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Re-Contextualizing Lu Xun's Early Thought and Poetics in the Journal *Henan*

Abstract In this paper I will re-contextualize Lu Xun's early thought, as evidenced in his lengthy classical-style essays, which are concerned with issues in literature, philosophy, politics and aesthetics during an era when China was facing profound cultural changes. Part of their significance lies in the way they provide us with an unabashed glimpse at what Lu Xun set out to accomplish, early on, in his new-found literary career. Although they are mainly the product of his final *Lehrjahre* (years of study) in Japan, the fact that he chose to include the two longest of them in the very first pages of his important 1926 anthology *Fen* (The grave) indicates that he considered the views expressed therein neither too immature nor too passé to reprint at the height of his career as a creative writer. In fact, he wrote that one of his reasons for doing so was that a number of the literary figures and issues treated in these essays had, ironically, taken on an increased relevance for China "since the founding of the Republic." The central concern of all the essays turns on questions of cultural crisis and transition. What I propose to do in this paper is to re-examine the essays within the context in which they first appeared, i.e., the expatriate Chinese journal *Henan*, then published in Tokyo as an unofficial organ of the anti-Manchu Tongmenghui (Revolutionary Alliance).

Keywords Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren, Mara Poetry, *Henan* (Journal), Tongmenghui, Lu Xun's early essays, Lu Xun's poetics, "Wenhua pianzhi lun," "Moluo shi li shuo," "Po e'sheng lun"

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Lu Xun's *Lerhjahre* and the Emergence of an Independent Scholar

For close to eight years from April 1902 to August 1909 Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) lived in Japan as a student and then what we might today call an independent scholar on a government scholarship from the office of the Qing Viceroy of Liangjiang (Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Anhui provinces).¹ From 1902 to 1904 he studied Japanese language and preparatory subjects at the Kōbun Institute 弘文學院. In 1903, after having acquired some ability to read Japanese, Lu Xun began his writing career with the aim of popularizing science among Chinese readers. To that end, he made abridged translations of two Jules Verne novels, hoping that science fiction would inspire an enthusiasm for science and discovery among young readers in China. Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853–1921), Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) and other reformers had already written on the potential for the popularization of “new knowledge” through the vehicle of fiction and Lu Xun quickly responded to that call.² Lu Xun's original plan had been to study mining and metallurgy at Tokyo Imperial University, which would have been a continuation of his educational program at the School of Mines and Railways 礦路學堂 attached to the Jiangnan Naval Academy 江南水師學堂, where he studied in Nanjing (1898–1900). But according to his own testimony, recalling his father's illness and death under the care of a traditional doctor, he came to believe that the acquisition of modern medical knowledge might equip him to better the lot of his people by curing their illnesses and thereby promoting their belief in reform.³ So in autumn 1904 he left the growing Chinese student community in Tokyo, which he thought lacked seriousness of purpose, for the relative isolation of Sendai Medical Academy 仙台醫學專門學校 in northern Honshū. With a knowledge of Western medicine, he hoped he could convince the Chinese of the validity

¹ Lu Xun Bowuguan and Lu Xun Yanjiushi, comp., *Lu Xun nianpu: Zengdingben*, 1: 88.

² His interest in translating fiction aside, Lu Xun's co-authored 1906 treatise *Zhongguo kuangchan zhi* 中國礦產志 (Gazeteer of China's mineral resources) sold so well it went through several print runs. See below.

³ Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji* (hereafter LXQJ), 1: 416. The original ending clause of the sentence: “. . . 一面又促進了國人對於維新的信仰” sounds a bit Japanese-influenced in terms of vocabulary and syntax. This is from his 1922 preface to his first short story collection *Nahan* (Outcry).

of reforms by curing their illnesses. In a way, this was similar to the earlier Western missionary effort to make Christian converts by setting up hospitals and medical clinics. Yet one day in his second year of medical studies, according to his own account, this dream was shattered.

It is not necessary to quote Lu Xun's well-known narrative about how he came to feel the greater urgency to use literature to attempt to cure the Chinese people spiritually during a lecture which showed a slide of Japanese soldiers executing a Chinese who had allegedly worked as a military scout for the Russians, in front of a group of Chinese who had come to take in the spectacle of a beheading. This is related in his preface to the first collection of his short stories *Nahan* 吶喊 (Outcry) (LXQJ [1991] 1: 416–17). Although literary historians have increasingly questioned the factual accuracy of this account on the evidence of things like Lu Xun's mediocre (but still passing) grades in medical school, it has riveted the attention of generations of readers as a key turning point in Lu Xun's consciousness of himself and his mission.⁴ Obviously, the idea of literature as a catalyst to bring about social change and spiritual transformation had already occurred to him. It was evident in his creative translations of social criticism (Victor Hugo), science fiction (Jules Verne) and *Sibada zhi hun* 斯巴達之魂 (The soul of Sparta, 1903), a reworking of the story of the Spartans at Thermopylae.⁵ He continued the narration in his 1922 preface:

There were quite a few among the Chinese students in Tokyo at that time who studied law, government, physics and chemistry, even policing, but there was no one studying literature and art. However, even in that discouragingly cold atmosphere I was fortunate enough to find several comrades. Aside from these, we took aboard a few necessary others and after discussion, decided the first step would be to publish a journal, the name of which was to suggest that this would mark a “new life” and,

⁴ Takeuchi Yoshimi 竹内好 (1910–77) was one of the first to voice doubts in his influential book *Rojin* 鲁迅 (Lu Xun) (Tokyo: Nihon Hyōronsha, 1944). But Lu Xun himself once stated that the account in his preface was “basically in accord with fact.” See Shen On-jun 申彦俊, *Sin Tonga* 新東亞 (The New East Asia), vol. 4, no. 30 (1934): 150–52. This is an account of a May 22, 1933 interview with Lu Xun by Korean journalist Shin On-jun (1903–38).

⁵ See Ping Zhu, “The Masquerade of Male Masochists: Two Tales of Translation of the Zhou Brothers,” 31–51.

since we for the most part still had a bit of a classical orientation, we decided to call it *Xinsheng* 新生 (New life).⁶ The time for publication drew nigh, first some of our writers disappeared, then our capital fled; in the end only three of us remained and we were penniless. Since we had started at an inopportune moment, there was no one to whom we could complain when we failed. After this even the three of us were driven apart, each by his separate destiny, so that we were no longer able to talk together at length about our beautiful dream for the future. This was the denouement of our abortive *Xinsheng*. (LXQJ [1991] 1: 417)

It may have been the end of their own magazine, but that certainly did not spell the end of Lu Xun's determination to enlighten his compatriots through writing. In 1906, after withdrawing from medical school, he returned to Tokyo and began to research and write five lengthy treatises in an archaic classical prose style influenced by that of the eccentric anti-Manchu philologist Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (Zhang Binglin 章炳麟, 1868–1936) in *Minbao* 民報 (The people's journal),⁷ for whom he still professed in 1936 a life-long admiration, mainly due to Zhang's uncompromising oppositional stance vis-a-vis the powers that be in China.⁸

Zhang Taiyan edited *Minbao* from July 1906 to October 1908. This choice of style was in itself a major statement. By so doing Lu Xun rejected the ornate,

⁶ The title was supposedly derived from Dante's *Vita Nova* ("New life"), but sounds a bit Confucian in Chinese.

⁷ As he put it in his preface to *Jiwai ji* 集外集 (Collection of the uncollected): "Later [i.e., after Yan Fu] I was influenced by Mr. Zhang Taiyan's and got 'ancient'" 以後又受了章太炎先生的影響，古了起來。See LXQJ (1991) 7: 4.

⁸ See his moving "recollections" of Zhang Taiyan—two essays in LXQJ (1991), 6: 545–51; 556–61. These are available in English translations by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang under the titles "Some Recollections of Zhang Taiyan" and "A Few Matters Concerned with Zhang Taiyan," see *Lu Xun, Selected Works* (hereafter LXSW), 4: 322–26; 327–34. For an extended discussion of their relationship, see Chen Xueran, "Zhang Taiyan yu Lu Xun de shitu jiaoyi chongtan." Chen concludes that the Zhang Taiyan Lu Xun admired was the late-Qing anti-Manchu revolutionist-scholar and that they later grew apart due to opposing positions regarding the New Culture Movement and vernacular literature. Although this may be the case, I would submit that there is actually a degree of self-identification between the Zhang Lu Xun described in 1936 and himself. In some ways Zhang Taiyan is a foil in Lu Xun's 1936 essays, but in others he becomes an alter-ego. Lu Xun concludes his own life by harking back to the idealism of his youth.

Qing-identified *pianwen* 駢文 (lit. parallel prose) but also bucked the popular trend toward simple *wenyan wen* 文言文 (literary Chinese) used by Liang Qichao in his journal *Xinmin bao* 新民報 (The new people's journal), which came to be referred to as *xinmin ti* 新民體. I have argued elsewhere that Lu Xun was trying to create a style that was at once more authentically “Chinese” by reverting to the *guwen* 古文 (lit. ancient-style prose) of the Han, Wei and Jin eras, while at the same time attempting to develop a discursive style that could accommodate modern concepts and also resonate with a moral and intellectual authority akin aurally and linguistically to that of the classics.⁹

Lu Xun published five essays and one translation in *Henan* magazine under the pseudonyms of Ling Fei 令飛 (Let Fly) and Xun Xing 迅行 (Swift Action). These were:

- “Ren zhi lishi” 人之歷史 (History of [the evolution of] humankind), published under the pen name Ling Fei, in issue 1 of *Henan*, December 1907;
- “Moluo shi li shuo” 摩羅詩力說 (On the power of Mara poetry), by Ling Fei, in issues 2–3 of *Henan*, February–March 1908;
- “Kexueshi jiaopian” 科學史教篇 (Lessons from the history of science), by Ling Fei, in issue 5 of *Henan*, June 1908;
- “Wenhua pianzhi lun” 文化偏至論 (On imbalanced cultural development), under the pen name Xun Xing, in issue 7 of *Henan*, August 1908;
- “Po e'sheng lun” 破惡聲論 (Toward a refutation of malevolent voices), by Xun Xing, in issue 8 of *Henan*, December 1908;
- “Pei-tuan-fei shi lun” 裴象斐詩論 (On Petöfi's poetry), a translation published under the pen name Xun Xing, in issue 7 of *Henan*, August 1908.

Continuing Relevance of the Early *Wenyan* Essays

These essays have been considered to have continuing relevance by Chinese

⁹ See my chapter titled “Lu Xun's Han Linguistic Project: The Use of *wenyan* to Create an ‘Authentic’ Han Vocabulary for Literary Terminology in His Early Essays,” in Lu Guoping ed., *Yu shijie jiegui: Hanyu wenhuaxue*, 289–312.

readers in part because Lu Xun himself included the majority of them (the first four from the above list) when he edited and compiled the first collection of his essays under the title *Fen* 墳 (The grave) in 1926. In his preface to *Fen*, written in Xiamen and dated October 30, 1926 “on a night of great winds” (probably symbolic of the threatening political situation in China, which in part was responsible for his leaving warlord-governed Beijing) he noted:

The poets I talked about [in “On the Power of Mara Poetry”] no one has mentioned again until now, and this is another minor reason that I have not been able to bring myself to discard this old manuscript. How excited I used to get at the mere mention of their names! After the proclamation of the Republic I forgot all about them, but how could anyone have imagined that they would astonishingly begin reappearing before my eyes time and again nowadays. (LXQJ [1991] 1: 3)

Lu Xun seems to be alluding to what he saw as the quashing of the May Fourth spirit and the demise of the New Culture Movement. Further on in the preface he talks about the need to continue to protest the warlord government's massacre of unarmed demonstrators, most of them students, in front of Government House on March 18, 1926 as well as his desire to continue to offend their apologists by publishing this anthology. Indeed, my suspicion after re-reading his preface is that the name of this anthology, *The Grave* has nothing to do with “burying” his earlier works, as some have thought, and may actually allude to the deaths of the protestors.¹⁰

The arcane style of classical Chinese in which the early essays were written proved an impediment to readers, so much so that after the founding of the People's Republic they were translated into *baihua wen* 白話文 (the written vernacular Chinese), first by Hong Qiao 洪橋 in 1976,¹¹ an edition that was

¹⁰ Although the preface is dated October 30, 1926, the volume was first published in March 1927 in Beijing by his literary associates in Weiming She 未名社 (The Unnamed Society). Eileen J. Cheng discusses Lu Xun's preoccupation with commemorating martyrs in *Literary Remains*, which I think tends to confirm my theory regarding the hidden implications of this title.

¹¹ See Hong Qiao, *Lu Xun wenyan lunwen shiyi*, an “internal circulation” book with no author accreditation treating six of the early essays.

never officially published until recently because Hong Qiao had been labeled one of Hu Feng's 胡風 "Rightist" co-conspirators.¹² In 1981 they were again translated by Wang Shijing 王士菁.¹³ The next year the longest of these, "On the Power of Mara Poetry" was again translated into vernacular by Zhao Ruihong 趙瑞蕪.¹⁴ In 1983 a partial Chinese translation of Kitaoka Masako's 北岡正子 articles on the sources Lu Xun used in writing "Mara" was done by He Naiying 何乃英 and published as a single volume.¹⁵ In 1984 Zhao Ruihong published a revised edition of his book, partly as a result of my cooperation with him in hunting down English sources. In 2006 Kitaoka revised some of her earlier papers on the young Lu Xun, publishing these as a volume of her collected essays.¹⁶ In 2007 it was announced that Hong Qiao's translation of "On the Power of Mara Poetry" would be finally be published formally after numerous revisions.¹⁷ In autumn of 2007, the former editor of the influential monthly *Dushu* 读书 (Study), Wang Hui 汪暉 gave a lecture at New York University devoted to the last of Lu Xun's 1908 essays, "Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices."¹⁸

¹² Hu Zhu 胡鑄 and Fu Xiao 符哮 argue that the mid-1950s campaign against Lu Xun's erstwhile protégé the Marxist literary theoretician Hu Feng (1902–85) was in reality just an extension of a purge by Mao directed at associates of Premier Zhou Enlai, which also saw General He Long 賀龍 (1893–1969) and erstwhile Communist intelligence chief Pan Hannian 潘漢年 (1906–77) as casualties. See their "Mao Zedong qiaoda Zhou Enlai bao yijian zhichou."

¹³ Wang Shijing 王士菁, *Lu Xun zaoqi wupian lunwen zhuyi*.

¹⁴ Zhao Ruihong, *Lu Xun Moluo shi li shuo zhushi, jinyi, jieshuo*.

¹⁵ Kitaoka Masako, *Moluo shi li shuo caiyuan kao*. These articles were originally published serially in *Yaso* 野草 (Wild grass), a Japanese journal on modern Chinese literary studies beginning with no. 9 (October 1972)–no. 30 (October 1982). They are as yet unfinished.

¹⁶ Kitaoka Masako, *Rojin Kyūbō no Yume no Yukue*. This work deals with the second half of Lu Xun's period of study in Japan. Chapter one discusses the role Lu Xun's study of German played in his idea of promoting a literary movement; chap. 2 his idea that the nation could be saved through the power of poetry and the formation of the idea of a school of Mara poets; chap. 3 the image and significance of man in "On the Power of Mara Poetry"; chap. 4 the poet as madman, the "self" in "The Diary of a Madman"; appendices on Yan Fu's *Tiānyān lùn* 天演論 (Evolution and ethics) as a premise to understanding Lu Xun's concept of man; Lu Xun and Petofi, with a focus on the meaning of *xiwang* 希望 (hope); on Dr. Galla Endre and Hungarian scholarship "On the Reception of the Literature of the So-Called 'Oppressed Nations' in Modern Chinese Literature, 1918–1937" (1972).

¹⁷ See Zhou Zhengzhang, "Moluo shi li shuo Hong Qiao jinyiben xu," 80–83.

¹⁸ LXQJ (1991) 8: 23–37. English translation by Kowallis in *boundary* 2, vol. 38, no. 2 (2011): 39–62. It was published as an article "Sheng zhi shan'e: Shenme shi qimeng?" For an English translation of Wang Hui's article, see Theodore Hutters and Yangyang Zong trans., "The Voices of Good and Evil," *boundary* 2, 63–123.

What is it about this group of stylistically archaistic and ostensibly quite “dated” essays that continues to engage Chinese intellectuals over a hundred years after their publication? Aside from the continued relevance of their subject matter and the questions he addresses, I think that for Lu Xun scholars at least, it is the way they serve as a blueprint for the future of Lu Xun’s literary career and set out clearly and in no uncertain terms what he stood for the rest of his life. Wang Dehou 王得後 has suggested that Lu Xun’s early essays can be said to fit together into chapters of a full-length book, treating humanity, science, intellectual history, literature, and religion respectively.¹⁹ Sun Yongjun 孫擁軍 says that other scholars see them as indicating “a demarcation of two lines of development in his thought up to 1907, moving from the development of man to the development of society; from the development of the mechanical to development at the spiritual level, indicating a gradual maturation of Lu Xun’s evolutionary thinking into his *li ren sixiang* 立人思想 (idea of establishing a modern citizenry).”²⁰ Whether or not future scholars will agree with these analyses, there is ample evidence to suggest that the essays constitute a manifesto, not only for Lu Xun’s literary career, but for his intellectual interests as well. But that is the subject of a different paper²¹ and my forthcoming book, which will include my revised translations of four of the early essays.²² With this article I intend to discuss Lu Xun in the framework of the context provided by the journal *Henan*, which became the vehicle for his publication of his early essays after the collapse of his efforts to bring out his own magazine *Xinsheng*.

Framing the Early Essays within the Vehicle of Their First Publication: The Journal *Henan*

There may be a degree of historical irony in its name in that Lu Xun is normally considered a man of Shaoxing in Zhejiang province on China’s southeastern seaboard. But anciently his clan is said to have fled there from

¹⁹ See Wang Dehou, *Lu Xun jiao wo*.

²⁰ Sun Yongjun, “Lu Xun he *Henan* zazhi de yuanyuan,” 71.

²¹ See Jon Eugene von Kowallis, “Lu Xun’s Early Essays and Present-Day China,” 19–34.

²² Jon Eugene von Kowallis, *Warriors of the Spirit*.

what is now Henan province during the Tartar and Mongol incursions toward the end of the Song era (960–1279), eventually becoming landlords in Zhejiang.²³ If that were the case, his being offered publication by its editors would have been a sort of homecoming, ancestrally speaking. Students from Henan in Tokyo had earlier founded *Yu bao* 豫報 (Yu was the name of an ancient kingdom in present-day Henan and still serves as an abbreviation for the modern province) in December 1906, which published a total of six issues by the time it closed in the summer of 1908. Although not as identifiably revolutionary as the later *Henan* magazine, *Yu bao* criticized governmental corruption and the incompetence of Qing diplomats.²⁴ *Yu bao* also carried ads for the publications *Zhongguo kuangchan zhi*²⁵ (Gazetteer on China's mineral resources) and *Zhongguo kuangchan quantu* 中國礦產全圖 (Comprehensive map of China's mineral resources) which Lu Xun had co-authored with Gu Lang 顧琅, then a student at Tokyo Imperial University, in the fourth and fifth issues of *Yu bao*. *Henan* magazine was established by Zeng Shaowen 曾紹文, the Head of the Henan branch of the Tongmenghui 同盟會 (Revolutionary Alliance).²⁶

According to the ninth clause of the magazine's charter (in issue 1), the journal was intended "to be published monthly, with a length of at least 120 pages, on the first of every month (according to the Western calendar) and it shall not fall behind schedule." But the publication schedule did not proceed on time and the Qing diplomatic mission eventually asked the Japanese

²³ See the genealogy presented in Wang Xirong, *Lu Xun shengping yì'an*, 13–15.

²⁴ Liu Zengjie, "Manhua Lu Xun yu Henan", 78.

²⁵ First published in July 1906 by Shanghai puji shuju, then in a revised and enlarged edition in winter 1906.

²⁶ Sun Yongjun, "Lu Xun he Henan zazhi de yuanyuan," 72. Huang Yi 黃軼 also deals with questions of the editorship of *Henan* magazine in her article "Youguan Henan jige wenti de bianzheng." Zhou Zuoren has written in *Zhitang huiyilu* (p. 254) that the chief editor was Liu Shenshu 劉申叔 (i.e., Liu Shipai 劉師培 1884–1919), which Huang Yi argues is a garbled recollection of Liu Jixue's name. Most scholars in China today have settled on Liu Jixue (1880–1960), a Tongmenghui member who hailed from Henan province. Liu Shipai was from Jiangsu province, not anywhere in Henan, his dates in Japan do not coincide with much of the publication dates for *Henan* and neither he, nor his biographers, mention his editorship of *Henan*, which would have been a major accomplishment. The *Lu Xun da cidian* 魯迅大辭典 (Great encyclopedia on Lu Xun, 2009), 722 and *Lu Xun quanji* (2005), list the editors as: "Cheng Ke 程克, Sun Zhudan 孫竹丹, et al." and the *Lu Xun quanji* (2005), 5, n. 2 adds that "the general editors (Zong bianji 總編輯) were Liu Chi 劉熾, et al."

government to ban it for radical views.²⁷ It was closed in December 1908 and the managing editor Zhang Zhongrui 張鍾瑞 detained for several days by the Japanese police, after only one year of its existence and having published only nine issues.

Why did Lu Xun chose *Henan* to publish his essays in and not one of the dozens of other contemporaneous expatriate journals such as *Zhejiang chao* 浙江潮 (in which he had published in 1903, the same year it was founded), *Jiangsu* 江蘇, *Hansheng* 漢聲, *Minbao*, *Yunnan* 云南 (est. 1906), *Dongting bo* 洞庭波 (est. October 1906); *Qinlong* 秦隴 (est. August 1907), *Jin cheng* 晉乘 (est. September 1907), *Sichuan* 四川 (est. November 1907) or *Yue xi* 粵西 (est. November 1907)? Zhou Zuoren tells us that although he and Lu Xun were “admirers of Zhang Taiyan, *Minbao* was only interested in politics and scholarship, not caring about literature and art, so that type of work had been left for *Xinsheng* to do.”²⁸ Lu Xun gives us another possible clue when he recalled: “These were manuscripts I sent to *Henan*; because the editor had a rather odd temperament—he wanted long articles—the longer the article, the more he paid. So things like ‘On the Power of Mara Poetry’ were a perfect match.”²⁹ Chen Mingyuan 陳明遠 tells us Lu Xun would have been paid approximately two yuan per thousand Chinese characters.³⁰ If the five articles he published in *Henan* totaled 50,000 characters, he would have received around 100 yuan, which would have gone a long way to solving his economic difficulties at the time.³¹ But it may in part have been simply due to the interest expressed in the brothers Zhou by one of the editors, of whom Zhou Zuoren writes in his memoirs: “[Sun Zhudan 孫竹丹] suddenly paid us a visit saying that students from Henan province were running a magazine but lacked people to write for them, so he called on us to help.”³² This could then provide a venue for the articles Lu Xun had intended to write in his own

²⁷ This is according to the account of a contemporary, Feng Ziyou 馮自由 in his *Geming yishi* 革命逸事 (Anecdotes about the Revolution), as cited in Liu Zengjie, “Manhua Lu Xun yu *Henan* zazhi,” 79, note 4. Feng was a veteran observer and participant in the pre- and post- 1911 revolutionary era.

²⁸ From Zhou Zuoren's account in *Lu Xun de qingnian shidai* (The era of Lu Xun's youth) reprinted in Zhou Zuoren and Zhou Jianren, *Shaonian cangsang: Xiongdi yi Lu Xun* (1), 192.

²⁹ LXQJ (1991) 1: 3.

³⁰ Chen Mingyuan, *Wenhuaren yu qian*, 145.

³¹ Sun Yongjun, “Lu Xun he *Henan* zazhi de yuanyuan,” 77.

³² Zhou Zuoren, *Lu Xun de qingnian shidai*, 57.

abortive journal *Xinsheng*. Zhou Zuoren in fact says as much: “What Lu Xun originally wanted to say in *Xinsheng*, he now published in *Henan*.”³³ Although Lu Xun never did say that exactly, he continued to remind his readers decades later (in 1926 and 1935) that the material he wrote about the poets in “On the Power of Mara Poetry” was still relevant to China and thus would merit a reading (*bu fang yi kan* 不妨一看).³⁴ *Henan* was also a venue he shared with Su Manshu 蘇曼殊 (1884–1918), by then already a prominent figure. Su published four drawings in *Henan* (two in issue 3, one in issue 4 and one in issue 5). They shared an interest in introducing the romantic poets Byron and Shelley to China and Lu Xun showed himself to be a defender of Buddhism (in the last of his early essays, “Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices”), with which Su Manshu had long been identified. In fact Lu Xun reportedly told Masuda Wataru 増田渉 that Su Manshu had initially been one of the small group of intending founders of his literary journal *Xinsheng*.³⁵

Unlike *Xinsheng*, *Henan* was not primarily a literary journal. It was a journal of politics and culture founded as an unofficial mouthpiece of the banned Revolutionary Alliance to propagandize for their cause.³⁶ Sun Yat-sen considered Henan province, with its central location as a railroad hub and industrial base, to be of prime strategic importance in the Central Plain, but he found the strength of revolutionary forces there too weak. For that reason he dispatched Zeng Shaowen there in 1906 to make inroads among the students of the Wubei Xuetang 武備學堂 (Modern School for Military Preparedness), fifty of whom were subsequently sent overseas to study military science and continue their infantry training in Japan.³⁷ It was one of a number of journals run ostensibly by provincial associations, but actually by regional branches of the Tongmenghui, financed by an initial donation from a

³³ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁴ I have in mind not only his 1926 preface to *Fen* but also his 1935 *Ti wei ding cao* (*San*) “題未定”草 (三) (“As yet untitled” Drafts #3).

³⁵ In Masuda Wataru, *Rojin no inshō* 魯迅の印象 (Impressions of Lu Xun), cited in Liu Huashan et al. eds., *Lu Xun zuopin cidian*, 335. This has been questioned. Zhou Zuoren’s account mentions the existence of a fourth partner initially, but does not mention Su Manshu’s name, see “Lu Xun de qingnian shidai” (The era of Lu Xun’s youth) reprinted in Zhou Zuoren and Zhou Jianren, *Shaonian cangsang: Xiongdi yi Lu Xun* (1), 192–93.

³⁶ Sun Yongjun, “Lu Xun he *Henan* zazhi de yuanyuan,” 73.

³⁷ Huang Yi, “Youguan *Henan* jige wenti de bianzheng,” 4–5.

wealthy widow who later became a major donor to Sun Yat-sen.³⁸ A contemporary chronicler and participant, Feng Ziyou 馮自由 (1882–1958), later wrote that it had considerable influence: “This journal advocated *minzu* 民族 (nationalism) and *minquan* 民權 (people’s rights) (two of Sun Yat-sen’s ‘Three Principles’).³⁹ Hong Wenwei 鴻文偉 was of the opinion that it was comparable to *Minbao* . . . in overseas student circles among the most prominent of the provincial-affiliated magazines, this journal would really have to be counted as number one.”⁴⁰ Feng added: “its [domestic] distributor, the Great River Book Society [Da He Shushe 大河書社], played a very strong role in promoting the progressive cause throughout Henan province.”⁴¹

How “Revolutionary” Were *Henan* and the Young Lu Xun?

But just how “progressive” a journal was *Henan*? Zou Lu 鄒魯 credits it with major influence, writing: “*Henan* magazine held the most radical views, it was totalistic in its advocacy of racial [i.e., anti-Manchu] and political revolution.” He credits it with “a wide distribution in the interior [of China],” estimating domestic sales of “up to and over 10,000 copies for each issue; [as a result] in the intellectual circles of Henan province, the upsurge in revolutionary thought came to practically equal that of the various provinces in the south.”⁴² That statistic is supposed to be for sales alone—it does not take into account the fact that copies must have been passed on and shared by other readers, giving the journal even greater influence. Zou Lu is probably inaccurate in his assessment of *Henan* as a radical organ of racist politics.

³⁸ This was Liu Qingxia 劉青霞 (b. 1877) who came from a prominent family in Henan province. Her father Ma Peiyao 馬培瑤 had been Viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi (Liang Guang Zongdu 兩廣總督). Together with her son she had fled to Japan, sought the protection of the Henan Provincial Association and thus met *Henan* magazine’s managing editor Zhang Zhongrui in 1906. See the article by Tian Jun, “Zizhu *Henan* zazhi de Liu Qingxia nüshi.”

³⁹ *Minquan* has often been identified with democracy. Missing here is *minsheng* 民生 (lit. “people’s livelihood”) sometimes called the equivalent of socialism.

⁴⁰ Feng Ziyou, *Geming yishi (Di san ji)*, 272.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴² Zou Lu, *Zhongguo Guomindang shigao*, 983.

From my own reading of the journal, *Henan* was not racially opposed to the Manchus because of their non-Han origins. It opposed policies that damaged the national interest and those Han Chinese who collaborated with tyranny. It also opposed Qing autocracy and intolerance of democracy⁴³ and frequently ran exposés on local governmental corruption, particularly in educational circles within Henan province.

It did not champion assassination of Manchu officials or other acts of violence, then in vogue among certain revolutionary groups, emphasizing instead ideas and theoretical enquiry. The authors took Social Darwinism on board and urged patriotic Chinese to “develop an independent and uncompromising spirit to bestir ourselves and take the initiative” 獨立不羈之精神，震蕩不拔之氣概⁴⁴ to bring about “self-strengthening and improve ourselves” 自振自作 . . . 自強自優, but this was within an international context, not an anti-Manchu one. This makes the orientation of the journal seem much closer to Lu Xun’s own thinking than *Minbao*, for Lu Xun was not overtly anti-Manchu and sought for a more self-reflective approach to remaking China. In fact, the journal studiously avoids couching arguments in terms of *minzu* 民族 (folk, race, people), rather it speaks of “restoring our *renquan* 人權 (human rights).”⁴⁵

Still, when we examine Lu Xun’s views, they seem moderate by comparison with some of the other articles. For example, if we look at the second-to-last issue (8) of *Henan* (December 1908) we find “Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices” is in a position of prominence as the second feature in the *lunzhu* 論著 section. This version has white and black-centered dots next to quite a lot of the text, indicating the author’s own emphasis on many points. These were all removed later in the 1938 edition of the *Lu Xun quanji* (and all other editions). Points Lu Xun gave double emphasis to include:

⁴³ See the lead feature article by Zhang Zhongrui (under the penname Hong Fei 鴻飛), “Duiyu yaoqiu kaishe guohuizhe zhi gankui.” The entire journal has just been reprinted in Beijing by Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe (2014). I will cite from the reprinted version.

⁴⁴ Yu Shi, “Lun minqi wei jianli junguo guojia zhi yaosu.”

⁴⁵ Again, see Hong Fei, “Duiyu yaoqiu kaishe guohuizhe zhi gankui,” which states: “Our compatriots share a common woe and there is none who does not wish to bestir himself to rid us of this vile government and restore our human rights in order to establish ourselves in a realm of freedom now and for the future” 我同胞公共之傷心莫不思，所以自力自振，以除去此惡劣政府而恢復我人權以特立於之天而後己也。

“When people start to have individuality, the masses are near to achieving awakening (*juewu* 覺悟)” (p. 17); “China of late is a realm of silence” (p. 17), etc. The article ends with the words *wei wan* 未完 (unfinished/to be continued). If we compare this with the very next article in the same issue: *Dui nei dui wai you jilie de jie jue wu heping de jie jue zhi tiezheng* 對內對外有激烈的解決無和平的解決之鐵證 (Iron-clad proof for a solution to the crisis of a lack of peace on the domestic and international fronts) by Nan Xia 南俠 (Southern Knight-Errant), to begin with this is a fairly revolutionary or at least combative-sounding pseudonym, as opposed to Lu Xun's more neutral *Xun Xing* 迅行 (Swift Action). The article implies that revolt can lead to a restoration of national autonomy and a higher standing in the world, not a note that any of Lu Xun's early essays ends on.

The Literary *Henan*

Despite its political agenda, *Henan* ran a considerable amount of fiction, literature and art in part to attract more readers. I once suggested that Lu Xun had anticipated many of the aspects of the May Fourth New Culture Movement in his early essays.⁴⁶ This has since become a topic for debate among scholars in China and Japan.⁴⁷ Some scholars have expressed the view that they were derivative, primarily of Japanese and Western sources. Kitaoka Masako argues that Lu Xun's original scholarship lies in what parts of the sources he selected, what he deleted, and how he fit them all together to make his own arguments, which differ from those of the original sources. I would agree with Kitaoka's assessment, but not with the simplification of her position to say that the early essays are simply cut and paste jobs. And interesting enough in this connection, Lu Xun's early essays were classified in 1908 by the editors of *Henan* as *lunzhu* 論著 (“Feature Articles” or “Op-Ed”), only his “On Petöfi's Poetry” was published under *yishu* 譯述 (“On

⁴⁶ Jon Eugene von Kowallis, “Lu Xun's *Wenyan* Essay *Moluo shi li shuo* and the Concerns of the May Fourth.” *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Interliterary and Intraliterary Aspects of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 in China*, Marian Galik ed., (Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 1990), 45–58.

⁴⁷ Huang Yi, “*Youguan Henan jige wenti de bianzheng*,” 6.

translations”).⁴⁸ And unlike the later sequence in the 1926 collection *Fen*, which places the two essays on evolution and science first, then follows with “On Imbalanced Cultural Development” and places “On the Power of Mara Poetry” in the final position, in *Henan* Lu Xun began with “On the History [of the Evolution] of Humankind” in issue 1 and then followed with “On the Power of Mara Poetry,” placing it in issues 2 and 3 of *Henan*. “On Imbalanced Cultural Development” came out later in issue 7, but the editors placed it in the most prominent position as the lead article at the very front of the issue (1–18). I think that is also significant. In addition, issue 7 contained his “On Petöfi’s poetry.” It may be relevant to note that this is a continuation of his interest in Petöfi Sándor, to whom he devotes a significant portion of “Mara.”⁴⁹

Zhou Zuoren has suggested that “Mara” may be read as representing precisely the type of content Lu Xun wanted to include in their journal *Xinsheng*.⁵⁰ If that is the case, then the other essays, “On Imbalanced Cultural Development” and “Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices” signal another departure in the evolution of his thought—from an interest in science and evolution to literature and thence to intellectual history, sociology, philosophy, ethics and ultimately religion. In a way this parallels his later development in the May Fourth and post-May Fourth era, as I see it: from science to literature to society to politics to philosophy. I am not suggesting that Lu Xun ultimately substituted ideological for religious faith. Rather I am thinking that he approached religion as a sociological phenomenon with philosophical elements (at least in the case of Buddhism)⁵¹ and finally went beyond politics, turning back to philosophy, and that one aspect of philosophy he continued to be attracted to was idealism, the same idealism that he found so fleeting in China in the early years of the Republic that he reprinted “Mara” and the other early essays, but did so without

⁴⁸ A partial translation of the chapter on “Petöfi’s Poems” from the Austrian literary historian Emil Reich’s (1854–1910) *Hungarian Literature: A Historical and Critical Survey* (London, 1898) published under the name Xun Xing in issue 7 of *Henan* (65–72), it is unfinished because the magazine was banned before the second installment came out.

⁴⁹ That is over half of section 9, the final section of “Mara.” See LXQJ (1991) 1: 96–98.

⁵⁰ From “Lu Xun de qingnian shidai,” *Shaonian cangsang: Xiongdi yi Lu Xun* (1), 193.

⁵¹ Here I am thinking of passages which challenge the late-Qing anti-superstition movement in “Po e’sheng lun” (1908). See LXQJ (1991) 8: 23–37.

“Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices.”⁵² We see this clearly in his final reflections in two essays on Zhang Taiyan,⁵³ in which he praises Zhang for his diehard idealism and life-long defiance of authority. Zhang becomes not just an eccentric but a Byronic character under Lu Xun's pen.

“Mara” as Manifesto

What does Lu Xun accomplish with his book-length essay “On the Power of Mara Poetry,” written in 1907? He begins with a meditation on the deaths of the world's most ancient civilizations and suggests that they lost their vitality because their literature lost its sincerity and thus the poets fell silent. This silence was characterized by desolation and alienation. Silence is a phenomenon he returns to in “Toward a Refutation of Malevolent Voices” (1908), arguing that rash doctrines proliferate in China without being challenged because “all channels are blocked.” In other words, the stifling of freedom of expression has contributed to extremism, which may ultimately be more tyrannical than the present order. How can China be awakened and rightfully guided? By the “voices of the heart” (*xinsheng* 心聲) that can only be articulated by truthful poets and writers who speak honestly and frankly. He then gives us a bevy of examples, starting with Byron in sections 2 and 4, Shelley in sections 3 and 6, Ibsen and Burns in section 5, Pushkin and Lermontov in section 7, Mickiewicz, Slowacki and Krasinski in section 8, and Petofi in section 9. He explains his turn away from China at the end of section 1 thus:

⁵² His failure to include “Po e'sheng lun” in *Fen* was never commented on by Lu Xun, nor to my knowledge, by any Lu Xun scholars in China or Japan. If the essay is as important as it seems today—and here I have in mind Wang Hui's prominently-featured essay “The Voices of Good and Evil: What Is Enlightenment?” Why was it (and the early essay on aesthetics) not included in *Fen*? My guess is that it was because he wanted to have the last word on his formative period return to idealism, just as his last word on Zhang Taiyan returns us to his youth.

⁵³ These are *Guanyu Taiyan Xiansheng er san shi* 關於太炎先生二三事 (Two or three things concerning Mr. Zhang Taiyan), LXQJ (1991) 6: 545–51 and *Yin Taiyan xiansheng er xiangqi de er san shi* 因太炎先生而想起的二三事 (Two or three things I have thought of in connection with Mr. Zhang Taiyan) LXQJ (1991) 6: 556–61. These have been translated into English by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in *Lu Xun, Selected Works* as “Some Recollections of Zhang Taiyan,” 4: 322–26 and “A Few Matters Connected with Zhang Taiyan,” in LXSW 4: 327–32.

That I now propose to suspend, for the time being, a more exhaustive treatment of ancient matters and instead to seek for new voices from alien lands is, in fact, motivated by a reverence for our own past.⁵⁴ The variety and number of such voices precludes any attempt at a complete treatment here, but judging in terms of strength sufficient to stir people, as well as the depth of their subject matter, one poetical school has emerged [in the West] as clearly unexcelled, this is the Mara group. The name is a Sanskrit word [I have] borrowed from India to translate an epithet once applied to Byron that meant he was a celestial demon, or what the Europeans call “satanic.”⁵⁵ But here [I am using it] to refer to all poets who are resolved to be rebels, whose themes agitate [their readers] to action, and who call down upon themselves the open displeasure of society. A delineation of their ideas and their deeds, their sub-divisions and their literary influence begins with Byron and runs all the way down to the Hungarian writer [Petöfi]. All the poets in this grouping have substantial differences, and are, moreover, distinctly heirs to and developers of their own national styles. Yet there is one common link that binds them, and that is the fact that not one has sought to pander to the tastes of society by producing sweet nothings or lilting lyrics to the tunes that were desired of them. Instead, they burst forth with a sharp cry that awakened all in earshot to vie against the heavens⁵⁶ and reject convention.⁵⁷ Their spirit has served as a constant source of inspiration to posterity and will remain so throughout the ages. Admittedly, they may have their detractors, but these are largely critics who were not contemporaries of the poets and did not live through the same experiences. For someone who lived then and was

⁵⁴ Lu Xun uses the term *huaigu* 懷古 (lit. “cherishing antiquity”).

⁵⁵ In the preface to his *Vision of Judgement*, a panegyric in verse purporting to describe the apotheosis of George III, Robert Southey, the then Poet Laureate of England, characterized Byron’s *Don Juan* as “a monstrous combination of horror and mockery, lewdness and impiety,” regretting that he had not been prosecuted for it, and denigrating the writer as the “chief of the Satanic school, inspired by the spirit of Moloch and Belial.” See Roden Noel, *Life of Lord Byron*, 165.

⁵⁶ *Tian* 天 (lit. “heaven”), here fate, the status quo, etc.

⁵⁷ “Convention” has been used to translate *su* 俗, which might otherwise be defined as “crassness,” “vulgarity,” “worldliness,” a “lack of refinement,” etc. It sometimes refers to “commonplace” as opposed to “higher” interests.

subject to the strictures of the times, suffering and longing for deliverance but attaining none, their poetry was imbued with a magic beauty and a mighty appeal. But for those who desire to use poetry to articulate accommodation, what they have to say has taken on far too ominous a ring.⁵⁸

Poets: The “Disrupters of Men’s Hearts”

But he returns to analyze what he considers the faults of ancient Chinese philosophy and poetics in section 2:

In Chinese politics, curtailing “disruption” has always been the ideal, but for reasons quite different from the above [notion that a return to high antiquity would bring the world back to the state of “great harmony”]. Anyone with the capacity to disrupt others or anyone with a marked susceptibility to such “disruptions” would be suppressed by our emperors. This was done out of fear that disruption might somehow threaten the throne and the emperor’s right to secure the line of succession for generations to come as the exclusive domain of his own offspring. So whenever genius⁵⁹ appeared, every possible effort was expended to destroy it. By the same token, the people themselves also suppressed anyone who disrupted them or had the potential to disrupt others. After all, they too valued their tranquility, preferring to curl up and atrophy because they detested the notion of having to go out and strive for anything. Thus when genius appeared, the people would expend their every effort to destroy it. [Similarly], when Plato formulated his ideal state, he said that poets would incite turmoil and should be exiled from its borders. Though nations [such as China and Plato’s Republic] may be qualitatively different, their methods of

⁵⁸ LXQJ (1991) 1: 65–66. For the length of the essay, I here do not include the Chinese original.

⁵⁹ Here, Lu Xun uses the English word “genius” alongside an early Chinese translation devised by Yan Fu—*xing jie* 性解, which connotes the “liberation of one’s basic nature.” Presently the term *tiancai* 天才 (lit. “heaven- or nature-given talent”) has gained wider acceptance as a translation for the word genius, which of course has different connotations.

governance actually stem from one and the same impetus.⁶⁰

From there he goes on to articulate a new definition of poetry and a new role for poets:

Poets are indeed “disrupters of men’s hearts.” For every human heart contains poetry within it, and when a poet has written a poem, it no longer belongs to him exclusively, but to others who, upon reading it, come to an emotional understanding of it in their own hearts. If there were no poetry in their hearts to begin with, how could they arrive at an understanding? This is only possible because they themselves have had similar feelings but could not put them into words. Poets say these things for them. Like [a musician] plucking a note, a response comes immediately from the heartstrings of the audience and the note reverberates throughout the caverns of the soul, causing all men of feeling to look up, inspired, as though they might be gazing on some new dawn ablaze with light that has the power to strengthen, ennoble, beautify, and enlighten until the muck and mire of accord and passivity are broken down thereby. The shattering of passivity spells the burgeoning of the human experience. At that point, the lives of all, from the emperor on high down to his vassals and thralls below, will never be the same again. They shall be compelled to work thenceforth in concert in the hopes of stifling [the spread of] this [poetry] so as to insure the preservation of the old order. This is, perhaps, quite a normal reaction. Those places where they have succeeded in preserving the status quo are what we now term the world’s “ancient civilizations.”⁶¹

By “ancient civilizations” he seems to be referring to China and other former empires of the Third World, then sunken to the status of colonies of the West, but I am wondering if he would include Britain in this as one of the world’s “ancient civilizations,” as he is critical of British society in his treatment of Byron later in the essay, somewhat along the lines of what he now says about China (continuing in section 2 of “Mara”):

⁶⁰ LXQJ (1991) 1: 66.

⁶¹ LXQJ (1991) 1: 69.

But since poetry could not be eliminated entirely, certain specifications had to be set down in order to confine it. In the instance of China, [our sage] emperor Shun proclaimed that poetry should “give voice to the innermost thoughts of its creator,” but later worthies held that poems were written in order to “restrain men’s emotions,” contending that within the entire *Book of Odes*, “there is not one among three-hundred-odd poems that transgresses the bounds of propriety.” Now, if poetry is to “give voice to the innermost thoughts of its creator,” how can it serve to “restrain” them? To insist that poetry must “never transgress the bounds of propriety” is to negate its function of “giving voice to the innermost thoughts” of its creator. Is this not tantamount to a guarantee of freedom circumscribed by the lash and the bridle?⁶²

Nevertheless, the subsequent literature of China actually ended up having to confine all of its activities within these boundaries. Notwithstanding the large quantity of poems and essays devoted exclusively to the praise of our masters and the flattery of the rich and powerful, a good portion of Chinese verse has been dedicated to man’s response to [nature]—the birds, the creatures, the forests, and the springs—but even that must be enclosed by invisible prison walls that make it impossible to describe the true beauty of the world between heaven and earth. Then we have oeuvres of gratuitous lamentation on the heartlessness of the world and the vicissitudes of history, as well as a treasure-house of reflections on the passing of the sages and worthies. But should a writer, regardless of his many equivocations, chance upon a subject so risqué as the mere mention of fondness between parties of the opposite sex, he will be immediately subjected to rigorous censure by those who clad themselves in the garments of Confucian morality. With that in mind, is it really necessary to describe the fate of someone who might dare to venture so far as to challenge convention?⁶³

Lu Xun was quick to borrow imagery for use in his classical-style poetry of the 1930s from Qu Yuan, but in “Mara” (section 2) he already makes the

⁶² LXQJ (1991) 1: 68.

⁶³ Ibid.

following appraisal, again uniquely insightful:

Only Qu Yuan, on the brink of death, when his mind churned with the fury of the waves, could pace by the shores of the Miluo River, looking back upon the mountains [of his homeland] and lament his feelings of isolation in poignant, melancholic lines that depicted his sorrow and his wrath. With the surging river before him, all constraints were let go. Qu Yuan could at last voice his rancor at the imbecility of the world and the crassness of society. He was free to sing of his own wasted talent and unappreciated learning, and to question with an unprecedented skepticism and in unabashed detail everything from the most basic myths and legends of creation down to the minutiae of history and all life forms with a fearlessness of tone which none before him dared assume. Though his works reverberate with poignant notes, both of beauty and of pathos, the aggregate lack of any trace or sign of a will to fight back has cost Qu Yuan dearly in terms of his appeal to posterity. The literary critic Liu Xie once remarked: “The most talented of writers have emulated the boldness of his artistic conception; craftsman-like stylists of a middle-level seize upon the beauty of his diction; aficionados savor his mountain and river [imagery]; and novices imitate his use of fragrant plants [and flower codes].”⁶⁴

All these things indicate a general obsession with formalistic qualities, one that has prevented our scholars from penetrating to a deeper level of understanding Qu Yuan’s verse. And so it was that this great, solitary figure went to a lone, watery grave, while society continued on, uneffected. In this light, Liu Xie’s comments take on a deeply tragic ring. For they only underscore the fact that great and beautiful voices have failed to stir the ears of our compatriots for quite some time already. In most cases, our poets have only versified to themselves and the people

⁶⁴ Liu Xie 劉勰 (c. 465–520) referred to in Lu Xun’s original by his cognomen, Liu Yanhe 劉彥和, was a prominent literary critic and author of the seminal text of early literary criticism *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The literary mind and the carving of dragons). This quotation comes from the end of the section. Citation from Liu Xie, “Bian sao” 辯騷 (Analysis of sao) chapter in *Wenxin diaolong*; see the corrected bilingual translation by Vincent Yu-chung Shih, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, 38–39.

have never been greatly enthralled.⁶⁵

From there he moves on to discuss the threat that art poses to materialism and conformity, describing a situation not unlike China today:

Since the advent of written history all the way up to the present day, how many instances have there been in China when great poets or *cǐ* lyricists have actually succeeded in employing their talents to create verses powerful enough to “remold men’s characters” and “elevate their thoughts?” A thorough search of our literature will yield few, if any. Yet this is not to place the blame on the poets alone, however, since the whole of the populace go about with but two giant words emblazoned on their chests, and these are “net profit,” expending energy only when it is gainful to them, and then just drifting off to sleep whenever their temporary needs are fulfilled. Even a tumultuous clamor would fail to “disturb” their “tranquility.” If a mind is not subject to [the] “disturbance” [of exterior stimuli], it faces only atrophy, decline, and death. This situation is further exacerbated when the notion of gain, steaming and simmering within the recesses [of the soul] until the thirst for profit drives men to base and despicable acts, engendering in them the most cowardly, vile, and mean of ways that, in turn, bring about a thorough debasement of the human spirit. Bereft of the noble simplicity and primitive energy of their early ancestors, they simply sink into the dissipations of a dying age with an abandon that the sages of old could scarcely have foreseen.⁶⁶

A Defense of Poetry

He then prepares to counter his critics with his own defense of poetry, which begins:

The proposition that poetry can be used to transform human

⁶⁵ LXQJ (1991) 1: 69.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

dispositions and actually bring a people into a new realm of sincerity, goodness, beauty, greatness and strength is likely to draw sneers as an impractical and unsubstantial notion, especially because of the abstract nature of such a proposal and the impossibility of carrying out an immediate demonstration. Perhaps the most substantial piece of counter-evidence presentable, however, lies with the cases of ancient civilizations that have been subjugated by foreign enemies. All such subject-peoples are cowed by the whip and harness more easily than beasts of burden; moreover, they leave no record of their groans or cries of pain behind to “disturb” their progeny, that they might one day awaken. Even if any such body of literature did exist, it would most certainly fall on deaf ears, for as soon as their suffering is minutely reduced, a subject-people will begin to busy itself with the calls of a livelihood, concerning itself only with the physical aspects of life and ignoring the ignominy of its own existence. Another round of defeat and more scenes of carnage are thus insured upon the arrival of the next foreign foe. It therefore stands to reason that a people unwilling to struggle will be subjected to war more often than a people who take to struggle; conversely, a people fearing death will be subjected to more losses and casualties than a brave populace who are willing to lay down their own lives.⁶⁷

And in this defense of poetry, he moves on to an example from German history of the early 19th century. Let us remember that Lu Xun was writing well before the First World War and try to imagine a time in which Germany was a weak and divided land of principalities conquered by Napoleon:

In August of 1806, Napoleon routed the Prussian army, and by July of the next year, Prussia sued for peace as a vassal of the French emperor. Yet even in those times of defeat and humiliation, the German people were able to maintain the spiritual and intellectual brilliance that has characterized them since antiquity untarnished. And it was amid such

⁶⁷ Ibid.

circumstances that E. M. Arndt came forth, producing his *Geist der Zeit*,⁶⁸ to proclaim the value of freedom and independence with a pen of magnificent beauty. His writing set the souls of his countrymen aflame with the thirst for vengeance, and when this came to the attention of the enemy, Arndt was quickly made into one of the most wanted men [in Europe], whereupon he fled to Switzerland.⁶⁹ But in 1812 when Napoleon, set back by the bitter cold and the burning of Moscow, retreated toward Paris, the rest of Europe gathered its troops from out of the chaos to oppose him.

The next year, Kaiser Wilhelm III of Prussia summoned his people to battle in the name of liberty, justice, and the fatherland. Students, poets, artists, all in the flower of their youth, rallied to the cause. Arndt returned home to write “What is the National Army?” and “The Rhine: A German River, Not the German Border”⁷⁰ in order to boost the morale of his young comrades. Among the volunteers was also Theodor Körner who, overwhelmed by the emotions of the hour, had resolutely taken up the pen. Resigning his post, he bade farewell to his parents and fiancée, and left with a rifle in hand for the front.⁷¹ A letter he wrote to his parents [at the time from Vienna] runs:

. . . The Prussian eagle has captured the heart of every loyal German, awakening in them a sense of great hope [for liberation]. All my artistic enterprise thirsts for a fatherland. I am willing to abandon all the joys and happiness I have achieved thus far in life in a struggle to the death for a fatherland. Verily, I have attained this revelation through the powers of all-knowing God. What sacrifice can be more noble than a death for the freedom of an entire nation and the good

⁶⁸ *The Spirit of the Times* was a treatise written between 1806–9. Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860) taught at Greifswald and wrote nationalist verse during the Napoleonic occupation, e.g., *Lieder für Deutsche* (Songs for Germans, 1813).

⁶⁹ To be historically accurate, this should read “Sweden.” Lu Xun seems to have confused the transliterations for the names of these countries in Chinese.

⁷⁰ These are the nationalist treatises “Was bedeutet Landsturm und Landwehr?” and “Der Rhein, Deutschlands Strom, nicht Deutschlands Gränze.” See *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1952), 1: 359.

⁷¹ Theodor Körner (1791–1813) fell at the siege of Leipzig.

of humanity? Limitless passions swell in my breast—I must go forth. . . .⁷²

Leier und Schwert [Harp and sword], a later collection of Körner's verse, resounds with the same spirit, firing the pulse of any reader who opens the volume. Such zeal and ardor was by no means unique to Körner in his day; rather, it was a common attribute of German youth in general. Körner's was a voice that spoke for all Germans—his blood that of a nation.

Then he brings home the point of the anecdote, and indeed much of his early (and later) writing by saying:

From this we may infer that Napoleon's defeat was brought about not by certain states, kings, or weapons, but rather by the citizenry of [various] nations. The people of a country are both the repository of its poetry and the means of its literary production, without which Germany would have never survived. Yet how could the die-hard utilitarians [of China], who scorn poetry and place their faith in the outmoded armaments of foreign countries to protect our homes and our families, have ever understood this? I am now comparing the power of poetry with [tangible things like] rice and salt merely [as a device] to shake those worshippers of material wealth and profit into the realization that gold and iron ore alone are not sufficient to revive a nation. We in China cannot simply pour ourselves into the mould of Germany or France. My purpose in this writing is [not to make a study of their outward forms, but rather] only to reveal the inner substance [of such cultures and their literatures] in the hope that we might attain some degree of enlightenment thereby.⁷³

⁷² See Körner's letter of March 10, 1813 to his father in *Körners Werke*, II, 497–98. Lu Xun's rendering is a condensation of a longer text. The corresponding excerpts of the German run: "der preussische Adler erweckt in allen treuen Herzen durch seine kühnen Flügelschläge die grosse Hoffnung einer deutschen . . . Freiheit. Meine Kunst seufzt nach ihrem Vaterlande . . . ich . . . will das hier gewonnene glückliche und sorgenfreie Leben mit Freuden hinwerfen . . . mir ein Vaterland zu erkämpfen . . . jetzt ist es bei Gott ein würdiges Gefühl . . . dass kein Opfer zu gross sei für das höchste menschliche Gut, für seines Volkes Freiheit. Eine grosse Zeit will grosse Herzen, und fühl' ich die Kraft in mir . . . ich muss hinaus . . ."

⁷³ LXQJ (1991) 1: 70–71.

I think it should be obvious to the reader that Lu Xun is not a proto-fascist, as some of my colleagues in America and Australia have suggested. What he admires is not German nationalism, but rather the power of poetry to stir its readers' souls to resist oppression. He even apologizes for making this comparison: "I am now comparing the power of poetry with [tangible things like] rice and salt merely [as a device] to shake those worshippers of material wealth and profit into the realization that gold and iron ore alone are not sufficient to revive a nation." And he reminds his readers that his motive in studying and introducing foreign literature to China is not to celebrate it, but rather in the hope that his compatriots can learn something from it.

Warriors of the Spirit

From Arndt and Körner, Lu Xun moves on to discuss in greater detail the life and works of Byron and other romantic poets he sees as carrying on the Byronic spirit in England, Russia, Poland, and Hungary. He concludes by saying that what China needs is "warriors of the spirit" like them. But he then asks the rhetorical question: "Are there those [like them] who with sincere voices will lead our people to goodness beauty and strength?" implying that China is still waiting for such voices. In the interim, it should reflect:

Though Byron and Shelley were crowned with the epithet "satanic," they were only human beings. So there is no real justification for referring to them or their fellows as the "satanic school," for the human condition will always give rise to persons like this. They are perhaps best described as those who have been startled into awareness by a perception of the voice of truth and their own keen sense of duty. Theirs is a bond which stems most likely from a shared sense of responsibility toward these convictions. This accounts for the uncanny similarities in their lives and for the way in which a great number of them took up arms and joined the bloody fray, or for how, like duelists, they thrust and parried, leapt and dodged before crowds that looked on with terror and excitement as they waged life-and-death struggles. Now if a society is without such figures as would be willing to let their blood flow before the eyes of the crowd, then its people are in a perilous state. But should

such men appear and the crowd refuse them its attention, or even worse, move forward to slay them, then as a society, that people have fallen into far greater peril and are devoid of hope for salvation.

Presently searching for their like in China, where are there any who can serve as warriors of the spirit? Is there a voice to speak forth in earnest and in truth the words that will lead our people on to goodness, beauty, strength, and vigor? Is there a voice of warmth and compassion ready to aid our people in making an exodus from the frozen wastes? Our nation is barren indeed, but we are without a Jeremiah to compose a dirge in lamentation for us to the world and future generations. Not that none has been born unto us, but rather that when such persons come to life, they are struck down by the masses. This factor alone, or its combination with any other, is responsible for the desolation in China. Busying ourselves striving only toward the corporeal considerations of material existence, we fell into a rapid decline which left us spiritually impoverished and incapable of withstanding the impact of the new tide [from the West].

When a hue and cry went up from the many for “reform,” it came about more as a tacit admission of their involvement in the evils of the past, little more than something akin to a verbal act of contrition on their part. But reforms did commence and hope was kindled along with them; yet what we needed most was men of learning who could introduce new culture. Although the past decade and more has certainly witnessed a steady stream of introductions from abroad, a closer examination of what has been brought back will reveal little aside from new Western-style cake recipes and the technical know-how to operate a modern prison system. In this way, China is perpetuating her own eternal desolation for the future as well. And, of course, another call for reform will soon be raised, as past precedent has demonstrated.⁷⁴

Zhou Zuoren’s Differences with Lu Xun

Where is Zhou Zuoren in all of this? Lu Xun’s “Mara” came out in issues 2 and

⁷⁴ LXQJ (1991) 1: 99–100.

3 of *Henan* (February and March 1908). Zhou Zuoren also published a lengthy treatise with a comparative perspective titled “Lun wenzhang zhi yiyi ji qi shiming yin ji Zhongguo jinshi lunwen zhi shi” 論文章之意义暨其使命因及中國近時論文之失 (On the significance of literature and its mission as well as the decline of the essay in recent times in China) under the pseudonym Du Ying 獨應 (Independent response) in issues 4 and 5 (May and June 1908).⁷⁵ I will refer to it hereafter as “On the Significance of Literature.” Zhou also writes in ancient prose, but his style is less archaistic than Lu Xun's. For example like Lu Xun, Zhou also attacked Confucianism in his early essay for stifling genius, which he calls *tiancai* 天才, rather than using *xingjie* 性解, Lu Xun's more archaic-sounding neologism (borrowed from Yan Fu 嚴復). Both these essays champion *jingshen* 精神 (spirit) over material and contend that wealth and weaponry, the development of industry and convening of parliamentary assemblies, are not the key to saving China. That lies in “literature, the repository of a nation's spirit,” as Zhou Zuoren puts it (*fu wenzhang wenzhang zhe, guomin jingshen zhisuo ji ye* 夫文章者，國民精神之所寄也).⁷⁶ Both he and Lu Xun use the term *wenzhang* 文章 to mean *belles lettres*, hence I translate it here as “literature.”

Zhou starts with the history of ancient Greece and Egypt, asserting that “it was due to their spirit (*jingshen*) that they excelled and expanded on their own accord and were capable of becoming resplendent nations.”⁷⁷ He examines the resistance in Bohemia, Serbia and Croatia to alien rule and concludes that their own literary and artistic renaissance “was like a spring flower bursting forth, like the swelling of a new tide, with a force omnipotent and omnipresent.”⁷⁸ These are metaphors not unlike those used by Lu Xun in “Mara” and other early essays, though the examples are different. One gets the feeling that the same agenda is being pursued, that is a discussion of China through various foreign examples, by comparison and contrast.

Both Zhou Zuoren and Lu Xun take Confucius to task for editing (i.e., censoring) the 3000 poems supposedly once included in the *Guofeng* 國風 (Airs of the States) section of the *The Book of Odes* down to just over 300.

⁷⁵ Installment 1 appeared in *Henan*, issue 4, 94–112; installment 2 in issue 5, 53–75.

⁷⁶ From installment 2 in *Henan*, issue 5, 74.

⁷⁷ From installment 1 in *Henan*, issue 4, 97.

⁷⁸ From installment 1 in *Henan*, issue 4, 99.

They held that this resulted in the decline in vitality, mediocrity and vulgarization of Chinese literature. Zhou Zuoren wrote that it “killed off the blossoming of our people’s thought in its infancy and turned literature into the handmaiden of emperors and kings.” Mainland scholar Chen Jihui 陳繼會 has asserted that the brothers Zhou were the first in modern Chinese history to criticize Confucianism and Confucian poetics (*shijiao* 詩教) from a literary standpoint.⁷⁹ They agreed on the characteristics of literature and its aesthetic functions. Their position offered a marked contrast with that of Zhang Taiyan, who saw little use for *belles lettres* except for propaganda. In “Mara” (part 3) Lu Xun spoke of the value of its aesthetic appeal to inspire and entertain. He quotes Dowden as saying:

There are many great works of art and literature in the world from which we learn little, or nothing . . . yet our joy in reading them is like that of a swimmer in the ocean who sees a boundless horizon open before him, breasts the waves, and comes forth at the end of the swim feeling physically and spiritually renewed. . . . Though the sea is but a mass of surging wave and churning water, devoid of emotion, that has never uttered a maxim or a moral pronouncement, nevertheless, the physical and mental well-being of the swimmer has been immediately enhanced by it.

And thus we may conclude that the functional role of literature in human affairs is no less important than clothing, housing, religion, or moral [teaching].⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Chen Jihui, “Xianxingzhe tansuo de zuji,” 71.

⁸⁰ LXQJ (1991) 1: 71. Lu Xun’s translation is a condensation of the original quotation: “There are a great many works of literature and art from which we learn little or nothing, at least consciously or in set term and phrase; but we go to them as a swimmer goes to the sea. We enter bodily, and breast the waves, and laugh and are glad, and come forth renewed and saturated with the breeze and the brine, a sharer in the free and boundless vitality of our lover, the sea. We have won health and vigor, although the sea has only its mysterious choral song, and the waves have clapped their hands around us, nor has ocean once straitened his lips to utter a little maxim or a moral sentence.”—from the published lecture by Irish poet, professor and critic Edward Dowden (1843–1913), “The Interpretation of Literature,” 252.

Zhou Zuoren Wanted to Discover What Makes Literature (and People) Tick

Zhou Zuoren, by contrast, looks more closely at the stuff of literature—what makes literature tick, declaring “this thing literature is images in action” (i.e., it functions through images—it is the writing/employment/work of images) 文章者，意象之作也。⁸¹ He has just told us: “Thought/ideas in literature, though of paramount importance, cannot alone be called composition” 思想在文，雖為宗主，顧便獨在，又不能云成；⁸² it must be made of “a combination of images, feelings, and flavor/color into one substance” 意象、感情、風味三者合為一質。⁸³ But he also cautions against “if *wen* overpowers then *zhi* (substance/content) will perish” 文勝質亡。⁸⁴ I think we can conclude that Zhou espouses a middle course between stylistics and substance, which already hints at a degree of reservation in his personality and poetics not evident in Lu Xun. Zhou Zuoren's title “Lun wenzhang zhi yiyi ji qi shiming yin ji Zhongguo jinshi lunwen zhi shi” is much longer and more prosaic than “Moluo shi li shuo.” It lacks the verve, the passion, and indeed the exotic appeal of a short title like “On the Power of Mara Poetry.” In a way, this also indicates the difference in their personalities, their approaches to life, scholarship and literature. Zhou was not taken with romanticism to the same degree as Lu Xun. Lu Xun wrote in his 1934 preface to *Jiwai ji* 集外集 (Collection of the uncollected) that “writing back in those days had to be impassioned in order to be considered good” 但這是當時的風氣，要激昂慷慨，頓挫抑揚，才能被稱為好文章，⁸⁵ but he seems to have been more sensitive to trends than Zhou, who remained aloof. This makes us reflect again on the pseudonym Zhou chose in 1908, Du Ying 獨應 (Independent/Lone response). Lu Xun identified his own personal struggle with that of the nation. If we re-read his early essay “On Imbalanced Cultural Development,” we find that the ultimate goal in his now famed advocacy of *liren* 立人 (establishing the people) was to re-establish the nation on better terms as a *renguo* 人國 (lit. “a nation of human beings,” i.e.,

⁸¹ From installment 1 in *Henan*, issue 4, 110.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 110.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁸⁵ LXQJ (1991) 7: 4.

citizens of individuality and integrity):

[We can thus], externally speaking, prevent ourselves from trailing behind the rest of the world in terms of intellectual developments while, internally speaking, remaining in touch with the pulse of our cultural heritage.⁸⁶ This drawing on the present and revitalizing the past should serve to establish a new school of thought, enabling the meaning of human life to attain greater significance and leading the people of our nation to achieve self-awareness, developing individuality so as to transform this country of loose sand⁸⁷ into a nation of human beings.

When a nation of human beings is established, we will become capable of mighty and unprecedented achievements, elevating us to a unique position of dignity and respect in the world; as such, what need would there be for superficial and mundane preoccupations?⁸⁸

But as in his approach to literature, Zhou Zuoren was interested in knowing what it was that actually made human beings tick, and so he studied cultural anthropology and the New Village Movement in Japan (which so impressed Mao) and Havelock Ellis' work on human sexuality. Lu Xun wanted to fire men's souls, Zhou wanted to describe life: "literature should explain human feelings to the world" and should be able to explain or reflect the *Zeitgeist* of an era. In "On the Significance of Literature," Zhou tells us "the difficulty for literature is to get a master craftsman who can describe life."⁸⁹ He also concludes: "We should write of good things, but not obscure the bad . . . [otherwise] that is gross deception."⁹⁰ In a way, that is a call for realism over romanticism.

⁸⁶ *Xuemai* 血脉 (lit. "the blood vessels and pulse" [of our culture]).

⁸⁷ The characterization of China as a tray of loose sand was most probably of European origin, but frequently employed by Sun Yat-sen and others in the era of the 1911 Revolution (and after) in nationalist discourse to urge unity of purpose. This occurs in lecture 1 on *Minzuzhuyi* 民族主義 (nationalism) in Dr. Sun's later treatise "Sanminzhuyi" 三民主義 (The Three Principles of the People). See Itō Teruo's 伊東昭雄 notes to the Japanese translation of this essay in *Rojin Zenshū*, 1: 90.

⁸⁸ LXQJ 1: 56.

⁸⁹ From installment 2 in *Henan*, issue 5, 59.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

Lu Xun Believed in Magic

Lu Xun, by contrast, ends “Mara” thus:

The Russian writer V. Korolenko⁹¹ has in his book *The Last Ray of Light* a passage describing how an old man taught a young boy to read in Siberia, which runs [. . .]. The book spoke of cherry blossoms and a golden oriole, neither of which existed in the icy wastes of Siberia. But the old man described them to the child, saying: “This is a bird which perches on the boughs of a flowering tree and lifts up its voice to sing a wondrous song!” The boy could then begin to imagine it.

True, a youth who lives amid such desolation cannot really hear the beautiful sound of an oriole singing, but he can get a description of it from some fore-knower. It is just that no such voices of fore-knowers have broken through the desolation of China. And this we would do well to contemplate, for we have *but* to contemplate, and nothing more!

Like Zhou Zuoren, the young Lu Xun was also a realist, but of a different hue: He believed in “magic” and for him that magic centered on the power of imagination and hope, a faith which he would retain for the rest of his career.

I remember when I read a paper⁹² years ago at the conference at Smolenice Castle, the Mao Dun scholar Chen Yu-shih and her husband objected to my focus on Lu Xun's use of the term *xiaotiao* 萧条 (desolation) in “Mara” to describe the state of China at the time. I was attempting to argue that his use of *xiaotiao* as a description for the alienated feelings of living with that desolation reflected a modern consciousness. The Chen couple responded that *xiaotiao* was an old word in Chinese, with nothing new to it. My counter was that even old words can be used in new ways. When we speak in English today we are using ancient Germanic, Old French, Latin and Greek words all the time. Yet it depends on how you use those words, what you say with them and what feelings they engender in their

⁹¹ Vladimir Korolenko (1853–1921) was a novelist and literary critic contemporaneous with Chekov. *The Last Ray of Light* (1900) is a novel set in Siberia, critical of the authoritarianism in the last decades of tsarist rule.

⁹² Jon Eugene von Kowallis, “Lu Xun's *wenyan* Essay *Moluo shi li shuo* and the Concerns of the May Fourth,” 45–58.

readers in a given epoch and situation. This is the essence of the late-Qing poetics which asserted it is possible to convey new wine in old bottles. Lu Xun does just that by couching the new arguments of his early essays in Zhang Taiyan-influenced *guwen*. He continued to do it throughout his career in his scholarly writings, and classical-style poetry. Why? I have argued elsewhere that he wanted to evoke the kind of cultural resonance that he felt he needed to make all these “modern” arguments stick.⁹³ I believe this now even moreso having re-examined his early essays in the context within which they first were published.

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⁹³ Jon Eugene von Kowallis, “Lu Xun’s Han Linguistic Project: The use of *wenyan* to create an ‘authentic’ Han vocabulary for literary terminology in his early essays,” in Lu Guoping, ed., *Yu shijie jiegui*, 289–312.

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