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## Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices

**Lu Xun**

*Translated and Annotated by Jon Eugene von Kowallis*

Corroded at the core and wavering spiritually, our once-glorious nation seems destined to wither away of its own devices amid the throes of internecine quarreling among the heirs to our civilization. Yet throughout the empire not a word is spoken against this, silence reigns, and all channels are blocked.<sup>1</sup> Rash doctrines have deluded the minds of the people,

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1. *Tianxia* 天下 (lit. "all under heaven") originally connoted the entire world known to the Chinese. Here it more probably refers to the author's own nation, hence I have translated it as "empire." *Weiyán* 违言 means "to speak against" in the sense of to directly challenge or admonish. The term originates in the *Zuo zhuan* 左传 [Zuo commentary], Duke Yin 隱公 section, Year Eleven. *Jimo* 寂寞 (silence/loneliness) would become a seminal term in Lu Xun's writing, suggesting repression and alienation. *Tian di bi* 天地闭 means all chan-

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1 whilst reckless demagogues heighten the pitch of their rhetoric by the day,  
 2 spreading their poison and wielding their daggers as if nothing short of the  
 3 imminent collapse of our ancestral land could sate them. Yet throughout the  
 4 empire not a word is spoken against this, silence reigns, and all channels  
 5 are blocked. As I have not yet abandoned hope for the promise of the  
 6 future, I remain eager to hear the voices of the hearts<sup>2</sup> of all thinking men  
 7 and earnestly entreat them to share with me their illuminating thoughts.<sup>3</sup>  
 8 For this inner light can break through darkness and silence, while the voices  
 9 of the heart can provide deliverance from falsehood and chicanery. In  
 10 human society such voices function like a clap of spring thunder that bestirs  
 11 the hundred plants to bud; like the crack of dawn in the east, they herald the  
 12 passing of the night. While I do not expect such a feat from the populace at  
 13 large, I cherish the hope that one or two scholars will take a stand, setting  
 14 an example for the rest and affording the people a chance to escape oblivion.  
 15 This hope, though humble and small, is like the sole remaining string  
 16 on a broken lyre or one lone star in the autumn sky. How much the worse  
 17 off would we all not be if even such a tiny glimmer of hope were denied us?  
 18 Only peaks solid as Sumeru<sup>4</sup> or mighty as Mount Tai<sup>5</sup> can withstand the  
 19 impact of extrinsic forces, other sentient beings<sup>6</sup> cannot remain unaffected.

20 \_\_\_\_\_  
 21 nels (lit. “heaven and earth”) are closed and comes from a line in the *Yi jing* 易经 [Book  
 22 of changes], *Kun wen* 坤文 commentary: *Tian di bi, xianren yin* 天地闭, 贤人隐 (“Heaven  
 23 and earth are closed, worthies [retreat into] seclusion”). Here it alludes to troubled times  
 24 where the freedom of speech or active exchange of ideas is being curtailed.

25 2. Lu Xun employs the term *xinsheng* 心声 (lit. “voices of the heart”) to mean sincere  
 26 and deeply held sentiments. It originates in the *Wen shen* 问神 (Enquiring of the spirits)  
 27 section of Yang Xiong’s 扬雄 *Fayan* 法言, where it suggests “voice” in the sense of spoken  
 28 words (*yan xin sheng ye, shu xin hua ye* 言心声也, 书心画也 “words are the voices  
 29 of the heart, writing the pictures of the heart”). See Morohashi Tetsuji 诸桥辙次, *Dai Kan-*  
 30 *Wa Jiten* 大汉和词典 (Tokyo: Taishukan, 1984) 4:4346. *Xinsheng* is an important term in  
 31 Lu Xun’s early literary thought, occurring first in his 1907 essay, “Moluo shi li shuo” 摩罗  
 32 诗力说 [On the power of Mara poetry].

33 3. *Neiyao* 内曜 (lit. “inner brightness/inner light”) should be translated “inner-brilliance”  
 34 according to Cheung Chiu-yee 张刳胎. Cheung suggests a link between this term and  
 35 Nietzsche’s “roots of passion” and Freud’s “life instinct”—the libido, which he in turn  
 36 tells us is related to Nietzsche’s “will to power.” See his monograph *Lu Xun: The Chi-*  
 37 *nese “Gentle” Nietzsche* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001), 40. The term is also employed by  
 38 Lu Xun in “Wenhua pianzhi lun” 文化偏至论 [On imbalanced cultural development] (1907).

39 4. The Chinese name *Xumi* 须弥 transliterates the Sanskrit *Sumeru* (lit. “of wondrous  
 height”), referring to a legendary mountain, sacred in both Buddhist and Hindu tradition.

5. Mount Tai in west-central Shandong, one of the Five Sacred Peaks of China, is symbolic of strength and stability.

6. *Youqing* 有情 (lit. “having feelings”) is a Buddhist term used to describe all sentient

Whenever violent gales rip through a valley or the strong rays of the sun  
 beat down upon a shallow river, changes are bound to occur in all things  
 that feel their force—this is the nature of matter. Such changes are even  
 more apparent in the realm of living creatures. As the sun’s energy arrives  
 with spring, ants begin crawling about on the ground; in late autumn, the  
 chirping insects fall silent. All flying and crawling creatures alter their activi-  
 ties in response to external factors, as dictated by biological principles.  
 Though human beings are superior to other living things, they inevitably  
 have their own particular emotional and physical reactions to the impact of  
 external forces, like all other living things. People generally experience a  
 sense of elation in spring; they concentrate in summer; with the desolation  
 of autumn, their spirits sink; and as with the hibernation of creatures, in win-  
 ter they grow somber. Sentiments are thus affected by seasonal change,  
 sometimes resulting in grievance and conflict. Yet no external events, be  
 they natural or human, have the power to alter a man’s convictions so long  
 as his words come from the heart. If something runs counter to his beliefs,  
 though the entire world might sing it with one voice, he cannot chime in. His  
 speech must give substance to his own views, not circumscribe or contain  
 them, because of the sheer forcefulness of the thoughts and ideas which  
 illuminate his heart and stir in his mind like the great waves of a mighty  
 ocean. Consequently, once his voice arises, the whole land will reawaken  
 and that strength could well prove greater than any other natural force, stir-  
 ring the mortal world and startling it into an awakening. This awakening will  
 mark the beginning of our rise out of the present situation. Only when one  
 speaks from the heart, becoming master of one’s own soul, can one begin  
 to have an individual identity; only when each person possesses an indi-

beings. Zhuangzi 庄子 uses it earlier in “Qi wu lun” 齐物论 with the connotation of “iden-  
 tity”: 可行已信; 而不见其形, 有情而无形。 See Chen Guying 陈鼓应, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi*  
 庄子今注今译 [Zhuangzi with modern annotations and vernacular translation] (Beijing:  
 Zhonghua Shuju, 1983), 1:46. A. C. Graham translates: “That as ‘Way’ it can be walked is  
 true enough, but we do not see its shape; it has identity but no shape.” See A. C. Graham,  
*Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), 51. Burton Watson  
 renders it: “He can act—that is certain. Yet I cannot see his form. He has identity but no  
 form.” See Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia  
 University Press, 1968), 38. A number of early Buddhist terms were borrowed from Daoist  
 vocabulary, and Lu Xun makes frequent use of expressions from *Zhuangzi* in this essay.  
 These linguistic borrowings, however, do not necessarily connote a direct philosophical  
 connection. See the views of Itoo Toramaru 伊藤虎丸 (1927–2003) as expressed in the  
 afterword to his commentary in *Rojin zenshu* 鲁迅全集 [Complete works of Lu Xun (in  
 Japanese translation)] (Tokyo: Gakken, 1986), 10:77.

vidual identity will the public approach a total awakening. However, if everyone leans in the same direction and ten thousand mouths sing the same tune, this singing cannot come from the heart, it is mere chiming in with others, like the meshing of gears in a machine.<sup>7</sup> Such a chorus is more disturbing to the ear than the groaning of trees or the clamorous cries of certain birds because it emphasizes the profound silence in the background. Yet China at present is an all-too-perfect example of just such a silence. The chaotic situation throughout China has given ample opportunity for foreign marauders: amid the ravages of the wars that ensued, people could scarcely survive. Men of integrity grew haggard,<sup>8</sup> while learned scholars retreated into the abyss of silence and isolation.<sup>9</sup> It is, in fact, difficult to determine whether the ideals of old<sup>10</sup> are still cherished by our people, but appearances suggest that weariness, inertia, and passivity have prevailed among them for a long time. Now the situation is changing again: different

7. The term *jigua* 机栝, here rendered “meshing of gears in a machine,” originally referred to a crossbow mechanism. The “Qi wu lun” chapter of *Zhuangzi* employs it to question the ultimately subjective nature of human judgments: 小恐惴惴，大恐纍纍。其发若机栝，其司是非之谓也。See Chen Guying 陈鼓应, *Zhuangzi jinzhu jinyi*, 1:41. Watson translates: “Their little fears are mean and trembly; their great fears are stunned and overwhelming. They bound off like an arrow or a crossbow pellet, certain that they are the arbiters of right and wrong” (Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 37). Compare Graham’s version: “‘Petty fears intimidate, / The supreme fear calms. / It shoots like the trigger releasing the string on the notch,’ referring to its manipulation of ‘That’s it, that’s not’” (Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, 50).

8. *Meiren momian* 美人墨面 (lit. “the faces of beauties were dark [and gaunt]”) occurs in the *Lanming xun* 览冥训 section of *Huainanzi* 淮南子 as an image (“beauties with disheveled hair and darkened faces”) employed to decry the cruel outrages of tyrant Jie 桀 at the end of the Xia 夏 dynasty. Ito Toramaru, in his notes to the Japanese translation of this essay in *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:74n14, interprets it here as a reference to the way in which Qing 清 soldiery rode roughshod over the populace at the collapse of the Ming 明 dynasty.

9. Literally, *fu qingling zhi yuan* 赴清冷之渊 means “they went into a clear, chilly abyss” and could suggest a watery grave, as in the case of poet-statesman Qu Yuan 屈原 from the Chu kingdom in ancient days, who committed suicide after being slandered at court. Again, Ito Toramaru takes this as a reference to events surrounding the Manchu invasion when numerous Ming loyalists took their own lives rather than surrender to the alien victors. Qingleng 清冷 may also be understood as a place name in Henan 河南 Province in the vicinity of Nanyang 南阳, but such suicides occurred throughout the Jiangnan 江南 region, including Lu Xun’s own hometown of Shaoxing 绍兴. See *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:74n15.

10. *Jiu nian* 旧念 (lit. “old ideas/concepts/ways of thinking”) might also be translated “nostalgia for the old [ways].”

ideas and strange new things are gradually coming into China. Out of concern for the fate of their endangered nation, men of ambition travel to Europe and America in the hope of borrowing elements of Western culture that can be adapted for their native land. Though they breathe fresh air and are exposed to new ideas abroad, the blood that flows within them remains that of descendants of the Yellow Emperor. Luxuriant plants may wither in confinement, yet flourish again through nourishment from without. Consequently, due to the revitalization of the old and the selective introduction of the new, a liberal and enlightened spirit prevails. On the one hand, we are broadening our own horizons; on the other, we are considering the possibilities traditional things hold for their native land. Once such ideas are articulated, they may well continue to gain force until, like a thunderbolt, they shake everything around them. Dreamers will continue to dream on in their slumber, but those who have awakened will agree that this is the correct path to follow, thus the people of China may yet be spared the terrible fate of national extinction through reliance on this company of learned men. Even if only one of them remains alive, China still has a hope of survival. Be that as it may, as time goes on, our state of silence continues unabated. And a thorough search in every direction fails to turn up any men of the sort needed. There are none who speak from their hearts; none who respond to outside stimuli. This benighted silence has transformed us into [a people] half dead and half alive. The brutal suppression of dissent<sup>11</sup> in the past has finally taken its toll, and the resultant process of decay will continue, obliterating all hope of regeneration. This is a matter of truly lamentable and grievous proportions. Yet I am also aware that those who would find fault with my views will have much to say against this. They will point out that for more than a decade China has been subjected to grievous humiliation [by foreign powers], but that because of this the intellectuals are gradually awakening from their dreamlike sleep, articulating the meaning of a [modern] nation and the significance of a [responsible] citizenry; a nascent public spirit and concern for the welfare of others has sprouted, and our will for independence and self-preservation has been fortified as the tide of public sentiment surges by the day—people are willing to speak out and express their opinions more and more. Foreign visitors to China are all amazed at how adept we have shown ourselves to be at reform. The inland gentry, on coming into contact with the material civilizations of alien regions and their

11. *Yizhe* 意者 might also be translated as “critics.” Again, it is possible that we have a veiled anti-Qing comment here.

1 products, take to imitating their customs and languages. Strutting down the  
2 street in top hats and tuxedos, they greet Westerners with a handshake  
3 and a smile, all quite convincingly. Those who dwell in the hinterland and  
4 are versed in the new ideas and trends are quick to lecture their compa-  
5 triots on the duties of citizens of a twentieth-century nation.<sup>12</sup> Their listeners  
6 all nod in approval and spare no effort in striving toward a timely completion  
7 of the goals set out for them. In addition, the gentry edify the people daily  
8 with newspaper articles and, on occasion, even attempt to enlighten them  
9 with books. It is held that these publications, although employing phrase-  
10 ology that tends to be awkward and obscurantist, so much so that readers  
11 cannot fully understand what is being said, will still serve as effective tools  
12 for the introduction of modern civilization to China. If they can revamp and  
13 retrain our armed forces, and successfully develop industry and commerce,  
14 before long the nation will attain wealth and power. We are still in a prepara-  
15 tory stage at present, yet everything is changing. Were persons long dead  
16 to view the present situation from their graves, they would be astounded at  
17 how much better the ideas and developments of today seem compared  
18 with those of the past, regretting only that they had died too soon. So “what  
19 do you mean [those opposed to my view would ask] by asserting that  
20 ‘silence still reigns [in China],’ et cetera”? If all the arguments to the con-  
21 trary are correct, then China at present is indeed a nation of tumult and  
22 clamor. But let us inquire into the nature of the opinions being expressed  
23 throughout society and the measures actually being taken by people.  
24 Neither voices of the heart nor illuminating ideas are anywhere to be found.  
25 Because the times and circumstances are different, the means of survival  
26 have changed with them: some people, fearful of suffering hunger and cold,  
27 rush to take up dishonest ways, donning the cloak of reform in order to con-  
28 ceal their naked self-interest. The situation may be compared to a wood-  
29 man boasting about his ax, while ascribing the country’s weakness to the  
30 farmers’ use of plowshares; or hunters praising the blunderbuss, while  
31 alleging that the people’s poverty is caused by fishermen who are enam-  
32 oured of nets. Then there are those who have traveled in Europe. If they  
33 happen to have learned to make devices to narrow women’s waists, like  
34 corsets and girdles, then they will encourage the cult of chastity by assert-  
35 ing that such fashions are “civilized” and maintain that refusal to adopt  
36 them is but barbarism. If those people really were woodmen, hunters, or  
37 corset makers, that would be alright; but in actuality they are incompetents  
38

39 12. Here he is critical of the inland gentry who style themselves as reformers.

who have not even mastered a trade. Deep inside they are foul and vacu- 1  
ous and can but spread hearsay and half-baked truths in order to hoodwink 2  
their contemporaries. Despite the growing number of persons who tout 3  
[reform] and the even greater number of those who chime in, these people 4  
do nothing to alleviate our desolation. In fact, the daily quantity of poison 5  
they produce is by itself sufficient to accelerate the decline and fall of China. 6  
One can but conclude that the misery they are bringing about is actually 7  
much worse than silence. Thus what is of primary value and offers us the 8  
greatest hope at present is that men of learning might appear with their 9  
own convictions and the subtlety and critical distance necessary to insulate 10  
themselves from the pompous claims and rash deceptions that presently 11  
abound and thoroughly critique [our] civilization.<sup>13</sup> These men would of 12  
necessity possess unwavering faith in their own principles and never be 13  
swayed by the praise or the condemnation of society. If the world lauds 14  
them, they must not be taken in by its flattery; if it reviles them, they should 15  
not feel disheartened; if people wish to follow them they should be allowed 16  
to do so, but if instead they hurl laughter and mockery at them in order to 17  
isolate them from others, they must not fear that either. The possibility of 18  
bringing light into our gloom and darkness, and striking the spark that can 19  
illuminate the inner-souls of our compatriots all hangs on this. When each 20  
person realizes his or her own identity and no longer merely drifts with the 21  
tide, this will enable China to stand on her own feet. As the situation exists 22  
today, the citizens of old and vanquished states that were formerly ignored 23  
or held in contempt by our men of ambition have all entered a state of self- 24  
awareness. They can speak from the depth of their hearts in clear and 25  
sonorous tones with their spirits running high and will, in time, no longer be 26  
subjugated through the powers of force and deception. So why does China 27  
alone persist in this solitary silence? Is it because this road is unwalkable, 28  
so our men of learning [hindered as they are by the obstacles before them] 29

30  
13. *Pingzhi wenming* 评隲文明 (lit. "to criticize/critique civilization") in this context means 31  
to act as a social and cultural critic. Itoo Toramaru draws a connection firstly with the role 32  
of the Mara poets, whose emergence Lu Xun hopes for in China, then with the individual- 33  
ist thinkers he hails in "Wenhua pianzhi lun" and the scientists he champions in "Kexueshi 34  
jiaopian" 科学史教篇 [Lessons from the history of science] (1907). Itoo makes the point 35  
that Lu Xun's assigning primacy to cultural criticism differentiates him from other Chinese 36  
revolutionists and Enlightenment figures of this era, who stressed politics, patriotism, 37  
and science. For this he credits the influence of late-Meiji era (i.e., post-1897) thought, 38  
such as the works of Takayama Chogyuu 高山樗牛 (1871–1902), whose *Bunmei hihyooka 39  
toshite no bungakusha* 文明批评家としての文学者 [The litterateur as cultural critic] (1901)  
contained a strong component of Nietzschean ideas. See *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:74–75n23.

1 cannot make their presence felt? Or is it that the learned prefer to keep  
 2 their mouths shut since sincere and heartfelt sentiments are being drowned  
 3 out by the din created by so many [self-proclaimed authorities]? Alas that  
 4 judging from the historical record, we can see that there has always been  
 5 the need for a vanguard to open and clear the way. But the deluge of filthy  
 6 water that has flooded the land carries even our bravest heroes down into  
 7 the muddy depths. The once-fertile and rich land of China has become a  
 8 dismal stretch of waste. The soul of the Yellow Emperor groans forth in  
 9 lamentation, and our race has abandoned its spirit: not even the promise of  
 10 sincere voices or illuminating thoughts is evident. Even though things are  
 11 thus and most of our failures have come about by our own doing, it is still  
 12 preferable for us to attempt to launch a single skiff of our own making than  
 13 to wait for others to build a giant ark [to save us]. That I have not yet aban-  
 14 doned hope for the promise of the future is my impetus in this writing.

15  
 16 . . . .

17 The propositions being advanced by men of the present may, after  
 18 some analysis and investigation, be divided into two major categories. The  
 19 first suggests that one should think of oneself as a citizen of a particular  
 20 nation,<sup>14</sup> while the second conceives of the individual as a member of the  
 21 world community.<sup>15</sup> Advocates of the first position may attempt to intimi-  
 22 date us with the prospect that China will perish if their ideas are not imple-  
 23 mented forthwith, while proponents of the second camp may insinuate that  
 24 failure to conform to *their* principles would be tantamount to a betrayal of  
 25 civilization. But the common goal of both camps, although not spelled out  
 26 in an organized agenda, is the elimination of all human individuality, so  
 27 that in their mixed-up state none dare differ from the next, and all dissolve  
 28 into one great mass, as if the various colours were all overlaid with a black  
 29 murky film. Should anyone make bold to disobey, the masses will be used  
 30 as a weapon to attack and persecute him, as a whip to chastise him back  
 31 into submission. In the past, when a man was pressed by his enemies,

32  
 33 14. This probably refers to the ideology of patriotism and raising the national conscious-  
 34 ness espoused by the constitutional monarchist faction led by Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858–  
 35 1927) and Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929). See Itoo Toramaru's 伊藤虎丸 commentary  
 36 in *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:75n26.

37 15. According to Itoo Teruo 伊东昭雄 (b. 1930), as cited in Itoo Toramaru's commentary  
 38 in *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:75n27, this refers to the position of Wu Zhihui's 吴稚晖 (1865–1953)  
 39 "anarchist" faction, as articulated in their journal *Xin Shiji* 新世纪 [New century], published  
 (June 1907–) in Paris. Also see Itoo Teruo, in *Rojin zenshuu*, 1:90n7.



he might cry out to the crowd for help; if he were suffering under a tyrant, he might call upon the masses for deliverance. But now that the masses themselves shall rule by fiat, to whom can anyone turn for sympathy? The appearance of tyrants *among* the common people must also be dated from the present era. In olden days, autocrats<sup>16</sup> ruled over the majority, but the masses sometimes had opportunities to rebel or flee. Today, when individuals who stand up alone are made to suffer at the hands of the crowd, they are denied the option of resistance or dissent. The public sing the praises of freedom, but the word *freedom* itself has never rung more hollow, nor the concept appeared more haggard than now. Since the people have lost their individuality, who then can call upon them to rejuvenate [the nation]? Yet the clamor of the various factions has assumed an even more frenetic pitch and shows no sign of abating. Although the two aforementioned propositions may appear contradictory, they are almost identical in their determination to obliterate individuality. The proposals advocated by these two groups may be reduced to several essential points. The first group simply stands for the eradication of superstition,<sup>17</sup> for the promotion of a cult of aggressive jingoism, and for [a system in which everyone] would carry out their duties and obligations. The other calls for everyone to use the same writing system,<sup>18</sup> the abolition of nations, and the unification of all into one.

16. Lu Xun heightens the irony of the contrast here by using the archaistic term *dufu* 独夫 (lit. “lone” or “isolated” man) for “autocrat” or “tyrant.”

17. With the establishment of new-style schools offering Western subjects in the wake of the Yangwu Yundong 洋务运动 and the 1898 Reforms there arose a movement calling for the eradication of “superstition,” which was largely aimed at folk religions. Kang Youwei called for the establishing of Confucianism as China’s *guojiao* 国教 or “national teaching/religion.” From 1905–1907, the magazine *Xiuxiang xiaoshuo* 绣像小说 [Illustrated fiction] published by Li Boyuan 李伯元 (1867–1906) through the Commercial Press at Shanghai ran a series of antisuperstition works, such as *Xiapian qiwen* 瞎骗奇闻 [Strange tales of chicanery], by Wu Jianren 吴趼人 (1866–1910), to expose superstition. It was held this was a necessary step in spreading science in order to restore China to wealth and power. Lu Xun subscribed to that view in his 1903 essay “Zhongguo dizhi luelun” 中国地质略论 [Short treatise on China’s geology], in *Lu Xun quanji* [Complete works of Lu Xun], 16 vols. (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1981), 8:3–21. But by the time he wrote this essay in 1907–1908, his position had changed, in part due to the influence of his mentor, Zhang Taiyan (Binglin 炳麟, 1868–1936). See Ito Teruo’s 伊东昭雄 commentary to the Japanese translation of Lu Xun’s essay “Kexueshi jiaopian” 科学史教篇 [On the lessons of the history of science] in *Rojin zenshuu*, 1:65n5.

18. The anarchist faction advocated the use of Esperanto as a world language in their journal *Xin Shiji* 新世纪, nos. 34–36 (February 15–29, 1908). This was opposed in an article Zhang Taiyan published in *Minbao* 民报 [The people’s journal], no. 21 (October

1 Both groups assert that unless these goals are carried out, we will find it  
 2 impossible to survive in the twentieth century. As shields to defend them-  
 3 selves, they have seized upon science, utilitarianism, evolution, and civili-  
 4 zation, believing all they champion to be of the highest order of correctness  
 5 and thus beyond refutation. Yet when we ask what science is and where  
 6 utilitarianism can be applied, what is the process of evolution, or the true  
 7 significance of civilization, their explanations become muddled, garbled,  
 8 and even self-refuting by virtue of the sharply contradictory assumptions  
 9 they maintain. Alack, for when the trunk of the tree itself has begun to  
 10 shake, to what can the branches and the leaves still cling? Does this mean  
 11 that the proponents of these positions are actually only drifting with the tide  
 12 and have no real positions of their own, for the time being merely chiming  
 13 in with others<sup>19</sup> so as to deceive people? Or that, knowing they possess  
 14 only the meagerest of talents themselves, in order to make a living they  
 15 are compelled to don such masks in the hope of advancing their reputa-  
 16 tions? If they can acquire recognition and solve the problem of their daily  
 17 subsistence, then they will certainly disregard any harm or injury inflicted  
 18 upon others along the way! Those who are pained at the tumultuous state  
 19 of China today worry that while “men of ambition” and “heroes” are in no  
 20 short supply, [real] people<sup>20</sup> are hard to find. It is certainly fortuitous to have  
 21 heroes and men of aspiration, but it is deplorable indeed that they veil their  
 22 true countenance and can never speak their mind. The noxious presence  
 23 this lends them infects whomever they come into contact with. Now the  
 24 confessions of Augustine, Tolstoy, and Rousseau embody true greatness;  
 25 these are voices of the heart which have welled up and surged forth from  
 26 its deepest recesses. If, even in their own vacuousness, our men of aspira-  
 27 tion and heroes were at least to follow the example of others, present them-  
 28 selves as men of principle, and hold forth with lofty airs on how to manage  
 29 the country and the world, I would be the first to hear them out. But if they

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 31 1908). See the commentary to the Japanese translation of Lu Xun's essay “Wenhua pian-  
 32 zhi lun” by Ito Teruo in *Rojin zenshuu*, 1:90n7.

33 19. The word *changyong* 唱喁, translated as “chime in,” is derived from a comic image  
 34 comparing the words of conflicting pundits to winds in the “Qi wu lun” 齐物论 [On equal-  
 35 izing things] section of *Zhuangzi* 庄子: *qianzhe chang yu er suizhe chang yong* 前者唱于  
 36 而隨者唱喁 “those in the lead calling out yeee!, those behind calling out yuuu!” (Watson,  
 37 *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 36); compare Graham: “the winds ahead sing out  
 38 AAAH!, the winds behind answer EEEH!” (Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*,  
 39 49).

20. Here the author says simply *ren* 人 (lit. “people”), i.e., genuine, sincere, dedicated  
 people.

are reluctant to express their true views in public, it is advisable for them to keep their proposals to themselves and set about to expurgate such pollution; this should have a cleansing effect on the public, allowing persons of true genius<sup>21</sup> to emerge and awaken the radiance [of the human intellect] within others. If this be done, the meaning of human existence will become clearer, and individuality will no longer be relegated to the murky depths. But since our men of aspiration and noble heroes will never agree to this, our only option is to analyze what they advocate and bring to light the falsehoods in their various positions.

• • • •

The eradication of superstition is a theme that has been pursued most vigorously of late. This subject has been lavishly discoursed upon by our learned gentry and has also been dealt with in a vast quantity of books. But all these fail to provide us with any definition of a “true” belief system at the outset; unless such a definition is established, how can we make comparisons which will reveal the misleading nature of superstition? For people living in this mortal world, with the possible exception of the ignorant and feebleminded, those who are not satisfied by material life alone will inevitably have spiritual needs. In ancient times, the common people in India thought that flashes of lightning from out of the dark clouds of a storm were a sign that Indra was battling his enemies, hence, in this case, reverence was born of fear. The ancient Hebrews observed the vastness of nature and were awed by it, so they developed teachings such as the divine origin of things and methods of invoking divine intervention; their later religion had its first inception here. In spite of the fact that our men of aspiration in China regard all this as superstition, I for one am of the opinion that such things are indicative of the desires of a people who sought to improve themselves by means of transcending a wholly relative and limiting reality in order to enter the lofty realm of unlimited absolutes. The human heart requires something to fall back upon; without some form of faith, the where-withal to endure is absent, hence the creation of religion was inevitable. In the case of China, a universal reverence for natural phenomena has always been regarded as the basis of culture. Worship of heaven and earth was the foundation for the systematic development of rituals and ceremonies.

21. Here Lu Xun uses the binom *xingjie* 性解 (lit. “basic nature liberated”), a term devised by Yan Fu 严复 (1854–1921), to translate the Western idea of “genius” in his influential translation of T. H. Huxley’s “Evolution and Ethics” under the title *Tianyan lun* 天演论 [On natural selection] (Tianjin: Guowen Huibian, 1897).

1 The reverence for heaven and earth, extended to the countless host of  
2 material things, provided a basis for all wisdom and moral principles, as  
3 well as our state and clan systems. In fact, the extent of its influence is  
4 immeasurable. Because of this, Chinese people have never slighted their  
5 native place, nor did social classes ever form; it was held that plants and  
6 rocks all had mysterious supernatural properties, and, possessing this  
7 metaphysical significance, they were viewed as different from ordinary  
8 objects. The wide range of things thus revered in China was unparalleled in  
9 the world. This trait has, however, just about been lost in the course of the  
10 countless deprivations our people have suffered. At present it is to be found  
11 only in the written accounts of the ancients and among a few peasants who  
12 still preserve the ways of their ancestors. It is next to impossible to find it  
13 among the literati. If some claim that the objects of the Chinese people's  
14 veneration are confined to the corporeal and extend neither to the intan-  
15 gible, nor to a single almighty being, but rather to numerous images, and  
16 that their beliefs are all superstition and delusion, I would pose the ques-  
17 tion: why must a single god without form be regarded as the true god? Reli-  
18 gions were created by people out of a desire to improve themselves; no  
19 matter if they worship many gods or one god, tangible or intangible deities,  
20 the intention of fulfilling man's spiritual need to uplift himself is still the  
21 same. Human beings, in their observation of phenomena and in their inves-  
22 tigation of the material world, felt as though every thing embodied some  
23 mysterious inspiration from which we derive poetry and song as well as  
24 everything that is beautiful or ingenious. Those with an understanding of  
25 spiritual matters still return to this point today, yet people in China had  
26 already arrived at such an understanding some four thousand years ago  
27 already. If these things are to be denounced as superstition, then what con-  
28 stitutes the "true" faith? Our gentry, at a time when the country is on the  
29 decline, have become spiritually blocked and interested only in petty gain.  
30 Though they are alive physically, they are dead spiritually. Thus they are  
31 ignorant of the mysteries and curiosities of life, as well as indifferent to the  
32 appeal of nature, bowing only before the emoluments of office. They take  
33 themselves as the yardstick by which to measure other people and then are  
34 greatly shocked to find that others have something to believe in; they there-  
35 fore seek to blame everything from military reversals<sup>22</sup> to national humilia-

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37 22. Ito Toramaru thinks this may refer to the criticism of Admiral Ding Ruchang 丁汝昌  
38 (1836–1895) after the defeat of the Qing dynasty's North Sea Fleet in the Sino-Japanese  
39 War of 1894–1895. *Rojin zenshu*, 10:76n33.

tion on these believers and find satisfaction only in destroying other people's sources of inner strength through slander and fabrications. They fail to realize that on the basis of historical evidence, it is apparent that the most damage to the fabric of society, to the nation, and to the altars of our ancestors has been caused not by the rural peasantry and little people, but by our faithless gentry. Thus the most urgent task before us today is to rid ourselves of this hypocritical gentry; "superstition" itself may remain! Then there are others who claim to have found definitive solutions, trumpeting science as the absolute criterion for determining truth. Having heard a little about chemistry they proclaim: "Phosphorous is an element [that glows in the dark], there is no such thing as a 'will-o'-the-wisp.'" After paging through a book or two on physiology, they announce: "The human body is composed of cells, so how can there be a soul?" Though their own knowledge is far from complete, such people insist upon interpreting all phenomena on the basis of a smattering of chemistry and a dash of physics, the most rudimentary principles of which they misconstrue. They fail to understand that the ineffable principles governing the myriad changes in the world simply cannot be contained in a primer on the natural sciences. Is it not sheer fantasy to attack religion simply on the basis of so meager a knowledge of science? There have, in fact, long been people in Europe and the West who proposed the creation of a religion based on science. The German scholar Haeckel,<sup>23</sup> through his studies in zoology, established monism—the theory that all phenomena in the universe arise from a single underlying principle.<sup>24</sup> He proposed erecting a shrine to rationality, the true Trinity of the nineteenth century. What were its three components? Truth, goodness, and beauty. He believed that rites and ceremonies continued to have a function, that is, to enable people to cope with present-day realities and encourage them to make further advances. Nietzsche, on the other hand, stimulated by Darwin's theories of evolution, attacked Christianity and created an

23. Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), the author of *Welträtse!* [The riddle of the universe], was a proponent of Darwin's theory of evolution, which he thought had been anticipated in Goethe's work. Haeckel called for a synthesis of science and religion. He was influential in fin de siècle China, and his ideas sparked Mao's theory of continuing revolution, according to a lecture given by Klaus Mehnert at the Universities Service Centre, Argyle Street, Hong Kong (1977).

24. This is elaborated in Lu Xun's early essay "Ren zhi lishi" 人之历史 [The history (of the evolution) of humankind] (1907), which he subtitles *Deguo Heige'er shi zhongzu fasheng xue zhi yi yuan yanjiu quanjie* 德国黑格尔氏种族发生学之一元研究诠释 [An exegesis of Haeckel's work on monism and the origin of races]. See *Lu Xun quanji*, 1:8–24.

1 entirely different philosophy, that of the *Übermensch*.<sup>25</sup> The proposals of  
 2 Haeckel and Nietzsche, though based on science, were still tainted with  
 3 distinctly religious and fantastical elements, and thus implied an alteration  
 4 in, but obviously not the elimination of, faith. Thus, up until the present,  
 5 these [scientific] doctrines have failed to have a major impact. This is  
 6 because science has been unable to provide deeper answers, and its  
 7 tenets do not satisfy the needs of the greater public. Nevertheless, those  
 8 who first advocated these ideas openly were determined men of great  
 9 learning and high moral character who had the conviction and the courage  
 10 to stand by what they believed without fear of offending their contempo-  
 11 raries. They were indeed men of talent. By contrast it should be obvious  
 12 that those who live today by wine and food alone are completely deluded  
 13 and illogical in their efforts to deprive others of their faith, though they may  
 14 clad themselves in scientific jargon about elements and cells like armor.  
 15 Yet I fail to understand why people who have heard their views still hold  
 16 them in esteem and praise them. Nevertheless, this group is actually not  
 17 the worst of the lot, for there are even more despicable groups which take  
 18 the destruction of Buddhist temples as their sacred mission. Since our  
 19 people are awakening, education should be promoted, but our “men of  
 20 aspiration” are almost always poor, while the rich are as a rule miserly. As  
 21 the work of national salvation must be accomplished without delay, certain  
 22 people have decided that temples and ancestral shrines must be pressed  
 23 into service as schools.<sup>26</sup> Thereupon, they advocate the eradication of  
 24 superstition, follow with the destruction of the idols in the temples, then set  
 25 themselves up as heads of the schools. That done, a teacher is engaged  
 26 and made to do all the work—and so a school is established. Yet the value  
 27 of Buddhism is universally accepted by all persons of insight, so what griev-  
 28 ance could they possibly nurture against Cathay that would put them into  
 29 such a rush to eradicate its doctrines from our soil? Before we seek to  
 30 assert that Buddhism has made no contribution to the populace, we should  
 31 first reflect upon the decline of their moral character, and realize that if we  
 32 want to save them, instead of trying to destroy Buddhism, we should has-  
 33 ten to spread it. In addition, what is the present state of schools in China?  
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35 25. Usually rendered “superman” or “over-man” in English, Lu Xun uses the translation  
 36 *chaoren* 超人 (lit. “one who transcends, goes beyond, or surpasses others”).

37 26. The idea of turning temples into schools was advocated by the reformist faction  
 38 and can be traced back to Zhang Zhidong’s 张之洞 (1837–1909) *Quan xue pian* 劝学篇  
 39 [Exhortation to study] and to one of the martyrs of the 1898 Reforms, Tan Sitong 谭嗣同  
 (1865–1898).

The teachers are themselves often lacking in knowledge, and understand very little of the West. Many are in fact merely hoodwinking people by putting on the appearance of being modern and progressive. Teachers of ancient history now lecture to their students about how the Yellow Emperor fought against “that chieftain what’s-his-name ‘You,’” evidence of their decidedly limited knowledge of the Chinese written language.<sup>27</sup> Those teaching geography allege that “the earth often gets punctured” but that “repair work is possible.” Neither do they understand that there is a difference between the actual shape of the earth and that of a classroom globe. But once they acquire all this “modern knowledge,” their students’ egos become inflated, and they style themselves as pillars of the Chinese state. Though they have no experience in government, their pride in themselves exceeds that of the founding fathers of entire nations. Their aspirations exceedingly base, their only goal is to pass the civil service examinations.<sup>28</sup> A China which will have to rely on such men for her future is a nation in a precarious state indeed! Although the monastic orders have been in a state of decline for some time already, Buddhist monks still maintain a much more unsullied and scholarly way of life than the students in such schools. In southern China, there are other “men of aspiration” who are even more extreme, wanting to ban the “parades of the gods”<sup>29</sup> conducted by the peasants. The farmers toil year-round almost without rest; when there is a break in their work finally, they hold festivals of thanksgiving to indulge the gods and themselves. Animals are slaughtered as part of sacrificial rites and celebrations, through which the farmers replenish themselves spiritually and physically. But our self-styled men of aspiration now raise the charge that such gatherings are a waste of money and time; they dash about calling for the abolition of these festivals and the expropriation of their funding for the use of the public treasury. Alas—no more expedient means of self-enrichment has been devised than this movement to “smash superstition”! It would be one thing if people were sinking into hopeless indulgence and addictions that sapped their vital energies, marred their dis-

27. This is a reference to Chi You 蚩尤, rival of the legendary Yellow Emperor—something Lu Xun presumes should be taught on Day One of any course in ancient Chinese history. A number of ill-educated teachers were unable to read the character for “Chi” (i.e., the first part of his name), substituting it with *mou* (“a certain”), hence “Mou You” 某尤.

28. So as to enter the officialdom—but the civil service exams were suspended by the Qing dynasty in 1905 and never reinstated.

29. *Saihui* 赛会 were processions in which the images of gods were carried from their temples into town in a ritual of thanksgiving.

1 positions, and dulled their perceptions. But it is something else entirely if  
 2 good, honest people<sup>30</sup> who have labored throughout the entire year seek a  
 3 form of spiritual sustenance. That is why our farmers hold lavish feasts at  
 4 year's end as a gesture of thanksgiving to heaven—to drink their fill in cele-  
 5 bration of the bounties that they have received, and obtain a respite for  
 6 mind and body, in anticipation of beginning work anew. Yet now even this  
 7 will be denied them, and they are to be reduced to a life of toiling like cattle  
 8 and horses under the yoke. But human beings cannot tolerate such fetters  
 9 and are bound to find some other means of giving vent to their frustrations.  
 10 This is, moreover, a matter of self-consolation, in which no outsiders are  
 11 entitled to interfere. Even tyrants are loath to interfere with poets chanting  
 12 their verses, nor do they prevent dancers from bending and stretching in  
 13 order to limber up their bodies. Yet when farmers seek a normal outlet, our  
 14 men of aspiration leap forth to intervene. Acting in this manner, such “prin-  
 15 ciple” men are a far worse scourge than tyrants. Among the perpetrators  
 16 of these indiscriminate actions, those who try to destroy religious beliefs  
 17 through slander and distortion are the better of the two groups; those who  
 18 would ban religious practices outright are the basest.<sup>31</sup> As to the numerous  
 19 types which fall in between, I will delineate the following as a few examples.  
 20 First, there are those who ridicule mythology. They slander the myths of  
 21 Greece, Egypt, and India alike, asserting that these were invented merely  
 22 as devices to dispel boredom or to amuse. Myths were devised by ancient  
 23 peoples who, observing the wonders of nature, gave rein to their imagina-  
 24 tion and anthropomorphized their inventions, creating original stories in the  
 25 classic genres of antiquity, bizarrely impressive. Though it is not appropri-  
 26 ate to accept such tales as true, it is a far greater mistake to ridicule them.  
 27 That the peoples of high antiquity had such vivid imaginations should be a  
 28 source of awe and inspiration to later ages; the arts and humanities of

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 30 30. Here Lu Xun uses the term *pusu zhi min* 朴素之民 to denote ordinary people or “com-  
 31 moners.” Itoo Toramaru suggests that this marks the emergence of a social conscious-  
 32 ness at the opposite end of the spectrum from the elite “voices” and “inner light” at the  
 33 outset of this essay, and the high sentiments of “warriors of the spirit” like the poets in  
 34 “On the Power of Mara Poetry,” whom he sees as leaders beckoning to the masses. See  
 35 *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:76n39.

36 31. This construction is reminiscent of a line in *Zhuangzi: Luan zhi shang ye, zhi zhi xia*  
 37 *ye* 亂之上也，治之下也 (“Those who throw it [the *tianxia*] into chaos are the better of the  
 38 two [categories]; those who [seek to] govern it are the worst”). See the “Tianxia” 天下  
 39 [All under heaven] chapter in *Zhuangzi jinzhū jīnyī* 庄子今注今译 [Zhuangzi: Contem-  
 40 porary annotations and commentaries], ed. Chen Guying 陈鼓应 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju,  
 41 1994), 863.



Western Europe have been greatly enriched by myth and legend; philosophy and literature have been strengthened and beautified in innumerable instances by the presence of these elements. If one desires to understand the Western humanities, the study of mythology is of prime importance, for if their myths are not understood, it will be impossible to appreciate their arts. If we remain ignorant of their arts, how can we come to terms with the intrinsic [value of their] civilization? To claim that Egypt perished because of superstition and to couple this with a denunciation of its entire ancient civilization would be infantile. Those who fail to understand the differences between antiquity and the present are beneath contempt. Secondly, certain persons have, in the name of scientific inquiry, questioned the [intelligence behind the construct of] mythic dragons in ancient China. In terms of intellectual derivation, this is simply a case of picking at the expecorations of foreigners. In the eyes of those who understand nothing but money and power, China's decline transforms even her rocks and flowers into objects of contempt. Finding fault with anything Chinese, they attempt, on the authority of zoological tenets, to disprove the existence of dragons. The dragon as a creature was created by the imagination of the ancients, and any attempt to classify it according to zoological category only exposes the ignorance of those who would propose such an endeavor. What is more, since these people are our own compatriots, what motivates them to peddle such theories? That the people of our country came up with such things should not be a source of shame or embarrassment—the richness of their imagination is something we can boast about. Ancient India and Greece, and more recently the nations of eastern and northern Europe, all came to possess a wealth of myth and fable that few other countries can match. The national character of all these peoples is distinguished and refined, ranking among the highest in the world, nor do we notice the rest of the world ridiculing them. The only source of shame for us should be that, unable to create myths and supernatural beings ourselves, we now import them from abroad, thinking our own ancients' imaginings poor by comparison. Alas that if the dragon, our national emblem, is reviled in such a manner, then no other relic of our culture shall survive. The double-headed eagle of Russia and the lion rampant of England have been spared such vilification only because these two countries have fared differently from ours in terms of power. Persons who use science as a cloak to conceal their own desires for wealth and power should not be included in serious discussion but rather be spat upon outright. And now there are yet another lot who want to do something entirely unprecedented in our history: to have their own religion

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1 designated<sup>32</sup> as the means by which to strengthen the faith of all the Chi-  
 2 nese, while they themselves remain the spiritual captives of others, and  
 3 their faith lies not in their own hands. Though they also present themselves  
 4 as men of aspiration who are smashing superstition, they are mere hench-  
 5 men for the establishment of a new orthodoxy.

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 7 . . . .

8 Those who venerate jingoism do so out of various motives, the better  
 9 of which is that they are [themselves] of a bestial nature, the other alterna-  
 10 tive being that they are of the basest slavish character: which of these moti-  
 11 vations best characterize China's "men of aspiration"? The earliest people  
 12 lived only in groups; later, states were formed and borders delineated,  
 13 within which people lived out the span of their lives. Had they made the  
 14 best possible use of natural conditions, devoted their efforts to the improve-  
 15 ment of their livelihood and lived in harmony without warring upon one  
 16 another, they would have done well for themselves: nor would this have  
 17 been impossible for them to achieve. Human life originated in protozoa and  
 18 may be traced through various insect, feline,<sup>33</sup> and simian stages before  
 19 achieving its present form. Thus the instincts of man's antecedents are still  
 20 nascent within him.<sup>34</sup> At times, these instincts come forth, and that accounts  
 21 for his predisposition to wreak mayhem and murder, commit acts of aggres-  
 22 sion, seize territory, women and children, gems and valuables in order to  
 23 sate his beastly cravings. Yet at times men fear the words of others, and so  
 24 create a mass of high-sounding names to camouflage what they have done  
 25 in order to escape censure. With the passage of time, these high-sounding  
 26 phrases permeate human consciousness and their origins are forgotten;  
 27 they become second nature to us and our disposition is thereby altered.  
 28 Such vile, evil distortions have infected even the wisest and most learned  
 29 of men. One example of this is how the doctrine of "pan-Slavism," which  
 30 has long existed in Russia, Bohemia, and a number of other states, is used  
 31 by those in high positions to justify their every action. Although it has not yet  
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33 32. Itoo Toramaru takes the phrase 定宗教 *ding zongjiao* (lit. "to stipulate a religion") as referring to Kang Youwei's attempt to have the Guangxu Emperor establish Confucianism as a state religion. See *Rojin zenshu*, 10:76–77n42.

36 33. Either Lu Xun believed that human beings were descended from great cats, or *hu* 虎 and *bao* 豹 (lit. "tigers and leopards") are a figurative stand-in for lower animals.

37 34. In Itoo Toramaru's reading, Lu Xun's use of *gu xing fu zhong* 古性伏中 (lit. "[their] ancient nature lurks within") indicates the influence of Yan Fu's translation of Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics." See *Rojin zenshu*, 10:77n43.

filtered down through society as far as the peasantry, this ideology has 1  
 taken such a firm grasp on the hearts of the intelligentsia and the poets 2  
 of those lands that even their most noble thoughts and highest inspirations 3  
 can scarcely purge them of it. What they term *patriotism* has very little to do 4  
 with developing art and culture so as to contribute to the greater glory of 5  
 mankind. Rather, it refers to incessant boasting of the military prowess of 6  
 one's own country, of how much land it has seized and how many people 7  
 have been killed in the process. Recently these people have come to real- 8  
 ize that man has other more lofty missions to fulfill. Acting like tigers and 9  
 wolves is no longer the first priority, and so such practices have been cur- 10  
 tailed somewhat. But men of lowly character have not yet abandoned evil 11  
 ways, and this has become a source of apprehension among people of 12  
 learning and insight, who have come to dread the military as they might an 13  
 adder or a scorpion, and this has led to widespread appeals for peace. 14  
 Their voices have struck a responsive chord in many hearts: Tolstoy was 15  
 one of their prophets. He argued that nothing in human life is more precious 16  
 than achieving self-sufficiency, i.e., each person living by his own means. 17  
 Rapine and aggression must be eliminated. The common people are con- 18  
 tent to live in peace [he contends], and only the rulers are fond of blood- 19  
 letting, driving their subjects forth to wars, which squander the human 20  
 resources of a nation, destroying homes and scattering families. The desti- 21  
 tute and unwanted inundate the country, stranded without places to live or 22  
 means of livelihood, thanks to the crimes of the politicians. How does he 23  
 propose this be remedied? The best course of action is not to obey orders. 24  
 When the call for mobilization comes, the troops should not assemble—just 25  
 remain in their fields and continue tilling. When orders are issued to arrest 26  
 the protesters, the law enforcement officers should refuse to fall in and 27  
 instead take up ploughs and harrows and join in the great tilling of the 28  
 fields. If tyrants can be isolated on high by their vassals' and their servants' 29  
 refusal to follow orders below, then all under heaven will be well governed. 30  
 However, evaluating the situation objectively, there are fallacies in this 31  
 theory. If one morning it were actually put into effect throughout the Rus- 32  
 sian Empire, enemy troops would surely arrive in invasion force that even- 33  
 ing. If the people were to lay down their arms at dawn, they would lose 34  
 their land by dusk, and the degree of displacement and suffering would 35  
 exceed anything that ever took place before. Hence, Tolstoy's proposals, 36  
 though fine as ideals, would in practice bring about results far different from 37  
 their original intention. But what [I am saying] here is determined solely on 38  
 the basis of what is in the vital interests [of any one nation]. When the dif- 39

ferences between peoples<sup>35</sup> are taken into account, then the ineffectuality of Tolstoy's view should become all the more apparent. During the course of evolution, disparities in the level of development emerged among humankind, such that some may be said to have retained certain traits identifiable with insects, others with apes, et cetera. Even after ten millennia of evolution, all may not have reached the same stage. Should this eventually take place, it would still require only one lone deviant to bring about the ruination of the entire social order. Since people of a gentle, accommodating nature are like newborn lambs, should a wolf suddenly enter their pasture, it would have the potential to slaughter every last one. To seek protection at the eleventh hour would surely be of no avail. It is obvious that the drive to slaughter and commit aggression, and to aggrandize one's own nation at the expense of others are animalistic forms of patriotism. If humanity wishes to rise above fowl and insects, we should no longer cherish such notions. But, as a corollary to this, the total elimination of war and the realization of permanent peace would seem possible only with the extinction of the human race and the destruction of the earth. Such being the case, weaponry will exist as long as humankind does. Weapons were invented for self-defense, to deliver us from tigers and wolves; they were not intended to be used as claws and teeth with which to maim and devour the weak and vulnerable of the earth. Weapons should be used for humanity's welfare; not as the means to enslave us. Only when people have understood this can they be considered responsible enough to discourse upon military affairs and to refrain from unleashing new horrors upon the world. Be that as it may, in the case of China, I find the theories which are current to be of a completely different order. Although there are those who mouth patriotism<sup>36</sup> and those who champion the cult of the warrior,<sup>37</sup> their motivations are particularly savage. In the name of culture, they roar like carnivores

35. Lit. "in view of the unevenness of humanity . . ." Again, Ito Toramaru sees the influence of Zhang Taiyan's thought on Lu Xun in the way he invokes Zhang's critique of Kang Youwei as a leveler with his utopian doctrine of *Datong* 大同 (The Great Harmony), a call for a new world order as articulated in his lectures (circa 1884 and after). See *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:77n44.

36. According to Ito Toramaru, this would be the patriotism being trumpeted by the reformist faction of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. See *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:77n45 and 10:75–76n26.

37. In 1903, in his *Xinmin shuo* 新民说 [Theory of the new people], no. 17, Liang Qichao had praised the Japanese samurai spirit, and in 1905, he published an article along similar lines titled "Zhongguo wushi dao" 中国武士道 [A warrior spirit for China]. See *Rojin zenshuu*, 10:77n46.

about to sweep down upon their prey; were they equipped with talons and fangs, they would lay waste to vast tracts. With such dispositions, they are hideousness and violence incarnate, yet the description “animalistic” still seems a bit inappropriate. On what do I base this opinion? I would venture to say that they display two deeply rooted characteristics that other animalistic jingoists lack. One is the way they worship powerful countries, and the other is the contempt in which they hold subjugated peoples. Jingoists must ordinarily hail from large, strong nations—countries awesome and powerful enough to ride roughshod over the rest of the world. For this reason, jingoists show respect for their own countries alone and look disdainfully upon others. Seizing upon the doctrine of the “survival of the fittest,” they attack the weak and small in order to realize their own desires.<sup>38</sup> They will know no satisfaction until they have taken over the entire globe and made all other races their subjects. Now, how does China fit into this as a nation? Traditionally, our people were content with farming and reluctant to stray from their native villages. Those lofty officials in high posts strove to attain recognition through meritorious service, while those in rural retirement [i.e., out of office] frequently bemoaned the state of affairs. China took the greatest pride in the splendor and beauty of her achievements as a civilization and did not seek to dominate the neighboring barbarian peoples by force; her love of peace was rarely equalled in the world. It is only that after so long a time of peace, our defenses gradually slackened and tigers and wolves were suddenly upon us, dragging our people through flood and fire. But that such events have come to pass is through no fault of our people. They have always abhorred bloodshed and slaughter, shown the greatest sorrow when taking leave of relatives or friends, and are content in their daily tasks. If the rest of the world were to adopt the norms of China, [confining themselves] as Tolstoy stipulated [to the defense of their own frontiers and refraining from aggression], war would never break out again despite the existence of many diverse ethnic groups and various sovereign states across the world. The rise of bestial jingoism<sup>39</sup> has proven traumatic

38. This represents a critique of “social-Darwinism,” the notion that the doctrine of natural selection might apply to nations and cultures as well as species.

39. Lu Xun’s term *shouxing zhi aiguo* 兽性之爱国 (lit. “bestial patriotism”) used above and referred to here seems to be a Chinese translation from the English translation of Danish critic Georg Brandes’s term “a brutal patriotism.” See Kitaoka Masako 北冈正子, “*Mara shi riki setsu no koosei*” 摩罗诗力说的构成 [The composition of “On the power of Mara poetry”], in *Kindai bungaku ni okeru Chuugoku to Nihon* 近代文学における中国と日本 [China and Japan in the literature of the recent historic period] (Kyuko Shoen, October

1 for all peace-loving peoples, and the constant threat of war has made it  
 2 impossible for people to carry on ordinary lives until it can be driven away.  
 3 In so doing, our only motive should be to drive [the enemy] back within his  
 4 old borders and certainly not to revive the bestial proclivities in ourselves,  
 5 much the less employ arms to slaughter the weak and pillage the power-  
 6 less and vulnerable. But this has not occurred to our “men of aspiration,”  
 7 who are matchless in their praise of aggression and yearn to emulate the  
 8 brute force of Russia and the might of Germany, as if those countries were  
 9 some sort of paradise. As to the fate of oppressed peoples with no one to  
 10 turn to, such as the populace of India and Poland, they simply ridicule their  
 11 fall with icy, contemptuous words. Of course, our own land of China has  
 12 long chafed under oppression at the hands of stronger nations, and though  
 13 we are not yet dead, carrion kites already circle overhead. As if our loss of  
 14 territory were not enough of a blow, it has been accompanied by indemni-  
 15 ties. Consequently, the people suffer from all forms of privation, and the  
 16 countryside is strewn with the corpses of the starving and the frozen. Here-  
 17 after we should amass the sharpest weapons and the strongest shields<sup>40</sup>  
 18 to defend ourselves, in order to prevent wild beasts and giant serpents from  
 19 devouring our country. But these should be applied only to self-defense; we  
 20 should not imitate the behavior of the aggressors by using them to commit  
 21 armed aggression against others. Why do we disapprove of aggression?  
 22 [I would] say [it is because we have ourselves been its victims, and], reflect-  
 23 ing on our own past, we must therefore become opponents of bestial jingo-  
 24 ism. Poland and India are countries suffering the same illness as China.  
 25 Although Poland has never had direct interaction with China, it is known  
 26 that her people have lofty, romantic sentiments and love freedom; hence all  
 27 feeling, freedom-loving peoples cherish that country as a symbol of these  
 28 two ideals. Can those who are unwilling to be slaves afford *not* to mourn  
 29 her? India, on the other hand, has been in communication with us since  
 30 ancient times and has given us wondrous gifts: our philosophies, faiths,  
 31 codes of morality, literature, and art have, without exception, gained  
 32 immensely from contact with India in a way that defies comparison even  
 33 among intimates and brothers. So if either of these countries are brought  
 34 into peril, we ought at least to feel sadness at their fates. If they should per-  
 35 ish, we ought to bewail them with loud cries. Similarly, if they are spared

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 37 1986), 97. The Danish term in Brandes's original is *raat Fædrelander*. See his *Indtryk fra*  
 38 *Rusland* [Impressions of Russia], in *Samlede Skrifter* [Collected works of Georg Brandes]  
 39 (Kjobenhavn: Gyldendal, 1899–1910), 10:465.

40. In other words, the best weaponry available.

calamities, we should offer thanks to heaven and pray for divine protection 1  
 that they, as well as our own land of China, may survive into the future. But 2  
 our “men of aspiration” are at present singularly of a different mind. They 3  
 assert that all such countries have fallen into this state through their own 4  
 degeneracy, and add to this a list of other gratuitous defamations. But is it 5  
 not due to the fact that we have ourselves repeatedly tasted fire and the 6  
 blade, and have cowered beneath the heel of power and despotism for so 7  
 long that we have lost our old character, and our ability to feel sympathy for 8  
 others has been worn away? All that remains in our hearts is the urge to 9  
 fawn upon the powerful, and it is because of this that such deluded, absurd, 10  
 and uninformed attitudes have led us to this pass! Thus, generally speak- 11  
 ing, those who sing the praises of militarism today have, through their pro- 12  
 longed submission to power and despotism, gradually nurtured a sense of 13  
 servility in their own hearts. They have forgotten their origins and joined the 14  
 cult of aggression, thereby becoming the lowest of the low. Those who 15  
 merely echo others and hold no firm opinions of their own are, in fact, a step 16  
 above them. There are also people who fall into neither of the above two 17  
 categories, but who nevertheless occasionally exhibit the characteristics of 18  
 our prehuman ancestors. I have seen several instances of this sort of think- 19  
 ing reflected in poetry and song lyrics, where they take pride in being part 20  
 of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s theory of the “Yellow Peril.” They growl ferociously, 21  
 calling for the destruction of London and the leveling of Rome. Paris alone, 22  
 they announce, will be allowed to remain standing, as a tourism destination 23  
 for libertine sex. Although the original proponents of the “Yellow Peril” slo- 24  
 gan compared the yellow race to animals, not even they could have been 25  
 so vicious. Through the present writing I beg to submit to all those of ability 26  
 in China that though bravery, strength, and resolve in struggle are certainly 27  
 attributes most appropriate to human life, they are best applied to self- 28  
 improvement and should not be employed to attack and swallow up inno- 29  
 cent countries. If our own foundation is stable, and we have surplus 30  
 strength, let us then act as the Polish general Bem<sup>41</sup> did in supporting Hun- 31

41. Józef Bem (1794–1850) was an artillery officer of Galician birth who distinguished him- 33  
 self as a member of a Polish regiment during the Napoleonic campaign against Russia in 34  
 1812. He attempted to hold Vienna against troops loyal to the House of Hapsburg during 35  
 the abortive Austrian Revolution of 1848, and then distinguished himself again against 36  
 overwhelming odds in the defense of Transylvania (1848–1849). With the suppression 37  
 of the revolt, he escaped to Turkey, adopted Islam, and was made governor of Aleppo, 38  
 where he later intervened on behalf of the Christian population at great risk to his own 39  
 personal safety, averting a massacre of Christians there.

1 gary, or as the English poet Byron<sup>42</sup> in aiding Greece, that is, to promote the  
 2 vital cause of freedom and to topple oppression, so that the world will finally  
 3 be rid of tyranny. We should offer aid and support to all nations in peril or  
 4 distress, starting with those which have been our friends and extending our  
 5 aid throughout the world. By spreading freedom everywhere, we can  
 6 deprive the ever-vigilant white race of its vassals and lackeys; *this* will mark  
 7 the beginning of a real “Yellow Peril.” As the situation stands today, we must  
 8 curtail our desire for and emulation of power and domination, and place a  
 9 greater emphasis on self-defense. A pity that China, herself a victim of  
 10 aggression, has thus far failed to reflect!

11  
 12 (To Be Continued)<sup>43</sup>  
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42. George Gordon (sixth Baron) Lord Byron (1788–1824) was perhaps the most celebrated and excoriated romantic poet, adventurer, and social rebel of his time. In 1824, he set sail with a private army, paid for by the sale of his ancestral estate in England, from Italy to Missolonghi in the Greek isles, where he attempted to rally the resistance against Ottoman Turkish rule and died of fever while in the service of that cause. He was much admired in late-Qing era China for this internationalist spirit and self-sacrificing dedication to the cause of liberty.

43. This essay was to have had a sequel, which never appeared. *Henan* 河南, the periodical in which this part was published, was banned by the Japanese government at the request of Qing officials shortly afterward, and Lu Xun returned to China in 1909 to take up a teaching position in order to support his younger brother, Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), who had married a Japanese wife and planned to continue his study of literature at a university in Japan.