ABSTRACT

Mao Dun (1896 - 1981) was an outstanding novelist, essayist, literary critic in the history of modern Chinese Literature. During his life time, he has already achieved an enviable status as a leading protagonist of the New Literary Movement.

His novels were like a mirror reflecting the realities of the Chinese agrarian society which was on the verge of disintegration, and they depict vividly the disillusionment and frustration of the idealistic youth and dissatisfied intellectuals in the midst of constant internecine wars. As such, his novels reveal the vicissitudes of life of the Chinese people gripped by the great revolutionary upheavels. For his literary attainments, he is often regarded as the 'Artist of the Times'.

His first novel, "the Eclipse"《蚀》，was written in 1927. His magnum opus "Midnight"《子夜》 had won him great acclaim and elevated his status as one of the leading literary figures in his days. Literary critics have written extensively on "the Eclipse", "Rainbow"《虹》 and "Midnight", but few have paid adequate attention to his later works such as "Putrefaction" which was written during the anti-Japanese war period. Critiques on "Putrefaction" often smack of political flavour, but lack in objective and penetrating analyses. This thesis attempts to evaluate objectively the literary merits of his novel and to highlight its significance in the modern Chinese literature.

Based his novel primarily on the "New Fourth Army" or "Wan Nan Incident" (《皖南事变》), the author began writing "Putrefaction"
in the summer of 1941. In the form of a diary, the novel unravels the atrocities and brutalities committed on the Chinese youth by the Kuomintang secret agent. The plot centres on Chao Hui Ming who is a member of the secret agent. The novel, too, exposes the ruthlessness and unscrupulousness of the Kuomintang secret agents who are anti-communist and heedless to national interest, wanting to achieve their nefarious objectives at all expenses.

This study on Mao Dun’s "Putrefaction" consists of six chapters.

The first chapter is an introduction which briefly explains the reason for selecting Mao Dun's "Putrefaction" for investigation, and outlines the scope of my thesis.

The next chapter attempts to make a survey of the author's life and discusses its bearing on his novels.

Chapter Three discusses in details the "Wan Nan Incident", the epochal event, which forms the subject matter of the author's novel.

The fourth chapter discusses the main themes of the novel and seeks to analyse the contents of the work and to bring out its social significance.

Chapter Five attempts to evaluate the literary merits of the novel. Emphasis is on characterisation, plot, diction and style. Here, the shortcomings of the book are also discussed.

The final chapter is the conclusion. It deals with Mao Dun's role in and his contribution to modern Chinese literature. In this chapter, I also try to analyse and comment on the various studies made by other writers on the novel "Putrefaction".