few politicians who are arrogant; when they talk about artists their mouths float up in sarcastic smiles. There are as well a few artists who are conceited; when they mention politicians they, too, shrug their shoulders. In fact, objectively they both have some truth. It would be best if each took the other as a mirror in which to inspect themselves. Don’t forget: we all are old China’s children carrying filth and darkness.

The truly great politician certainly has a truly great soul sufficient to remodel and cleanse by personal example (ganhua) the darkness and filth in the souls of others; here the great politician is also the great artist. The artist who truly has a
great soul is also certainly able to unite, organize, mobilize, and lead the revolutionary forces; here the great artist is also the great politician.

Finally, with cordial sincerity and ardent hope, I respectfully call out in a thin voice to my comrade artists: Assume more fully the great mission of transforming the soul and first focus on doing work among ourselves and our own camp. Especially in China, reform the social system; it not only determines the speed at which the revolution will be completed but also will influence the success or failure of revolutionary work.