
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Jon Eugene von Kowallis

Understanding Wild Grass by Talking to Oneself: Lu Xun's *Yecao* through the Lens of *Ziyan Ziyu* and the Prism of the Past

Abstract This article makes a reinterpretation of Lu Xun's acclaimed prose poetry collection *Yecao* (Wild grass), written between 1924–27, by reading it in conjunction with a rediscovered prototype consisting of seven pieces published in *Guomin gongbao* (The citizen's gazette) between August and September 1919 under the title *Ziyan ziyu* (Talking to oneself). Lu Xun's *baihua* prose style had advanced considerably in the interim, but the author discerns a degree of thematic overlap between the two collections, on the basis of which he proposes answers to key questions that have been asked about *Yecao* since its first publication, concluding that it is still as fresh and avant-garde a collection to readers today as it was nearly one hundred years ago.

Keywords Lu Xun (1881–1936), *Yecao*, *Wild Grass*, Chinese prose poetry, *sanwen shi*, modern Chinese literature, May Fourth, New Culture Movement

Between 1924–26 Lu Xun penned the extraordinary volume of what has been called “prose poetry” that we now know as *Yecao* 野草 (Wild grass), a twenty-three piece somberly lyrical work sometimes compared with Baudelaire's 1857 work *Les Fleurs du mal* (The flowers of evil) or *Petits Poèmes*

Jon Eugene von Kowallis (✉)
Chinese Studies Program, School of Humanities and Languages, The University of New
South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia
E-mail: j.kowallis@unsw.edu.au

en prose.¹ In the mid-1920s Lu Xun was still fighting an existential battle similar to the one he already had hinted at in his *Zixu* 自序 (Preface) to the first collection of his stories *Nahan* 吶喊 (Outcry), i.e. what scholars such as Leo Ou-fan Lee 李歐梵 and later Wang Hui 汪暉 considered a struggle against despair, or what I would prefer to define as the need to find meaning in life in a far-from-perfect world. Others, such as Wang Xiaoming 王曉明 (1993) and Li Tianming 李天明 (2000), speculate the anxiety they find present in *Wild Grass* was an outgrowth of guilt he felt over his failed marriage with Zhu An 朱安 and his attraction to his former student, Xu Guangping 許廣平. But several *Yecao* pieces have been discovered to exist in prototypes that Lu Xun published considerably earlier, between August and September 1919 under the title *Ziyan ziyu* 自言自語 (Talking to oneself),² which was to have a sequel that did not come out at that time. Although this has been known to the scholarly world for some time, it begs several questions, which I believe have been neglected or left unanswered. Was that sequel *Yecao* or is *Yecao* simply a revision and expansion? To what extent do the prose pieces in *Ziyan ziyu* have bearing on the interpretation of *Yecao* as a whole? Second, but equally important in our understanding of

¹ Sun Yushi 孫玉石 states that, in addition to Baudelaire, Lu Xun was influenced by Turgenev, Frederik van Eeden (*De Kleine Johannes*), Eroshenko, Petöfi, and Nietzsche. See Sun Yushi, *Yecao yanjiu* 野草研究 (A study of Wild grass), 216. In his treatment of *Yecao*, Leo Ou-fan Lee does not mention Turgenev and observes that “the traces of Baudelaire are discernable, though it would be difficult to prove any direct imitation of *Les fleurs du mal*—see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun, 191–92*. Nicholas A. Kaldis, although considering antecedents as far back as the *Chu ci* and *Han fu*, as well as Turgenev and Baudelaire, concludes that “imitation [in] and influence [on *Yecao*] are difficult to prove” (p. 116); see Nicholas A. Kaldis, *The Chinese Prose Poem: A Study of Lu Xun’s Wild Grass (Yecao)*, 111–21.

² These were a preface and six prose pieces published under the pen name Shen Fei 神飛 (Divine flight) between 19 August and 9 September 1919 in the *Xin wenyi* 新文藝 (New literature) column of *Guomin gongbao* 國民公報 (The citizen’s gazette). From this it is apparent that Lu Xun intended them as a contribution to the New Literature Movement at the time, their title and the pseudonym indicates he had a high regard for them. They were rediscovered only some sixty years later and published on 3 May 1980 in *Renmin ribao* 人民日報 (People’s daily), reprinted in *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集 (The complete works of Lu Xun) 8: 91–96. Hereafter LXQJ. The prominent Taiwan scholar of late-Qing poetics Wu Hung-i 吳宏一 chose them for inclusion as the very first chapter in a self-study book he compiled for Taiwanese students who want to learn how to write prose: *Cong yuedu dao xiezuo: Xiandai mingjia sanwen shiwu jiang* (From reading to writing: Fifteen lectures on prose works by modern masters).

Yecao, is how Lu Xun uses the past rhetorically. How does the past become crucial to the speaker’s self-definition and self-positioning in this modernist work?

The Mysteries of Life and Death

The young Lu Xun concluded his summation of the tempestuous life of Shelley in part 6 of his 1907 treatise *Moluo shi li shuo* 摩羅詩力說 (On the power of Mara poetry) with an anecdote and a pronouncement:

Alas that though the questions of life and death are primary, their truths remain elusive; the poet could not put them out of mind despite the paradox that the only solution lay in death itself. Thus, when during a sailing trip Shelley once fell into the sea, he was heard to exclaim with joy: “Now . . . I shall solve the great mystery!”³ But he did not die. On another occasion, while swimming in the ocean, he went down and did not resurface. After his companion had pulled him out, on coming to, his first words were: “I always want to probe the bottom of a well—they say truth lies there. If I had found truth, you would have found me dead.”⁴ Now that Shelley is really dead, he has come to a true understanding of the mysteries of life and death; yet that understanding will remain his alone.

嗟乎，死生之事大矣，而理至闕，置而不解，詩人未能，而解之之術，又獨有死而已。故修黎曾泛舟鑿海，乃大悅呼曰，今使吾釋其秘密矣！然不死。

³ In June of 1816 when Shelley and Byron were sailing on Lake Geneva they ran into a storm. With the boat about to capsize, Shelley implored Byron not to save him, exclaiming: “Now I shall know the great secret of life.” But they both survived that time. See Zhao Ruihong, *Lu Xun Moluo shi li shuo: Zhushi, jinyi, jieshuo*, 117–18, n. 45. According to Trelawny, Shelley once took Mrs. Williams and her children out on the bay in a small craft one afternoon and “. . . starting suddenly from a deep reverie, into which he had fallen, exclaimed with a joyful and resolute voice, ‘Now let us together solve the great mystery!’” Hamada’s version of the same incident, from which Lu Xun may have been working, has Shelley actually falling into the water and speaking in the singular, not plural, about his intentions of discovering the reality of the Great Hereafter. See Hamada Yoshizumi 濱田佳澄, *Shierei* シェレー (Shelley), 165.

⁴ “I always find the bottom of a well, and they say Truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found an empty shell . . .” As quoted in Symonds, *Shelley*, 151–52.

一日浴於海，則伏而不起，友引之出，施救始蘇，曰，吾恒欲探井中，人謂誠理伏焉，當我見誠，而君見我死也。然及今日，則修黎真死矣，而人生之闕，亦以真釋，特知之者，亦獨修黎已耳。⁵

Lu Xun's life-long friend, Xu Shoushang 許壽裳 once wrote that *Yecao* could be said to embody Lu Xun's philosophy.⁶ Kiyama Hideo 木山英雄, in his seminal article "Reading *Wild Grass*," asserts *Mujie wen* 墓碣文 (The epitaph) to be the center of and most important piece in the *Yecao* collection.⁷ In it perhaps the most widely discussed passage has been the fading inscription carved on the back (literally "the dark") side (*yinmian* 陰面) of the tombstone, which is eerily written in the first person, as if the corpse entombed therein is speaking directly to the reader (as well as the narrator). But part of the eerie effect is the fact that it joltingly appears in *wenyan* 文言 (classical Chinese), within a collection written almost entirely in a beautiful vernacular (*baihuawen* 白話文) that sounds much more like contemporary writing than most of Lu Xun's earlier short stories.⁸ The inscription reads:

"... I tore out my heart to eat it, wanting to know its true taste. But the pain was so agonizing, how could I tell its taste? ..."

"... When the pain subsided I savored the heart slowly. But since by then it was stale, how could I know its true taste? ..."

"... Answer me. Or begone!"

⁵ LXQJ (1991) 1: 86–87.

⁶ Xu's exact wording was: "至於《野草》，可說是魯迅的哲學" (As for *Wild grass*, it can be said it is Lu Xun's philosophy), see Xu Shoushang, *Wo suo renshi de Lu Xun* 我所認識的魯迅 (The Lu Xun I knew), 76. Zhang Yiping 章衣萍 paraphrased Lu Xun, saying Lu Xun told him "他的哲學都包括在他的《野草》裏面" (His entire philosophy is contained in *Wild grass*)—as quoted in Sun Yushi, *Yecao yanjiu*, 141.

⁷ See Mushan Yingxiong 木山英雄 (i.e. Kiyama Hideo), *Yecao zhuti goujian de luoji jiqi fangfa* 野草主體構建的邏輯及其方法 (The logic and method of the structure of *Wild grass*) (orig. 1963), Chinese translation by Zhao Jinghua 趙京華, in *Wenxue fugu yu wenxue geming* 文學復古與文學革命 (Literary archaism and literary revolution), 52 and *Du Yecao* 讀野草 (Reading *Wild grass*), section 5, part 3 "The Creation of a Series of Dreams" Chinese translation of *Yasou Cedoku* 野草解讀 (Decoding *Wild grass*) (orig. 2002) in Zhao Jinghua, op. cit., p. 338. In the latter he calls this piece "the *Yecao* within *Yecao*."

⁸ Probably an important study could be authored just on the language and style of *Yecao*.

"..... 決心自食，欲知本味。創痛酷烈，本味何能知?"

"..... 痛定之後，徐徐食之。然其心已陳舊，本味又何由知?"

"..... 答我。否則，離開!"⁹

Here we have a fundamental challenge, a question not so much about death but rather about whether or not we can know the essence of (i.e. the significance of) life, being posed to the reader of the inscription by an ancient corpse who, after all, might well be more qualified than any of us, having both lived and died (and the latter for some time already). In the *Tici* 題辭 (Foreword; lit. "Inscription") to *Yecao*, itself considered a poem in prose, Lu Xun refers to "those long dead" (*chen siren* 陳死人) as a source of nourishment for wild grass,¹⁰ in other words, the dead (the men and women of the past) may provide a perspective on the significance of life that is beneficial to and nurturing of new life. The implication is that only by drawing on the past (*xiqu chen siren de xie he rou* 吸取陳死人的血和肉)" can we nourish art, enrich the present, grow the future and attempt to arrive at a knowledge of what is important in life, yet we must do this with caution, because certain nutrients also carry the potential for harm and thus we need to look at the past critically.

What Lu Xun was expressing in *Mujie wen* and in the above passage in *Mara* is, in essence, akin to what he is pursuing in and what is perhaps the most famous piece in *Yecao*: *Xiwang* 希望 (Hope) when he translates the line from the Hungarian poet Petöfi Sandor: "Juewang zhi wei xuwang, zheng yu xiwang xiangtong" 絕望之為虛妄，正與希望相同. The Yangs translate this into English as "Despair, like hope, is but vanity," but literally it means "The delusion in despair is precisely the same as that of hope,"¹¹ implying we cannot, in our present physical form, know the real

⁹ Chinese original text in LXQJ (1991) 2: 202. English translation by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang in *Yecao: Han Ying duizhao* (Wild Grass: A bilingual edition), 98–99.

¹⁰ "Wild grass strikes no deep roots, has no beautiful flowers and leaves, yet it imbibes dew, water and the blood and flesh of the dead, although all try to rob it of life." The original Chinese text: 野草，根本不深，花葉不美，然而吸取露，吸取水，吸取陳死人的血和肉，各各奪取它的生存. Chinese text in LXQJ (1991) 2: 159. English trans. in bilingual ed., op. cit. pp. 2–3.

¹¹ LXQJ (1991) 2: 159.

¹² LXQJ (1991) 2: 178. Bilingual ed., 40–44.

meaning of life—because of time, the antithesis of our physical *Dasein*, it remains elusive. But we can make an existential commitment to keep on,¹³ as the protagonist does in *Guoke* 過客 (The passer-by) when the central figure of the traveler, on entering middle age¹⁴ decides to *fenran xiang xi zou qu* 奮然向西走去 (resolutely walk on to the west)¹⁵ and in *La ye* 臘葉 (The blighted leaf) where the speaker exclaims:

“This leaf has been blighted!” I thought. So I plucked it and slipped it inside Satula’s collected poems, the book I had just bought. I suppose I hoped to preserve for a time this blighted motley of colors so soon to fall, to prevent its drifting away with the other leaves.

我自念：這是病葉呵！便將他摘了下來，夾在剛才買到的《雁門集》裏。大概是願使這將墜的被蝕而斑斕的顏色，暫得保存，不即與群葉一同飄散罷。¹⁶

Again, he makes an existential choice for life over death. This is not to say Lu Xun feared death—in a letter dated 30 May 1925 he wrote to Xu Guangping:

I curse the “suffering in human life,” but do not abhor death, because “suffering” can be lessened, while death is inevitable. Though it is referred to as “the end,” it’s not worth grieving over.

我是詛咒“人間苦”而不嫌惡“死”的，因為“苦”可以設法減輕而“死”是必然的事，雖曰“盡頭”，也不足悲哀。¹⁷

And in *Si huo* 死火 (Dead fire), another seminal piece in *Yecao*, which begins with the speaker in a dream falling into a valley of ice, where the

¹³ In treating the Foreword (*Tici*) to *Yecao*, Nicholas Kaldis remarks on “. . . Lu Xun’s sense of the inadequacy of language in confronting traumatic events (historical or personal)” but “he still resolves to use poetic expression to try and approximate this feeling of needing to find a written medium for his deepest sensibilities . . .” See Kaldis, *The Chinese Prose Poem*, 152, 153.

¹⁴ We are told in the text that he is “around 30 or 40” 約三四十歲, which Lu Xun in his day considered middle age. *LXQJ* (1991) 2: 188. Lu Xun was 41 at the time of the writing.

¹⁵ *LXQJ* (1991) 2: 194. Bilingual ed., 80–81.

¹⁶ *LXQJ* (1991) 2: 219. Bilingual ed., 134–35.

¹⁷ *LXQJ* (1991) 11: 79.

heat from the speaker’s body re-awakens a flame of frozen fire (“dead fire”) and together they escape the icy valley, even though we are told this means that the fire will have to burn itself out. We are told of the liberated fire:

It leapt up like a red comet, and together we left the valley. Suddenly a large stone cart drove up and I was crushed to death beneath its wheels, but not before I saw the cart fall into the valley of ice.

“Aha! You will never meet the dead fire again.” I laughed with pleasure as I spoke, as if pleased that this should be so. (April 23, 1925)

他忽而躍起，如紅彗星，並我都出冰穀口外。有大石車突然馳來，我終於蹶死在車輪底下，但我還來得及看見那車就墜入冰穀中。

“哈哈！你們是再也遇不著死火了！”我得意地笑著說，仿佛就願意這樣似的。

一九二五年四月二十三日。¹⁸

Certainly, there is an element of the surreal in the sudden appearance of the giant stone cart and the speaker being crushed to death beneath its wheels, but the speaker seems to take pleasure in knowing that, like the “Gate of Darkness,” the source of his destruction predeceases him,¹⁹ and also that he is freed from the burden of having to deal with the existential dilemma put onto him by his inadvertent kindling of the dead fire.

The Value in *Talking to Oneself* (*Ziyan Ziyu*)

But let us look at what would appear to be a precursor to the tale of the dead fire in Lu Xun’s 1919 series “Talking to Oneself”:

¹⁸ *LXQJ* (1991) 2: 196. Bilingual ed., 86–87.

¹⁹ Ng Mau-sang wrote: “Having released the dead fire, ‘I’ was unconcerned about his own fate, but the demoniacal spirit in him required that the agent of his death be safely out of the way, unable to cause further trouble. He was thus filled with ghoulish delight at seeing the stone cart fall into the frozen valley.” See the article “To Awaken or Not to Awaken—Symbols of Anxiety in *Wild Grass*,” accompanying his translations in *Renditions*, 162.

II Frozen Fire

Flowing, surging fire—is this molten coral?

Its core takes on a greenish white, like the heart of coral, its body completely red, like the flesh of coral; the outer layer has a bit black, as the coral has been scorched.

Fine indeed, but unfortunately too hot to touch.

Having met with indescribable cold, the fire turns to ice.

Its core takes on a greenish white, like the heart of coral, its body completely red, like the flesh of coral; the outer layer has a bit of black, and this is still because the coral has been burnt.

Fine indeed, but unfortunately too hot to touch.

Fire, frozen fire, people have no way to deal with it, but does it also suffer?

Alas, the frozen fire.

Alas, alas, O people of the frozen fire!

二 火的冰

流動的火，是熔化的珊瑚麼？

中間有些綠白，像珊瑚的心，渾身通紅，像珊瑚的肉，外層帶些黑，是珊瑚焦了。

好是好呵，可惜拿了要燙手。

遇著說不出的冷，火便結了冰了。

中間有些綠白，像珊瑚的心，渾身通紅，像珊瑚的肉，外層帶些黑，也還是珊瑚焦了。

好是好呵，可惜拿了便要火燙一般的冰手。

火，火的冰，人們沒奈何他，他自己也苦麼？

唉，火的冰。

唉，唉，火的冰的人！²⁰

Although considerably shorter, a number of the elements from “Dead Fire” in *Yecao* are present already, including the idea that this is something humans are unable to handle, the question of human suffering, and whether or not the fire will become a curse on, rather than an ally of,

²⁰ The above (and others from *Ziyan ziyu*) are my own translations. For the original texts, see *LXQJ* (1991) 8: 91–96.

humankind. In *Yecao*, if it plays a role in the speaker’s destruction, as in the old expression *tong gui yu jin* 同歸於盡 (to end it all at once together), this is foreshadowed by the last line in *Ziyan ziyu*, which suggests it will bring calamity upon those who are involved with it (“Alas, alas, O people of the frozen fire”). If the frozen fire is indeed to be taken as a symbol of the potential of revolution,²¹ then it does not bode well. But could it have been that in Lu Xun’s mind in September 1919? Probably not revolution per se, but perhaps it refers to the potential destruction inherent in the genii released by the May Fourth and the iconoclasm that came about as a result of the release of the fire in the process of pursuing the cause (rather prophetic!). Frozen fire has sometimes been linked in the minds of some commentators with the “subterranean fire spreading, raging underground . . .” (*dihuo zai dixia yunxing, bentu* 地火在地下運行，奔突 . . .) in the April 26, 1927 *tici* to *Yecao*.

I would note here that Lu Xun later suspected his *tici* had been expurgated from *Yecao*, either by the publisher or by government censors in 1931, as editions printed in that and subsequent years had the foreword expunged with no comment from the publisher.²² But the *tici*, although it has the quality and uses the language and imagery of a prose poem, dates from what was the beginning of another period in the author’s life and gives it a wholly new role (if this is indeed the same fire, which I doubt). After all, we are not told it has been frozen, only that it is subterranean, spreading, raging underground. Clearly, the *Huo de bing* 火的冰 (Frozen fire) of 1919 is not the *Di huo* 地火 (subterranean fire, lit. “raging underground”) of 1927, nor is the *Si huo* 死火 (Dead fire) of 1925. I think

²¹ Even Taiwan scholar Wu Hung-i subscribes to this, commenting: “Fire represents the zeal of the revolution; ice, the coldness of reality” 火，代表革命的熱情；冰，代表現實的冷酷 (Wu, p. 19). Nicholas Kaldis also gestures in this direction when he tells the reader: “The flame is more amenable to being the agent of its own movement toward death than to compliant stasis and extinction (remaining abandoned on the icy valley floor)” (Kaldis, p. 215) and “Although it may not constitute an overt call to political action, ‘Dead Fire’ exposes the individual in a state of existential uncertainty, aware of its inevitable fate yet simultaneously altering the terms of that inevitability by taking action” (Kaldis, p. 218).

²² The publisher was Shanghai Beixin Shuju. The deletion of his Foreword began with the seventh edition (May 1931). See his letters of 23 November 1935 to Qiu Yu 邱遇 (*LXQJ* [1991] 13: 256) and 19 February 1936 to Xia Chuanjing 夏傳經 (*LXQJ* [1991] 13: 314).

we can therefore conclude that the image of the spreading and raging “subterranean fire,” however compelling it may be, is something tacked onto *Yecao*, as is the speaker’s professed sentiment that he would “rejoice” after his wild grass is burned up by the molten lava that bursts forth from the subterranean fire.²³ In fact, Lu Xun indicated in a letter to Xiao Jun 蕭軍 written in the final years of his life (October 9, 1934) that he was rather satisfied with *Yecao*, at least in terms of style and technique.²⁴

No Country for Old Men?

In order to understand his original motivation in writing this type of prose poetry, let us set aside for the time his latter-day *tici* and look instead at what I would propose might be regarded as the real or at least an alternative foreword to his whole prose poetry endeavor, the *xu* 序 (preface) to *Ziyan ziyu*:

I Preface

On a summer’s night in a river village, waving a plantain-leaf fan and sitting under a big tree in the cool air is quite a comfortable thing.

Men and women all talk leisurely and tell stories. Children sing their songs while others play guessing games.

Only Old Man Tao sits alone by himself, day in day out. Because he has never been to the city in his life, his knowledge of the world is limited, and he has no tales to tell. Losing his sight and going deaf, if

²³ “Once the molten lava breaks through the earth’s crust, it will consume all the wild grass and lofty trees, leaving nothing to decay. But I am not worried; I am glad. I shall laugh aloud and sing” The original Chinese text: 熔岩一旦噴出，將燒盡一切野草，以及喬木，於是並且無可朽腐。但我坦然，欣然。我將大笑，我將歌唱。LXQJ (1991) 2: 159. English trans. from bilingual ed., 2–5.

²⁴ The whole passage in the letter reads: “That volume of mine *Wild Grass*, in terms of technique is really not bad at all. But in terms of mood it is too disconsolate. That is because it was written after I’d met with quite a few setbacks. I hope that you’ll free yourself of the influence of that sort of disconsolation.” 我的那一本《野草》，技術並不算壞，但心情太頹唐了。因為那是我碰了許多釘子之後寫出來的。我希望你脫離這種頹唐心情的影響。LXQJ (1991) 12: 532.

you ask for seven he answers eight, tell him three and he says four;²⁵ this gets on one’s nerves, so no one pays any attention to him.

He will just keep shutting his eyes, saying something to himself. If you listen closely, although most words are incoherent, several interesting utterances yet come forth.

As the night wears on, those come to take in the cool air all eventually go on their way. I go home and light a lamp, not yet wanting to sleep, I write down the words I have heard and on re-reading them, discover they are utterly devoid of meaning.

In fact how could someone such as Old Man Tao have anything good to say? But since I have written them out, for the time being I will keep his words.

Having kept them, what will come of it? This, not even I can answer.

—written by lamplight on the Eighth of August in the Eighth Year of the Republic of China (1919).

一 序

水村的夏夜，搖著大芭蕉扇，在大樹下乘涼，是一件極舒服的事。

男女都談些閑天，說些故事。孩子是唱歌的唱歌，猜謎的猜謎。

只有陶老頭子，天天獨自坐著。因為他一世沒有進過城，見識有限，無天可談。而且眼花耳聾，問七答八，說三話四，很有點討厭，所以沒人理他。他卻時常閉著眼，自己說些什麼。仔細聽去，雖然昏話多，偶然之間，卻也有幾句略有意思的段落的。

夜深了，乘涼的都散了。我回家點上燈，還不想睡，便將聽得的話寫了下來，再看一回，卻又毫無意思了。

其實陶老頭子這等人，那裏真會有好話呢，不過既然寫出，姑且留下罷了。留下又怎樣呢？這是連我也答復不來。

中華民國八年八月八日燈下記。²⁶

²⁵ The first phrase *wen qi da ba* 問七答八 is probably simply descriptive of the way a deaf (and potentially senile) old man might respond to a question with an answer on another subject. The second phrase *shuo san hua si* 說三話四 sounds similar to one in Shanghai dialect *xia san hua si* 瞎三話四, meaning to speak randomly or incoherently; to talk nonsense 亂講亂說，瞎說，胡扯。

²⁶ LXQJ (1991) 8: 91. First published August 19, 1919.

This preface is important in that it was actually written at the time the pieces in *Ziyan ziyu* were composed, unlike the *tici* to *Yecao*, which was written in Guangzhou on 26 April 1927, just after Chiang Kai-shek's purge of the Reds,²⁷—and several years after the other pieces in *Yecao* had been composed. The preface to “Talking to Oneself” may be read as the author addressing his own relationship to the past at the time of the May Fourth Movement. Although Old Man Tao 陶老頭子 has lived a life in isolation from the outside world (as China might have been depicted at the time of the May Fourth)²⁸, now has impaired senses and speaks in language and in a manner which is irritating to the narrator and the younger people around him, the narrator returns home and finds himself writing down the old man's words, inexplicable as they (and the act in and of itself) may be, and concludes: “In fact how could someone such as Old Man Tao have anything good to say? But since I have written them out, for the time being I will keep his words. Having kept them, what will come of it? This, not even I can answer.” The ending is so laconic it reminds the reader of the corpse's command toward the end of *Mujie wen* (The epitaph) in *Yecao*: “. . . 答我。否則，離開! . . .” (“Answer me. Or begone!”). In both instances, a challenge is posed to the reader. As ambivalent as the speaker is about the worth of the past, he is reluctant to discard it, even now at the height of the New Culture Movement. Instead, he writes it down to preserve it, even though he is not sure there is any real worth in so doing. Again, this reminds the reader of another passage that Lu Xun would write later in the preface to *Nahan* when the speaker is confronted by his friend Jin Xinyi 金心異 (a stand-in for the real historic figure Qian Xuantong 錢玄同) with the question of why he is doing textual scholarship on the inscriptions from ancient stelae:

“What is the use in copying these things out?” he ventured an informed question.

“There is no use.”

²⁷ This began in Shanghai on 12 April and in Guangzhou on 15 April 1927.

²⁸ See his description of China at the beginning of Lu Xun's 1908 essay “Wenhua pianzhi lun” 文化偏至論 (Concerning imbalanced cultural development) in *LXQJ* (1991) 1: 44.

“So, what is the point in your copying them?”

“There is no point.”

“I think you could write some pieces for us”

“你鈔了這些有什麼用?” 有一夜，他翻著我那古碑的鈔本，發了研究的質問了。

“沒有什麼用。”

“那麼，你鈔他是什麼意思呢？”

“沒有什麼意思。”

“我想，你可以做點文章……”²⁹

And of course, according to the preface to *Nahan* at least and after the exchange about the Iron House, this was the point at which his career as a creative writer of “essays that resembled short stories” (*xiaoshuo moyang de wenzhang* 小說模樣的文章) began. So one might say his writing career began from his collating stories of the past on the eve of the May Fourth. Not with the present, nor with the future, but rather in trying to come to terms with the past. Here I am reminded of Lydia Liu's contention that *Zhufu* 祝福 (The new year's sacrifice), which she sees as Lu Xun's contribution to the “Science vs Metaphysics” debate (1923) may be based on, inspired by or a response to an ancient Buddhist sutra.³⁰ This point is an important link between his short stories, *Yecao*, and *Gushi xinbian* 故事新編 (Old tales retold): Coming to terms with the past is an intrinsic part of moving ahead, just as China today seeks to look back to its own past in order to attain spiritual and philosophical insights on the present, and Hong Kong seeks to redefine itself by coming to terms with the mixed heritage of its own past, something it eschewed during the period of British colonial rule.

History as an Amalgam

Many of these thematic concerns can be seen in the third piece from

²⁹ *LXQJ* (1991) 1: 418. The English rendering is mine.

³⁰ This is the tale of the sufferings of Bhiksuni Suksma (*Weimiao Biquni* 微妙比丘尼), story #16 in the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (Sutra of the wise and foolish). See Lydia H. Liu, “Life as Form: How Biomimesis Encountered Buddhism in Lu Xun,” 21–54.

Ziyan ziyu, titled *Gucheng* 古城 (Ancient city):

III Ancient City

Do you think that there is a stretch of flat land over there? There is not. It is actually a mountain of sand, inside the mountain of sand is an ancient city. In this ancient city, long ago, there lived three people. The ancient city was not expansive but [its walls were] very high. There was only one door, and that door was a gate.

Thick fog, a leaden grey, rolled up the yellow sand, carrying it like giant waves.

A youth said, "The sand is coming. We cannot survive. Flee quickly, child."

An old man said, "Nonsense, there's no such thing."

In this way passed three years, twelve months and eight days.

The youth said, "The sand is piling up high, we can't survive. Child, flee quickly."

The old man said, "Nonsense, there's no such thing."

The youth wanted to open the gate, but it had grown heavy because so much sand had accumulated above it.

The youth, trying as if his life depended on it, eventually lifted the gate, using his hands and feet to prop it, but he could not get it open to even the height of two feet.

The youth pushed the child forward, telling him: "Flee quickly!"

The old man held him back, saying: "It's nothing!"

The youth said: "Flee quickly. This is not theory. It is already fact."

Thick fog, a leaden grey, rolled up the yellow sand, carrying it off like a wave.

Of later events, I have no idea.

You should know that the sand mountain could be excavated to take a look at the ancient city. Beneath the gate perhaps there will be a corpse. Within the gate, will there be two or one?

三 古城

你以為那邊是一片平地麼？不是的。其實是一座沙山，沙山裏面是一座古城。

這古城裏，一直從前住著三個人。

古城不很大，卻很高。只有一個門，門是一個閘。

青鉛色的濃霧，卷著黃沙，波濤一般的走。

少年說，“沙來了。活不成了。孩子快逃罷。”

老頭子說，“胡說，沒有的事。”

這樣的過了三年和十二個月另八天。

少年說，“沙積高了，活不成了。孩子快逃罷。”

老頭子說，“胡說，沒有的事。”

少年想開閘，可是重了。因為上面積了許多沙了。

少年拚了死命，終於舉起閘，用手腳都支著，但總不到二尺高。

少年擠那孩子出去說，“快走罷！”

老頭子拖那孩子回來說，“沒有的事！”

少年說，“快走罷！這不是理論，已經是事實了！”

青鉛色的濃霧，卷著黃沙，波濤一般的走。

以後的事，我可不知道了。

你要知道，可以掘開沙山，看看古城。閘門下許有一個死屍。閘門裏是兩個還是一個？³¹

Here we have a prototype for the hero in Lu Xun's well-known essay "Women xianzai zenyang zuo fuqin" 我們現在怎樣做父親 (What is required of us as fathers today?)³² who shoulders up the "Gate of Darkness" to allow the children to escape, but then is himself crushed by its inescapable weight. That essay is dated October 1919, less than a month after this prose piece came out. The ancient city, of course, may be read as a symbol of China and its looming means of death its own yellow sand, propelled by a thick fog. I will avoid making references to the *wumai* 霧霾 or "haze" of the present day, but it seems clear that the threat to the nation originates from within its own borders. The ending is more laconic than in its longer counterpart and its hero, if he is a hero, is younger. The central question which remains is to be solved by archaeologists—future generations, or at least those who have an interest in examining the past. This is a parable set in the past, but it

³¹ LXQJ (1991) 8: 92–93. First published 20 August 1919.

³² LXQJ (1991) 1: 129–43. English translation in Lu Xun Selected Works 2: 56–71. Hereafter LXSW.

comments on the present and perhaps the future: What will be the outcome of the flight advocated (especially for the child) by the youth? Will the child escape or will they all perish still? The ending is a bit like that of *Zhujian* 鑄劍 (Forging the swords) (written in October 1926 but published in two installments on 25 April and 10 May 1927), where all three heads—the evil king, the boy, and the man in black—friends and foe alike, end up simmering in the same cauldron and continuing their fight in a surreal animated manner. But here in *Ziyan ziyu*, the question is posed to the reader in a more paradoxical and, arguably, more modernist ending. Will there be a corpse amid the portals? One or two? You must decide.

Traditionally, crabs symbolized success in the imperial exams or purity (they are said to seek a place with pure water to live in). Two crabs traditionally might allude to the two top candidates, but the *keju* 科舉 examination system had been abolished in 1905, so when Lu Xun wrote the following sketch about two crabs in *Ziyan ziyu*, he was obviously referring to something else, perhaps two worldly *wenren* 文人 (literati), representing different worldviews:

IV Crabs

The old crab feels ill at ease, feeling its entire body growing too hard. It knows its shell will soon be shed.

It dashes about trying to find a crevice in which to hide and blocks the entryway with stones so it can shed its shell in secret. It knows that to shed its shell in the open would be dangerous. Its body is so soft as to be readily devoured by other crabs. This is not empty fear, it has seen this happen with its own eyes.

It moves in a great rush.

A nearby crab asks: “Elder Brother, why are you in such a panic?”

“I’m about to shed my shell.”

“Why not do it here? I can help you.”

“That’d be too scary!”

“You aren’t afraid of anything that might lurk in that crevice, but instead you fear one of your own kind?”

“It is not my own kind that I fear.”

“What is it that you fear then?”

“I fear that you’ll devour me.”

四 螃蟹

老螃蟹覺得不安了，覺得全身太硬了。自己知道要蛻殼了。

他跑來跑去的尋。他想尋一個窟穴，躲了身子，將石子堵了穴口，隱隱的蛻殼。他知道外面蛻殼是危險的。身子還軟，要被別的螃蟹吃去的。這並非空害怕，他實在親眼見過。

他慌慌張張的走。

旁邊的螃蟹問他說，“老兄，你何以這般慌？”

他說，“我要蛻殼了。”

“就在這裏蛻不很好麼？我還要幫你呢。”

“那可太怕人了。”

“你不怕窟穴裏的別的東西，卻怕我們同種麼？”

“我不是怕同種。”

“那還怕什麼呢？”

“就怕你要吃掉我。”³³

Here we have another laconic ending (becoming characteristic of this cycle) and a suggestion of a type of cannibalism similar but not identical to that which Lu Xun referred metaphorically earlier in *Kuangren riji* 狂人日記 (A madman’s diary) (1918) that may hide behind the other crab’s offer to help. Wu Hung-i says the crab seeking to shed its shell is trying to rid itself of the vestiges of tradition (*biyu paoqi jiu chuantong* 比喻拋棄舊傳統), whereas the second crab represents those who seek to retain it.³⁴ But I would suggest that one of the most conspicuous features in this piece is the use of the word *tongzhong* 同種 which suggests the Japanese imperialist slogan of *tongwen tongzhong* 同文同種 ([we are of] the same culture and the same race), which Lu Xun would mock in *A Q Zhengzhuàn* 阿Q正傳 (The true story of Ah Q) (December 1921–February 1922)³⁵ and elsewhere. After all, the May Fourth Movement began with a demonstration protesting Japanese encroachment. And territorial

³³ LXQJ (1991) 8: 93.

³⁴ See Wu Hung-i, *Cong yuedu dao xiezuo*, 22.

³⁵ LXQJ (1991) 1: 504–5, 530, n. 34.

encroachment was often equated metaphorically with being devoured.

The New Youth

Next, Lu Xun moves on to the subject of youth, in keeping with the May Fourth, with all its energy, imperiousness, and impetuosity:

V Bo'er (lit. "Son of the waves")

Bo'er ran off angrily.

This child Bo'er is already as tall as a low hut, but he's still naughty, I do not know where he learned all these bad things, but now he wants to grow flowers.

I do not know where he went to get these roses he planted in dry ground, watering them in the morning, then in mid-morning and again at noon.

At noon he watered them and was overjoyed at a speck of green on the soil. In the afternoon he watered them, but the speck of green had disappeared, perhaps eaten by insects.

Bo'er went off to get the watering pot, angrily running to the river side, where he saw a girl crying.

"Why are you here crying?" he asked.

The girl replied: "Have you tasted the river water?"

Bo'er tasted the water and said "There's nothing special about the flavor."

The girl told him: "I shed a tear into it, yet it's still flavorless, so how could I not cry?"

Bo'er replied: "You're a foolish girl!"

Angrily he ran to the ocean shore, where he saw a boy crying.

Bo'er asked: "Why are you here crying?"

The boy asked: "What color do you think the water in the ocean is?"

Having looked at the water in the ocean, Bo'er replied: "It is green."

The boy told him: "I shed a drop of blood into it, yet it is still green, so how could I not cry?"

Bo'er responded: "You're a foolish kid."

Yet it's Bo'er who is the fool. How in the world can there be roses

that put forth buds in half a day, when they are still seeds in the ground?

Even if they never come forth, it's not as though there won't be other roses on the earth.

五 波兒

波兒氣憤憤的跑了。

波兒這孩子，身子有矮屋一般高了，還是淘氣，不知道從那裏學了壞樣子，也想種花了。

不知道從那裏要來的薔薇子，種在幹地上，早上澆水，上午澆水，正午澆水。正午澆水，土上面一點小綠，波兒很高興，午後澆水，小綠不見了，許是被蟲子吃了。

波兒去了噴壺，氣憤憤的跑到河邊，看見一個女孩子哭著。

波兒說，“你爲什麼在這裏哭？”

女孩子說，“你嘗河水什麼味罷。”

波兒嘗了水，說是“淡的”。

女孩子說，“我落下了一滴淚了，還是淡的，我怎麼不哭呢。”

波兒說，“你是傻丫頭！”

波兒氣憤憤的跑到海邊，看見一個男孩子哭著。

波兒說，“你爲什麼在這裏哭？”

男孩子說，“你看海水是什麼顏色？”

波兒看了海水，說是“綠的”。

男孩子說，“我滴下了一點血了，還是綠的，我怎麼不哭呢。”

波兒說，“你是傻小子！”

波兒才是傻小子哩。世上那有半天抽芽的薔薇花，花的種子還在土裏呢。便是終於不出，世上也不會沒有薔薇花。³⁶

There was more than a degree of naiveté surrounding the idealism of the May Fourth. This piece might be read as a parable about the necessity for protracted struggle and for self-reflection, not name-calling. These were some of Lu Xun's themes in other works at the time as well: There will be no quick solutions or easy outs for the nation or for the young intellectuals who made up the majority of his readers. In a way, this cautions against -isms and the quick fix that they offer; nevertheless, the

³⁶ LXQJ (1991) 8: 94-95.

parable tells the reader not to lose hope: Even if they don't come forth here, roses will still exist somewhere else on the earth. Lu Xun's works may be critical and sometimes dark, but they are not claustrophobic—there is always a world outside, beyond failure and disconsolation.

Live as Real People

This applies even to dying:

VI My Father

My father lay upon the bed, gasping for air, his face very sallow and jaundiced, I was a bit afraid to risk a look at him.

His eyes slowly closed, his breathing gradually grew fainter. My old wet-nurse³⁷ told me, "Your father is about to die, you call him back."

"Daddy."

"No, louder!"

"Daddy!"

My father opened his eyes for an instant and the corner of his mouth moved, as if a bit sad, then he slowly closed his eyes again.

My wet-nurse then told me: "Your father is dead."

Ah! Now I think a peaceful death, a tranquil death should be allowed to come slowly.

Whoever dares to start yelling and kicks up a fuss at such a time is committing a grave error.

Why did I not listen to my father and let him slip slowly away into death, instead of yelling at him.

Ah! My wet-nurse. You were devoid of ill-intent, yet still told me to make this great mistake, disrupting my father's death, so that he could hear only shouts of "father," not the greater beckoning that

³⁷ The later version in *Zhaohua xishi* 朝花夕拾 (Dawn blossoms plucked at dusk) changes this character from being the speaker's former wet-nurse to a neighbor lady "Mrs. Yan who lived in the same compound, a lady who was well-versed in rites and ritual, came in" 住在一門裏的衍太太進來了。他是一個精通禮節的婦人。We are told in the annotations to LXQJ (1991) that this was "the wife of his great uncle Zhou Zichuan" 叔祖周子傳的妻子。See LXQJ (1991) 2: 290, n. 12.

should have called him to cross the Elysian Fields.³⁸

At that time I was a child and did not understand things. Now that I'm slightly clearer, it's too late. I now tell my child, if I close my eyes, whatever you do, don't start yelling in my ear.

六 我的父親

我的父親躺在床上，喘著氣，臉上很瘦很黃，我有點怕敢看他了。

他眼睛慢慢閉了，氣息漸漸平了。我的老乳母對我說，“你的爹要死了，你叫他罷。”

“爹爹。”

“不行，大聲叫！”

“爹爹！”

我的父親張一張眼，口邊一動，彷彿有點傷心，——他仍然慢慢的閉了眼睛。我的老乳母對我說，“你的爹死了。”

阿！我現在想，大安靜大沈寂的死，應該聽他慢慢到來。

誰敢亂嚷，是大過失。

我何以不聽我的父親，徐徐入死，大聲叫他。

阿！我的老乳母。你並無惡意，卻教我犯了大過，擾亂我父親的死亡，使他只聽得叫“爹”，卻沒有聽到有人向荒山大叫。

那時我是孩子，不明白什麼事理。現在，略略明白，已經遲了。我現在告知我的孩子，倘我閉了眼睛，萬不要在我的耳朵邊叫了。³⁹

This is without a doubt the prototype for *Fuqin de bing* 父親的病 (Father's illness) in *Zhaohua xishi* 朝花夕拾 (Dawn blossoms plucked at dusk). In my reading, both question the logic of traditional ideas and practices, as well as revealing the author's sensitivity to the danger of being coopted into a belief system with inhumane values, manipulation and how we abuse others, both advertently and inadvertently. Viewed in this light, neither piece is about wallowing in guilt or self-blame. And this is in keeping with the May Fourth era theme of *Kuangren riji* (A madman's diary) as well: Live as real human beings, genuine people (zhen de ren 真

³⁸ Literally *huang shan* 荒山 means a desolate, barren mountain. I have borrowed the term Elysian Fields from ancient Greek religion to suggest a place that souls go immediately after the death of the physical body.

³⁹ LXQJ (1991) 8: 95. First published 9 September 1919.

的人),⁴⁰ untainted by the old beliefs inherent in the social, political and extended family/clan system.

Reflecting on the Past

Remaining on the topic of the family, Lu Xun concludes the first cycle of these musings (there was to be a sequel, which never came out) with:

VII My Brother

I dislike kite flying; but one of my younger brothers delighted in the idea of flying a kite.

After my father passed away, my family ran out of money. No matter how fervently he desired it, my brother couldn't get a kite.

One afternoon, I went into a room we never used and discovered my brother hidden away there, putting together a make-shift kite. There were a few bamboo slats he had carved, a few sheets of paper he bought on his own, and four wind-wheels he had fashioned and pasted together.

I dislike kite flying and detested his enthusiasm for flying kites, so I got angry, trampled the wind-wheels, broke the bamboo frame, and tore up the paper.

My brother went out of the room crying, then sat quietly beneath the portico. What he did after that I paid no attention to at the time, so I have no way of knowing.

I later realized that I had wronged him. My brother however had completely forgotten this wrong—he continued in his friendly way to call me “big brother”.

I was very regretful and told him this story, but he could not dredge up a trace of the event from his memory. He just kept on calling me “big brother” in that friendly way of his.

Ah! My brother. If you do not remember my wrong, how can I ask you to forgive me?

Yet I still ask for your forgiveness!

⁴⁰ LXQJ (1991) 1: 431.

七 我的兄弟

我是不喜歡放風箏的，我的一個小兄弟是喜歡放風箏的。

我的父親死去之後，家裏沒有錢了。我的兄弟無論怎麼熱心，也得不到一個風箏了。

一天午後，我走到一間從來不用的屋子裏，看見我的兄弟，正躲在裏面糊風箏，有幾支竹絲，是自己削的，幾張皮紙，是自己買的，有四個風輪，已經糊好了。

我是不喜歡放風箏的，也最討厭他放風箏，我便生氣，踏碎了風輪，拆了竹絲，將紙也撕了。

我的兄弟哭著出去了，悄然的在廊下坐著，以後怎樣，我那時沒有理會，都不知道了。

我後來悟到我的錯處。我的兄弟卻將我這錯處全忘了，他總是很要好的叫我“哥哥”。

我很抱歉，將這事說給他聽，他卻連影子都記不起了。他仍是很要好的叫我“哥哥”。

阿！我的兄弟。你沒有記得我的錯處，我能請你原諒麼？
然而還是請你原諒罷！⁴¹

This is the prototype for what was re-written into *Fengzheng* 風箏 (Kites) in *Yecao*. It lacks the charm of the detail and specifics of the story as Lu Xun relates it in *Yecao*, with passages such as:

But retribution came to me at last, long after our parting, when I was already middle-aged. I was unlucky enough to read a foreign book on children, from which I learned for the first time that play is a child's best occupation, and playthings his good angels. At once this childhood tyranny over the spirit, forgotten for more than twenty years, came to my mind; and that instant my heart seemed to turn to lead and sink heavily down and down. I knew how I could make it up to him: give him a kite, approve of his flying it, urge him to fly it, and fly it with him. We could shout, run, laugh! . . . But by this time he, like me, had long had a moustache.

⁴¹ LXQJ (1991) 8: 96.

然而我的懲罰終於輪到了，在我們離別得很久之後，我已經是中年。我不幸偶而看了一本外國的講論兒童的書，才知道遊戲是兒童最正當的行為，玩具是兒童的天使。於是二十年來毫不憶及的幼小時對於精神的虐殺的一幕，忽地在眼前展開，而我的心也仿佛同時變了鉛塊，很重很重的墮著，墮著。我也知道補過的方法的：送他風箏，贊成他放，勸他放，我和他一同放。我們嚷著，跑著，笑著……然而他其時已經和我一樣，早已有了鬍子了。⁴²

A comparison of these two pieces makes it obvious how much Lu Xun's style and sophistication as a writer of *baihuawen* had advanced in the interim. Nevertheless, the same theme is there and unchanged. What is most significant is that this piece appeared in *Ziyan ziyu* some five years earlier than the quarrel and breakup of Lu Xun and his brother Zhou Zuoren in July 1923. Thus the assertion that "Kites" in *Yecao* was written as a result of Lu Xun's feelings of regret about the breakup and as an admission of his guilt vis-à-vis Zhou Zuoren is questionable. "Kites" to me turns on the representation of the past and one's inability to go back in time to change mistakes and alter injustices, but the speaker in *Ziyan ziyu* ends with: "Yet I still ask for your forgiveness!" highlighting the existential truth that we must live with our sins and misdeeds and try to atone for them, even if atonement is impossible. And here I am reminded of Takeuchi Yoshimi's 竹內好 idea of *kaishin* 回心 (turn of heart)⁴³, which I would link not to Buddhism or Christianity, as Li Xinfeng 李心峰 and Li Dongmu 李冬木 have done, but rather in this context to the classical Chinese idea of *fanxing* 反省 (reflection on one's own actions and motivations). Lu Xun's speaker in *Wo de xiongdi* (My brother 我的兄弟) and throughout *Ziyan ziyu* is calling on us to reflect on the past in order to make ourselves able to live in a better way in the present and the future.

⁴² LXQJ (1991) 2: 183. Bilingual ed., p. 55.

⁴³ Li Xinfeng postulates the term *kaishin* 回心, as used by Takeuchi, is derived from Buddhism, meaning to change one's mind after gaining enlightenment or, in Lu Xun's case, to reach a turning point ("這裏指魯迅走上文學道路的一個關鍵性的契機。也可以譯為轉捩點，關節點，但都不太確切……")—see his translation of Takeuchi's *Rojin* 魯迅 (Lu Xun), 46. Whereas Li Dongmu in *Jindai de chaoke* 近代的超克 (Overcoming modernity) interprets it as the Christian term "conversion" (p. 45). Others take it to mean "repentance" (*chanhui* 懺悔). Morohashi defines it as 1) 心を改める改心 (to change the heart; change one's mind) 2) 往日の愛情を回復する (to return to the feelings of love from former days). Morohashi Tetsuji, comp., *Dai Kan-Wa Jiten* (Great Sino-Japanese dictionary) (1984) 3: 54.

Without the sort of reflection and self-examination that *Ziyan ziyu* and its sequel *Yecao* call for, we cannot move on. This is the ultimate theme of *Yecao* and what Lu Xun meant by the way he set about to *jiepou ziji* 解剖自己 (dissect oneself).⁴⁴

The Core of Lu Xun's Philosophy

What is Lu Xun's philosophy, if it is articulated in *Wild Grass*, as Xu Shoushang claimed? According to the late Charles Alber, the first Western scholar to comment extensively on *Yecao*, Lu Xun "sees man as a victim of tyranny from above, yet he also sees man as a perpetrator of tyranny Like animals, men devour each other's flesh, or if not the flesh itself, the very soul that takes refuge within that flesh."⁴⁵ This reminds me a bit of Lu Xun's concluding observation on Byron at the end of part 4 of *Moluo shi li shuo*:

Thus, at the same time he exalted power and praised the strong, Byron also proclaimed: "I love America,⁴⁶ this realm of freedom, this green meadow of God, this land unbowed."⁴⁷ From this it becomes evident how Byron could delight in Napoleon's decimation of the world, while at the same time loving Washington's struggle for liberty; how he could be fascinated by the ravages of pirates, yet go forth to single-handedly adopt the cause of Greek independence; how repression and resistance could be and were embodied in one

⁴⁴ His famous remark: "It is true that I often dissect others, but even more frequently I dissect myself even more mercilessly" 我的確時時解剖別人，然而更多的是更無情面地解剖我自己 originates in his "Xie zai Fen houmian" 寫在《墳》後面 (Afterword to "The Grave"). See LXQJ (1991) 1: 284.

⁴⁵ Charles J. Alber, "Wild Grass, Symmetry and Parallelism in Lu Hsün's Prose Poems," in *Critical Essays on Chinese Literature*, 11.

⁴⁶ America in Byron's day was perceived as a weak nation defying the reactionary powers of Europe, as well as a spiritual successor to the democratic heritage of ancient Greece.

⁴⁷ Attributed to Byron 1) on the field of battle in Greece (p. 273) and 2) in a conversation with an American which took place approximately three months prior to his lordship's death in Greece (p. 334) by Kimura Takatarō in *Bairon: Bungei-kai no dai mao* (Byron: The satan of the literary world). According to my correspondence with Byron scholar Leslie Marchand, neither of these attributions can be verified.

and the same man. It is on this paradox that [his dedication to] both liberty and human dignity turned.

故既揄揚威力，頌美強者矣，復曰，吾愛亞美利加，此自由之區，神之綠野，不被壓制之地也。由是觀之，裴倫既喜拿破侖之毀世界，亦愛華盛頓之爭自由，既心儀海賊之橫行，亦孤援希臘之獨立，壓制反抗，兼以一人矣。雖然，自由在是，人道亦在是。⁴⁸

Alber suggests that the conclusion to *Yecao* lies in its foreword (*tici*), written one year later than the rest of the collection. “The poet’s life,” he tells us, “is the mud in which the stately tree of creative talent tries to grow. But the tree finds no support in the mud, and the only crop the soil can produce is weeds, wild grass. The poet therefore compares his poetry to weeds, something unwanted and troublesome . . . I believe that the poet has finally accepted the reality of death . . . [his] hope that these weeds will quickly die . . . and in the very act of dying affirm the existence of life. Otherwise he ‘will not have lived’ and that, asserts the poet, would be worse than death.”⁴⁹

As much as I admire his scholarship on Lu Xun, the sinologists of the former Soviet Union, and Ding Ling, I am not convinced of Alber’s conclusion that “Death lies at the very core of *Wild Grass*.”⁵⁰ In October 1919, just as he was finishing *Ziyan ziyu*, Lu Xun wrote:

Burdened as a man may be with the weight of tradition, he can yet prop open the gate of darkness with his shoulder to let the children through to the bright, wide-open spaces, to lead happy lives hence-forward as rational human beings. This is a great and important task, and a most difficult one.

自己背著因襲的重擔，肩住了黑暗的閘門，放他們到寬闊光明的地方去；此後幸福的度日，合理的做人。這是一件極偉大的要緊的事，也是一件極困苦艱難的事。⁵¹

⁴⁸ LXQJ (1991) 1: 78–79.

⁴⁹ Alber, “Wild Grass, Symmetry and Parallelism in Lu Hsūn’s Prose Poems,” 17.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 19.

⁵¹ From *Women xianzai zenyang zuo fuqin* (What is required of us as fathers today) in LXQJ (1991) 1: 140. English trans. in LXSW (1980) 2: 71.

He concludes *Yecao* not with death, but with “An Awakening” (*Yi jue* — 覺). There he muses at the end on the lonely, but heroic lives of the young writers who brought out the literary journal “The Sunken Bell” (*Chen zhong* 沈鍾), the successor to the short-lived journal *Qian Cao* 淺草 (Short grass), which he greatly admired and on which he may have based his own title *Yecao*:

The editors of *The Sunken Bell*, in an untitled address to their readers, have written: “Some people say our society is a desert. If this really were the case, though rather desolate it should give you a sense of tranquility, though rather lonely it should give you a sense of infinity. It should not be so chaotic, gloomy and above all so changeful as it is.”

Yes, the young people’s spirits have risen up before me. They have grown rough, or are about to grow rough. But I love these spirits which bleed and suffer in silence, for they make me feel I am in the world of men—I am living among men.

While I have been editing, the sun has set, and I carry on by lamplight. All kinds of youth flash past before my eyes, though around me is nothing but dusk. Tired, I take a cigarette, quietly close my eyes in indeterminate thought, and have a long, long dream. I wake with a start. All around is still nothing but dusk; cigarette smoke rises in the motionless air like tiny specks of cloud in the summer sky, to be slowly transformed into indefinable shapes.

《沈鍾》的《無題》——代啓事——說：“有人說：我們的社會是一片沙漠。——如果當真是一片沙漠，這雖然荒漠一點也還靜肅；雖然寂寞一點也還會使你感覺蒼茫。何至於象這樣的混沌，這樣的陰沈，而且這樣的離奇變幻！”

是的，青年的魂靈屹立在我眼前，他們已經粗暴了，或者將要粗暴了，然而我愛這些流血和隱痛的魂靈，因為他使我覺得是在人間，是在人間活著。在編校中夕陽居然西下，燈火給我接續的光。各樣的青春在眼前——馳去了，身外但有昏黃環繞。我疲勞著，捏著紙煙，在無名的思想中靜靜地合了眼睛，看見很長的夢。忽而警覺，身外也還是環繞著昏黃；煙篆在不動的空氣中飛

升，如幾片小小夏雲，徐徐幻出難以指名的形象。⁵²

This piece is dated April 10, 1926. Although he was writing not long after the March 18th Massacre,⁵³ which he deplored in at least four essays and elsewhere in *Yecao*, the ending of “An Awakening” moves beyond grief and mourning in the direction of hope.

Wild Grass in the 21st Century

It is not my contention that *Ziyan ziyu* can provide us with all the insights we need to interpret everything in *Yecao*, but I am convinced that it provides enough textual evidence to re-contextualize a number of its most philosophically important pieces and thereby furnishes a necessary challenge to some of the theories about what may have been lurking behind *Yecao* in the “dark recesses” of Lu Xun’s mind. If we return at this point to the quotation from *Mara* about Shelley given at the outset of this article: “Now that Shelley is really dead, he has come at last to a true understanding of the mysteries of life and death; yet that understanding will remain his alone.” It becomes clear that in *Yecao* death provides no answer, at least not to the living. *Yecao* is like a psychotropic drug, it is about expanding the consciousness of the living, not ending it. That is what made it in the 1920s, and continues to make it now, almost a century later, such engaging reading for those who seek to understand Lu Xun’s philosophy and to probe, thereby, the meaning of existence.

Acknowledgement I would dedicate this article to the memory of Raoul David Findeisen (1958–2017), forever a light in our field.

⁵² LXQJ (1991) 2: 224–25. Bilingual ed., pp. 146–48. I have modified the Yang’s translation slightly.

⁵³ On that date in 1926 troops of the Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 warlord government opened fire on unarmed demonstrators who had marched from Tian’anmen to Government House 執政府, near Houhai, killing 47 and wounding 150 plus. Lu Xun, in a famous essay commemorating his fallen students, *Wu hua de qiangwei zhi er* 無花的薔薇之二 (Roses without blooms #2) called it “The darkest day since the founding of the Republic” 民國以來最黑暗的一天 in LXQJ (1991) 3: 264. For the Yangs’ translation of the essay (“More Roses Without Blooms”), see LXSJ (1980) 2: 259–60.

References

- Alber, Charles J. “Wild Grass, Symmetry and Parallelism in Lu Hsün’s Prose Poems,” in *Critical Essays on Chinese Literature*, edited by William H. Nienhauser. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1976.
- Hamada Yoshizumi. *Shierei* シエレー (Shelley). Meiji 33. Reprint. Tokyo: Minyusha, 1900.
- Hsia, T. A. *The Gate of Darkness: Studies on the Leftist Literary Movement in China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968.
- Kaldis, Nicholas A. *The Chinese Prose Poem: A Study of Lu Xun’s Wild Grass (Yecao)*. Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2014.
- Kimura Takatarō. *Bairon: Bungei-kai no dai maō* (Byron: The satan of the literary world). Tokyo: Daigakukan, 1902.
- Lee, Leo Ou-fan. *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Liu, Lydia H. “Life as Form: How Biomimesis Encountered Buddhism in Lu Xun.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 1 (Feb. 2009): 21–54.
- Lu Xun. *Lu Xun Selected Works*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980.
- . *Lu Xun quanji* (The complete works of Lu Xun). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1991.
- . *Yecao: Han Ying duizhao* (Wild Grass: A bilingual edition). Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001.
- Morohashi Tetsuji, comp. *Dai Kan-Wa Jiten* (Great Sino-Japanese dictionary), 1984.
- Mushan Yingxiong (i.e. Kiyama Hideo). *Yecao zhuti goujian de luoji jiqi fangfa* (The logic and method of the structure of Wild Grass). 1963. Translated by Zhao Jinghua, in *Wenxue fugu yu wenxue geming* (Literary archaism and literary revolution). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004.
- Ng, Mau-sang. “To Awaken or Not to Awaken—Symbols of Anxiety in Wild Grass.” *Renditions* 26 (1986): 151–64.
- Sun Yushi. *Yecao yanjiu* (A study of Wild Grass). Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982.
- Takeuchi Yoshimi. *Rojin* (Lu Xun). Translated by Li Xinfeng. Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1986.
- Wu Hung-i. *Cong yuedu dao xiezu: Xiandai mingjia sanwen shiwu jiang* (From reading to writing: Fifteen lectures on prose works by modern masters). Taipei: Yuanliu chubanshe, 2012.
- Xu Shoushang. *Wo suo renshi de Lu Xun* (The Lu Xun I knew). Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1978.
- Zhao Ruihong. *Lu Xun Moluo shi li shuo: Zhushi, jinyi, jieshuo* (Lu Xun’s “On the Power of Mara Poetry”: Annotations, vernacular translation exegesis). Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1982.
- Zhunei Hao (i.e. Takeuchi Yoshimi). *Jindai de chaoke* (Overcoming modernity). Translated by Li Dongmu et al. Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2005.

Copyright

Submission of a manuscript implies: that the work described has not been published before (except in the form of an abstract or as part of a published lecture, review, or thesis); that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere; that its publication has been approved by all co-authors, if any, as well as—tacitly or explicitly—by the responsible authorities at the institution where the work was carried out. The author warrants that his/her contribution is original and that he/she has full power to make this grant. The author signs for and accepts responsibility for releasing this material on behalf of any and all co-authors. Transfer of copyright to Higher Education Press and Brill becomes effective if and when the article is accepted for publication. After submission of the Copyright Transfer Statement signed by the corresponding author, changes of authorship or in the order of the authors listed will not be accepted by Higher Education Press and Brill. The copyright covers the exclusive right (for U.S. government employees: to the extent transferable) to reproduce and distribute the article, including reprints, translations, photographic reproductions, microform, electronic form (offline, online) or other reproductions of similar nature.

An author may self-archive an author-created version of his/her article on his/her own website and or in his/her institutional repository. He/she may also deposit this version on his/her funder's or funder's designated repository at the funder's request or as a result of a legal obligation, provided it is not made publicly available until 12 months after official publication. He/she may not use the publisher's PDF version, which is posted on brill.nl/flsc, for the purpose of self-archiving or deposit. Furthermore, the author may only post his/her version provided acknowledgement is given

to the original source of publication and a link is inserted to the published article on Brill's website. The link must be accompanied by the following text: "The original publication is available at brill.nl/flsc."

All articles published in this journal are protected by copyright, which covers the exclusive rights to reproduce and distribute the article (e.g., as offprints), as well as all translation rights. No material published in this journal may be reproduced photographically or stored on microfilm, in electronic data bases, video disks, etc., without first obtaining written permission from the publishers. The use of general descriptive names, trade names, trademarks, etc., in this publication, even if not specifically identified, does not imply that these names are not protected by the relevant laws and regulations.

While the advice and information in this journal is believed to be true and accurate at the date of its going to press, neither the authors, the editors, nor the publishers can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Special regulations for photocopies in the USA: Photocopies may be made for personal or in-house use beyond the limitations stipulated under Section 107 or 108 of U.S. Copyright Law, provided a fee is paid. All fees should be paid to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, USA, Tel.: +1-978-7508400, Fax: +1-978-6468600, <http://www.copyright.com>, stating the ISSN of the journal, the volume, and the first and last page numbers of each article copied. The copyright owner's consent does not include copying for general distribution, promotion, new works, or resale. In these cases, specific written permission must first be obtained from the publishers.

FRONTIERS OF LITERARY STUDIES

IN CHINA

Volume 13 · Number 2 · June 2019

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

- 169 Open Letter of Apology

RESEARCH ARTICLES

- 171 Jon Eugene von Kowallis
Understanding Wild Grass by Talking to Oneself: Lu Xun's *Yecao*
through the Lens of *Ziyan Ziyu* and the Prism of the Past
- 200 Xudong ZHANG
Agonistic Memory, Compound Temporality and Expansion of
Literary Space in Lu Xun

FEATURED AUTHOR: WANG ANYI

- 262 *A Girls' Trip*
- 298 *The Rescue Truck*
- 312 Workshop Discussions
(Participants: WANG Anyi; Xudong ZHANG; Jing WANG; Shiqi LIAO;
XIE Jun; Cong ZHOU; LI Xin; ZHOU Yi; Students.)

Aims & Scope

Frontiers of Literary Studies in China provides a forum for peer-reviewed academic papers in literary studies within and outside of China in order to promote communication and exchanges between scholars working in different institutional settings and along different cultural and intellectual traditions. It seeks to reflect advances in independent research and theoretical thinking in the field of literary analysis and interpretation broadly defined and in dialogue with critical discourses on issues of common and shared intellectual and social concerns of today's world. It is this publication's duty to introduce

The editorial office
Higher Education Press
Tel: 86-10-58581828
Fax: 86-10-58556517
E-mail: wenglm@hep.com.cn

Submission information
Manuscripts should be submitted to:
wenglm@hep.com.cn,
journalsubmission@pub.hep.cn

Subscription information

ISSN print edition: 1673-7318
ISSN electronic edition: 1673-7423

Subscription rates

For information on subscription rates please contact: Customer Service

China
customercenter@pub.hep.cn
North and South America
sales-us@brill.com
Outside North and South America
sales-nl@brill.com

Orders and inquiries

中国大陆地区
高等教育出版社
100029 北京市朝阳区惠新东街 4 号富盛大厦
15 层
电话: +86-10-58556485
http://journal.hep.com.cn

China
Higher Education Press
4 Huixin Dongjie, Beijing 100029, China
Tel: +86-10-58556485
Fax: +86-10-58556034

Copyright

Submission of a manuscript implies: that the work described has not been published before (except in the form of an abstract or as

to the world fresh academic achievements from the field of Chinese literary studies. Equal editorial attention and effort will be given to showcasing the productivity and innovativeness in both China and abroad.

Abstracted/Indexed in: Bibliography of Asian Studies, Current Abstracts, ESCI, Humanities Abstracts, Humanities Index, Humanities International Index, OmniFile Mega, OmniFile Select, OmniFile V Full Text, and SCOPUS.

part of a published lecture, review, or thesis); that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere; that its publication has been approved by all co-authors, if any, as well as tacitly or explicitly by the responsible authorities at the institution where the work was carried out. The author warrants that his/her contribution is original and that he/she has full power to make this grant. The author signs for and accepts responsibility for releasing this material on behalf of any and all co-authors. Transfer of copyright to Higher Education Press becomes effective if and when the article is accepted for publication.

Outside China

BRILL
c/o Turpin Distribution
Stratton Business Park
Pegasus Drive
Biggleswade
Bedfordshire SG18 8TQ
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 1767 604954
Fax: +44 (0) 1767 601640
E-mail: brill@turpin-distribution.com

Cancellations must be received by September 30 to take effect at the end of the same year.

Electronic edition

For access to an electronic version please visit the journal's webpage at brill.com/flsc.

Production

Printed in the People's Republic of China

Jointly published by
Higher Education Press and Koninklijke Brill NV, which incorporates the imprints Brill, Global Oriental, Hotei Publishers, IDC Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, and VSP.

Frontiers of Literary Studies in China

Editor-in-Chief

Xudong ZHANG New York University/Peking University

Associate Editors-in-Chief

Ban WANG Stanford University
Jon Eugene von Kowallis University of New South Wales

Book Review Editor

LIU Zhuo Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

Editorial Collective

Todd Foley	New York University	Christopher Lupke	University of Alberta
Xiang HE	University of New Mexico	Tze-lan D. Sang	Michigan State University
Wilt Idema	Harvard University/Leiden University	Pu WANG	Brandeis University
Sabina Knight	Smith College	Keith B. Wagner	University College London
LI Guangyi	Chongqing University	WANG Xiaoming	Shanghai University
		John Yu Zou	Chongqing University

Copy Editor

William McGrath Manhattan College

Managing Editors

WENG Limeng Higher Education Press
SUN Haifang Higher Education Press

ISSN 1673-7318
e-ISSN 1673-7423

Volume 13 · Number 2 · June 2019

Available
online

<http://www.brill.com/flsc>
<http://journal.hep.com.cn/flsc>

中国文学研究前沿

Frontiers of
**Literary
Studies**
in China



HIGHER EDUCATION PRESS



Supported by Chinese Fund for the Humanities and Social Sciences

(本刊获中华社会科学基金资助)

Volume 13
Number 2
2019

Frontiers of
Literary Studies
in China

IN THIS ISSUE

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Jon Eugene von Kowallis

Understanding Wild Grass by Talking to Oneself: Lu Xun's *Yecao* through the Lens
of *Ziyan Ziyu* and the Prism of the Past

Xudong ZHANG

Agonistic Memory, Compound Temporality and Expansion of Literary Space in Lu
Xun

FEATURED AUTHOR: WANG ANYI

A Girls' Trip

The Rescue Truck

Workshop Discussions

ISSN 1673-7318

CN11-5745/I
邮发代号: 80-982



9 771673 731195