

# An Analysis of Lu Xun's Old Tales Retold

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**An Analysis of Lu Xun's *Old Tales Retold***

**Jing Xia**

A thesis in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of Master of Philosophy

School of Humanities and Languages

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## Thesis submission for the degree of Master of Arts (Research)

Thesis Title and Abstract

Declarations

Inclusion of Publications  
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Corrected Thesis and  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines Lu Xun's last short story collection, *Old Tales Retold*, from the perspective of influence from the translations Lu Xun's made from foreign languages on the composition and content of his own short stories and essay. Examples include Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's "Rashōmon"; Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Kuriyagawa Hakuson's literary theory, *Symbols of Anguish*; as well as Tsurumi Yūsuke's cultural critique, *Thought, Landscape and Characters*. Chinese mythology, the works of Wang Chong, Sima Qian and Zhuangzi are also sources and materials Lu Xun draws on in *Old Tales Retold*. Inspired by literary techniques and ideas from these sources, Lu Xun creates a brand new style of modern story whose satire targets both antiquity and the present, serving his ultimate purpose of criticising of the Chinese national character.

The first chapter is a detailed analysis of the first story "Mending Heaven", focusing on techniques and images Lu Xun borrows from Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Nietzsche, and an ongoing theme throughout the collection of failed communication. The second chapter interprets the stories, "The Flight to the Moon" and "Forging the Swords", in terms of symbolism in Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Anguish*. The two stories, based on Lu Xun's own experience, reveals the writer's anxiety over his family life and reflection on the spiritual revolution he personally engages in. An analysis of the remaining five stories is included in the last chapter, detailing Lu Xun's criticism of certain characteristic traits of the Chinese intelligentsia and his covert criticism of China's dictatorship in two political allegories, "Gathering Vetch" and "Curbing the Flood". The cruelty inherent in *wangdao* 王

道 (the Kingly Way) and the truth behind *shanrang* 禅让 (abdication in favour of the worthy) are the focal points of these two allegories respectively. In addition, Lu Xun's endeavour to promote a language for the masses (*dazhong yu* 大众语) and put it into practise it in the last story "Resurrecting the Dead", is also discussed.

In conclusion, *Old Tales Retold* can be deemed as Lu Xun's criticism of the Chinese national character in a story form. The epitomisation of characters of various social classes, briefly and ingeniously depicted through their conversations and actions in this collection, highlights positive characteristic traits of sincerity, faithfulness, rationality and sacrifice, as opposed to negative ones such as glibness, self-aggrandisement, withdrawal and vulgarity in the Chinese. Tsurumi Yūsuke's view that liberalism must be based on individuality, contributes to Lu Xun's unique perspective on reforming the national character through language as a significant pathway towards a liberal society.

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## Literature review

Compared with the number of studies published on Lu Xun's first two collections of short stories *Nahan* 呐喊 (*Call to Arms*) and *Panghuang* 彷徨 (*Wandering*), those dedicated to his last collection *Gushi Xinbian* 故事新编 (*Old Tales Retold*) including eight short stories written in a span of 13 years from 1922–1935, constitute a much smaller portion. The eight stories are titled “Butian” 补天,<sup>1</sup> “Benyue” 奔月, “Lishui” 理水, “Caiwei” 采薇, “Zhujiang” 铸剑, “Chuguan” 出关, “Feigong” 非攻 and “Qisi” 起死. The following is a literature review of the studies on this collection by scholars from Europe, the United States, Japan and China over the past decades beginning in the 1960s.

The comment by C. T. Hsia on *Old Tales Retold* that “[it] combines topical satire with malicious caricature of ancient Chinese sages and mythological heroes. ... The resulting levity and chaos in *Old Legends Retold* mark the sad degeneration of a distinguished if narrow talent for fiction”<sup>2</sup> initiated a well-known debate between Professor Hsia and his Czech counterpart Jaroslav Průšek in 1962 in *T'oung Pao*. For *Old Tales Retold*, Průšek argued “In this many-faceted iridescence lies the individuality and originality of Lu Hsun's artistic technique, which C.T. Hsia is unable to grasp”.<sup>3</sup> To refute, in an almost equally long article in the same journal, C. T. Hsia asked Průšek to elaborate on his high praise for the collection, and pointed out “the faults of this story [“Mending Heaven”] – a levity of tone and the intrusive note of personal peevishness and ephemeral satire – are largely present in most

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<sup>1</sup> In the Yang's translation, “Mending Heaven”. Hereafter I will use their English translations for the titles: “The Flight to the Moon”, “Curbing the Flood”, “Gathering Vetch”, “Forging the Swords”, “Leaving the Pass”, “Opposing Aggression”, and “Resurrecting the Dead”.

<sup>2</sup> See C. T. Hsia. *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction 1917–1957*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> See Jaroslav Průšek. “Basic Problems of the History of Modern Chinese Literature and C. T. Hsia, A History of Modern Chinese Fiction.” *T'oung Pao*, Vol. 49, Issue 1, 1962, p. 382.



of the other tales.”<sup>4</sup> “Curbing the Flood” and “Gathering Vetch” were considered by Hsia to be “better than the rest”, for the “satiric sketch of the intellectuals” in the former and the “hapless heroes” in the latter “are somewhat reminiscent of the many weakling characters in his non-historical fiction”.<sup>5</sup> Such tit-for-tat debate over the artistic value of *Old Tales Retold* has not been seen since then in the academic world, but these two forerunners’ comments on the collection have heavily influenced critics from later periods of time who have carried the well-known debate further by digging into the “merits” and “demerits” of *Old Tales Retold*, so that the following criticism of the collection, no matter over the style of it or the allegorical connotations, can probably be regarded as echoes and responses to that of Průšek and Hsia.

While Průšek himself didn’t respond with any article dedicated to *Old Tales Retold*, his younger colleague Berta Krebsova had already published a lengthy three-part article in 1960 and 1961 in *Archiv Orientální*, before the public debate began. In this article, Krebsova started from a brief examination of the “content and form” in Lu Xun’s short stories from “Kuangren Riji” 狂人日记 (Diary of a Madman), in which she argued the writer created “a work that was new in content and form, artistically mature and deeply ideological in purpose”.<sup>6</sup> For *Old Tales Retold*, she first of all classified historical novels into “romantic historical novels”, “pseudo historical novels” and their variant “historico-satirical, pseudo historical novels”, and then pointed out Lu Xun’s main intent in writing the collection is “critical evaluation, ... a positive and constructive aim, with a strong ethical bias”<sup>7</sup> before delving into a detailed analysis on each story to decide “to which of the above categories his

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<sup>4</sup> See C. T. Hsia. “Scientific Study of Modern Chinese Literature, a reply to Professor Průšek.” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 50, Livr.4/5, 1963, p. 460.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 461.

<sup>6</sup> See Berta Krebsova. “Lu Hsün and his collection Old Tales Retold.” *Archiv Orientální*, Vol. 28, 1960, p. 228.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 231.

collection of old tales can most properly be said to belong.”<sup>8</sup> The eight stories in it were divided into two parts, those written before 1927 and those after, and by comparing the different literary treatments by the author of the original historical materials, Krebsova concluded “the author’s internal growth” can be found in “this ever more definite and conscious orientation towards problems of the present day”, and reflects “the struggle to bring about a new social order”.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the analysis of the first story “Mending Heaven”, Krebsova proposed that it is “a new type of historical tale” and “not yet a purely satirical tale”, as it’s not a parody of the past, and Lu Xun’s purpose is “to give the people of old times a further lease of life”.<sup>10</sup> For the first part of the stories, as she argued, the writer “takes the past as his starting-point in order to elucidate it, give it a topical interest”, while in the latter, the writer’s “angle of approach is from the present which, by being projected into the past, assumes a new topicality, a new plasticity, a new significance”.<sup>11</sup> This new “topicality, plasticity and significance” was exemplified in her analysis of “Gathering Vetch” in which Lu Xun “develops and gives a new formulation to the thoughts already indicated by Ssu-ma Ch’ien [司马迁] ... and he works out the analogies that the story provides with the present as a cover for criticism of certain features of present-day life.”<sup>12</sup> Moreover, she described the two protagonists Boyi 伯夷 and Shuqi 叔齐 as “a kind of Don Quixotes of Chinese Antiquity, for they, too, live in an unreal world of their own imagination, fight for by-gone ideals and earn only the compassion or ridicule of their fellow-men”.<sup>13</sup> Working on both the historical and

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>12</sup> See Berta Krebsova. “Lu Hsün and his collection Old Tales Retold.” *Archiv Orientální*, Vol. 28 (4), 1960, pp. 641-642.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 647.

present-day levels, Lu Xun renders the brothers into “many-faceted symbols”, so that the story falls into the type of “pseudo-historical”.<sup>14</sup>

For the last three stories “Leaving the Pass”, “Opposing Aggression” and “Resurrecting the Dead” with major characters as “outstanding representatives of Ancient Chinese Philosophy”, Krebsova pointed out that the three “are all connected with a journey, which introduces a certain amount of action into what is otherwise the static content of the tales and enables the author to develop a number of subsidiary episodes and situations”.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in her analysis of “Resurrecting the Dead”, the compositional difference of this story from the other seven in the collection as well as the similarity to “Guo Ke” 过客 (The Wayfarer) from *Ye Cao* 野草 (*Wild Grass*) was cited by her. To summarise Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 庄子 in the two stories which are “expressly satirical” and the one about Zhuangzi is “bordering on parody”, Krebsova pointed out Lu Xun’s standpoint, when interpreting the two philosophers’ stories, is not from the time when Laozi and Zhuangzi were alive, but from Lu Xun’s own time, and the stories are “in the form and with the ideological content they had achieved in the course of time under the modifying influences and tendencies of later upholders of the philosophy”.<sup>16</sup> In addition, she argued that Lu Xun’s “strong orientation towards the present” is reflected in the last three stories, and thus the writer “attributed a more concrete form and a deeper purpose” to the role of literature in transforming society, from “the standpoint of a class ideology”.<sup>17</sup> For the story of “Opposing Aggression”, she associated it with the time when China was threatened by the Japanese invasion, and on the other hand, at the historical level, associated it with the application of “good and justice” as the core of Mozi 墨子’s

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 656.

<sup>15</sup> See Berta Krebsova. “Lu Hsün and his collection *Old Tales Retold*.” *Archiv Orientální*, Vol. 29, 1961, p. 268.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 284.

teaching, before reaching her conclusion that the story becomes both “an apotheosis of humanity – and the author’s legacy”.<sup>18</sup>

In conclusion, Krebsova returned to the question of whether *Old Tales Retold* is satirical or historical, pointing out “its satirical character is modified by the author’s wish to enlighten as a first step to reform”.<sup>19</sup> By revealing the “objectivity” and “subjectivity” of how the writer uses both the “objective penetration of reality” and his “taking up a stand on the side of the recognised truth”, she described the collection as “the historico-satirical tale, with a clearly-defined tendency, aiming at the reform of society, of humanity”.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, her comparison of Lu Xun’s work with that of Wu Jingzi 吴敬梓, author of the 18<sup>th</sup> century work of fiction *Rulin Waishi* (*The Scholars*), is worth mentioning. There she claimed what the two great satirists share in common are “their approach to and choice of material”, an “*a priori* programmatic, moral tendency”, and “indirect criticism” as well as the physical descriptions of the figures. On the other hand, Lu Xun elevated Wu Jingzi’s social satire to a new level with “a class-conscious approach to social problems”, “scientifically based analysis”, “undisguised tendentiousness and partisanship” together with “a persistent endeavour to reform”.<sup>21</sup>

Towards the end of her analysis, Krebsova identified Lu Xun’s creative contribution to the form of Chinese short stories as “‘flash-shots’ of reality” to reveal the root causes of reality “from the most various angles”, and took Lu Xun’s views on short stories further to a comparison between European writers’ views to demonstrate the influence of Russian

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 289-294.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 296.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 297-299.

literature on Lu Xun, before reaching her conclusion that *Old Tales Retold* is “a worthy vehicle for the highest values of the Chinese literary heritage, while at the same time embodying the most mature results of the artistic and ideological trends of his day”.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the collection was put into a comparison between other historical stories by Lu Xun’s contemporaries, such as Mao Dun 茅盾 and Guo Moruo 郭沫若, to demonstrate Lu Xun’s uniqueness in treating the material with “the utmost freedom”, as opposed to other writers’ approaches of “accepting the material’s face value as an objective historical reality”.<sup>23</sup> In the end, Krebsova reiterated that *Old Tales Retold* belongs to a “pseudo-historical” category with characteristics like “a sceptical... attitude to history...”; “... the anachronistic interpretation from the point of view of the present”; “the debunking ... of generally accepted views”; and “the presence of an ethical, didactic purpose”.<sup>24</sup>

To sum up, Krebsova’s argument on *Old Tales Retold* has never been surpassed in English-language scholarship, both in terms of its scope and originality. Even until now, there has been no other comprehensive analysis of this length in English of all the eight stories from the collection available. Her primary argument of categorising *Old Tales Retold* into “pseudo-historical” style is pioneering and has inspired further discussions among following researchers as to whether it is an entirely new style of fiction invented by Lu Xun. In addition, Krebsova might be the first scholar in the English language to point out that when writing this collection Lu Xun’s perspective is “a Marxist scientific view of a modern historian”<sup>25</sup> which is still subject to debate, but has found echoes in researchers elsewhere 20 years later, such as Ito Toramaru 伊藤虎丸.

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 301-305.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 308.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 309.

More than a decade later in 1971, distinguished scholar of Lu Xun studies in the US, William A. Lyell in his dissertation titled “The Short Story Theatre of Lu Hsun”, discussed the stories in *Call to Arms* and *Wandering* plus a single piece “Huaijiu” 怀旧 (Remembrances of the Past), but did not include those in *Old Tales Retold*, as he said “they are not short stories in the true sense, but rather re-tellings of ancient myths, legends, and historical incidents for satirical purposes”.<sup>26</sup> By contrast, Pearl Hsia Chen in her book *The Social Thought of Lu Hsün 1881–1936*<sup>27</sup> maintained that “in his collection *Old Stories Retold* he tried to recapture the flavour of the past and to recast ancient legends in modern style”,<sup>28</sup> and drew a conclusion that “he [Lu Hsün] was not only a transmitter, but a synthesizer. ... By the 1930s Lu Hsün had accepted the dialectical theory that opposing elements of traditional Chinese culture and socialistic ideology must be preserved in the synthesis.”<sup>29</sup> The story “Opposing Aggression” was singled out for analysis, as it “was aimed at revealing some of the fundamental aspects of Mohism”.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, their contemporary, Russian scholar V. I. Semanov, while examining Lu Hsün’s short stories in comparison with the exposure novels in the late Qing era, called stories in *Old Tales Retold* “satiric-heroic tales”<sup>31</sup> and said “that enormous talent ... came to fruition (though apparently not fully) in Lu Hsün’s essays and in *Old Tales Retold*”.<sup>32</sup> The three researchers, in their criticism, did not go into the details of the collection and stopped short of providing enough evidence to support their argument, though

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<sup>26</sup> See A. William Lyell. “The Short Story Theatre of Lu Hsün.” PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1971, p. vi.

<sup>27</sup> Pearl Hsia Chen submitted her dissertation under the same title in 1953 to the University of Chicago.

<sup>28</sup> See Pearl Hsia Chen. *The Social Thought of Lu Hsun 1881–1936: A mirror of the intellectual current of modern China*. New York: Vantage Press, 1976, p. 302.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>31</sup> See Vladimir Ivanovich Semanov. *Lu Hsün and His Predecessors*. Translated and edited by Charles. J. Alber. White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1980, p. 95.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 113.

Semanov's approach of looking back to the previous eras seemed to have blazed a trail in the study of Lu Xun's novels.

It was not until the 1980s that *Old Tales Retold* re-entered the sights of researchers. Leo Ou-fan Lee, in the introduction of his edited volume *Lu Xun and his Legacy*, called it “a fascinating collection of flawed experiments, a mixed genre in which Lu Xun tries to modernise ancient Chinese legends by recreating fictionally some of the material he has researched as a scholar”.<sup>33</sup> In his monograph *Voices from the Iron House*, starting from a speculation that Lu Xun might have had a grand plan to create a series of new fictional works about the mythology of ancient China, followed by sketches of many pre-Qin era philosophers, he suggested that only the second story “Forging the Swords” measures up to the writer's ambition, because this story about the theme of “revenge”, the writer's favourite theme, is the one created with the best skills. He sang high praise for Lu Xun's outstanding narrative skills to expand the very short original story in classical Chinese into a 20-page one, still terse in the vernacular, yet full of details, with brilliant sketches of characters, all of which serve the theme “revenge” well. In this story, the theme of “revenge” is a philosophical concept, instead of a social or political one.<sup>34</sup> In a separate article as the appendix of the book, Leo Ou-fan Lee cited the first story of the collection “Mending Heaven” as an example of Lu Xun's attempt to re-examine Chinese mythology by assimilating foreign inspiration into ancient Chinese sources. The inspiration behind this story, claimed Leo Lee, is Sigmund Freud's and Henri Bergson's theories through the intermediary of Kuriyagawa Hakuson 厨川白村's *Kumon no Shōchō* 苦悶の象徴 (*Symbols of Anguish*). It is the modified borrowing of

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<sup>33</sup> See Leo Ou-fan Lee. *Lu Xun and His Legacy*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, xi.

<sup>34</sup> See Leo Ou-fan Lee 李欧梵. *Tiewu zhong de nahan* 铁屋中的呐喊 (*Voices from the Iron House*). Translated by Yin Huimin. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001, pp. 29-34.

Freud and Bergson's ideas by Kuriyagawa that prevents Lu Xun from depicting Nü Wa 女媧 in a more erotic way, and that in turn leads to the failure of Lu Xun to deliver a more powerful narrative about the birth of arts.<sup>35</sup> The most significant point of view of Leo Ou-fan Lee is that he labelled *Old Tales Retold* as an "experiment" and "a mixed genre", a step further in the discussion about the style of the collection, attempting to make it an independent genre.

In 1990s, Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie commented that the collection was "very different to the other two in theme and style. These eight stories are based on legends and other historical writing, retold in a highly original way. Through these stories, Lu Xun re-evaluates major figures from the Chinese past".<sup>36</sup> Around the same time, Chiu-yee Cheung ranked *Old Tales Retold* among the trend of rewritings of historical stories in the 1930s by claiming that "to rewrite historical stories as social and political criticism in literary masks was popular in the 1930s, and Lu Xun's *Old Tales Retold* was no exception". Two of them, "Curbing the Flood" and "Opposing Aggression", he claimed, are "more directly related to China's political situation".<sup>37</sup> In the past decade, Cheung published a series of articles in Chinese detailing his point of view, which will be discussed later.

Probably the most important article about *Old Tales Retold* during this period was Marston Anderson's "Lu Xun's Facetious Muse: The Creative Imperative in Modern Chinese Fiction". He described the collection as a "fractured-legend form" invented by Lu Xun, which provides "a significant context in which to judge both the promise and the perils

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<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 199-204.

<sup>36</sup> See Bonnie S. McDougall and Kam Louie. *The Literature of China in the 20th Century*. London: Hurst & Company, 1997, p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> See Chiu-yee Cheung. *Lu Xun: The Chinese Gentle Nietzsche*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2001, p. 130.



attending the introduction of mythopoetic tropes into contemporary fiction”.<sup>38</sup> After examining the writing in similar styles by several contemporary Chinese writers, who he maintained were inspired by the form Lu Xun invented, Anderson carried on his argument by calling *Old Tales Retold* Lu Xun’s boldest experiment in narrative form, and pointed out that it is “facetiousness” 油滑, a term Lu Xun employed as the demerit of his first story “Mending Heaven” in the collection in the “brilliant, self-mocking preface”, that “compounded the critical difficulties”.<sup>39</sup> Marston Anderson rejected previous interpretations of the volume that attempted to put it into the category of either historical fiction or satire, and maintained that those critics failed to recognize the radical nature of Lu Xun’s experimentation in the form of this collection. According to him, Lu Xun’s tales constitute a stark contrast to most historical fictions in that the writer aimed to “denaturalize the complex amalgam of history, myth and traditional ideology ... in the process challenging the continued authority of these forces in the contemporary world”, by shocking “the reader into recognizing both the deep penetration of the past into the present and the modern world’s perpetual reinterpretation of the past in the light of its own concerns”.<sup>40</sup>

The other aspect of the radicalness of this collection is the intricate use of symbols and allegory, argued Anderson in the latter half of his article. He pointed out that symbolism is “evident” in the first three stories written in the 1920s, while allegory is apparent throughout in the collection. He traced symbolism in the first three stories back to Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s *Symbols of Anguish* that Lu Xun translated in 1924 and indicated Lu Xun was “reinventing traditional images” in “Mending Heaven” by making Nü Wa embody “the force

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<sup>38</sup> See Marston Anderson. “Lu Xun’s Facetious Muse: The Creative Imperative in Modern Chinese Fiction”, in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*. Widmer, Ellen, and David Der-wei Wang (ed), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, pp. 249-250.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 260.

of life (or *élan vital*) ... rather than native concept of creativity”.<sup>41</sup> In his analysis of allegory in *Old Tales Retold*, Anderson emphasized the latter five stories and demonstrated two levels of allegory in them: the cultural and the personal. For the former, with stories of the philosopher Mozi and the intricate relations between Confucius and Laozi, he argued, Lu Xun’s intention was to examine “the reified social consequences of their ideas” and to demonstrate “how these ideas have impeded or advanced the welfare of China and its people”, by “subjecting their teachings to a materialist critique” embodied by the demands of the Chinese people. For the latter, Marston Anderson claimed that Lu Xun “unambiguously identifies himself with the culture-heroes he depicts”, especially Nü Wa in “Mending Heaven”, Yi 羿 in “Flight to the Moon” and Yan zhi Aozhe 宴之敖者 in “Forging the Swords”, in which “Lu Xun allegorized psychological issues of great personal concern to him at the time he wrote”.<sup>42</sup>

Towards the end of this long essay, Marston Anderson examined two stories in detail, “Mending Heaven” and “Resurrecting the Dead”. In the first story, for the opening scene of Nü Wa, he cited it as “probably the most erotic passage” Lu Xun has ever written, but the second act of repairing heaven is, he argued, a symbol of “a mature stage of creative endeavor”.<sup>43</sup> More important, in the analysis of the last part of the story where Nü Wa was baffled by her own little creatures, Anderson revealed his insight into the scene that it is the language, the “linguistic facility” that prevented Nü Wa from understanding humans. All in all, this story is, on one level, “an allegory of society’s alienation from the generative sources of nature” and on the other, “Lu Xun’s work to recount the ‘creation of literature’ as well as

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 261.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 264.

humankind”.<sup>44</sup> As for the concluding story “Resurrecting the Dead”, he saw it as an allegory of the fraudulence of the intellectual’s social duty in the encounter between themselves and the common man. In addition, from the cultural critique angle, the story could be an analogy of how “Lu Xun himself performs in his retelling of these ‘old tales’”, if the resurrected skull can be viewed as the embodiment of anachronism.<sup>45</sup> In conclusion, he defended Lu Xun’s “facetiousness” as “the inevitable consequences of certain historical and aesthetic exigencies” and confirmed that “Lu Xun’s use of anachronism and allegory serves precisely” his purpose to “puncture the aura of inviolability that surrounds the legendary heroes”. Moreover, the anguish the entire collection is based on, Anderson claims, derives from Lu Xun’s “pained struggle to reconcile the deeper impulses of his creativity with his scrupulous sense of moral and political responsibility”.<sup>46</sup> All in all, Marston Anderson carried forward Berta Krevsova’s categorization of the collection as “pseudo-historical novels” as well as Leo Ou-fan Lee’s “experiment”, into a style invented by Lu Xun, a point of view that has inspired a new generation of literary critics. By shunning the debate over its style, he creatively weaves an intricate analysis of the symbols and allegory used in *Old Tales Retold*, examining several stories against the backdrop of ancient mythology and legends, thus widening and deepening the scope of studies of this collection. Although his discussion of “Leaving the Pass” and “Curbing the Flood” is relatively weaker, his interpretation of “facetiousness” as a clue to understanding Lu Xun’s radical experimentation in writing is insightful but has not been duly responded to until now.

As for the academic studies in the recent two decades, Eva Shan Chou was the first to point out that the fiction of *Old Tales Retold* is “of a very different sort than that included in *Call to*

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267.

*Arms or Hesitation*. Lu Xun himself used the term ‘yanyi’ 演义 (historical romance) to describe these embellished myths, whereas he used ‘xiaoshuo’ 小说 (stories) for the other two collections.”<sup>47</sup> Earlier, Ann Louise Huss in her PhD dissertation in 2000 categorised the collection into a new genre, “a very self-reflexive genre, a parody of the historical novel”, as “this collection of revamped traditional and mythological tales presents legendary images and figures in ways that contradict culturally endorsed interpretations and thereby usurps any prestige which may have been ‘historically’ imposed upon the characters and their personalities”.<sup>48</sup>

In 2011, Gu Mingdong published an article exploring postmodernism in *Old Tales Retold* with a detailed analysis of “Forging the Swords” to suggest that “*Old Tales Retold* effectively signifies a new direction in Lu Xun’s creativity. ... the story collection is an imaginative conglomerate of self-reflexive contemplations of life, society, and human existence. As a collection of quasi-postmodern stories, it exemplifies a post-modern condition”.<sup>49</sup> The same year saw the publication of an article on the story “Resurrecting the Dead” by Wilt L. Idema, in which he noticed the story was written in the form of a play and focused on the background of this tale by sorting out the evolution of the original story into various forms through Daoism in the later centuries, before reaching the conclusion that “but to fully understand the extent of Lu Xun’s originality and creativity, we should not only know his ultimate sources, but also the later and popular adaptations of the old tale he retold”.<sup>50</sup> The criticism of the above researchers approached the collection in their own way that has added

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<sup>47</sup> See Eva Shan Chou. *Memory, Violence, Queues: Lu Xun Interprets China*. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Association for Asian Studies, 2012, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup> See Ann Huss. “Old Tales Retold: Contemporary Chinese Fiction and the Classical Tradition.” PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> See M. D. Gu. “Postmodern Narrative without Postmodern Conditions: Home-Made Modernism in Lu Xun’s *Old Tales Retold*.” *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 44 no. 1, 2014, p. 112.

<sup>50</sup> See Wilt L. Idema. “Lu Xun’s ‘Resurrecting the Dead’ and Its Precursors”. *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, Vol. 34, December 2012, p. 29.

to the variety of studies of *Old Tales Retold*, among which Idema stood out with a meticulous examination of the evolution of Daoism through different periods of history, thus shining more light on the less discussed side of this story and somehow justifying Lu Xun's motive which was mistaken by C. T. Hsia decades ago as "malicious caricature of ancient sages".

One year later in 2012 Chiu-yee Cheung published an article in Chinese about "Leaving the Pass", an analysis of the story from the perspective of the events during the 1930s, focusing on his hypothesis that this story is a self-portrayal of Lu Xun, a comment put forward by writers from the League of Left-wing Writers after the publication of the story.<sup>51</sup> By reviewing the comments by Qiu Yunduo 邱韵铎, Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸 and Zong Jue 宗珏, as well as Lu Xun's denial of it as a "zikuang" 自况 (self-portrayal) both in private letters and in an article, he asserted the story is not entirely about the history but still shed light on reality, and only through the perspective of the internal affairs of the League can a critic grasp this level of the story. Based on the negative attitudes towards and comments on Lu Xun by Zhou Yang 周扬, then head of the League, Cheung attempted to prove the association of these events with the dialogue between Laozi and his student in the story.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, he categorised Lu Xun as a type of "introspective" writer and suggested that "appealing to emotions" constitutes a significant part of his work, which can be applied to the interpretation of this story.<sup>53</sup> In the end, Chiu-yee Cheung claimed the story is obviously allegorical of the events around the League during the 1930s rather than vague sarcasm about history, but finally he concluded that such a great story cannot be limited to interpretation at only one level [political].<sup>54</sup> Earlier in 2010, he published another article comparing

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<sup>51</sup> See Chiu-yee Cheung, "Chuguan de xianshi yuyi" 《出关》的现实寓意 (Leaving the Pass" as an Allegory of the Reality). *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊, Issue 1, 2012, p. 174.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182.

“Opposing Aggression” and the movie version of the story by a Hong Kong director, with a conclusion that the theme of “Opposing Aggression” is “opposing the Japanese aggression against China”, and it might contain Lu Xun’s desire to “unite both the Chinese and the Japanese people against the Japanese invasion”.<sup>55</sup>

As for the research by scholars in China in the 1950s, Ting Yi’s opinion on *Old Tales Retold* in his posthumously published *A Short History of Modern Chinese Literature* based on a series of lectures he gave in Beijing and Moscow was “in fact, they are too realistic and militant to be treated as purely historical stories. Compared with his three earlier stories, the themes of the five stories written in 1934–1935 were more constructive and more daring”.<sup>56</sup> In 1982, Wang Yao published a milestone article exclusively on *Old Tales Retold*. Based on his review of opinions about the stories in the collection in the 1950s<sup>57</sup> of his contemporary Mao Dun, Wang analysed all the eight stories in association with Lu Xun’s translations of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介’s historic stories, the harlequins from the local traditional opera, *Mulian* 目连 Opera of Shaoxing, as well as Lu Xun’s own *Zhongguo Xiaoshuo Shilue* 中国小说史略 (*A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*). One of the most prominent views in his article is about “*youhua*” 油滑 (facetiousness);<sup>58</sup> he suggested that “it’s obvious that the ‘facetiousness’ Lu Xun used to describe his skills as ‘having not improved’, is in fact not only an expression of modesty, but has profound meanings.” In

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<sup>55</sup> See Chiu-yee Cheung. “Lu Xun xiaoshuo Feigong he Zhang Zhiliang de dianying Mogong bijiaolun” 鲁迅小说《非攻》和张之亮的电影《墨攻》比较论 (A Comparison between Lu Xun’s “Opposing Aggression” and the Movie “Mogong” directed by Zhang Zhiliang). *Huawen Wenxue* 华文文学, Issue 1, 2010, pp. 14-15.

<sup>56</sup> See Ting Yi 丁易. *A Short History of Chinese Modern Literature*. Translation of 中国现代小说史略. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970, p. 119.

<sup>57</sup> During that period, there was a heated debate over whether the collection was historical or satirical, and the articles were published in 1957 in the form of a book entitled *Gushi Xinbian de Sixiang Yiyi he Yishu Fengge* 故事新编的思想意义和艺术风格 (*On the Connotations and Artistic Style of Old Tales Retold*).

<sup>58</sup> “油滑” is translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang as “facetiousness”, while Berta Krebsova used “distortion and caricature”.

Wang's opinion, "the profound meanings" of "youhua" can be interpreted as Lu Xun's ambivalent attitude toward this new style he employs to breathe life into the ancients in these stories. On the one hand, it is indeed effective; however, Lu Xun worries about the potential that such a hard-to-grasp style can be misused and thus become detrimental to the seriousness of writing. In addition, Wang points out the potential link between Lu Xun's style of "youhua" and traditional Chinese operas; such kind of "facetiousness" has existed for a long time in the form of harlequins whose function is to poke fun at other characters or events in real life with witty and sarcastic remarks.<sup>59</sup>

In the first story "Mending Heaven", as Wang pointed out, the intrusion of characters like the scholar dressed in the traditional-style costume and the Daoist monk, rightly serve the purpose of "facetiousness" by shaping sharp contrasts between the greatness of creative work and despicableness of vicious sabotage.<sup>60</sup> As for "Flight to the Moon" and "Forging the Swords", Wang Yao regarded the two stories, together with "Mending Heaven" as an "ode to the heroes", while the first two, more specifically, share the same theme of "the fate and the path of a warrior".<sup>61</sup> One point worth mentioning is that Wang identified the songs in the "Goujian Fa Wu Waizhuan" 勾践伐吴外传 (*Anecdote of King Goujian's War against the Kingdom of Wu*) from *Wuyue Chunqiu* 吴越春秋 (*The Annals of Kingdom Wu and Kingdom Yue*) as the source of the three songs in "Forging the Swords", which aim to "emphasise the meaning and nature of revenge".<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Wang Yao 王瑶. "Lu Xun gushi xinbian san lun" 鲁迅《故事新编》散论 (Thoughts on Lu Xun's Old Tales Retold). *Jinian Lu Xun dansheng yibai zhounian xueshu taolunhui lunwenxuan* 纪念鲁迅诞生一百周年学术讨论会论文选 (*Selected Theses at the Seminar on the 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Lu Xun*). Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1983, pp. 48-50.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 56-58.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60.

Unlike the above stories written in the 1920s, historical materialism was the perspective Lu Xun adopted in writing the two stories about the Great Yu 禹 and Mozi, representatives of “the toiling people”, argued Wang, as part of the writer’s efforts to produce another version of the history of China.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, harsh criticism against Laozi and Zhuangzi prevails in “Leaving the Pass” and “Resurrecting the Dead”, “revealing the hypocrisy and contradictions innate in Taoism by setting the two characters in the real-world scenarios”.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Wang added that “Resurrecting the Dead” was inspired by the writer’s translation in 1934 of *Adios a La Bohemia* by Pío Baroja, in which the Spanish writer creatively use the form of a one-act play to tell a story. For the last story about Boyi and Shuqi, Wang started from the mixed attitudes by Chinese intellectuals towards these two influential characters throughout history, to demonstrate Lu Xun’s critical attitude toward them through his depiction of the complexity in the personalities and behaviours of the two brothers.<sup>65</sup> Another important theme of the story is “*wangdao*”王道 (the Kingly Way), which was practised not only by Boyi and Shuqi but also King of Wu of the Zhou Dynasty 周武王 as well as two comic characters Lord Xiaobing 小丙君 and Xiaoqiongqi the Robber 小穷奇, and the hypocrisy of the latter group of self-claimed practitioners of “the Kingly Way” only reduces the “sincerity” of the two brothers into “pedantry and folly”. Moreover, Wang quoted Mao Dun’s praise for the story to reassert that Lu Xun adopted materials from an extensive collection of ancient books and organised them ingeniously into a story by injecting new meanings into it, so that it is both a historical story and a satire on present-day events.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.



Finally, Wang concluded his article with a discussion on “*yanyi*” 演义, a label that Lu Xun put on the collection in the preface of his self-selected works. By citing the study of stories in this form in the writer’s own *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, Wang asserted that Lu Xun in his study recognised the value of *yanyi* as a literary tradition that is worth passing on to the future, due to its tremendous social impact, and then carried forward the form in his *Old Tales Retold* by relying on the basis of “*yi*” 义, “the historical fact and the real personalities of ancient characters”, and focusing on the literary device of “*yan*” 演, “adding a bit of fictional details to the plot in accordance with principles of creative writing”.<sup>67</sup> In conclusion, although Wang entitled his argument as “*sanlun*” 散论 (discursive thoughts), such modesty did not negate the significance of the article at all, which not only resides in the insightful comments contained therein that associated Lu Xun’s collection with both the traditional Chinese literary heritage as well as artistic sources and the writer’s translation of foreign literature, but also lies in the new territory into which Wang directed his criticism of *Old Tales Retold*.

During the 1990s, Gao Yuandong published a series of articles about *Old Tales Retold*, focusing on Lu Xun’s criticism of the traditional thoughts and values. Attempting to reveal a pattern of cultural critique of the main schools of ancient China – Confucianism, Mohism and Daoism – as part of Lu Xun’s ongoing efforts to “*liren*” 立人 (cultivate the individual) or to “*gaizao guominxing*” 改造国民性 (remould the national character), Gao delved into both the writer’s rejection and reception of the Chinese cultural heritage to examine Lu Xun’s real attitudes toward the three major schools.<sup>68</sup> For Confucianism, Gao divided Lu Xun’s opinion

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>68</sup> See Gao Yuandong. “Daode yu shigong: Lu Xun dui rujia sixiang de pipan yu chengdan” (shang) 道德与事功：鲁迅对儒家思想的批判与承担 (上) (Morality and Undertaking: Lu Xun’s Criticism against and

about it into two categories: Confucianism viewed as a detrimental ideology and values imposed on from above, and a discipline inherited as cultural facts and thoughts. Then Gao argued that while strongly criticising Confucianism in the former category, Lu Xun, in fact, expressed respect for the discipline and even accepted it. Citing “Leaving the Pass” as the most apparent example of Lu Xun’s practising of the Confucian discipline, Gao analysed the writer’s explanation of the story as about “Confucius trumping Laozi” before reaching his conclusion that Lu Xun was approving of the Confucian tactic of “*yi rou jinqu*”以柔进取 (forging ahead with gentleness) while disapproving of Laozi’s strategy of “*yi rou tuizou*”以柔退走 (withdrawing with gentleness), which might reflect Lu Xun’s shift from moral judgement and practical enterprise innate in Confucianism onto the level of cultural heritage appraisal.<sup>69</sup> According to Gao, such dialectical critique of the values of Confucianism, as opposed to “total rejection” or “partial reception” was applied in “Gathering Vetch”, an allegory of cultural critique against the Confucian epitomes of Boyi and Shuqi as “*neisheng*”内圣 (the Inner Sages) and King of Wu as “*waiwang*”外王 (the Outer King). Moreover, Lu Xun’s criticism of the canonised Boyi and Shuqi, role models of Confucian ethics, unfolded itself in the ultimate contradictions between the two brothers’ doings and the four aspects of Confucian ethics: *ren, xiao, zhong, shu* 仁、孝、忠、恕 (benevolence, filial piety, loyalty and tolerance), said Gao.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, in writing “Leaving the Pass” and “Gathering Vetch”, Lu Xun revealed the beneficial and detrimental roles Confucianism could play in Lu Xun’s

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Reception of Confucianism) (the first of a two-part article). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 10, 1991, pp. 12-13.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

undertaking of “cultivating individuals” and thus pointed out a way to critically inherit this cultural heritage.<sup>71</sup>

In a separate article, Gao analysed the three songs in “Forging the Swords”, which had puzzled critics since the publication of the story, attempting to pin down the relations between the form and content of the songs and Lu Xun’s perspective on revenge. Gao argued if the three songs in “the style of *lisao*” 骚体 embodied his philosophy of revenge, the character of Yan zhi Aozhe 宴之敖者 was its concrete representation, the spirit of revenge of Lu Xun with characteristics of both Nietzsche’s Superman and Lord Byron, a Mara poet.<sup>72</sup> As for the third song sung by Meijianchi 眉间尺 in the tone of Yan zhi Aozhe, its theme marked the spiritual coming-of-age of the boy Meijianchi, whose spirit was blended with that of Yan zhi Aozhe, symbolising the formation of a new personality that has transcended the parochialism of personal revenge.<sup>73</sup>

In 1999, Gao published another article titled “On the relationship between the thought of Lu Xun and Mozi”, in which he tried to “look at the position, pathway and method Lu Xun adopted to creatively transform the Chinese heritage” in “Forging the Swords”, “Opposing Aggression” and “Curbing the Flood”.<sup>74</sup> By looking back to the origins of Mohism and Confucianism and pointing out their subtle relations both contradictory and complementary

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<sup>71</sup> See Gao Yuandong. “Daode yu shigong: Lu Xun dui rujia sixiang de pipan yu chengdan” (xia)道德与事功：鲁迅对儒家思想的批判与承担（下）(Morality and Undertaking: Lu Xun’s Criticism against and Reception of Confucianism) (the second of a two-part article). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 11, 1991, p. 63.

<sup>72</sup> See Gao Yuandong. “Geyin zhong de fuchou zhexue – Zhujian yu haha’aixige de xianghu guanxi dujie” 歌吟中的复仇哲学 – 《铸剑》与《哈哈爱兮歌》的相互关系读解 (The Philosophy of Revenge in the Songs – Interpreting the Relations between “Forging the Swords” and the Sing-Hey-for-Love Songs in it), *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 7, 1992, p. 39.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> See Gao Yuandong. “Lun Lu Xun yu Mozi de sixiang lianxi” 论鲁迅与墨子的思想联系 (On the Relationship between the Thought of Lu Xun and Mozi). *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Congkan* 中国现代文学丛刊, Issue 2, 1999, pp. 165-166.

to each other, Gao concluded the vital difference between the two schools of philosophy was the perception of the nature of human beings, society and the state, with Mohism emphasising achieving one's goal through enterprise and discipline rather than through moral preaching. Then he quoted Lu Xun and other scholars to explain the demise of Mohism and its revival in the mid-to-late Qing era, as well as the attitude of Zhang Taiyan 章太炎(Zhang Binglin 章炳麟) toward Mozi which Gao argued was how Lu Xun approached Mohism since Zhang had been his teacher. Therefore, the commonly recognised theme of "revenge" in "Forging the Swords" was tinted with characteristics of Mohism. Although the implication of Mohism was vague in this story, due to the influence of Lu Xun's cynicism, scepticism and even nihilism around 1926, the connections between the writer and Mohism became explicit in "Opposing Aggression" and "Curbing the Flood", when Lu Xun finally found a role model for "the individual" he had been seeking to cultivate since his early years in Japan.<sup>75</sup> Yu and Mozi, whose "effects, doings and actions never betrayed their motive, morality and thoughts", were chosen in the two stories as the "ideal individuals", according to Gao. In the end, Gao also associated the moral principles of Mohism with those of the Chinese Communist Party at that time to support his point of view that, inspired by the revolution in China during his time, Lu Xun switched the basis of his model for the "ideal individual" from the Western to the Chinese heritage, and the same can be said of Lu Xun's perspective on revolution.<sup>76</sup> In my view, this far-fetched and hasty last claim of Gao in this article somehow weakens his argument about Lu Xun's reception of Mohism. Gao jumps into the conclusion that the Chinese Communist Party upholds the moral principles of Mohism too abruptly and without supporting evidence. Most important, Lu Xun generally re-assembles the characters

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<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

in his stories based on people in real-life prototypes he knew very well.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, it is more convincing to claim that the character Mozi in “Opposing Aggression” resembles close friends and teachers of Lu Xun, rather than the Red Army soldiers that Lu Xun had never met.

To analyse the collection from the perspective of the philosophy of Daoism, Gao in a separate article cited “Leaving the Pass” and “Resurrecting the Dead” to prove Lu Xun’s rejection of Laozi and his disciples.<sup>78</sup> Compared with Confucianism, Lu Xun’s attitudes toward Daoism were far more complicated, and his rejection of the ideas of Zhuangzi and Hanfei 韩非 “that had penetrated deep into his marrow like a poison, was more like Lu Xun’s effort to ‘detox’, that is to expel their ideas through internal conflicts. In this process, Lu Xun’s mentality was to some degree, torn apart”, Gao argued.<sup>79</sup> For the character of Laozi in “Leaving the Pass”, despite Lu Xun’s denial that it was a “self-portrayal” in the article he wrote in response to the critics as well as his letters to Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸, Gao suggested that due to a structural inconsistency between Lu Xun’s intention and the original material, and Lu Xun’s unconscious sympathy for Laozi, the story was indeed a self-portrayal and a self-criticism of Lu Xun himself.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, in contrast to his subtle compassion for Laozi, Lu Xun’s portrayal of Zhuangzi in “Resurrecting the Dead” was far more caricature-like, according to Gao. Through an analysis of two different images of Zhuangzi

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<sup>77</sup> In “Wo zenme zuoqi xiaoshuo lai” (How I came to write fiction), Lu Xun said “I would not rely on one specific individual, but more often than not, use a mouth from someone in Zhejiang, a face from Beijing, and clothes from Shanxi to create a composite character. When people say this or that story of mine was an attack on such and such a person, it’s utter nonsense.” translated by Jon Eugene von Kowallis in *Jottings under Lamplight* (Harvard University Press), p. 56.

<sup>78</sup> See Gao Yuandong, “Lun Lu Xun dui daojia de jujue – yi gushi xinbian de xiangguan xiaoshuo wei zhongxin” 论鲁迅对道家的拒绝 – 以《故事新编》的相关小说为中心 (On Lu Xun’s Rejection of Taoism – a Discussion Centred around Taoism-related Stories in *Old Tales Retold*). *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Congkan* 中国现代文学丛刊, Issue 1, 2007, p. 93.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 96-101.

under Lu Xun's pen in *Han Wenxueshi Gangyao* 汉文学史纲要 (*Outline History of Chinese Fiction*) and "Resurrecting the Dead", Gao concluded that Zhuangzi in this story was a typical image of a "weishi" 伪士 (hypocritical literatus), and what Lu Xun dealt with in the story was not the real and academic image of Zhuangzi but a vulgarised one.<sup>81</sup> It was "the nihilism aroused by the vulgarised Zhuangzi that sank deep into Lu Xun himself which the writer wanted to purge his mind of. This reflected Lu Xun's rejection of the Daoist principle of 'chushi' 出世 (a "detached" world view), as well as his farewell to the resulting undertones of despair and wandering that characterised his previous writings".<sup>82</sup>

To sum up, the above articles by Gao on *Old Tales Retold* can be deemed as an argument to categorise the stories in this collection as Lu Xun's cultural critique, in which Lu Xun created several "characters with charisma who contributed to the forming of the Chinese cultural characteristics as well as the traditional heritage".<sup>83</sup> In this sense, his study is highly original and diverts the long-lasting discussion around the style of the collection onto a different path. In other words, by examining the last five stories in terms of Lu Xun's attitudes toward China's cultural heritage, Gao centres his argument around Lu Xun's life-long goal of *liren* 立人 (to cultivate individuals), which reveals the possible connections between *Old Tales Retold* and Lu Xun's early works.

Among other equally important studies of the collection during the 1990s in China was Yan Jiayan's examination into the technique Lu Xun adopted, that is, the perspective of expressionism in *Old Tales Retold*. In the first half of this article, to demonstrate that Lu Xun

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95.

explored extensively the expressionist arts and expressionism became the focus of his attention, Yan Jiayan cited various sources including the essays and letters he wrote in the 1910s and 1920s, his translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Anguish* and other articles by Japanese expressionist artists in the 1920s, as well as Lu Xun's compilation of the paintings and woodcuts by expressionist artists Edvard Munch and Käthe Kollwitz, together with a large amount of books about this particular school of art the writer purchased since 1924. In the second part, Yan Jiayan proposed that it is not a coincidence that "subtle but significant changes can be found in the creative principles of Lu Xun" during the same period of time.<sup>84</sup> Through a comparison between the principles of creative writing and fine arts Lu Xun adopted and discussed before and after 1925, Yan concluded that an essay titled "Zenmexie" 怎么写 ("How to write") written in 1927, marks an important transition in Lu Xun's creative perspective.<sup>85</sup> In the last part of this article, Yan challenged the label previous scholars put on *Old Tales Retold* as a work of realism; instead, he maintained that the collection is "mainly modernist, to be exact, expressionist", as the most distinctive feature of the collection is "the intrusion of some episodes and details of the modern times" into ancient mythology, legends and history, constituting a stark contrast between the past and the present and resulting in the *Verfremdungseffekt* (distancing effect), a technique belonging to none other than the expressionist arts.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, another feature of the expressionist arts – absurdity – can be exemplified by "Forging the Swords" and "Resurrecting the Dead", argued Yan. In addition, the most significant feature of the collection lies in "the expression of Lu Xun's own feelings, state of mind and artistic taste by means of re-telling the ancient stories. ... Such self-expression is in the perspective of expressionism rather than a simplistic

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<sup>84</sup> See Yan Jiayan 严家炎. "Lu Xun yu biao xian zhuyi – jian lun gu shi xin bian de yishu tezhen g" 鲁迅与表现主义 – 兼论《故事新编》的艺术特征 (Lu Xun and Expressionism – on the Artistic Features of Old Tales Retold). *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue* 中国社会科学, Issue 2, 1995, p. 146.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

self-portrayal”.<sup>87</sup> In conclusion, Yan asserted the purpose of Lu Xun to re-sketch the characters from mythology and history is to “restore their original images as ordinary human beings”, and “such restoration of ancient heroes into personalities living in a mundane world is a common feature of modernist works”.<sup>88</sup> All in all, despite that his argument on Lu Xun’s application of expressionist technique into the collection was somehow weakened by an unbalanced and hasty account of each of the eight stories, this article seems to be among the first to demonstrate a new perspective in Lu Xun’s *Old Tales Retold*, and to argue for the integrity of all the eight stories in this collection in terms of its artistic features.

Ten years later, Zheng Jiajian published his book on the poetics of *Old Tales Retold*, the only book to date in Chinese academia solely dedicated to the collection. His ambition was to establish a new theoretical system to “cast light on the textual world of *Old Tales Retold*”, that is, the perspectives of linguistic device, creative motives and stylistic features, inspired by literary theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin.<sup>89</sup> In the first five chapters of this book, Zheng presented a detailed analysis of the collection in terms of parodies, metaphors, and narrative strategies and concluded that its style is a brand new one Lu Xun created. Regardless of the long-running debate in China as to whether the collection falls into the category of historic novels or sarcastic novels, he coined a name for this new poetic style – “*gushi xinbian shi xiaoshuo*” 故事新编式小说 (Old Tales Retold-esque novels).<sup>90</sup> At the end of the fourth chapter in which the collection was set against the backdrop of Chinese literary heritage for examination, Zheng carried forward Wang’s point of view about “facetiousness” in *Old Tales*

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>89</sup> See Zheng Jiajian 郑家健. *Bei Zhaoliang de Shijie: Gushi Xinbian Shixue Yanjiu* 被照亮的世界：《故事新编》诗学研究 (*An Enlightened World: A Poetic Study on Old Tales Retold*). Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001, pp. 8-9.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*, p. 363.



*Retold*, and concluded that it is indeed a “unique insight of Lu Xun into China’s society, history and culture”; it embodies “the depth, complexity and abundance”; and more importantly, “the collection’s association with the humour in folklore is undeniable”.<sup>91</sup> In the fifth chapter, Zheng expanded his discussion to the fields of film art and fine arts, and introduced a comparison between the collection and the Chinese translation of four dialogues by the ancient Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata translated by Zhou Zuoren.<sup>92</sup> For the last two chapters, Zheng expanded his analysis of poetics into other works of Lu Xun such as *Wild Grass* along with other stories. Generally speaking, Zheng’s book can be deemed as an ambitious attempt to interpret *Old Tales Retold* from another perspective that had not been discussed previously. However, piling up of a multitude of sporadic details and far-fetched associations with influence of Chinese heritage and foreign works on the collection undermines Zheng’s argument. It could have been more powerful if Zheng had focused on the chapters about linguistic devices and narrative techniques only.

As recently as 2016, Sun Yu published an analysis of “Resurrecting the Dead”, in which he looked at a unique perspective from which Lu Xun approached Zhuangzi in this story, in comparison with those of the Qing-era scholars, and scholars such as Zhang Taiyan and Hu Shi 胡适, along with Lu Xun’s contemporaries such as Guo Moruo and Shi Zhecun 施蛰存. Sun pointed out that Lu Xun discovered an “alternative” Zhuangzi in his early essays, while in “Resurrecting the Dead”, the only story by Lu Xun about Zhuangzi, an apparent influence of the perspective Lunacharsky adopted in interpreting Don Quixote can be found, so that “important elements of Russian literature are introduced implicitly into Lu Xun’s

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<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243.

interpretation of ancient Chinese culture”.<sup>93</sup> Finally, Sun argued, with Lu Xun’s depiction of Zhuangzi as the victim of applying his metaphysical thoughts in real life, Lu Xun aims to criticise the “*disanzhong ren*” 第三种人 (intellectuals of the so-called “third category”) who claimed to be politically “impartial”, by revealing the possibility that the new generation of intellectuals might fall into collaboration with the authoritarian regime without realising it.<sup>94</sup> In this sense, it is Lu Xun’s ability to bypass the old-fashioned academic and aesthetic approaches to Zhuangzi that enables him to produce an “alternative” character, because Lu Xun’s perspective, rooted in his values and his own world view, is entirely different from those who have contributed to the discourse on Zhuangzi since ancient times.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, Zhu Chongke in his PhD thesis not only accepted the categorization of the collection into an Old-Tales-Retold type of fiction but also applied post-modern theories such as Mikhail Bakhtin’s carnivalesque into his study.<sup>96</sup> In conclusion, for the past twenty years in China, academic research on *Old Tales Retold* has unfolded in a much more diversified way, drawing inspirations from research in other parts of the world while significantly expanding its own scope.

Finally, a brief review of Japanese scholars’ criticism of *Old Tales Retold* will be presented. Takeuchi Yoshimi 竹内好, a Japanese scholar prominent early on in Lu Xun studies, in the 1940s claimed that this collection differed from Lu Xun’s past work, disrupting the

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<sup>93</sup> See Sun Yu 孙郁. “Lu Xun dui Zhuangzi de linglei xushu” 鲁迅对庄子的另类叙述 (An Alternative Depiction of Zhuangzi by Lu Xun). *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文艺研究, Issue 3, 2016, pp. 50-52.

<sup>94</sup> What Sun means is that Lu Xun sees through the “political impartiality” of these intellectuals of the so-called “third category”. They claim themselves to be “politically impartial”, so they don’t criticise the KMT government. However, while intoxicated in their “impartiality”, they don’t realise that by not criticising the KMT, they’re already siding with the dictatorship.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>96</sup> See Zhu Chongke 朱崇科. “Lun gushi xinbian xiaoshuo zhong de zhuti jieru” 论故事新编小说中的主体介入” (A Study on Subjective Interventions in *Old Tales Retold*-style Fictions). PhD thesis. National University of Singapore, 2005.

continuity of the writer's stories, and due to the inconsistency within the eight stories in terms of their styles, the collection was a failure.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, it was difficult to be categorised as "historical fiction", so calling it a "fantasy" would be more appropriate as Lu Xun "utilised history as a source, based on his own interpretation of it", thus removing the contradictions innate in typical historical novels. This was a distinctive feature of Lu Xun's historic stories.<sup>98</sup> As for each of the stories, "Opposing Aggression" and "Curbing the Flood" were the best in terms of artistic value, while "Mending Heaven" was the hardest to understand, and there was no sarcasm at all but a sense of mystery throughout "Forging the Swords", according to Takeuchi. It is noteworthy that in his interpretation of "Leaving the Pass", Takeuchi suggested that the three characters Laozi, Confucius and Guan Yinxī 关尹喜 represented three contradictory personalities of Lu Xun himself, while for "Resurrecting the Dead" the reason why Zhuangzi was caricaturised lay in the writer's inner conflict of being tempted to accept yet struggling to reject the ideas of this ancient scholar.<sup>99</sup> In the 1950s, Takeuchi re-read the collection and modified his view by admitting that *Old Tales Retold* was "a unique work and hard to be positioned in world literature because this type of stories was never seen before", but he still maintained that except for two or three stories therein, the collection "was not indispensable to the understanding of Lu Xun".<sup>100</sup>

Contrary to Takeuchi, Ito Toramaru 伊藤虎丸 who began his study of Lu Xun after World War II based on the same two stories, voiced a strikingly different view that, if viewed from the perspective of Lu Xun as an "upholder of science", *Old Tales Retold* demonstrated the writer's efforts to create new characters using realism as his scientific approach; the impetus

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<sup>97</sup> See Takeuchi Yoshimi 竹内好. *Cong Juewang Kaishi 从"绝望"开始 (Rising from "Despair")*. Translated and edited by Jin Conglin. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2013, p. 138.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 141-145.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

behind his efforts to re-create positive heroes was his acceptance of Marxism around 1928.<sup>101</sup> In the analysis of “Opposing Aggression”, Ito identified “the merging of current real-life events with the scenarios from myth and legend” as a “unique perspective on realism created by Lu Xun”.<sup>102</sup> In addition, Ito argued that the trajectory of development in Lu Xun’s thought reflected in the eight stories could be one from idealism in “Mending Heaven”, through the rejection of idealism in “Forging the Swords” and “The Flight to the Moon”, to a “light” version of realism in “Curbing the Flood” and “Opposing Aggression”.<sup>103</sup> Ito’s contemporary Kiyama Hideo 木山英雄, translator of *Old Tales Retold* into Japanese, also gave high praise to this collection. In the postscript attached to his translation, Kiyama argued against simplistic classification of the characters such as Laozi and Zhuangzi as negative ones and Yu and Mozi as positive ones, and pointed to expressionist dramatist Bertolt Brecht’s theory of *Verfremdungseffekt* (distancing effect) that aims to make the audience reflect on the story rather than identify with characters, as an alternative perspective to interpret the collection.<sup>104</sup> More important, he interpreted “facetiousness” as the writer’s reminder to the readers rather than a negation of his own work, and the collection indeed requires further study because the use of terms like “facetiousness” and “jokes” in comments by Lu Xun himself on the collection, could well be a sign of his pride in his own creativity.<sup>105</sup>

The first year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the publication of an article about *Old Tales Retold* by Katayama Tomoyuki 片山智行, in which he argued that despite the differences between the

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<sup>101</sup> See Ito Toramaru 伊藤虎丸. *Lu Xun yu Ribenren: Yazhou de Jindai yu “Ge” de Sixiang* 鲁迅与日本人：亚洲的近代与“个”的思想 (*Lu Xun and the Japanese: Asia in Modern Times and the Concept of “individuality”*). Translated by Li Dongmu. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001, pp. 156-157

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>104</sup> See Kiyama Hideo 木山英雄. *Wenxue Fugu yu Wenxue Geming* 文学复古与文学革命 (*Literature Renaissance and Literature Revolution*). Translated by Zhao Jinghua. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004, pp. 375-377.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 377-378.

first three stories and the last five, the overall theme of the collection was hidden in the first story “Mending Heaven” – the antithesis of “*shi*” 实 (reality) and “*xu*wang” 虚妄 (delusion), or “*xing*” 行 (implementation) and “*ming*” 名 (name). Moreover, “facetiousness” helped to deepen the theme of “Mending Heaven” – a tragedy about the “implementer” of creation, the protagonist Nü Wa, who sacrificed her own life for humans but ended up being denied and condemned by the “little creatures” who populate the story.<sup>106</sup> For “The Flight to the Moon”, Katayama took the story up a level above the personal grievances between Lu Xun and Gao Changhong 高长虹, to another: a heroic implementer’s tragic encountering of betrayal from his disciple and wife.<sup>107</sup> Katayama argued that the antithesis of delusion and reality can be found in the dialogue between Meijianchi and Yan zhi Aozhe from “Forging the Swords”, and this theme can be pinned down at the end of the story in Lu Xun’s ironic creation of “the tomb of three kings”. Therefore, Katayama maintains that the highest achievement of Lu Xun’s *Old Tales Retold* resides in this delusion/reality antithesis in its theme, rather than the much discussed style of “facetiousness”.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, Katayama points out that if “Opposing Aggression” and “Curbing the Flood” are interpreted only in terms of Lu Xun’s embrace of Marxism as his new world view, one will thereby ignore the overall theme of the collection: the antithesis between implementation and name, as well as between delusion and reality.<sup>109</sup> In addition, the two stories about Laozi and Zhuangzi together with “Gathering Vetch” are aimed at criticising the “passiveness” of the intellectuals of his day. Katayama also cited Lu Xun’s opinions from his early essays written in Japan as well as those written in the 1930s to argue against interpretation of the two stories from the thoughts of Laozi and Zhuangzi; instead, he proposed that Lu Xun’s aim is the criticism of that sort of “empty talk” and the

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<sup>106</sup> See Katayama Tomoyuki 片山智行. “Gushi xinbian lun” 《故事新编》论 (On *Old Tales Retold*). Translated by Li Dongmu. *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 8, 2000, p. 26.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

characteristics of “slacking off” among the intellectuals then. In the end, Katayama concluded that “the collection is based on the characteristic trait of ‘slacking off’ in the Chinese national character Lu Xun discovered during his study in Japan, and presents a “powerful antithesis of the efforts of ‘implementers’ to reform the world, and the ‘delusion’ of the opinionated people”.<sup>110</sup> Among the Japanese scholars discussed above, Ito’s perspective is undoubtedly the most outstanding and original in that he identifies a link between Lu Xun and science by calling the writer an “upholder of science”, which blazes a new trail in the examination of Lu Xun’s thought and cultural criticism, or the very origin of Lu Xun as a writer and a thinker. However, whether it is realism that is adopted in *Old Tales Retold* is still subject to debate; expressionism that focuses on each individual character’s mental state rather than the outer world, seems to outweigh realism in this collection. Moreover, Katayama’s interpretation also stands out as he introduces the theme of national character, a celebrated aspect of Lu Xun’s works, into the discussion of this collection, casting light on the potential to link Lu Xun’s early works with *Old Tales Retold*. Last but not least, Katayama’s identification of the antithesis between delusion and reality throughout the entire collection is ground-breaking and inspiring, and asserts the potential influence of Buddhism on Lu Xun, a unique and indispensable perspective on the makings of Lu Xun.

All in all, the trajectory of academic appraisal of Lu Xun’s *Old Tales Retold* in the U.S., Europe and Asia for the past 60 years demonstrates the complexity innate in this collection. The heated discussion about its style that led to tremendous divergence among Lu Xun scholars seems to be replaced by an agreement that *Old Tales Retold* is a brand-new style of fiction, which put an end to the debate over whether the collection is historical or satirical. That said, scholars still contest the artistic value of the collection, with some recognising it as

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<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 33-35.

unique and indispensable to Lu Xun's works, while others rejecting it as only experimental or even a failure. On the other hand, new trails recent scholars have blazed such as those on the allegorical and symbolic features of the collection together with both the domestic and foreign influences on it, have been increasingly discussed. However, there remain questions unanswered, including other historical sources and the context for each story and its characters; the meaning of *youhua* (facetiousness); the differences between the first three stories and the last five; the motive of Lu Xun to start writing the first three stories, set it aside but then resume writing the rest of the stories in the collection after a span of 13 years; and the relations between this collection and his other writings.

## Chapter One

In this chapter, the first story in *Old Tales Retold*, “Mending Heaven” will be examined in terms of influences of Lu Xun’s translation of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s “Rashōmon” (羅生門) together with his translation of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Lu Xun’s creative use of the techniques and themes that he borrowed from these writers, and his treatment of the raw material these short stories are based on, will also be discussed, in order to reveal the process through which Lu Xun moulds a brand new style of story that he himself referred to as descended from the classic category *yanyi* 演义<sup>111</sup> (historical romance). Finally, the theme of failed communication in the first story will be analysed to conclude this chapter.

In the discussion about Lu Xun’s motive for writing “Mending Heaven”, some scholars<sup>112</sup> have attributed it to Lu Xun’s statement of “using Freudian theories to explain the origin of creation – the creation of men as well as of literature”<sup>113</sup> in the second paragraph of the preface. Leo Ou-fan Lee even points out that the inspiration behind this story is Sigmund Freud’s and Henri Bergson’s theories through the intermediary of Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s *Symbols of Anguish*.<sup>114</sup> However, it is most likely an anachronistic mistake, in that Lu Xun’s

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<sup>111</sup> See Lu Xun. “Zixuanji zixu” 《自选集》自序 (Preface to the *Self-selected Collection of Lu Xun’s Works*, in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 4. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 468.

<sup>112</sup> See Marston Anderson. “Lu Xun’s Facetious Muse: The Creative Imperative in Modern Chinese Fiction”, in *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China*. Ellen Widmer and Wang Te-wei (ed), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 261, and Wang Furen 王富仁. “Chaungzaozhe de kumen de xiangzheng – xi butian” 创造者的苦闷的象征-析《补天》 (The Symbol of Anguish of a Creator – an Analysis of “Mending Heaven”). *Mingzuo Xinshang* 名作欣赏. Issue 4, 1986, pp. 37-42.

<sup>113</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>114</sup> See Leo Ou-fan Lee 李欧梵. *Tiewu zhong de Nahan* 铁屋中的呐喊 (*Voices from the Iron House*). Translated by Yin Huimin. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001, pp. 29-34.



knowledge of Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson through *Symbols of Anguish* came no early than April of 1924 when he purchased the book.<sup>115</sup> In one of Lu Xun's correspondences in January 1925 with a reader about his translation of Kuriyagawa's book, he confessed that *Symbols of Anguish* was the first book of Kuriyagawa that he had read and "before that I didn't pay attention to him".<sup>116</sup> It is true that Lu Xun's translation of the book is, in fact, not the first version in Chinese; the first known translation was published in 1921 in a supplement of *Shishi Xinbao* 时事新报 (*The China Times*), with only the first two chapters; the third chapter was translated and published by another translator in 1924 in *Dongfang Zazhi* 东方杂志 (*The Eastern Miscellany*).<sup>117</sup> However, the evidence that Lu Xun was unaware of the earliest translation<sup>118</sup> until he received and responded to the reader's letter mentioned above, is crystal clear. As for the possible source from which Lu Xun learned of the theories of Sigmund Freud, further research is needed. What this thesis intends to call attention to is Lu Xun's motive in writing "Mending Heaven" that the writer clearly indicates at the beginning of the same paragraph in the preface, where he specifies, "My idea at that time was to take material for some stories both from antiquity and the present age".<sup>119</sup> In the following paragraphs, the possible source that inspires Lu Xun to draw material from both ancient times and the contemporary world will be identified, and his motive in writing this particular story, or even the entire collection, will be further explored.

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<sup>115</sup> See Lu Xun. 日记十三 (Diary Vol. 13), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 15. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 507.

<sup>116</sup> See Lu Xun. "Guanyu kumen de xiangzheng" 关于《苦闷的象征》 (About *Symbols of Anguish*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 7. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 253.

<sup>117</sup> See Liang Min'er 梁敏儿. "Kumen de xiangzheng yu fuluoyide xueshuo de chuanru" 《苦闷的象征》与佛洛伊德学说的传入 (Symbols of Anguish and the Introduction of Sigmund Freud's Theory into China). *Zhongguo Xiandai Wenxue Yanjiu Congkan* 中国现代文学研究丛刊. Issue 4, 1994, p. 248.

<sup>118</sup> See Lu Xun. "Guanyu kumen de xiangzheng" 关于《苦闷的象征》 (About *Symbols of Anguish*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 7. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 254.

<sup>119</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 3.

What does Lu Xun mean when he refers to both ancient times and the present, what sense does this juxtaposition make, and what specific events triggered him to do so? To solve these questions about his creating of “Mending Heaven”, one needs to look back a year earlier to 1921 when Lu Xun translated and published Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s “Rashōmon” in *Chen Bao* 晨报 (*the Morning Post*). In the note attached to his translation, Lu Xun says,

This is historical fiction, not a story from history, and can be considered as one of his best stories, in which he takes up facts from ancient times and breathes new life into it, thus establishing connections between them and the modern man.”

“这一篇历史的小说（并不是历史小说），也算他的佳作，取古代的事实，注进新的生命去，便与现代人生出干系来。<sup>120</sup>

In 1923, when his translation of “Rashōmon” and other short stories of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Kikuchi Kan 菊池寛, Eguchi Kan 江口渙, Arishima Takeo 有島武郎, Mori Ogai 森鷗外 and Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石, together with Zhou Zuoren’s translation of other writers’ stories was published as *Xiandai Riben Xiaoshuoji* 现代日本小说集 (*A Collection of Modern Japanese Stories*), Lu Xun quoted the above comment in a longer introduction of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke.<sup>121</sup> Interestingly, the exact same comment can be used to describe Lu Xun’s own “Mending Heaven”, or even the entire collection of *Old Tales Retold*. Perhaps the scholars who were involved in the heated debate over whether *Old Tales Retold* is historical or satirical decades ago should have referred to this comment. Hasn’t Lu Xun already answered the question over whether he has been inspired by his own translation of Akutagawa’s “Rashōmon” and moulded a new type of story-writing? Some scholars have

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<sup>120</sup> See Lu Xun. “Luoshengmen yizhe fuji” 《罗生门》译者附记 (Translator’s Note on *Rashōmon*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 252.

<sup>121</sup> See Lu Xun. “Xiandai riben xiaoshuoji – fulu – guanyu zuozhe de shuoming – jiechuan longzhijie” 《现代日本小说集》附录 – 关于作者的说明 – 芥川龙之介 (Akutagawa Ryūnosuke – About the Japanese writers – Appendix to *A Collection of Modern Japanese Stories*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 243.

already pointed out such possible influence from Akutagawa's short stories on Lu Xun.<sup>122</sup> In this thesis, my focus will be how Lu Xun borrows the technique of "intrusion" from "Rashōmon" and creatively uses it in "Mending Heaven" to modernise the traditional Chinese story form of *yanyi*.

### A technique borrowed from Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

Deriving material from two separate stories in the ancient Japanese story collection *Konjaku Monogatari* 今昔物語集 (*A Collection of Stories Old and New*)<sup>123</sup> and records in *Hōjōki* 方丈記 (*An Account of My Hut*),<sup>124</sup> Akutagawa recreates the original stories with his exploration into the psychological activities deep inside his main character, while signalling the readers frequently in the plot with "intrusions of the narrator" in "Rashōmon",<sup>125</sup> which exerts a unique effect on the readers. As the translator of the story and a writer himself, Lu Xun is fully aware of Akutagawa's technique that can breathe "new life" into old material, therefore connecting the modern era with ancient times. Indeed, in the entire story of

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<sup>122</sup> See Wang Xiangyuan 王向远. "Lu Xun yu jiechuan longzhijie, juchi kuan lishixiaoshuo chuanguo bijiaolun" 鲁迅与芥川龙之介、菊池宽历史小说创作比较论 (On the Comparison between the Historical Fiction of Lu Xun, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Kikuchi Kan). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 12, 1995, pp. 43-55; Fujii Shōzō 藤井省三. "Lu Xun yu jiechuan longzhijie – Nahan xiaoshuo de xushu moshi yiji gushijiegou de chengli" 鲁迅与芥川龙之介 – 《呐喊》小说的叙述模式以及故事结构的成立 (Lu Xun and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke – on the Narrative Model and Story Structure of *Call to Arms*). *Yangzijiang Pinglun* 扬子江评论, Issue 2, 2010, pp. 17-22; and Yoshida Yōko 吉田陽子. Lu Xun's "The New Year's Sacrifice" and Eguchi Kan's "Kyukoku no Yoru" (鲁迅『祝福』と江口渥『峡谷の夜』). Thesis Collection of International Cultural Studies of Aichi Prefectural University, Issue 18, 2017 (愛知県立大学大学院国際文化研究科論集第18号(2017)), pp. 69-90.

<sup>123</sup> See "Nihon no koten wo daizai ni shita Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no sakuhin" 日本の古典を題材にした芥川龍之介の作品 (A List of Japanese Classical Literary Works that Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Stories Draw Material from). <http://www.hosen.okayamac.ed.jp/library/wpcontent/uploads/7525a1d272957154405187abfc08268a.pdf>. viewed on 9 Oct 2018.

<sup>124</sup> See Donald Keene. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era: Fiction*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1987, p. 559.

<sup>125</sup> The plot of "Rashōmon" is set in Kyoto in the aftermath of a series of disasters and famine sometime between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century. A foot soldier dismissed from his master samurai was wandering in the disaster-stricken city when he encountered a harrowing scene of an old woman plucking hair from a dead body in the tower over the city's gate. With subtle inner conflicts, he ended up becoming a robber himself after stopping the woman from doing that.

“Rashōmon”, the narrator intrudes into the plot several times, either covertly or overtly, all serving the same purpose – retelling the story through the lens of a modern writer.

The places in the plot where the narrator explicitly intrudes are easier to identify, for they carry indicators such as “ancient records or stories” and the name of a specific era in history, or even self-reflection and modification of “the writer” himself. Examples of such “intrusions” are cited below:

1. Old records tell us that people would smash Buddhist statues and other devotional gear, pile the pieces by the roadside with flecks of paint and gold and silver foil still clinging to them, and sell them as firewood.

“旧記によると、仏像や仏具を打碎いて、その丹がついたり、金銀の箔がついたりした木を、路ばたにつみ重ねて、薪の料に売っていたと云う事である。”

(“据旧记说，还将佛象和佛具打碎了，那些带着丹漆，带着金银箔的木块，都堆在路旁当柴卖。”)

2. We noted earlier that the servant was “waiting for the rain to end,” but in fact the man had no idea what he was going to do once that happened.

“作者はさっき、「下人が雨やみ待っていた」と書いた。……だから「下人が雨やみを待っていた」と云う方が、適當である。”

(“著者在先，已写道‘家将待着雨住’了。……所以与其说‘家将待着雨住’，还不如说‘遇雨的家将，没有可去的地方，正在无法可想’，倒是愜当的。”)

3. The weather, too, contributed to the *sentimentalisme* of this Heian Period menial.

“その上、今日の空模様も少からず、この平安朝の下人の *Sentimentalisme* に影響した。”

(“况且今日的天色，很影响到这平安朝家将的 *Sentimentalisme* 上去。”)

4. Moved by six parts terror and four parts curiosity, the servant forgot to breathe for a moment. To borrow a phrase from a writer of old, he felt as if “the hairs on his head were growing thick.”

“下人は、六分の恐怖と四分の好奇心とに動かされて、暫時は呼吸をするのさえ忘れていた。旧記の記者の語を借りれば、「頭身の毛も太る」ように感じたのである。”

(“家将被六分的恐怖和四分的好奇心所动了，几于暂时忘却了呼吸。倘接了旧记的记者的话来说，便是觉得‘毛戴’起来了。”)

5. Each time a hair gave way, a little of the man's fear disappeared, to be replaced by an increasingly violent loathing for the old woman. No, this could be misleading: he felt not so much a loathing for the old woman as a revulsion for all things evil – an emotion that grew in strength with every passing minute.

“そうして、それと同時に、この老婆に対するはげしい憎悪が、少しずつ動いて来た。－いや、この老婆に対すると云っては、語弊があるかも知れない。むしろ、あらゆる悪に対する反感が、一分毎に強さを増して来たのである。

(“而且同时，对于这老姬的憎恶，也渐渐的发动了。－不，说是‘对于这老姬’，或者有些语病；倒不如说，对于一切恶的反感，一点一点的强盛起来了。”)<sup>126</sup>

In the above quotations, the intruding author repeatedly reminds the readers of the present time they live in by emphasising the name of a period in ancient times and exposing to the readers his quoting from the original version of the story several hundreds of years ago, together with the unique characteristics of modern Japan in the period of *Taishō* 大正, such as the French word *sentimentalisme*, when the country was undergoing rapid Westernisation since the Meiji Restoration. Moreover, the same narrator lays bare the mistakes or defects of his own writing and modifies them without concealing the process at least twice in “*Rashōmon*”, a feat that is not seen in the classical stories and undoubtedly is adopted from the modern Western ones. Therefore, through the juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern, the narrator alienates the readers from the old period of time while urging them to pick up the perspective of the writer himself, the perspective of a modern man. Such juxtaposition is an unmistakable indicator of a new style of historical story which Akutagawa endeavours to bring about to reform the traditional Japanese ones. Akutagawa points out the

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<sup>126</sup> For the English translation, see *Rashomon and Seventeen Other Stories*. Translated by Jay Rubin. London: Penguin Books, 2006, pp. 3-6.

For the original Japanese, see Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龙之介. *Luoshengmen* 罗生门. Translated and annotated by Lin Shaohua 林少华. Beijing: Zhongguo yuhang chubanshe 中国宇航出版社, 2013, pp. 3-14.

For the Chinese translation, see Lu Xun. *Lu Xun yiwen xuanji – duanpian xiaoshuo juan* 鲁迅译文选集 – 短篇小说卷 (*Selected Translations of Lu Xun – Volume of Short Stories*). Shanghai: Shanghai sanlian shudian 上海三联书店, 2014, pp. 220-225.

“falseness” of old Japanese stories in one of his essays in *Sumiedō Zakki* 澄江堂雜記 (*Miscellaneous Notes of Sumiedō*). He says, “in those stories, the ancients and the present-day souls share the same ‘heart’, or mentality”. What Akutagawa promotes is a type of historical stories that, through the juxtaposition of the past and the present, can “naturally deliver certain implications”.<sup>127</sup>

On the other hand, the covert intrusion in “Rashōmon” requires a much closer reading to find – the pimple on the right side of the face of the protagonist. As a minor skin disease that evades description of the original story writer, the pimple in “Rashōmon” follows this foot soldier from the beginning till the end, appearing four times and serving as a trigger that prompts him to make a choice between good and evil, that is, not to violate the moral code and starve to death, or to rob others of their belongings to survive the famine and natural disasters. In the description of the pimple for the first time in the story, the foot soldier was “agonised” over it, symbolising his internal struggle against an impulse of doing evil, while in the end when he was engaged in an inner battle over whether to rob the old woman or not, he pressed the “big pimple with pulse” with his right hand, which hints at his efforts to suppress the drive to commit a crime, but finally as evil took over him, before he reached out to rob the old woman of her clothes he let go of his right hand.

The reason why the pimple can be categorised as the technique of “intrusions of the narrator” lies not only in the fact that the pimple was non-existent in the original story from hundreds of years ago, but also in that such detailed description of a minor skin problem which acts as

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<sup>127</sup> See Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. *Jiechuan Longzhijie Quanji* 芥川龙之介全集 (*The Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke*) Vol. 3. Translated by Luo Xingdian, Chen Shengbao and Liu Lishan. Jinan: Shandong wenyi chubanshe 山东文艺出版社, 2005, p. 303.

a literary device to deliver the theme of a story, is a modernist approach. Akutagawa himself later in his essay collection *Miscellaneous Notes of Sumiedō* explains the function of the pimple in “Rashōmon”. Citing two other terms for a pimple from other old books, he points out that this minor ailment must have plagued almost everyone in ancient times, implying that it was those story tellers who failed, or did not care, to mention it in their narratives.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, the pimple as a facial feature of the protagonist stands on a firm ground, with its authenticity endorsed both by the experience of modern readers and by the records in other ancient books. In addition, the scenes of famine and natural disasters in Kyoto in “Rashōmon” have already been identified as borrowings from other historical records.<sup>129</sup> Thus, the credibility of the fiction “Rashōmon” is enhanced since the background the plot is set in, including even the pimple, has indeed been recorded in history. Such a technique of collecting raw material from a wide variety of books from olden times, selecting and scissoring it, and finally piecing the mosaic into a cogent and vividly narrated piece of fiction is essential to historical stories; however, the perfect balance between the credibility and literary appeal of such type of stories is extremely hard to achieve. Lu Xun understands the conundrum, and that’s why in the preface of *Old Tales Retold*, he says:

As for historical stories, to my mind those based on extensive research with sound evidence for every word are extremely hard to write, even though they are sneered at as ‘novels smacking of the school-room’; whereas not much skill is needed to take a subject and write it up freely, adding some colouring of your own.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> See Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. *Jiechuan Longzhijie Quanjī* 芥川龙之介全集 (*The Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke*) Vol. 3. Translated by Luo Xingdian, Chen Shengbao and Liu Lishan. Jinan: Shandong wenyi chubanshe 山东文艺出版社, 2005, p. 299.

<sup>129</sup> See Donald Keene. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era: Fiction*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1987. p. 559.

<sup>130</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 3.

Most likely from Lu Xun's view, Akutagawa's "Rashōmon" serves as a brilliant example of maintaining such a difficult balance of this brand new style, in which embellishments of a gothic atmosphere, the characters, their inner battles and even the author's reflections are given free play from the perspective of modern stories, while material from the original stories or records of ancient times adds authenticity to the story. Such balanced juxtaposition of old and new helps it achieve the ultimate cogency. Thereby a skillfully wrought new bottle (form) for the age-old mellow wine (content) is meticulously crafted. This is why Lu Xun labels "Rashōmon" as "historical fiction" instead of a story derived from history.

### **Drawing on China's ancient heritage**

In the following section, focus will be given to Lu Xun's own moulding of a new form of story to retell the legend from centuries ago in "Mending Heaven", with inspirations from "Rashōmon" and the existing story form of *yanyi* in China. The entire process exemplifies Lu Xun's purpose of *fugu* 复古 (returning to antiquity). The technique, "intrusion of the narrator", is not seen in *Old Tales Retold*; however, the perspective of a modern man as the narrator on the ancients, can be identified throughout "Mending Heaven", retelling the brief legend of Nü Wa making humans with earth and mending heaven with stones of five colours. Just like Akutagawa weaving two separate stories together (the main plot together with the episode where the old woman justified her wrongdoing) and adding details from other old material at his disposal (the harrowing scenes of a famine-stricken Kyoto), Lu Xun binds together the original stories of Nü Wa from *Huinanzi* 淮南子 and *Shanhaijing* 山海经 (*Classic of Mountains and Seas*) as the main story line, while inserting imaginative plots written in the style of *Shangshu* 尚书 (*The Book of History*) together with records from *Shiji*



史记 (*Records of the Grand Historian*) as the “intrusive” sideline and the ending<sup>131</sup>, in which the originally separate records from the pre-Qin and Han eras are brocaded into one story, urging the readers to view these ancient stories from a fresh new angle, i.e. how a goddess toiled to create humans and even sacrificed herself to save them but ended up being accused by her creation, and her contributions being usurped. Such implicit “intrusions” of one historical record into another mark not only a stark contrast with “Rashōmon”, but also the point where Lu Xun departs from the influence of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and tailor-makes his own new style of historical story that targets both the past and the present. In other words, Akutagawa, with his superb skills, pieces together raw material from old sources, mainly to show the mentality of modern man, or himself, which embodies the ethos of the modern era; his interest is never in the ancients, or the Japanese cultural heritage.<sup>132</sup> Nevertheless, what Lu Xun strives to do in “Mending Heaven” with the borrowed technique of intrusion from Akutagawa is targeting at both the present and the past.

Many critics have anatomised the present-time events that Lu Xun alludes to in “Mending Heaven”. Lu Xun himself gives the readers clues on the story’s association with his contemporaries in the preface of *Old Tales Retold*. This chapter will emphasise the cultural heritage Lu Xun critically uses in writing this story to be specific, how and why Lu Xun treats the material from ancient texts and braids them into “Mending Heaven”. By treating, I mean selecting, modifying, scissoring and merging of ancient mythology. For the material

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<sup>131</sup> “Mending Heaven” consists of three sections: 1. Nü Wa making humans with earth; 2. Nü Wa mending the Heaven destroyed from a war between humans and toiling to death amid contempt from the humans she has created; and 3. Nü Wa’s body parts being appropriated by humans and her legacy being reduced to the Daoist priests’ fantasy of Fairy Mountains that beguile the great emperors of the First Emperor of Qin and Emperor of Wu of Han.

<sup>132</sup> See Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. *Jiechuan Longzhijie Quanji* 芥川龙之介全集 (*The Complete Works of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke*) Vol. 3. Translated by Luo Xingdian, Chen Shengbao and Liu Lishan. Jinan: Shandong wenyi chubanshe 山东文艺出版社, 2005, pp. 323-324. He says in an essay entitled “Days of Yore” that “the purpose of the so-called ‘historical story’ is not, to some degree, to reproduce the ‘past’. Generally speaking, from this point we can possibly see the difference between the story and the mythology.”

selection of tales about Nü Wa, Lu Xun centres his story around the folk legend instead of the official records. In the first section, he sews together two separate old stories which is most likely inspired by Wang Chong 王充, while inserting a fictional episode written in the style of *The Book of History*, one of the core orthodox Confucian scriptures in the second section, and ends this story with his modification of a tale from *Classic of Mountains and Seas* together with “faithful historical accounts” from *Records of the Grand Historian*.

First, for the section about Nü Wa creating humans, the raw material from the books written during the pre-Qin and Han eras is listed as follows:

Who on earth moulded the body of Nü Wa?

– Chapter of Inquiry into the Universe of *Chu Ci*

女娲有体，孰制匠之

– 楚辞•天问

There were ten gods named “the intestines of Nü Wa”, transformed from the body parts of the goddess and living in a wilderness called Liguang.

– Chapter of Dahuang Xijing of *Classic of Mountains and Seas*

有神十人，名曰女娲之肠，化为神，处栗广之野

– 山海经•大荒西经

The Yellow Emperor chose between *yin* and *yang*; divine Shangpian shaped ears and eyes; and divine Sanglin moulded arms and hands: Thus Nü Wa created seventy human beings.

– Chapter of Shuolin of *Huainanzi*

黄帝生阴阳，上骈生耳目，桑林生臂手：此女娲所以七十化也。 – 淮南子•说林

The folk legend had it that when the heaven and the earth came into being, there were no humans. Nü Wa created man from the yellow mud and then due to the intense labour she felt exhausted, so that she relied on a thick rope she made, immersing it in the mud and slinging it up to continue. Therefore, the rich and the noble were those moulded with her hands, while the poor and the low were those spawned from the mud slung away.

– *Fengsu Tongyi* quoted in *Taiping Yulan*

俗说天地开辟，未有人民，女娲抟黄土作人，剧务，力不暇供，乃引绳于繄泥中于举以为人。故富贵者黄土人也，贫贱凡庸者繄人也。

– 风俗通义 (引自《太平御览》)

Wa was a divine goddess from the age of yore who created everything.

– *Shuowen Jiezi*

Apparently, the first section of “Mending Heaven” is mainly based on the record in *Fengsu Tongyi*. Lu Xun is faithful to the first sentence of the old legend and expands it with his description of Nü Wa’s inner activities, like Akutagawa does with the foot soldier in “Rashōmon”. Lu Xun is especially truthful to the detail about the hardship of creating humans that made the goddess change her method by using a rope to continue. The reason why Lu Xun is steadfast in dealing with this particular detail of that record documented by a scholar of the Han era from folktales is its truthfulness: creating humans requires monumental effort and tremendous physical labour, which reflects the pain of the physical labourers. Moreover, the labour could be deemed as referring to the excruciatingly painful process that a woman undergoes when giving birth to her child by clinging to a rope hanging from the roof,<sup>133</sup> during which some even die due to dystocia.<sup>134</sup> Yuan Ke 袁珂 holds that Nü Wa is the oldest goddess in the Chinese mythology who generates the world, and the mythology about the goddess preserves the evidence for an archaic matriarchal period of time in China.<sup>135</sup> The female characters are significant in *Old Tales Retold*, though they are not necessarily the major roles, except for in “Mending Heaven”, where Nü Wa is not only in the leading role but also embodies a heroic characteristic trait that Lu Xun sings high praises for. The goddess represents those who sacrifice their own lives for their creation and saves the world from warfare between men, thus deserving the same, or even higher status than the other characters like Mozi 墨子 and Yu 禹 in the following stories in the collection.

<sup>133</sup> See Yang Zijian. *Shi Chan Lun* 十产论 (*Ten Methods of Labour*).

<https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=306504>, viewed on 23 Oct 2018. This medical book of the Song era recorded a way to give birth by sitting or squatting with hands clinging to a piece of cloth hanging from the beam in the maternity chamber.

<sup>134</sup> The record from *Classic of Mountains and Seas* about “the intestines of Nü Wa” could possibly be the apotheosis of women who died of difficult labour.

<sup>135</sup> See Yuan Ke. *Zhongguo Shenhua Shi* 中国神话史 (*A History of Chinese Mythology*). Beijing: Beijing lianhe chubun gongsi 北京联合出版公司, 2015, p. 26.

Therefore, the image of a selfless mother and saviour of the world that Lu Xun recreates from ancient folk legend harbours his criticism against the canonised male-centred Confucian and Daoist scriptures from which Nü Wa was deleted and her contribution and glory obliterated. The fact that the above folk legend of Nü Wa from *Fengsu Tongyi* can only be found now in an anthology compiled in the Song era, or the late 10<sup>th</sup> century, but not in the current edition censored during the Qing era in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>136</sup> is solid proof. The purposes of Lu Xun, I argue, in choosing the story of the marginalised goddess, are two: saving the Nü Wa legend from oblivion to decentre the male-dominated discourse of history; and reviving the original cultural heritage, from the angle of a modern man who is, though, confined by his own time, but somehow well aware of such a limitation. It is this stand point that distinguishes Lu Xun from his contemporaries who also preach “returning to antiquity”, in that the latter hold up the slogan either without critically examining the authenticity of the ancient records, or interpreting them whimsically, or speaking for the interest of those in power, thus distorting the cultural heritage. In a word, what they aim to restore is an autocracy with themselves in power, while what Lu Xun endeavours to promote is a Chinese heritage from a period of time as far back as the Han era, in which he sees the origin of vitality and creativity he can draw on and more characteristic traits he can collect to better describe the Chinese national character. On the other hand, Lu Xun’s intrusive modern eye renders the old legend vivid and lively by adding a multitude of colours in the background of Nü Wa. It makes less sense to attribute such an eye only to Lu Xun’s powerful imagination and creative writing skills; it has more to do with his insight into the “old” and the “new”. For him, to view the ancients or history as “primitive” and “dead” is a blunder of modern man, as

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<sup>136</sup> See Lu Xun. “Zhushi 2 of gushi xinbian – butian” 故事新编·补天—注释 2 (Annotation No.2 of *Old Tales Retold – Mending Heaven*), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 366-367.

the ancients were also indeed human beings, and the past was a continuum of a series of “current moments” that were as fresh and lively as every moment of present times a modern man experiences. Therefore, to write a truly credible story about ancient times, a modern writer should “intrude” deep into the past and recreate the life of the ancients with meaningful details. This coincides with Akutagawa’s juxtaposition of the ancient and the modern, the indispensable element for an ideal historical story of authenticity.

Next, examples from the first and the second section of “Mending Heaven” will be cited to support my argument. The prelude to the scene of Nü Wa’s creation of human out of mud, where she woke up from a dream in a dazzling world of a myriad of vivid colours, has won acclamations from many critics, although their interpretations vary, including an impression of the “erotic” from Leo Ou-fan Lee and Marston Anderson. I do not agree with them; it is a misinterpretation of Lu Xun’s depiction of Nü Wa as a woman of flesh and bone, rather than a goddess on a pedestal with her humanness or womanhood taken away during her apotheosis as a divine mother in a male-dominated discourse of Chinese history. If examined from the perspective of Lu Xun’s intention to revive the ancient goddess and her characteristic traits, Nü Wa in “Mending Heaven” is an image of an impeccably beautiful woman, physically strong, healthy and full of love for life, almost to the level of personification of *Das Ewig Weibliche* (the eternal feminine) in Goethe’s term, or the goddess Venus from Sandro Botticelli’s famed painting in the early Renaissance. At a glance, such a sketch of a woman seems very modern or of Western style to Chinese readers, not resembling those in ancient Chinese stories where women were generally physically weak and suffered misfortune incurred from a man’s betrayal. However, it might be surprising that this particular setting at the beginning of “Mending Heaven” quoted below most likely derives from the relics of the Han era, including the enchanting colours of Nü Wa’s environment.

This way and that through the pink sky floated wisps of rock-green clouds, behind which winked stars. In the blood-red clouds at the horizon was the glorious sun, like some fluid orb of gold lapped in a waste of ancient lava; opposite, the frigid white moon seemed as if made of iron. But she did not notice which was setting or which rising.<sup>137</sup>

The scenario where Nü Wa was alone with a panoramic picture of the Sun, the Moon and the stars in the background is the modernised coloured version of one or several of the stone carvings from the Han era, whose rubbings constitute a significant part of Lu Xun's collections. According to his diary, the time when the very first ten rubbings of stone carvings from Shandong area were added to his collection was 11<sup>th</sup> of September 1913,<sup>138</sup> and in 1927 in an article, "Xiamen Correspondence No. 3" (厦门通信 (三)), he mentioned seeking to publish his compilation of such rubbings entitled *Hanhuaxiang Kao* 汉画像考 (*A Study of Han Stone Reliefs*).<sup>139</sup> According to one of the recent studies of about 800 rubbings in his collection, 14 of them are carvings of a single image with a human head and a snake tail, including only one relief of two figures, most probably the legendary Fu Xi 伏羲 and Nü Wa; this particular one was described in the article as "Fu Xi is on the left side and Nü Wa on the right, holding tools of drawing a rectangular and a circle respectively. Both have a human head and a tail like snakes tangling with each other. The Sun is above them, the Moon between their tails and stars all around them".<sup>140</sup> Undoubtedly, Lu Xun takes up the scene from one or two of his collections and add into the picture colours that every modern man can see from the sky, the celestial bodies and trees and flowers, so the opening of "Mending

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<sup>137</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 11.

<sup>138</sup> See Lu Xun. "Guichou riji" 癸丑日记 (Diary of the Year *Gui Chou* [1913]), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 15. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 78.

<sup>139</sup> See Lu Xun. "Xiamen Tongxin (san)" 厦门通信 (三) (Xiamen Correspondence No. 3), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*A The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 413.

<sup>140</sup> See Dai Xiaoyun. "Lu Xun cang hanhuaxiang zhong fu xi nü wa xingxiang shidu" 鲁迅藏汉画像中伏羲女娲形象释读 (Interpretations of the Images of Fu Xi and Nü Wa in Lu Xun's Collections of Han Stone Reliefs). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 1, 2009, pp. 74-75.

Heaven” is like a black-and-white photo taken two thousand years ago transformed into a modern-day coloured one, thanks to Lu Xun’s efforts to revive the originally existing hues of Nü Wa’s paradise, which are unseen in those antiques, not due to the fact that they did not exist in the ancient time but simply due to the lack of appropriate techniques to faithfully preserve them.

### Lu Xun’s critical response to Wang Chong

To cite another example from the second section of the story that demonstrates Lu Xun’s critical reception of the cultural heritage, I would refer to the plot in which Nü Wa mended heaven in the wake of the battle between the giant Gong Gong 共工 (Kang Hui 康回) and Zhuan Xu 颛顼. According to the original records in *Huainanzi*, the legend of Nü Wa mending heaven and the battle between Gong Gong and Zhuan Xu at *buzhoushan* 不周山 (the Broken Mount) were two separate stories in different chapters not related to each other at all:

Back in ancient times, the four giant pillars holding up the world collapsed and the earth cracked, turning the entire world into chaos with bushfire and flood everywhere and men preyed on by beasts and birds. Nü Wa mended heaven by melting five-colour stones, broke the feet of giant tortoises to support the world, killed a black dragon to save Jizhou and stopped the flood by filling the ash of weed into it.

往古之时，四极废，九州裂，天不兼覆，地不周载，火熒焱而不灭，水浩洋而不息；猛兽食颛民，鸷鸟攫老弱。于是女娲炼五色石以补苍天，断鳌足以立四极，杀黑龙以济冀州，积炉灰以止淫水。<sup>141</sup>（淮南子·览冥训）

In the days of yore when Gong Gong and Zhuan Xu battled for the title of Emperor, Gong Gong was so furious that he punched the Broken Mount so that the pillars upholding the heavens collapsed and the ropes binding the earth together were broken. In the end, the Sun,

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<sup>141</sup> See 淮南子·览冥训 (Chapter of Lanmingxun of *Huainanzi*). <https://ctext.org/huainanzi/lan-ming-xun/zhs>, viewed on 2 Nov 2018.

the Moon and the stars were misplaced, the earth tilted to the southeast, thus triggering a flood flushing the sand and mud to the southeast.

昔者共工与颛顼争为帝，怒而触不周之山，天柱折，地维绝。天倾西北，故日月星辰移焉；地不满东南，故水潦尘埃归焉。<sup>142</sup>（淮南子•天文训）

It was over two hundred years after *Huainanzi* was edited that Wang Chong connected the two stories together in his *Lunheng* 论衡, as he claims:

Confucian scriptures say, “When Gong Gong was defeated in a war against Zhuan Xu for the throne of *tianzi* (the son of heaven), he was so furious that he punched the Broken Mount. Therefore, the pillars upholding the heaven collapsed and the ropes binding the earth together were broken. Nü Wa mended heaven by melting five-colour stones and broke the feet of giant tortoises to support the world. In the end, the Sun and the Moon were misplaced, the earth tilted to the southeast, thus the rivers flowed that way.” This is a record from the days of yore and the folk legend has it. Learned scholars, though doubting its credibility, don’t know what exactly makes it wrong; even if they know it is wrong, they have no evidence to refute it. So they dare not venture a comment for they are afraid of making a wrong claim. In my opinion, judging from the law of nature as well as the human world, it’s false all in all.

儒书言：“共工与颛顼争为天子，不胜，怒而触不周之山，使天柱折，地维绝。女娲销炼五色石以补苍天，断鳌足以立四极。天不足西北，故日月移焉；地不足东南，故百川注焉。”此久远之文，世间是之言也。文雅之人，怪而无以非，若非而无以夺，又恐其实然，不敢正议。以天道人事论之，殆虚言也。<sup>143</sup>

Here in the second section of “Mending Heaven”, Lu Xun adopts Wang Chong’s version that reverses the order of the two stories recorded in *Huainanzi*, and connecting Nü Wa with the battle of the Broken Mount, which was the original name of Lu Xun’s story, “Mending Heaven” when it was first published in 1922. As for the reasons behind such plot setting, it can be attributed to Lu Xun’s affirmation of Wang Chong’s work, as *Lunheng* was among a

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<sup>142</sup> See 淮南子•天文训 (Chapter of Tianwenxun of *Huainanzi*). <https://ctext.org/huainanzi/tian-wen-xun/zhs>, viewed on 2 Nov 2018.

<sup>143</sup> See Wang Chong. 论衡•谈天 (Chapter of Tiantian of *Lunheng*). <https://ctext.org/lunheng/tan-tian/zhs>, viewed on 2 Nov 2018.



list of only a handful of books from ancient China that he recommended to Xu Shiying 许世瑛,<sup>144</sup> son of his life-time friend Xu Shoushang 许寿裳. Lu Xun must have read *Lunheng* and adopted the version recorded by Wang Chong, as such a merging of two separate stories makes better sense and renders the plot of “Mending Heaven” more coherent and succinct; the irrelevant details such as Nü Wa killing a black dragon are deleted, so that the image of a female heroine as the saviour of the world in the wake of a catastrophic war between two male characters becomes more prominent.

What’s more, three details in this section of “Mending Heaven” quoted below can be deemed as Lu Xun’s salute to Wang Chong’s editing of the folk legend. The first example is about the tortoises, whose descriptions in *Lunheng* and in “Mending Heaven” are listed below:

[Nü Wa] breaking the feet of tortoises to support the world” ... If the feet of the tortoise can be used as pillars supporting Heaven, the size of the tortoise must be larger than the world. Nü Wa is indeed a goddess, but how can she kill such giant tortoises? If she kills them, what tools does she use? Their feet are said to support Heaven, so their skin must be as hard as metal or stone. No knife or sword and spear or halberd can penetrate it, and crossbows or arrows are also useless.

“断鳌之足，以立四极”……鳌足可以柱天，体必长大，不容于天地，女娲虽圣，何能杀之？如能杀之，杀之何用？足可以柱天，则皮革如铁石，刀剑矛戟不能刺之，彊弩利矢不能胜射也。<sup>145</sup>

... She looked helplessly around. A school of giant tortoises was sporting in the ocean. Surprised and pleased, she lost no time in putting the mountains on their backs and giving the order: “Take them to some quieter place!” The giant tortoises nodded and trooped off into the distance.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> See Lu Xun. “Kaigei Xu Shiying de shudan” 开给许世瑛的书单 (A List of Books Recommended for Xu Shiying). in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 8. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 497.

<sup>145</sup> See Wang Chong. 论衡·谈天 (Chapter of Tiantian of *Lunheng*). <https://ctext.org/lunheng/tan-tian/zhs>, viewed on 2 Nov 2018.

<sup>146</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 17.

It is likely that Lu Xun, when writing the story, responds to Wang Chong's rhetorical question from circa 1800 years ago and remoulds Nü Wa as a loving and caring female without any intention of harming or killing the creature. After all, it makes much more sense that a divinity who has mothered all the people on the Earth would not harm any life randomly. In addition, when Wang Chong raised doubt over the possibility that Nü Wa could kill giant tortoises and wondered what tools the goddess might use, what he applied was the law of the physical world rather than the magical powers beyond the realm of humans, which is generally considered a significant theme of *Lunheng*, i.e. “*zhi xushi zhifen*” 知虚实之分 (to tell the difference between fact and fallacy). If in the above example Lu Xun breaks away from Wang Chong's way of thinking to establish a brand new image of a more humanitarian Nü Wa, in the second example he agrees with Wang Chong in terms of the texture of the sky. Before making his judgement on the legitimacy of the legend, Wang Chong raises a question:

Then what on earth is the sky made of? Is it made of air or physical substances? If it's air, then the sky is not different from the cloud or smoke. Then why does it need to be supported by pillars and can it be broken? If Nü Wa fixes it with stones, then it must be of physical material. If the legend is true, then the sky must be made of substances like jade or stone. 且夫天者，气邪？体也？如气乎，云烟无异，安得柱而折之？女娲以石补之，是体也。如审然，天乃玉石之类也。<sup>147</sup>

In “Mending Heaven”, Lu Xun inserts a detail in the second section, covertly identifying himself with Wang Chong's opinion, as quoted below:

Nü Wa inhaled a mouthful of cold air and looked up at the sky. There was a great crack across it, deep and wide. Nü Wa stood up and tapped the sky with her fingers. Instead of a clear ring, it gave a sound like a cracked bowl.

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<sup>147</sup> See Wang Chong. 论衡·谈天 (Chapter of Tiantian of *Lunheng*). <https://ctext.org/lunheng/tan-tian/zhs>. viewed on 2 Nov 2018.

The usual practice of identifying the quality of a piece of jade or porcelain in China is to tap it with one's fingers and listen to the sound it gives out, to tell the differences in their texture. With this particular depiction, Lu Xun not only agrees with Wang Chong's conclusion, but also enhances the humanness of Nü Wa, making the goddess more down-to-earth as she possesses general experience of human beings which has accumulated through toil and labour and been passed down to future generations. Moreover, it is another piece of evidence that the image of Nü Wa in "Mending Heaven" is more than just a larger-than-life female; it embodies the image of an ideal individual of action that Lu Xun is seeking.

### ***Thus Spoke Zarathustra as a possible inspiration***

The third example of the subtle intertextual interactions between Lu Xun and Wang Chong about Nü Wa mending heaven is their differences in the size of the goddess. In the same chapter of *Lunheng*, Wang Chong says,

Nowadays it can be observed that there is tremendous distance between the sky and the ground, which must have been the same back in ancient times. ... As a human being limited by her height, Nü Wa could not reach the sky. Thus, what means did she resort to in mending heaven?

察当今天去地甚高，古天与今无异。……女媧，人也，人虽长，无及天者。夫其补天之时，何登缘阶据而得治之？<sup>148</sup>

Lu Xun does not agree with Wang Chong in terms of the height of the goddess, in that detailing of Nü Wa being much taller and bigger than the mountain peaks around her and sharp contrasts between the size of her as opposed to that of the "little creatures" she created are widespread in the second and the third section of the story. However, it is not to say that Lu Xun denies the humanness of Nü Wa; on the contrary, Nü Wa under Lu Xun's pen appears to be just like humans with all the joy and anger, toil and weariness, and with death

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

as her final destination. I would argue that Lu Xun's personification of Nü Wa, compared with Wang Chong's understanding, reveals Lu Xun's varied path from the traditional Chinese thoughts in his investigation into the characteristic traits of an individual. The inspiration of Lu Xun's giant Nü Wa may be the image of "the Overman" from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* of Nietzsche; the antithesis of "the Overman" and "the Last Man" in Nietzsche's allegory can be found in "Mending Heaven" as Nü Wa versus the "little creatures".

The prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is potentially the only book chapter or story that Lu Xun has translated twice into Chinese.<sup>149</sup> The first translation into classical Chinese was never published,<sup>150</sup> and in 1920, two years before he wrote "Mending Heaven", he re-translated it into vernacular Chinese and published it on a monthly titled *Xin Chao* 新潮 (*The Renaissance*) attached with a translator's note.<sup>151</sup> The fact itself is sufficient to endorse the significance of this book of Nietzsche for Lu Xun, not to mention his efforts to encourage Xu Fancheng 徐梵澄 to study in Germany and translate Nietzsche's works, including the entire book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into Chinese in the 1930s. As for the influence of this allegory on Lu Xun's story writing, recent scholarly attention has been focused on "A Madman's Diary" and *Wild Grass*.<sup>152</sup> In the following, I'll discuss two features in "Mending Heaven" as inspiration that Lu Xun draws on from his translation of the prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

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<sup>149</sup> Zhang Zhaoyi. "Lu Xun: Zhongguo Wenhe de Nicaï" 鲁迅：中国“温和”的尼采 (*Lu Xun: The "Gentle" Version of Nietzsche from China*). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011, p. 179.

<sup>150</sup> See Huang Qiaosheng. "Lu Xun shougao de shoucang, zhengli he chuban" 鲁迅手稿的收藏、整理和出版 (The Collecting, Editing and Publishing of Lu Xun's Manuscripts). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 6, 2014, p. 54. The original title of Lu Xun's Classical Chinese translation is Chaluodusideluo rushishuo xuyan 《察罗堵斯德罗如是说》绪言.

<sup>151</sup> See Lu Xun. "Chalatusitela de xuyan yizhe fuji" 《察拉图斯忒拉的序言》译者附记 (Translator's Note on the Prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 484.

<sup>152</sup> Zhang Zhaoyi. "Lu Xun: Zhongguo Wenhe de Nicaï" 鲁迅：中国“温和”的尼采 (*Lu Xun: The "Gentle" Version of Nietzsche from China*). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2011, pp. 357-386.

The first characteristic in “Mending Heaven” is the antithesis of Nü Wa embodying “the Overman” versus the “little creatures” symbolising “the Last Man”. Striking similarities between the two stories in terms of this theme can be identified in the fifth section of Nietzsche’s prologue featuring “the Last Man”, and the last two sections of Lu Xun’s “Mending Heaven”. In Nietzsche’s prologue, “the Last Man” is featured in the fifth section, where Zarathustra, before introducing this type of man as the “most contemptible man” to the crowd, “fell silent” among the laughing bystanders, and concluded that “they do not understand me”; this idea was consolidated with the interruptions from the crowd of bystanders during his speech about “the Last Man”. Therefore Zarathustra asserted in the end that “now I speak to them as to goatherds”.<sup>153</sup> Coincidentally, the second section of “Mending Heaven” is nearly entirely dedicated to the inability of Nü Wa to understand, or to communicate with, various types of “the little creatures” defined by their differences in moustache styles, costume and language use. The most striking antithesis in this section is an individual (Nü Wa) versus the crowd (the little creatures), echoing the same theme in the fifth section of the prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Zarathustra, a lone thinker, failed to communicate with the crowd. Although Nietzsche did not go into the details to describe various types of “the Last Man” like Lu Xun does with the little creatures, it’s quite likely that such specific descriptions of features like the moustache, costume and language use are inspired by one line from Nietzsche in this prologue:

They have something of which they are proud. What is it called that makes them proud? They call it culture, it distinguishes them from the goatherds.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books, 2003, pp. 45-47.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

他们有一点东西，藉此高傲着。使他们高傲的，名为什么呢？这便名教育，这便使他们赛过了牧羊儿。<sup>155</sup>

It is reasonable to argue that Lu Xun, in “Mending Heaven”, carries forward Nietzsche’s argument and interprets “culture” as represented by three features – moustache, costume and language use. Humans have attached significance to these elements only to distinguish them from others, thus creating a divide or even inequality between each other rather than seeking a consensus and cooperation.

Moreover, two characteristics of “the Last Man” summarised in this section of Nietzsche’s allegory have been introduced into Lu Xun’s historic romance of the goddess Nü Wa. They are the “smallness” and “longevity” of “the Last Man” in the middle of the fifth section of the prologue where Zarathustra described to the crowd “the Last Man” who didn’t understand love, creation, longing or a star, as quoted below:

The earth has become small, and upon it hops the Ultimate Man, who makes everything small. His race is as inexterminable as the flea; the Ultimate Man lives longest.<sup>156</sup>

地也就小了，在这上面跳着末人，就是那做小了一切的。他的种族是跳蚤似的除灭不完；末人活得最长久。<sup>157</sup>

In the previous section discussing the intertextuality between “Mending Heaven” and the section about Nü Wa in Wang Chong’s *Lunheng*, the reason why the goddess was giant has been detailed. However, if viewed from the potential inspiration Lu Xun has obtained from his translation of the prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the colossal build of Nü Wa is purported to contrast the smallness of “the little creature”, including their “tiny tears even

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<sup>155</sup> See Lu Xun. *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun’s Translations*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, p. 447.

<sup>156</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. translated by R. J. Hollingdale. London: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 46.

<sup>157</sup> See Lu Xun. *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun’s Translations*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, p. 448.

smaller than mustard seeds” along with their written characters like “minute black specks”.

<sup>158</sup> These details about the “little creatures” in “Mending Heaven” seems to elaborate on Nietzsche’s claim that “[they] makes everything small”. Similarly, as for the second characteristic of “longevity” of “the Last Man”, the third section of “Mending Heaven” in which neither the First Emperor of Qin or Emperor of Wu of Han found the Fairy Mountains, a symbol of longevity or even eternal life – can be better explained as in agreement with Nietzsche’s interpretation of the existence of human beings: either to become “an Overman”, or remain “the Last Man”. It is based on Nietzsche’s classification that Lu Xun lumps the “great emperors” of China into the group of “the Last Man”, as their longing for eternal life was not a genuine longing to transcend themselves to be “an Overman”, but only to perpetuate their corporeal pleasure, the very base need of human beings, without showing any mercy for the toil or even the lives of fellow human beings. Therefore, the long-standing tradition of the apotheosis of Chinese emperors in the official record of history claiming they were “sons of heaven” is covertly shattered in “Mending Heaven”. I maintain that Lu Xun’s plot setting enhances the humanness of Nü Wa who is not depicted as a deity that won’t perish, thus contrasting sharply with the “great” emperors who pursued longevity more than anything else.

Moreover, the two most famous emperors’ doomed search for the Fairy Mountains only proves that they are as ridiculous and foolish as other “little creatures”. Lu Xun implies that the goddess Nü Wa embodies the characteristic traits of “the Overman” who is spiritually creative, toiling to her death for her love of humans, animals and nature, and above all being alone throughout the entire story, and who has never been affected by the elements of human

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<sup>158</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 21.

culture, i.e. moustache styles, language use or costume. Throughout the entire story, Nü Wa had no clothes on, and could not speak or understand human language. These are the characteristic traits Lu Xun ingeniously creates for the character in order to highlight Nü Wa as a perfect embodiment of Nietzsche's "the Overman" who transcends the masses but never trampling over them. Nü Wa's pity toward humans and animals is echoed by the heroic and humanitarian deeds of Mozi in "Opposing Aggression". Humanitarianism is the shared traits of the two characters who sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the masses without asking for anything in return. The only difference between the two characters lies in language: Nü Wa's inability to understand human language is in stark contrast with Mozi's intelligent use of language in his successful communication.

Another similarity between the prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and "Mending Heaven" resides in the exact repetition of certain paragraphs in both texts. In the former, the line of "Thus began Zarathustra's down-going" appears at the end of the first section and exactly repeats itself in the end. In the latter, Lu Xun follows Nietzsche's suit by inserting his depiction of the Sun and the Moon from the beginning of the story into the end of the second section where Nü Wa died, with only a few words changed:

1. In the blood-red clouds at the horizon was the glorious sun, like some fluid orb of gold lapped in a waste of ancient lava; opposite, the frigid white moon seemed as if made of iron. **But she did not notice which was setting or which rising.**<sup>159</sup>
2. In the blood-red clouds at the horizon was the glorious sun, like some fluid orb of gold lapped in a waste of ancient lava; opposite, the frigid white moon seemed as if made of iron. **It was hard to say which was setting or which rising.**<sup>160</sup>

The literary device of repetition Lu Xun employs has evaded previous scholars. In fact, repetition as a feature can be identified throughout *Old Tales Retold*, especially in the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 23.



mysterious songs Yan zhi Aozhe and Meijianchi chanted in “Forging the Swords”, and in the conversations between Laozi and Confucius in “Leaving the Pass”. Although each repetition harbours specific connotations, generally speaking the technique can be viewed as inspired by Nietzsche’s theme of “eternal recurrence”, one of his fundamental conception<sup>161</sup> in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Evidence can be found in Lu Xun’s note attached to his translation of the prologue that he has pinned down and grasped this particular conception of Nietzsche:

In the tenth section, the eagle and the serpent guide Zarathustra to go down. The eagle and the serpent are both symbols: the latter embodies eternal recurrence (Ewige Wiederkunft), while the former represents arrogance, symbolising the Overman. The intelligent and arrogant refers to the Overman; the ignorant and arrogant are the crowd. Such ignorant arrogance is the result of education.

第十节鹰和蛇引导 Zarathustra 开始下去。鹰与蛇都是标征：蛇表聪明，表永远轮回 (Ewige Wiederkunft<sup>162</sup>)；鹰表高傲，表超人。聪明和高傲是超人；愚昧和高傲便是群众。而这愚昧的高傲是教育 (Bildung) 的结果。<sup>163</sup>

Repetition as a literary device is usually employed in poems to signal emphasis. In “Mending Heaven”, the above quoted repetitive depictions of the background, where Nü Wa woke up and finally toiled to death, constitute an ode to a female who sacrifices her life to create human beings, signalling to the readers that the goddess is indeed mortal and that immortality is a delusion. Moreover, it also reveals Lu Xun’s understanding of Nietzsche’s *Ewige Wiederkunft*: it is *lunhui* 轮回 (Samsāra, or the eternal cycle of birth, suffering, death and rebirth) that marks human history. Just like Nietzsche adopting the identity of Zarathustra, the ancient Persian prophet, to deliver his own philosophy about “the Overman” to address current affairs, indicating the same event that happened in the past is happening again, Lu Xun moulds Nü Wa as an exemplification of a perfect human, aiming to commemorate his

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<sup>161</sup> See Paul Loeb. *The Death of Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 1.

<sup>162</sup> “Wiederkunft” is a typo in the collection; the correct spelling is “Wiederkunft”.

<sup>163</sup> See Lu Xun. *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun’s Translations*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, p. 458.

heroic contemporaries who dedicated their lives to the salvation of their fellow men and the entire nation from the autocratic monarchy, but ended up with betrayal and stigmatisation just like Nü Wa. Additionally, the Sun and the Moon that repeatedly appear in “Mending Heaven” also carry profound connotations respectively, like the eagle and the serpent from the prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, as explained in Lu Xun’s note to his own translation. This will be further discussed in the next chapter about symbolism.

All in all, in the above section, evidence in terms of the theme, the form and the symbols in “Mending Heaven” has been presented in order to demonstrate the influence of Lu Xun’s translation of the prologue of Nietzsche’s allegory on his own rewriting of the legend about Nü Wa. In the first section of this chapter, another influence of Lu Xun’s translation of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s “Roshōmon” has been discussed, mainly in terms of techniques in short story writing. In between the two influences, details of how Lu Xun selected material from the Chinese classics have also been illustrated. Moreover, whether Nü Wa symbolises “birth of art” (Leo Ou-fan Lee) or “the force of life (élan vital)” (Marston Anderson), my argument above supports the latter, and develops Anderson’s view into that Nü Wa embodies the characteristic traits of a heroine, as the story of “Mending Heaven” is indeed, as Wang Yao deems it, “an ode to the heroes”. What I would like to demonstrate is the particular process in which Lu Xun revives the traditional Chinese story form of *yanyi* 演义, by absorbing influences from modern foreign writers and selecting ancient Chinese source material from the perspective of a modern writer. The style of *yanyi* itself refers to a folk literature form, characterised by its vivid details, combining plots together with an unorthodox view of the past events and figures, i.e. the view of the common people rather than the elite Confucian scholars. *Old Tales Retold* is a modernised form of *yanyi* Lu Xun handcrafts to dedicate to the nascent and ill-fated Republic of China, with his earnest hope

that this piece of ancient legend rewritten in plain language can reach a larger audience with profound influence, just like its widely circulated predecessors, such as *Romance of Three Kingdoms* 三国演义, so that the image of a modern version of Nü Wa, or an individual, can be re-established in the collective memory of the Chinese and last into the future. In this sense, “Mending Heaven” and the entire collection can be regarded as part of the legacy Lu Xun dedicated to the first republic in Asia with any real chance of survival that he and others strove to found.

### **The theme of language and failed communication**

My above analysis may shed light on Lu Xun’s efforts of *fugu* (return to antiquity), a meticulous revival of the Chinese cultural heritage with hard evidence collected from all sorts of artistic forms; his “intrusive eye” to view the ancients elevates his retelling of old tales above the level of a mere facsimile. Moreover, I argue that one of the reasons why he expands his scope of examination of ancient Chinese heritage from a variety of written records, especially the unconventional ones, to other artistic forms like stone reliefs, is to revert to the original heritage by salvaging the obliterated and removing the distorted from heavy censorship and destruction by those in power throughout history in the name of defending the Confucian moral code. As a scholar trained with traditional Chinese philological methodology, a proficient speaker and writer of the Japanese language, as well as a translator of Japanese and German literature, Lu Xun acquired extraordinarily profound understanding of language: the vessel to deliver thoughts and feelings between human beings is, unfortunately, easily subject to misrepresentation, alteration and distortion due to changes of time, space and cultural background. Therefore, the alienation among humans stemming from linguistic barriers within China, emerges as one of the major themes in Lu Xun’s works, including *Old Tales Retold*. If as discussed before, in “Rashōmon”, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

covertly intrudes into the story by putting an annoying pimple on the protagonist's face and attaches great significance to it, Lu Xun also uses this technique by inserting failed linguistic communication, in both oral and written forms, between Nü Wa and her creatures in "Mending Heaven". Marston Anderson posits that it is "linguistic facility, a disturbing characteristic" that prevents Nü Wa from understanding humans. I'll elaborate on this point of view and argue that the theme of failed communication reappears in all the remaining seven stories in the collection, serving as a key to a holistic understanding of *Old Tales Retold*.

To begin with, in writing "Mending Heaven", Lu Xun does not entirely identify himself with the folk legend recorded in *Fengsu Tongyi*. The last sentence of the old record claims the distinction between the rich and noble as well as the poor and the lowly originates from the very beginning of human beings when Nü Wa created them. Lu Xun clearly discards such fatalistic claim in "Mending Heaven". However, it is not to say that Lu Xun's motive is to champion the notion that men are created equal; instead, in the second section, Lu Xun retells the distinction between human beings based on his own interpretation: it is not only material possession that classifies human beings into different social groups in a hierarchy, but the language. In the second section, with language communication, both in oral and written form, together with various styles of costume, the divide between the goddess and men deepens and finally leads to the creatures' unjustifiable accusation of her. Therefore, an assumption can be made that one of the themes of "Mending Heaven", or even the entire collection of *Old Tales Retold*, comes down to the alienation between individuals due to their language use. The seemingly "illiterate" Nü Wa embodies a perfect individual with a pure heart, whose fate is doomed when trapped in a net of accusations weaved with meticulously crafted words and expressions by men. The communication between Nü Wa and the humans she created

actually started in an optimistic way in the first section, where the non-verbal exchange of thoughts in the form of gibberish like “Akon! Agon!” and “Uvu! Ahaha!”,<sup>164</sup> made both laughing as if the joy and happiness of life from the bottom of the heart of the creator and the created were delivered to each other without the medium of language. Nevertheless, as they were “going further off by degrees, talking more volubly”, “She ceased to understand them”<sup>165</sup> in the second section when formal language was involved. When the written form of language was used, the estrangement between Nü Wa and the little creatures in four different types defined by their varied language use, was so aggravated that in the final section the goddess’s legacy was reduced by those in power and the intelligentsia to the absurd pursuit of immortality. It is worth mentioning that, in the last paragraph of the story, even the giant tortoises didn’t understand Nü Wa, so the Fairy Isle the goddess asked them to carry was lost under the water.<sup>166</sup>

Lu Xun’s view about the failure of linguistic communication between men and goddess Nü Wa in “Mending Heaven” can be traced back to the prologue of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* where one of the most significant themes is the failed communication between Zarathustra and the crowd. However, Lu Xun examines language deeper, especially the ancient Chinese linguistic heritage, and associates the Chinese language with the national character. Most of his reflection can be found in the form of essays of cultural and social criticism written in 1919 in his essay collection of *Re Feng* 热风 (*Hot Wind*). In this section, an example will be cited to prove such a connection to support my argument that *Old Tales*

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<sup>164</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 13.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

*Retold* is, in itself, a critique of the national character. One of the impressive details about the second type of language users in “Mending Heaven” is “the bamboo tablet” as quoted below:

When her glance fell on him, he made haste to present the tablet, which she took. It was a highly polished green bamboo tablet on which were two columns of minute black specks, far smaller than those on oak leaves. Nü Wa admired the skillful craftsmanship.<sup>167</sup>

On this bamboo tablet was recorded the written accusation from this type of small creatures against Nü Wa in the style of Confucian classics dating back to the pre-Qin era. Lu Xun borrows some expressions such as *luocheng yinyi* 裸裎淫佚 (lewd nakedness) from *Mencius* 孟子 and *Guoyu* 国语 respectively to fit the story into the background of the days of yore, and, on the other hand, to satirise the copying of ancient language in modern times. A very similar idea was put down in a short essay published in 1919 in *La Jeunesse*, titled “Suiganlu – sishiqi 随感录四十七 (Capriccio No. 47)”, in which Lu Xun describes a small piece of ivory meticulously carved with an article from over 1000 years ago of three hundred Chinese characters in length, in extremely tiny size only readable with the help of a microscope. This small piece of ivory with carvings resembles the bamboo tablet with tiny characters written on it in “Mending Heaven”. Lu Xun’s point, clearly indicated in this short essay, is that spending such meticulous efforts in carving the characters in such a miniature size is in itself pointless; that is, in his own words, “why not carve the characters on a much larger piece of ivory so that everyone can recognize them immediately without using a microscope?”<sup>168</sup> Then, he diverts to the topic of classical Chinese in this essay, arguing that it doesn’t make any sense that his contemporaries make tremendous efforts to learn to read and write in the classical style to communicate with each other. In the end of this essay, he summarises such

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> See Lu Xun. “Suiganlu sishiqi” 随感录-四十七 (“Capriccio No. 47”) in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 351.

type of waste of human efforts as “*nong xuanxu*” 弄玄虛 (to play obscurantist tricks) as these artefacts, at the first glance, seem admirable, but upon second thought do not contribute but bring additional trouble to learners of the language. Therefore, an analogy can be found in this essay that classical Chinese is compared to excessively delicate artefacts, in that both of them have been deliberately made extremely complicated and difficult to grasp, thus becoming increasingly detrimental to the communication between their users. Such a juxtaposition echoes the second section of “Mending Heaven”, where Nü Wa became increasingly incapable of understanding the small creatures as their language use evolved from oral expression to written characters on a delicately crafted bamboo tablet. That is to say, the contributing factor behind this failed communication is the fact that the Chinese language users are playing obscurantist tricks with the language, rather than using the language to express their ideas, not to mention develop the language to suit the modern world. As a result, the language itself is degenerating into empty symbols that are extremely difficult for the majority to grasp. Lu Xun’s promotion of vernacular Chinese can be attributed to such a point of view, as the vernacular Chinese is still lively and is much easier to grasp, despite its own demerits, and thus difficult to be monopolised by a small group of cultural elites. Examples of this point of view can be found in other essays in *Hot Wind*, and also exemplified in the four variations of the character *hui* 茴 earnestly demonstrated by Kong Yiji 孔乙己 on the counter of a tavern in the town of Luzhen in Lu Xun’s own favourite short story. Moreover, the theme of linguistic communication runs on after “Mending Heaven” and into the rest of the stories in *Old Tales Retold*, culminating in “Resurrecting the Dead”.

## Chapter Two

This chapter will examine how Lu Xun's translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Anguish* in 1924 influences the stories "The Flight to the Moon" and "Forging the Swords" he wrote in 1926 during a four-month stay at Xiamen University, and in 1927 during his stay in Guangzhou, and how Lu Xun's re-writing of the two venerable legends demonstrates his covert criticism of the Chinese national character. The first point has so far evaded almost all academic considerations of *Old Tales Retold*. It constitutes the basis of this chapter, for without Lu Xun's discovery and translation of this outstanding piece of literary criticism, *Old Tales Retold* might not have existed, or at least "Forging the Swords" would not have attracted wide attention and acclaim from critics and writers. If "Mending Heaven", his first attempt inspired by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's brilliant adaptation of tales from ancient times, still does not match Lu Xun's expectation so that he "decided to write no more tales of this sort",<sup>169</sup> then *Symbols of Anguish* helps lift him out of the frustration and reignite his aspiration to polish his techniques to form a mature style of his own. To a large extent,

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<sup>169</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 3.



Kuriyagawa's monograph itself is an excellent epitome of fusing the Western theories of psychoanalysis with elements of Buddhist tradition, citing examples from both European and Japanese literature to support his argument. This is probably why, in the preface of his translation, Lu Xun speaks highly of it as being "so original that it becomes creative itself, with unique and profound understanding of literature and art".<sup>170</sup> Such a compliment is rarely seen in Lu Xun's comments on his contemporaries, not to mention the fact that he completed his translation in an incredibly short period of 19 days, used it in his lectures at several universities in Beijing<sup>171</sup> and translated another monograph by Kuriyagawa, *Chule Xiangyazhita* 出了象牙之塔 (*Out of the Ivory Tower*) the next year. All that said, it is essential to point out that Lu Xun's appreciation and admiration for *Symbols of Anguish* is built on a shared understanding of literature and art; for Lu Xun who was unsatisfied with "Mending Heaven" and eager for a theoretical inspiration, the timely arrival of Kuriyagawa's work sheds light on the conundrum of literary creation and appreciation, and points out a pathway to elucidate the writer's anguish with symbols that can strike a responsive chord in readers. Therefore, Kuriyagawa's unfinished theory of literature provides theoretical foundation to Lu Xun's improvement of his new story style and his criticism of the Chinese national character, which can be found masked in the pervasive symbolism in the two stories that goes beyond the level of his personal life, and deep down into the subconscious of his fellow citizens, thus elevating *fugu* 复古, one of the general motifs of *Old Tales Retold*, to a level well above his contemporaries. It is true that the two stories are strongly associated with Lu Xun's life events, but their ultimate meanings penetrate the deepest level of the collective

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<sup>170</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> See Lu Xun. 日记十三 (Diary 13 [1924]), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 15. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 530-531.

subconscious of Lu Xun's fellow citizens, that is, in Kuriyagawa's term, the "very core of the truth of humans and nature".<sup>172</sup>

Generally speaking, when discussing the influence of *Symbols of Anguish* on Lu Xun's creative writing, critics mostly focus on the influence on *Wild Grass* and cite *guangyi de xiangzhengzhuyi* 广义的象征主义 (symbolism in a broad sense)<sup>173</sup> to interpret the prose collection, hailed by many as Lu Xun's best and most obscure work. Leo Ou-fan Lee and Marston Anderson are probably the first in English-language academia to identify symbolism in *Old Tales Retold*, and Anderson specifies that symbolism is evident in the first three stories. However, both of them provide analysis of the symbols in "Mending Heaven" only. Aiura Takashi 相浦杲 points out that besides this "symbolism", the other inspiration Lu Xun obtains from his translation of *Symbols of Anguish* is *tianmaxingkong side dajingshen* 天马行空似的大精神 (unrestrained spirit like a soaring Pegasus).<sup>174</sup> In my opinion, there are more than the above two quotes from Lu Xun's note to his translation. In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on three major elements in *Symbols of Anguish* concerning symbolism, the collective subconscious and Kuriyagawa's unique approach to the fundamental problems of literature, before my interpretation of "The Flight to the Moon" and "Forging the Swords".

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<sup>172</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 43.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p 14. This sentence was quoted by Lu Xun in the introduction of the same book on page 2.

<sup>174</sup> See Aiura Takashi 相浦杲. "Guanyu Lu Xun de sanwenshiji Yecao – cong bijiaowenxue de jiaodu laitan (shang)" 关于鲁迅的散文诗集《野草》- 从比较文学的角度来谈(上) ("On Lu Xun's Prose Collection *The Wild Grass* – from the Perspective of Comparative Literature) (Part One of Two)". *Laoning Daxue Xuebao* 辽宁大学学报. Issue 1, 1984, p. 73.

## The heart and the dream

The “heart” is a literal translation of the Chinese character *xin* (心) seen in Kuriyagawa’s *Symbols of Anguish* and Lu Xun’s translation, the meaning of which, in the context of the first chapter in the book, can be interpreted into English as “the spirit” or “the soul”. As Lu Xun comments in the preface of his translation, “the first chapter entitled ‘On Literary Creation’ is his core argument, the second chapter, ‘On the Appreciation of Literature’, is about literary criticism, and the last two chapters are secondary arguments based on the core one”.<sup>175</sup> The first chapter indeed lays the foundation for the entire book, where the “heart” and the “dream” are introduced and elucidated. Anguish, out of “the oppressed *ēlan vital* or vitality”, preludes this chapter; it is analysed and discussed in detail, including under the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis, and summarised as “the root of literature and art”.<sup>176</sup> In the last two sections, anguish is elevated to human suffering. Kuriyagawa writes:

Literature and art should not be the objects the masses flirt with, but the very symbol of the serious and profound human suffering.

文艺绝不是俗众的玩弄物，乃是该严肃而且沉痛的人间苦的象征<sup>177</sup>。

However, such a “symbol in a broad sense” is not easily attainable unless a writer or artist can penetrate the world of dreams, or his or her subconscious, to perceive this *da kuhuan*, *dakunao* 大苦患，大苦恼 (collective human suffering).<sup>178</sup> In addition, to express such universal suffering due to the clashes between the vitality of human beings and hindrances in the practical world, expressionism is a vital tool for writers and artists to be able to transcend their immediate circumstances, perceive “the truth of the objective world” and express what they capture in the form of symbols in Kuriyagawa’s words, to “craft a concrete shape for the

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<sup>175</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

symbolised heart”. Only through this way can writers and artists seize the “marrow of the nature and life” and their works contain their “genuine spirit”.<sup>179</sup> At the end of this chapter, Kuriyagawa quotes lines from William Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*<sup>180</sup> to illustrate his theory about symbols, that 1) the “fine frenzy” in a poet’s eye refers to “a dormant passion buried deep inside the subconscious”; 2) a poet can “grasp the images of things unknown in a human condition that evade the eyes of the masses”; 3) thus, a poet seizes the intangible truth of life by giving them “a local habitation and name” and composes a dream with symbols.<sup>181</sup> In other words, literature and the arts employ symbols to express truth by way of delving deep into human suffering.

Therefore, the “heart” of a writer or artist needs to be sensitive enough to feel human suffering, to be profound enough to dig deep into their own subconscious and capture the symbols of their own suffering or the collective human suffering, and finally to be creative enough to give the symbols physical shapes that can resonate in the hearts of others. In this case, the “heart” seems to perform two different functions: to examine itself as an external object and to serve as the subject to be examined. Such a paradox can be found crystallised in the inscription on the tablet of a tomb from “the Epitaph” in *Wild Grass* that 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 tastes? (抉心自食，欲知本味。创痛酷烈，本味何能知)”.<sup>182</sup> If this piece of evidence can be deemed as an example of Lu Xun’s honest and excruciating examination into his own “heart” or subconscious in 1925, inspired by his translation of *Symbols of Anguish* a year earlier, in “The Flight to the Moon” and “Forging the Swords”, he deepens his scrutiny

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>182</sup> See Lu Xun. *Wild Grass*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, pp. 120-121.

into the subconscious of his fellow people by turning the legends from days of yore into a psychoanalysis of his nation. This is most probably galvanised by the first chapter of *Symbols of Anguish* where Kuriyagawa summarises the Freudian interpretation of the ancient Greek tragedies as being categorised into “the beautiful dreams of a nation”.<sup>183</sup> Also, towards the end of this unfinished work, Kuriyagawa, when discussing the origin of literature, reasserts that “if poems are the dreams of an individual, mythology is the dream of a nation”.<sup>184</sup> In this sense, the first three stories of *Old Tales Retold* embody Lu Xun’s efforts to revive the dreams of his fellow countrymen, hoping to inject creativity into literature and art and boost their morale deep down in their subconscious. This is also an essential theoretical ground on which Lu Xun continues with the writing of his own historical fiction dedicated to his compatriots, as Kuriyagawa furnishes him with confidence that literature and art, or symbolism in a broad sense, can arouse resonance in the heart of a nation. With the theory ready, then comes the question of how to rewrite old legends to strike a chord in the subconscious of his contemporaries.

### ***Vox populi, Vox Dei***

The third chapter of *Symbols of Anguish*, “Examination into the Fundamental Problems of Literature and Art”, the most brilliant part, casts light on specific approaches to the “broad symbolism”. As previously stated, Lu Xun was not satisfied with “Mending Heaven” at that time, probably because when creating the minor characters such as “little creatures” representing varied groups of the masses, he tipped his scale a bit too much on the side of light-hearted sarcasm based on characters from his imagination, lacking the depth and weight of the complexity of individuals in real life. Therefore, in the next two stories written in

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<sup>183</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 24.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

Xiamen and Guangzhou, Lu Xun was quite economical with this type of caricature, i.e. being sarcastic for the sake of sarcasm. His rejection of such superficial caricature results in a relatively more “serious” story “Forging the Swords”,<sup>185</sup> and probably the most enticing one in *Old Tales Retold*, whose merits reside in the “broad symbolism” that penetrates into the abyss of the subconscious of every reader.

Kuriyagawa’s interpretation of the Latin proverb *Vox populi, vox Dei* is that deity, which is non-existent, is actually the “desire to live a life, lurking in the subconscious of men”,<sup>186</sup> and that children’s rhymes as well as popular songs can be seen as the true voices of the masses and can reveal the dynamics of their times, as warnings, criticism and prophecies.<sup>187</sup>

Moreover, he emphasises the significant task for a writer to “examine the *status quo* or the current condition, and to describe the very core of it to a level that the masses cannot reach, so that their works can be a prophecy for the future”.<sup>188</sup> Kuriyagawa cites the example of Guy de Maupassant’s short story “The Necklace” as an example of “presenting to the readers the ironical and tragic nature of life”,<sup>189</sup> and praises William Shakespeare for creating his great works by “extensively adopting raw material from nonsensical anecdotes from history, old legends, fabricated tales by women, compilations of trivial news stories and so on”.<sup>190</sup> This very commentary on the wide range of sources of raw material for Shakespeare’s plays, possibly casts a light on the conundrum of recreating historical stories Lu Xun is ruminating about. Therefore, there comes an old woman denying the reputation of the Archer Yi 羿 and,

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<sup>185</sup> See Lu Xun. 书信 (一九三六 致外国人士) (Letters to foreigners of the Year 1936), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 14. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 385-386. In this letter to Masuda Wataru 增田涉, Lu Xun said “Forging the Swords” was comparatively more seriously written.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

instead, wrongly attributing Yi's achievement to his student Feng Meng 逢蒙 in "The Flight to the Moon", while in "Gathering the Vetch", readers encounter a surprising turn in the end where Boyi and Shuqi are stopped from gathering vegetables for their meagre sustenance in the mountain because of an accusation made by a maid named A Jin 阿金 and starved to death. These remarks made by the non-existent female characters in the original legends represent the masses in their sharp, coarse, silly but true voices, an indispensable constituent of the national character. Compared with "Mending Heaven", minor characters from the rest of the stories in *Old Tales Retold* speak more, act more, play more important roles and even take over the scenes of the major characters from what one can see in "Curbing the Flood".

### ***Disinterestedness***

If the previous two instances from *Symbols of Anguish* enlighten Lu Xun on symbolism in a broad sense and the indispensable role of the previously marginalised common people under the current conditions, the last part of Chapter Three of this book lays bare how a writer or artist can merge reality and fantasy to achieve a "waking dream",<sup>191</sup> or how an artist's genuine individuality can have resonance in the subconscious of an extensive range of readers. The solution Kuriyagawa offers in his literary theory is "disinterestedness", i.e. a means to lift one above "the practical life" and onto a higher level, so that one can clearly "observe the enhanced, enlarged and deepened human life or conditions as a whole" as opposed to "the chaotic, unordered and fragmented practical and immediate experience".<sup>192</sup> Kuriyagawa hails this level of artistic observation of life as a tranquil, clear and bright state of mind, which he calls "the ultimate realm of Samādhi (三昧境)",<sup>193</sup> a Buddhist term for "a

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<sup>191</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng 苦闷的象征 (Symbols of Anguish)*. Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 68. The subtitle of this section of the chapter is literally "day dreaming".

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

state of mind in which there was perfect unification of ...man and instrument, subject and object, actor and action, thought and deed”.<sup>194</sup> This is where Kuriyagawa himself merges the Western theory of psychoanalysis with the Japanese Buddhism and creates a unique literary theory of his own and for the East Asian like-minded. As one who is deeply influenced by his teacher, fellow revolutionist and advocate of Buddhist philosophy Zhang Binglin (章炳麟), Lu Xun might share this perspective of Kuriyagawa, and this is most likely the reason why Lu Xun, in the translator’s note, has high praise for its originality.

To clarify, Kuriyagawa adopts another expression to explain this crucial concept of disinterestedness – *yoyū* 余裕 (margin or space) – in this chapter to propose that “only when there is a margin or distance between a writer and the immediate life experience, can one thoroughly feel and taste the scene we call reality”.<sup>195</sup> The term was not new to Lu Xun at that time; in *A Collection of Modern Japanese Stories* he and Zhou Zuoren 周作人 co-translated and published in 1923, Lu Xun quoted Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石’s explanation of the term as a note about the writer that was attached to his translation, where Natsume employs “*furenai shōsetsu* 触れない小説 (stories of a detached style)”<sup>196</sup> to interpret the style. As translator of two of Natsume’s stories in the collection, Lu Xun regards his unique style in the translator’s note as representing “the new Edo-style art in the Meiji era literature to a level no contemporary of his has ever achieved”.<sup>197</sup> What is most important in Lu Xun’s

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<sup>194</sup> See Daisetz T. Suzuki. *Zen and Japanese Culture*. Tokyo: Tuttle Publishing, 1988, p. 223.

<sup>195</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 68.

<sup>196</sup> See Natsume Sōseki. “Preface to Takahama Kyoshi’s Story Collection *Silver Cock’s Comb*” (高浜虚子著『鶏頭』序). [https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000148/files/2667\\_6504.html](https://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000148/files/2667_6504.html). Viewed on 27 March 2019.

<sup>197</sup> See Lu Xun. “*Xiandai Riben Xiaoshuoji* – fulu - guanyu zuozhe de shuoming – xiamu shushi” 《现代日本小说集》附录 – 关于作者的说明 – 夏目漱石 (Natsume Sōseki – About the Japanese writers – Appendix to *A Collection of Modern Japanese Stories*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 239.



comment on Natsume's "detached style", I argue, is his revival of the literary style of the past (the Edo era refers to the period of time from 1603 to 1867, succeeded by the Meiji period, Natsume Sōseki's times, until 1912) to create a new one for his contemporaries, i.e. the "perfect unification" of the old and the new or the East and the West, exactly the same as what Lu Xun discovers from Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's modern stories derived from old legends as well as in Kuriyagawa's literary theory fusing the modern European and ancient Asian theories. For Lu Xun, Natsume and Akutagawa inspire him with stories brilliantly crafted in their own varied style by recreating the old literary sources with new techniques of modern times to describe the current condition, while Kuriyagawa provides him with an insightful theory revealing the nature of literature and the methods for a writer to ascend to the ultimate level of a perfect unity.

To sum up, the term disinterestedness refers to a detached attitude towards one's immediate life experience, as Kuriyagawa argues that literature is "non-moral" due to its "aloofness from the values of the practical world";<sup>198</sup> however, it does not mean a withdrawal from life or a propagation of evil, but a reminder to keep a degree of distance from life experience while delving deeper into the very core of it. This may sound paradoxical, but it sets the tone for the rest of the stories in *Old Tales Retold*, where the merits and demerits of the characters are demonstrated as they originally were, devoid of layers of sacred halos imposed on their heads. Lu Xun's use of caricature is designed to focus the readers' attention on their most distinctive characteristic traits,<sup>199</sup> rather than to attack them with shallow mockery. However,

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<sup>198</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 71.

<sup>199</sup> See Lu Xun. "Mantan manhua" 漫谈"漫画"(About "Caricatures"), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 241. The original text is 漫画的第一件紧要事是诚实, 要确切的显示了事件或人物的姿态, 也就是精神 (The foremost element in caricatures is true to the original object so that the features of an event or a person, or their spirits, can be exactly demonstrated).

Lu Xun's efforts to wipe off the paint from their faces or take them off the pedestal, especially the pre-Qin era scholars in the last three stories in the collection, have been wrongly interpreted by critics for decades. For example, the far-fetched associations and misinterpretations of "Leaving the Pass" after the story was published forced Lu Xun to write an article accusing some critics of "narrowing down my short story or literally dumbing it down".<sup>200</sup> In my view, the reason behind the misinterpretations is this "non-moral" perspective that Lu Xun borrows from Kuriyagawa as an effective means to pinpoint the characteristic traits in them, and even the conditions of their making. That is to say, Lu Xun's intention is to urge the readers to discard their simplistic judgment of historic figures and to further explore the making of the Chinese national character for example, the contradiction between the Confucian moral principles and the cruel authoritarian regime as the most significant contributing factor behind the tragedy of Boyi and Shuqi in "Gathering Vetch". Therefore, Kuriyagawa's principle of "disinterestedness" enables Lu Xun to pierce through the superficial judgment of them, positive or negative, and arrive at the realm of "Samādhi" where he sees dictatorship and cruelty in the Chinese national character.

### **"The Flight to the Moon"**

The incident that prompted Lu Xun to write "The Flight to the Moon" is Gao Changhong's poem published in November 1926 in which he compared himself to the Sun, Lu Xun to the night and a female character *ta* 她 to the Moon, and lamenting "the Sun" had to give up and let the "night" have "the Moon".<sup>201</sup> In one of his correspondences with Xu Guangping while he was in Xiamen, Lu Xun expresses his contempt for Gao Changhong's attack and says "At

<sup>200</sup> See Lu Xun. "Chuguan de guan" 《出关》的“关” (About the Misinterpretations of "Leaving the Pass"), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 536.

<sup>201</sup> See Lu Xun. "Liangdishu yiyier zhushi yi" 《两地书》——二 注释 (1) (footnote 1 to *Letters between Two* 112), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 11. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 282.

that time, I wrote a story to satirise him and sent the story to *weiming she* 未名社 (The Unnamed Society)".<sup>202</sup> This was undoubtedly the trigger of "The Flight to the Moon", but to say it is all about Lu Xun's defence of himself against the attacks from Gao Changhong is yet another example of dumbing down the stories in the collection. Some critics already propose to consider Lu Xun's other life events back then, such as unsatisfying working condition at Xiamen University, his anxiety due to declining creativity and fear for his relationship with Xu Guangping,<sup>203</sup> as triggers of the story. I agree with this point of view and propose another perspective to interpret the story: Lu Xun's explanation of the reason why Chang E left her husband for the Moon is inspired by his understanding of the character Nora from *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen.

In Lu Xun's version,<sup>204</sup> the deteriorating relationship between Chang E and Yi that ended up with the wife abandoning her husband constitutes the main plot and accounts for two thirds of the story, while Yi's narrow escape from Feng Meng's assassination attempt is but one episode in the second section. Therefore, the theme of the story is Lu Xun's serious and honest thoughts about the relationship between husband and wife. As he points out in an essay entitled "Lun zhengleyan kan" 论睁了眼看 ("About Seeing with Eyes Open"), the drawbacks of traditional marriage have not been duly discussed, with story writers only romanticising the exchanging of poems between young men and women falling in love, or

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>203</sup> See Long Yonggan. "Gushi xinbian de yuanfa, chongqi and wancheng fawei" 故事新编的原发、重启与完成发微 (Examination of the Motives of Lu Xun to Start, Resume and Complete his Writing of *Old Tales Retold*). *Qiusuo* 求索. September Issue of 2015, p. 134.

<sup>204</sup> The plot of "The Flight to the Moon" consists of three sections. The first is a vivid description of how Yi came back home with only a few sparrows that caused Chang E's complaint and Yi's sense of guilt. The second is set on the next day when Yi shot a domesticated hen and had to compensate an old woman for it. On his way back home, he escaped his student Feng Meng's assassination attempt by dint of his outstanding martial arts skills. However, upon returning home with better game, he found Chang E took the pills of immortality he had obtained from a Daoist monk and then flew to the Moon in the third section. The story ends with Yi's failed attempt to shoot the Moon down and his determination to catch up with his wife the next day.

using external pressures from their parents or an order from the emperor to make them tie the knot, without questioning whether the institution is good or not.<sup>205</sup> Lu Xun's implication is to cite marriage as an example to support his argument in this article that to achieve *yuanman* 圆满 (completeness, or a perfect ending), his fellow Chinese resort to the means of *man he pian* 瞒和骗 (concealment and deception) to hide or cancel marital difficulties, rather than recognising and solving them. This is probably the reason why Lu Xun selects the ancient legend of Chang E and Yi as his raw material, as this story with an imperfect ending of the breaking-up of a couple is one of a kind in traditional Chinese romantic stories. Additionally, it echoes Lu Xun's worry about the future of his relationship with Xu Guangping. In this sense, his personal anguish and a popular legend merge into a symbol in a broad sense about marriage in real life.

### ***Food as a symbol of financial security in a marriage***

In the most ancient version of Chang E's flight to the Moon, her motive remains a mystery.

The text is:

For example, Yi obtained the elixir of immortality from *Xiwangmu* (Queen Mother of the West) but it was stolen by Heng E<sup>206</sup> to fly to the Moon. Yi regretted the loss of the elixir. Why? He did not know how to make it.

— Chapter of Lanmingxun from *Huainanzi*

譬若羿请不死之药于西王母，姮娥窃以奔月，怅然有丧，无以续之。何则？不知不死之药所由生也。

— 淮南子•览冥训

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<sup>205</sup> See Lu Xun. "Lun zhengleyan kan" 论睁了眼看 (About Seeing with Eyes Open), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 252.

<sup>206</sup> Heng E 姮娥 is the original name of Chang E 嫦娥. The change of her name is said to avoid using the character with the same pronunciation as the name of Liu Heng, Emperor Wen of Han (汉文帝刘恒).

Lu Xun offers his explanation for the reason why Chang E deserted her husband – the shortage of decent food. The description of food dominates the first section of “The Flight to the Moon” where the writer gives free rein to his imagination about the shortage and abundance of food in ancient times with specific examples as humble as noodles with crow sauce, and as luxurious as leopards, bears, camels and wild boars. Such vivid description of food is potentially linked to Lu Xun’s dissatisfaction with the lack of palatable food in Xiamen. There is plentiful evidence in the collection of his correspondences with Xu Guangping, *Liangdishu* 两地书 (*Letters between Two*). For instance, in Lu Xun’s second letter upon his arrival at Xiamen University, he complains that “the dishes are bland here in Xiamen (the food in the canteen on campus cannot be swallowed down, so we chip in and hire a cook...but the dishes are still bland), and therefore I still eat paprika”.<sup>207</sup> The same simple diet in the story, such as “five baked cakes, five stalks of leek and a package of paprika”<sup>208</sup> becomes Yi’s only meal on a hunting errand for a whole day. Moreover, about the same time as “The Flight to the Moon” was written, in his letter to Xu Guangping, he expresses his eagerness for going to Sun Yat-sen University as well as tasting snake meat and water beetles.<sup>209</sup> No wonder Lu Xun especially dedicates one whole paragraph in the story to Yi’s nostalgic recollection of “the giant boar and the huge python”<sup>210</sup> in his glorious old days.

However, the story is not limited to a projection of the writer’s vexation in his immediate circumstances; food, be it serpent or sparrow, is the symbol of financial security, which is exactly the ultimate worry of Lu Xun about the future of his relationship with Xu Guangping,

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<sup>207</sup> See Lu Xun. “Liangdishu sishiyi” 《两地书》四一 (*Letters between Two* 41), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 11. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 119.

<sup>208</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 35.

<sup>209</sup> See Lu Xun. “Liangdishu bashiliu” 《两地书》八六 (*Letters between Two* 86), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 11. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 232.

<sup>210</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 33.

and of a husband or breadwinner in a marriage. Suppose a husband cannot bring home palatable food to his wife, in other words, cannot financially support his wife's life expectation – their marriage will most probably fall apart with the wife walking out of home and never coming back. In "The Flight to the Moon", Yi was "overcome by shame" and "flushed up to his ears" with a sense of guilt because he blamed himself for feeding "a woman like this on nothing but noodles and crow sauce".<sup>211</sup> This detail reveals Lu Xun's concern about the financial condition of their future life, or whether he can afford the quality of life that Xu Guangping will be satisfied with. In real life, although Xiamen University and Sun Yat-sen University at Guangzhou offered good salaries, Lu Xun still doubted whether being a professor was his ultimate goal in his life. In a letter to Xu Guangping around the time he wrote "The Flight to the Moon", he expresses the dilemma for the future between being a writer and being a professor.<sup>212</sup> It seems that Lu Xun weaves the story based on the first option, imagining the worst but possible scenario that someday his creativity declines and he cannot produce enough books to guarantee the financial security of his family. For a well-educated modern female like Xu Guangping, leaving her husband and family behind is almost inevitable. It is upon this fear deep inside of him that Lu Xun identifies lack of financial security as the reason why Chang E left Yi behind and flew away to the Moon, and renders this ancient myth into a modern allegory of marital difficulties.

The significance of financial security can be found in Lu Xun's well-known speech, "Nuola zouhou zenyang" 娜拉走后怎样 (What Happens after Nora Leaves Home), in which he asserts that "Thus the crucial thing for Nora is money or – to give it a more high-sounding

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p 35.

<sup>212</sup> See Lu Xun. "Liangdishu liushiliu" 《两地书》六六 (*Letters between Two* 66), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 11. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 187.

name – economic resources”<sup>213</sup>; to have equal status in the economy is key to women’s free choice of their lifestyle. It has to be pointed out that Lu Xun’s focus in this statement is on money as the essential means for Nora to realise her desire to be independent from her husband, rather than money itself. In Lu Xun’s speech, he uses a rhetorical question to emphasise the importance of one’s means to get to one’s ends: “Otherwise the question arises: What has she taken away with her apart from her awakened heart?”<sup>214</sup> He goes on with his answer that if Nora only has a scarf with her, no matter how long it is, it’s not the right means to help her realise her dream. This is where an association between Nora and Chang E can be established: the two women, due to different reasons, walk out of their marriage. However, Chang E obtains the right means (the elixir) so that she flies to the Moon, while Nora’s fate hinges on whether she has adequate means (financial support). Moreover, the theme of “means” underlies elsewhere in “The Flight to the Moon”, mainly in the description of Yi’s powerful tools hanging on the wall that appears twice in the story:

Nüyi lit the lamp. The vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger glimmered on the opposite wall in its faint rays. After one look, Yi lowered his head and sighed.<sup>215</sup>

女乙来点灯了，对面墙上挂着的彤弓、彤矢、卢弓、卢矢、弩机、长剑、短剑，便都在昏暗的灯光中出现。羿看了一眼，就低了头，叹了一口气

He [Yi] walked round and round the room, then went to the hall and sat down. Looking up he could see on the opposite wall the vermilion bow and arrows, the black bow and arrows, the crossbow, the sword and the dagger.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> See Lu Xun. “Nuola zouhou zenyang – yijiuersannian shieryue ershiliuri zai Beijing nvzi gaodeng shifanxuexiao wenyi huijiang” 娜拉走后怎样——一九二三年十二月二十六日在北京女子高等师范学校文艺会讲 (What Will Happen to Nora After She Walks Out of Home – Speech at Literature Society of Beijing Women’s Normal University on 26 December, 1923), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 168.

See Lu Xun. *Lu Xun: Selected Works*. Vol. 2. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1980, p. 88.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., p. 167. Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>215</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 33.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

羿又在房里转了几个圈子，走到堂前，坐下，仰头看着对面壁上的彤弓、彤矢、卢弓、卢矢、弩机、长剑、短剑……

Here, the enumerative description of Yi's weapons, different from that of the surroundings of Nü Wa in "Mending Heaven", makes prominent the theme of "means" for one to realise one's goals. All in all, in "The Flight to the Moon", food, luxurious or humble provided by the husband as well as weapons, are symbols for financial security, a significant contributing factor to a successful long-term relationship or marriage. The above analysis demonstrates how Lu Xun dives deep into his own subconscious and captures his most profound worries about his personal life and elevates the symbols of his personal worries up to a level that echoes to a wide range of readers.

### ***The voice of the masses***

In the first section of this chapter, when discussing potential influence of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Anguish* on Lu Xun's *Old Tales Retold* through Lu Xun's translation, I quote Kuriyagawa's reminder to the writers to learn from William Shakespeare's use of raw material from every possible source in his plays, one of which is from women. Inspired by Kuriyagawa's comment, Lu Xun creates four intrusive female characters who were non-existent in the original legends and inserts them into four stories in *Old Tales Retold*: an old woman in this story, mother of Meijianchi, Yu's wife in "Curbing the Flood" and A Jin in "Gathering Vetch", each representing different stereotypical characteristics of the Chinese.

The old woman in "The Flight to the Moon" embodies those who cannot distinguish truth and lies but easily buy into rumours, though nevertheless are penny-wise at the level of everyday life. For instance, she is incredibly smart at bargaining with Yi for the compensation of her hen killed by Yi and successfully defends her own rights. On the other hand, she is foolish in



believing in rumour and accusing Yi of lying about his accomplishments and wrongly attributing them to Yi's student Feng Meng. Lu Xun's characterisation of this character, with only a short dialogue, demonstrates his more polished techniques of moulding characters, compared with those he is not satisfied with in "Mending Heaven". This vivid characterisation of a minor character most likely stems from Lu Xun's personal experience of dealing with them, as recorded in his correspondences with Xu Guangping during his stay in Xiamen, in which he complains several times about how penny-wise and greedy the canteen workers and a cook he hires are, and about a doorman who steals magazines and books delivered in his mail.<sup>217</sup>

More important, the intrusive character of an old woman highlights the tragic fate of a hero whose name is unheard among the masses. What is even more ridiculous is that such a woman was so confident in her own judgment that she rejected Yi's explanation and accused him of lying, defending Feng Meng's fake reputation instead. In this event, the overall theme of failed communication in *Old Tales Retold* is again highlighted, but in a different way: the communication between Yi and the old woman is partially successful, only at the level of material compensation, the symbol of means of living (money); however, in terms of complicated intellectual tasks such as to distinguish truth from lies, there is total failure, or even worse, leading to the further propagation of misinformation. Therefore, Yi stopped clarifying the facts with her immediately. The partial failure of verbal communication between Yi and the old woman highlights the difficulty in understanding between two parties using the same language, as opposed to Nü Wa using no language at all and the "little creatures" who invented a complicated writing system of a language. Therefore, the subtle

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<sup>217</sup> See Lu Xun. "Liangdishu jiushisan, jiushiwu, yibailingsan" 《两地书》九三、九五、一〇三 (*Letters between Two* 93, 95 and 103), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 11. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2005, p. 246, p. 254, p. 264.

shift of focus of this theme in “Mending Heaven” and “The Flight to the Moon” can be viewed as the embodiment of Lu Xun’s ongoing efforts in understanding language itself and its users. If in “Mending Heaven” the writer attributes the failure of communication to the use of the complex writing system of the Chinese language, suggesting his support of the milestone Vernacular Chinese Movement (白话文运动) initiated by Hu Shi 胡适 and Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 in 1917, in “The Flight to the Moon” he puts forward his own questioning over the limitation of communication in vernacular Chinese. It is a significant shift in Lu Xun’s quest for a new linguistic tool to write stories and to communicate, and more importantly in his reflection on the vernacular Chinese and its users, which prompts him to champion the concept of *dazhong yu* 大众语 (a language for the masses) in the 1930s.

### ***Covert criticism of Mencius and Daoism***

The last section of my discussion of “The Flight to the Moon” will focus on Lu Xun’s adaptation of the original stories that reveals his criticism of the traditional cultural heritage. Two major aspects will be examined: Yi’s tragic destiny as well as Chang E and the Daoist elixir of life. To start with, the original story of Feng Meng, Yi’s disciple who killed his master due to jealousy, is recorded in *Mencius*:

Feng Meng learned the art of archery from Yi, and then he killed his master because he thought the master was the only one in the world whose skills surpassed him. Mencius commented: “Yi was also to blame for this.

逢蒙学射于羿，思天下惟羿愈己，于是杀羿。孟子曰：“是亦羿有罪焉。”<sup>218</sup>

However, in Lu Xun’s adaptation, Feng Meng thought he succeeded in killing Yi with his archery skills but actually failed as his master’s skills and abilities were still superior. Lu Xun brushes off Mencius’s unjustifiable fault-finding judgment that does nothing but blur the

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<sup>218</sup> See *Mengzi–lilou* 孟子•离娄 (Mencius – Chapter of Lilou). <https://ctext.org/mengzi/li-lou-ii/zhs> Viewed on 10 April 2019.

distinction between right and wrong, and indicates that Feng Meng's assassination attempt is unethical like *jianjing* 剪径 (highway robbery) as opposed to "hunting",<sup>219</sup> the means of Yi as a hunter to make a living. Lu Xun's rewriting focuses on the theme of betrayal, which indeed implies Lu Xun's confidence in himself as an established writer who keeps on improving his skills. On the other hand, it reveals his deep concern over the vulgarisation of the young writers, like Gao Changhong, who "stoop so low" to establish their own fame by trashing their kind-hearted seniors and "pick up swearing".<sup>220</sup> This, too, signifies another shift from "Mending Heaven", in terms of Lu Xun's opinion about the young generation of writers, for he realises that not all young writers are pure-hearted and grateful; some of them "appear to be new thinkers, but are despots, cruel officials, spies and villains in actuality" as he confides to Xu Guangping in their correspondences.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, striking similarities can be found in the short story "Dogs, Cats and Mice" in *Zhaohua Xishi* 朝花夕拾 (*Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*), written earlier in 1926, where the plot of a disciple's foiled attempt to kill the master due to the master's superior skills, becomes a nursery tale from Lu Xun's Grandma, with the protagonists substituted for Master Cat and Disciple Tiger. Different from Mencius, Lu Xun's recollection of his comment on the story as a child is that it is pure luck that the cat escaped thanks to the impatience of the tiger.<sup>222</sup>

Other evidence can be found in a *jeu de mots* in this scene where Yi was aware of Feng Meng's attempt to assassinate him and fired an arrow to counteract it:

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<sup>219</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 41.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> See Lu Xun. "Liangdishu yiyier" 《两地书》——二 (*Letters between Two* 112), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 11. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 280.

<sup>222</sup> See Lu Xun. "Gou, mao, shu" 狗·猫·鼠 (Dogs, Cats and Mice), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 242.

Zing! Two arrow-heads collided, sparks flew into the air and the two shafts thrust up to form an inverted V before toppling over and falling to the ground.

只听得铮的一声，箭尖正触着箭尖，在空中发出几点火花，两支箭便向上挤成一个“人”字，又翻身落在地上了。<sup>223</sup>

To my regret, this brilliant wordplay that symbolises Lu Xun's modified understanding of the complexity of human nature is lost in an equally brilliant reconciliation in the English translation. In this scene, the Chinese character *ren* 人 (human) is borrowed to describe the tit-for-tat of two shooting arrows, symbolising the shameless betrayal of a disciple against his master and the master's timely and righteous fightback. There are two levels, I argue, in this wordplay: 1) men are not necessarily the “noblest” creatures in the world, for fratricide is commonly seen in men; 2) to fight back against unjust treatment is noble and righteous. The first level can be deemed as Lu Xun's criticism of the long-standing “standard” explanation of the character “人” recorded in *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字 that defines man as “the noblest life of heaven and earth ... which resembles the shape of a leg and an arm”,<sup>224</sup> the first half of which is possibly the outcome of a Confucian influence of hierarchy that puts humans on the top level of a pyramid-shaped structure of living beings on Earth and can lead to a narcissistic awareness of a person's self over the lives of others. Coincidentally, Zhang Binglin (Zhang Taiyan 章太炎), when lecturing on *Shuowen Jiezi* to his students, including Lu Xun in Tokyo, edited out the first part of Xu Shen 许慎's definition and only kept the latter,<sup>225</sup> probably due to Zhang Taiyan's egalitarianism toward all sentient beings from the Buddhist thought. This coincidence is not cited to prove Zhang Taiyan's influence on Lu Xun, but to

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<sup>223</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, pp. 38-39.

<sup>224</sup> See *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字. <https://ctext.org/shuo-wen-jie-zi/ren-bu1/zhs>. Viewed on 11 April 2019. The original definition is “天地之性最贵者也...象臂胫之形...”.

<sup>225</sup> See Zhang Taiyan lecturing and Zhu Xizu 朱希祖, Qian Xuantong 钱玄同 and Zhou Shuren 周树人 recording. *Zhangtaiyan Shuowen Jiezi Shouke Biji* 章太炎说文解字授课笔记 (*Notes from the Lecture of Shuowen Jiezi by Zhang Taiyan*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2010, p. 329.

demonstrate, in a microscopic way, the two intellectuals' rethinking of the concept of *ren* 人 in this story, and the closely associated character of *min* 民 in the next one, "Forging the Swords". Moreover, the second level of this *jeu de mots* serves potentially as the trigger for Lu Xun to pick up the legend about the revenge of Meijianchi soon after "The Flight to the Moon", as Yi, in this episode, is moulded as a hero or a fighter not because of his past glory but his spontaneity to strike back against his enemy who initiated a malicious attack as well as his honourable fight back within the scope of self-defence. In this sense, Yi is characterised as a hero in a different sense from the ancient legend: when a hero encountered setbacks in his career, a marriage crisis and even brazen betrayal of his disciples, what he resorted to as a way out of difficulties were tools, skills and actions rather than supernatural power or withdrawal. Therefore, Yi, the symbol of a fighter with "eyes darting lightning, his beard and hair flying in the wind like black tongues of flame",<sup>226</sup> is apotheosised like Nü Wa in the brand-new collection of mythology dedicated to the masses of the Republic of China.

On the other hand, Chang E, the hero's wife, represents a new generation of women who enjoy equal status with their husbands and are courageous enough to walk out of their marriage – the Chinese version of Nora. One year after Lu Xun wrote "The Flight to the Moon", he published an essay of fragmented thoughts where "wifedom" is singled out as "non-existent in the nature of women"; it is "assumed, and is only a combination of motherhood and daughterhood".<sup>227</sup> Lu Xun stops short of defining "wifedom", but Chang E can be deemed as an embodiment. The bedrock of wifedom relies on marriage, a contractual relationship in which both parties have equal rights to choose to continue or to cease, while

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<sup>226</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 45.

<sup>227</sup> See Lu Xun. "Xiao zagan" 小杂感 (A Short Collection of Fragmented Thoughts), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 555. The original text is 女人的天性中有母性，有女儿性；无妻性。妻性是逼成的，只是母性和女儿性的混合。

motherhood or daughterhood stems from blood ties where no one enjoys the right to make their own choices. In “The Flight to the Moon”, the very reason why Chang E could openly complain about the diet and throw tantrums at her hard-working husband is the fact that she was sure about her equal status with her husband in their marriage; it may seem that she is self-absorbed but this is the first and essential step to cultivate women’s individuality and pursue their own aspirations. Chang E epitomises the new generation of women like Xu Guangping, treating marriage or partnership as their own choice and a means to realise happiness rather than a life-long selfless dedication and sacrifice to their husband’s clan.

***From the symbol of the human to the symbol of the Moon***

In addition, Chang E’s flight harbours Lu Xun’s covert criticism of the Daoist tradition with his symbolisation of the Moon. The celestial body only appears in the final section of the story that reminded Yi of a childhood tale which his grandmother told about the “lovely landscape in the moon”, and “as he watched the moon floating in a sapphire sea, his own limbs seemed very heavy”.<sup>228</sup> This detailed description of a stark contrast between the “light and distant” realm of celestial deities and the “heavy and tangible” world of humans serves as a clue to the symbol of the Moon in this story: the desire of humans to escape from the eternal suffering of the physical world. To do this, one needs to resort to the elixir obtained from a Daoist priest, which is different from the original legend where the elixir was a gift from a female deity, *Xi Wangmu* 西王母.<sup>229</sup> It is evident that with such a substitution, the role that Daoism plays in the Chinese heritage is once again highlighted. The habitual flight from urgent actualities is so deeply ingrained that even Yi, with his most powerful bow and three arrows, could not shoot it down. Therefore, with this symbol, Lu Xun suggests that escapism

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<sup>228</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 45.

<sup>229</sup> See footnote 38.

cannot be rooted out from the national character of the Chinese, who are so habitually obsessed with their pathetic delusion of being happy and free from suffering in a non-existent fairy land that they turn a blind eye to the real problems in life, and are not willing to solve them with their minds and hands. In this sense the biggest irony Lu Xun lays bare is that human beings living in this physical world with all kinds of needs to gratify end up with longing for an otherworldly life, a life without bodily needs. The factor behind this mindset is the Daoist root in the Chinese heritage embodied by the priests who fabricated stories of fairy isles to cheat emperors into searching for the secret to eternal life in “Mending Heaven”, and in this story symbolised by an elixir that lured females into the fake hope of a heavenly world without suffering at all. However, Lu Xun’s criticism of the Daoist root rests more on its role in the making of the national character, rather than the religion itself. Such characteristic traits of escapism under the influence of Daoism can be summarised as, in Lu Xun’s words, “the Chinese dare not face up to the actualities, but to come up with peculiar escapes through concealment and deception and deem them as legitimate ways. These measures attest to the timidity, laziness and glibness in our national character.”<sup>230</sup>

### **“Forging the Swords”<sup>231</sup> – an allegory of the 1911 Revolution and dictatorship**

Previous scholarly discussion about “Forging the Swords” concentrates on the theme of revenge. Wang Yao is probably the first to pinpoint that theme, and Leo Ou-fan Lee shares

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<sup>230</sup> See Lu Xun. “Lun zhengleyan kan” 论睁了眼看 (About Seeing with Eyes Open), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 254. The original text is 中国人的不敢正视各方面，用瞒和骗，造出奇妙的逃路来，而自以为正路。在这路上，就证明着国民性的怯弱，懒惰，而又巧滑。

<sup>231</sup> A summary of the story is, in the first section, Meijianchi, a boy nearly 16, was caught in a dilemma of whether to kill a mouse or not, when he was told of his father’s forging two treasured swords by the order of the King and being killed by the King because he hid one of them at home, and urged by his mother to avenge his father’s death with that sword. The second section is about Meijianchi’s preparation to carry out his assassination and his suicide as he was persuaded into giving his head and sword to a dark man who claimed he would get revenge for him. The climax of the plot comes in the third section where the dark man tricked the King into watching the “dance” of the boy’s head in a boiling cauldron and managed to behead the King as he bent over to look at the macabre sight. Upon seeing Meijianchi’s head was to lose the battle that ensued against

the same view. On the other hand, Wang Yao also regards this story as “an ode to the heroes” that resonates with Marston Anderson who claims this retelling of an old legend intricately uses symbols and allegory, reminding the readers of “the deep penetration of the past into the present”. In this section about probably the most fascinating story in *Old Tales Retold*, focus will be given to my interpretation of the story as an allegory of the 1911 Revolution from the perspective of Lu Xun’s involvement as an alleged member of the Guangfu Hui 光复会. I will also discuss the symbolic embodiment of the characteristics of revolutionists involved in this “great event”<sup>232</sup> that ended the last dynasty in China. In addition, via the symbols of the swords and heads, together with my explanation of the three peculiar songs, Lu Xun’s covert criticism of the revolution will be presented. To start with, it is essential to note that memories of the events and figures from the past dominate Lu Xun’s writing during the period of time when he left Beijing for Xiamen and then moved to Guangzhou. The essays collected in *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk* were “copied from my memories” and written during “a period of over nine months under varied circumstances”.<sup>233</sup> The original title he had assigned to the collection, *Jiushi Chongti* 旧事重提 (*Old Matters Raised Anew*) can be deemed as nearly synonymous to *Gushi Xinbian* (*Old Tales Retold*). Therefore, I would argue, “Forging the Swords” is another piece of reminiscence of Lu Xun’s own life experience with the Guangfu Hui as well as its cooperation and conflicts with the Tongmeng Hui 同盟会 before and after the 1911 Revolution. This experience, disguised as a rewritten old legend, tells the tragic fate of an organisation of pure-hearted students and scholars who made tremendous contributions to the revolution with their spiritual defiance, but were

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the King’s head, the dark man beheaded himself and joined in to help the young man. In the final section, due to the failed efforts to distinguish the shattered skulls of the three, they were all buried together in one tomb.

<sup>232</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 127.

<sup>233</sup> See Lu Xun. “Zhaohua xishi - xiaoyin” 《朝花夕拾》小引 (Preface to *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 235.



obliterated during a purge from the Tongmeng Hui (later reorganised as the Kuomintang 国民党 or Nationalist Party). Moreover, inspired by Kuriyagawa's theory of "symbolism in a broad sense", this "more seriously written" story becomes, in itself, an allegory of revolutions in China in the past and future, based on Lu Xun's strenuous exploration into his own suffering as well as that of his fellow revolutionists. As for the reason why it took Lu Xun more than 10 years to write a story to commemorate his fellow revolutionists, it's most likely another influence from Kuriyagawa's theory of disinterestedness – to view an event objectively and thoroughly by keeping a fair distance from it. This particular technique endows "Forging the Swords" with a profundity that transcends partisan politics and the traditional theme of vendetta; the story penetrates into the hearts of Lu Xun and his fellow revolutionists who are caught in the agonising moral conundrum of violence and justice in a revolution, and captures their characteristic traits such as hesitation, bravery and recklessness. Symbolism, furthermore, abstracts these unique traits from individual revolutionists and turns this story into an allegory of revolution in China. In this sense, "Forging the Swords" is the apex of Lu Xun's criticism of the Chinese national character in *Old Tales Retold*.

Whether Lu Xun joined the Guangfu Hui or not has been disputed for a long time, mainly due to Zhou Zuoren's strenuous denial and Xu Shoushang's affirmation. However, in recent decades scholars of Lu Xun studies like Tang Tao 唐弢,<sup>234</sup> Qian Liqun 钱理群,<sup>235</sup> Chen

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<sup>234</sup> See Tang Tao. "Lu Xun Zhuan -yige weidade beijude linghui (diqizhang ji dibazhang)" 鲁迅传 – 一个伟大的悲剧的灵魂 (第七章及第八章) (A Biography of Lu Xun: A Great and Tragic Soul – Chapter 7 and Chapter 8). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, 1992 (08), p. 45.

<sup>235</sup> See Qian Liqun. *Zhou Zuoren Zhuan* 周作人传 (A Biography of Zhou Zuoren). Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 2013, p. 100.

Shuyu 陈漱渝<sup>236</sup> and Ni Moyan 倪墨言<sup>237</sup> have come down in favour of Lu Xun's membership.<sup>238</sup> In addition, other sources like the frequently quoted records of conversations between Lu Xun and Masuda Wataru as well as notes from a speech Lu Xun delivered at a fine art association in Shanghai on 21 December 1932,<sup>239</sup> point to the possibility of his affiliation. Therefore, it has been asserted as a fact, the latest version of *The Complete Works of Lu Xun*, with controversies remaining over the exact time when he joined the Guangfu Hui.<sup>240</sup> In recent decades, scholars have used Lu Xun's membership in the Guangfu Hui which was involved in the 1911 Revolution to help interpret the writer's works.<sup>241</sup> In this section, I argue that Meijianchi 眉间尺 in "Forging the Swords" represents the Guangfu Hui, while Yan zhi Aozhe 宴之敖者 (the dark man) embodies the Tongmeng Hui who took away the military force (the sword) as well as most of the members of the Guangfu Hui (the head of Meijianchi) by merging the two organisations together, and successfully overthrowing the Manchu Qing Dynasty (the assassination of the King). Through this lens, the puzzle of why Yan zhi Aozhe, called Meijianchi *chouren* 仇人 (foe)<sup>242</sup> and laughed after the young man

<sup>236</sup> See Chen Shuyu. "Lu Xun de hongse, huise he bense" 鲁迅的红色、灰色和本色 (The Red and Grey Paint on Lu Xun and His True Colour). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, 2011 (09), p. 50.

<sup>237</sup> See Ni Moyan. "Lu Xun jiaru Guangfu Hui de jige wenti" 鲁迅加入光复会的几个问题 (Several Questions concerning Lu Xun's Joining the Guangfu Hui). *Bolan Qunshu* 博览群书, 2012 (01), p. 36.

<sup>238</sup> See Zhang Nianchi 章念驰. *Wo Suozhidao de Zufu Zhang Taiyan* 我所知道的祖父章太炎 (*My Grandfather Zhang Taiyan as I Know Him*). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016, pp. 49, 205 and 224.

<sup>239</sup> See Liu Yunfeng (ed.). *Lu Xun Yiwen Quanji (xia)* 鲁迅佚文全集 (下) (*A Collection of Uncompiled Works of Lu Xun – second of two*). Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 2001, p. 796.

<sup>240</sup> See Lu Xun. "Lu Xun shengping zhuyi jianbiao" 鲁迅生平著译简表 ("A Brief List of Events in Lu Xun's Life and His Works"), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 18. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 6.

<sup>241</sup> See Chen Fangjing. "Lu Xun yu Guangfu Hui – Fan Ainong jiedu" 鲁迅与光复会 - 《范爱农》解读 (Lu Xun and the Guangfu Hui – an Interpretation of "Fan Ainong"). *Mingzuo Xinshang* 名作欣赏, 2010 (10), pp. 4-9.

See Wang Binbin. "Lun Guangfu Hui yu Tongmeng Hui zhizheng dui Lu Xun de yingxiang" 论光复会与同盟会之争对鲁迅的影响 (On the Influence of the Conflict between the Guangfu Hui and Tungmeng Hui on Lu Xun). *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文艺研究, 2017 (05), pp. 63-75.

<sup>242</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 134. The original word of "*chouren*" was liberally rendered into "the single one" by the Yangs on p. 135.

beheaded himself and offered him his head and sword, can be solved. The plot of Meijianchi taking his own life refers to the fact that a majority of members of the Guangfu Hui such as Qiu Jin 秋瑾, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 and Zhang Taiyan also joined the Tongmeng Hui<sup>243</sup> to realise their common goal based on their trust in such an alliance, but in “Forging the Swords”, Lu Xun who chose not to join the Tongmeng Hui, uses the first song of the dark man to reveal that it is most likely that the Tongmeng Hui took over the Guangfuhui through deception due to the former’s fear and jealousy of the latter’s military power. In the end, Yan zhi Aozhe used the sword taken over from Meijianchi to kill the King (military uprising putting an end to the Manchu monarchy) and later himself, and finally joined the ferocious fight between the heads of the King and Meijianchi (symbolising a spiritual revolution against the Manchu dynasty led by the leader of the Guangfu Hui, Zhang Taiyan, as well as members including Lu Xun).

However, in previous studies, Yan zhi Aozhe, the dark man, is generally considered to be Lu Xun himself, for this name derives from a pen name Lu Xun used once, a clever wordplay to mark a significant event in his personal life – his being driven out from the house of the Zhou clan at Badaowan in Beijing by his brother Zhou Zuoren’s Japanese wife, Hata Nobuko.<sup>244</sup> It seems to be far-fetched to associate the character with the Tongmeng Hui regardless of such solid evidence. To support my argument, I will elaborate on the symbols Meijianchi and Yan zhi Aozhe represent in the following paragraphs from the perspective of Lu Xun’s criticism

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<sup>243</sup> Wang Binbin. “Lun Guangfu Hui yu Tongmeng Hui zhizheng dui Lu Xun de yingxiang” 论光复会与同盟会之争对鲁迅的影响 (On the Influence of the Conflict between the Guangfu Hui and Tongmeng Hui on Lu Xun). *Wenyi Yanjiu* 文艺研究, 2017 (05), p. 68.

<sup>244</sup> See Lu Xun. Footnote 5 of “Sitang zhuanwen zaji tiji” 《俟堂专文杂集》题记-注释 5 (Note 5 of Preface to *A Collection of Rubbings of Ancient Bricks from Shaoxing Area*). in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集* (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 69. In this note, Xu Guangping recalls Lu Xun’s explanation of the pen name 宴之敖者 that the character 宴 consists of three radicals denoting a house, the Sun and a female, and the character 敖 means “being driven out”. Therefore, the name means “someone who is driven out of his house by a Japanese woman”.

of the national character, based on his frank examination of his inner world and that of his fellow revolutionists. Firstly, the two major characters in “Forging the Swords” are epitomes of the revolutionists. It is on a higher platform that Lu Xun sees through the surface of conflicts between then political organisations and discovers several collective characteristic traits he and his fellow revolutionists share. Indeed, Yan zhi Aozhe represents Lu Xun, but he can also be viewed as symbolising the Guangfu Hui, as the *jeu de mots* behind this pen name of Lu Xun can also be interpreted as “a political organisation that was driven out or purged by another with the Sun as its party flag”. That is to say, the radical of the Sun in the character 宴 can also be used to denote the pattern of the Sun in the middle of the flag of the Tongmeng Hui (and also the Kuomintang). The reason why Lu Xun lends the name to the dark man (only once in the entire story) is due to his discovery through an impartial examination of himself that the characteristic trait of cold-bloodiness and the ingrained belief in the elimination of his political rivals, as demonstrated by Yan zhi Aozhe, also reside in himself. Evidence can be obtained in Lu Xun’s other works of the same period of time. For example, in the essay “Fan Ainong”<sup>245</sup> from *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, Lu Xun confesses that his very first impression of Fan Ainong in Tokyo, who challenged Lu Xun’s opinion and refused to cooperate with him in regard to how to respond to the Manchu regime’s execution of Xu Xilin 徐锡麟, was that “if China had no revolution, no more need be said on the matter. If there was a revolution, the first thing to do was to root out Fan Ainong.”<sup>246</sup> This comment turns out to presage Fan Ainong’s tragic fate of being purged by

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<sup>245</sup> See Lu Xun. “Zhujian – zhushi 17” 《铸剑》注释 17 (Note 17 of “Forging the Swords”) in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 8. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 451-453. Although consensus has it that the story was finished in April, 1927, I argue that October, 1926 is the time Lu Xun started to write it, soon after he wrote “Fan Ainong”.

<sup>246</sup> See Lu Xun. “Fan Ainong” 范爱农, in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 322. The original text is “中国不革命则已，要革命，首先就必须将范爱农除去”，and Lu Xun. *Selected Works*. Vol. 1. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1980, p. 414.

fellow members from the same organisation, alluding to exactly the same destiny of the Guangfu Hui being purged by its ally, the Tongmeng Hui.

In addition, other clues to the symbol of Yan zhi Aozhe can be found in the description of him throughout the story – *heiseren* 黑色人 (the dark man), i.e., a political party represented by the traditional Chinese character *dang* 黨. As an organisation of revolutionists, the Guangfu Hui consists of not only students and scholars, but also outlaws and secret society members, and so does the Tongmeng Hui. These ambitious schemers like Wang Jinfa 王金发, whom Lu Xun mocks as “*lulin daxue chushen* 绿林大学出身 (graduated from ‘the Green Woods University’)”,<sup>247</sup> band together as a clique in the revolution, using fair means or foul to eliminate their political rivals. Their cold-bloodedness and cruelty invalidate the righteousness of a revolution, so they need the spiritual and moral endorsement of the intellectuals. Therefore, in “Forging the Swords”, the dark man denied being called a “champion of justice” and only confessed that he excelled at revenge. On the other hand, Meijianchi represents the characteristics of kind-heartedness and sincerity, as well as indecision and gullibility; these qualities are commonly found in the well-educated young men with high moral principles in China. Striking similarities between Meijianchi and Lu Xun can be found in Lu Xun’s works. For example, Lu Xun’s affection for a pet mouse and his sadness over its death are recorded in a story about his childhood – “Dogs, Cats and Mice” in *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*. Moreover, the soft temperament of Meijianchi and the description of his head as “a boy’s head with *xiumei changyan* 秀眉长眼 (fine eyebrows, large eyes)”<sup>248</sup> sketch exactly the facial features and personality of Lu Xun

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<sup>247</sup> See Lu Xun. “Fan Ainong” 范爱农, in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 2. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 325.

<sup>248</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 139.

himself. All in all, “Forging the Swords” symbolises the complicated relationship between the two stereotypical revolutionists: cooperative (the faithful) and fratricidal (the treacherous), which have marked every revolution in China’s history. The faithful and the treacherous characteristic traits are most conspicuously embodied in the contrasting attitudes of Meijianchi and the dark man towards the lives of others. Meijianchi felt “as remorseful as if he had committed a crime”<sup>249</sup> when he accidentally stepped on a rat and caused its death, and later was afraid “his invisible sword might hurt them [the crowd]”<sup>250</sup> when he was planning for his assassination of the King; while the dark man showed no remorse at all but laughed out loud as if holding a precious tool he longed for to realise his goal, after urging Meijianchi to behead himself, and when carrying out his assassination scheme he was calculating and decisive, exhibiting not a single trace of indecision or regret. Such a trait of cruelty or of realising one’s goal by killing others can be seen in many revolutionists who employ assassination as the means of revolution from both the Guangfu Hui and the Tongmeng Hui, including the leaders of the former, Xu Xilin, Qiu Jin and Tao Chengzhang 陶成章, as well as heads of the latter such as Chen Qimei 陈其美 who was said to order Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 to assassinate Tao Chengzhang in 1912.<sup>251</sup> In comparison, Meijianchi represents intellectuals like Lu Xun who have reservations about sacrificing others’ lives or killing the innocent people to realise their goal. Rather, they champion using the right means for their ends because the scholars are aware of the fact that the means are indeed the ends: cruel bloodshed only leads to even more atrocities and culminates in tyranny that repeats itself in a vicious cycle. Therefore, it can be concluded that Lu Xun identifies

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>251</sup> See Zhang Xueji. “Tao Chengzhang an jige wenti de zai tantao” 陶成章案几个问题的再探讨 (Another Discussion about Several Questions Regarding the Assassination of Tao Chengzhang). *Zhejiang Xuekan* 浙江学刊, 2011 (5), p. 20.

cruelty as the most significant characteristic trait of those revolutionists, and it is cruelty that plays an indispensable role in the making of tyrants in this allegory of revolution.

What then is the legitimate means of revolution that can relieve China of the eternal recurrence of tyranny? Lu Xun's answer is a spiritual revolution designed to reform the national character, the symbol of which is the fight between Meijianchi's head and the King's head in "Forging the Swords". The spiritual aspect is a significant constituent of the 1911 Revolution and the leader of it is Zhang Taiyan, member of both the Guangfu Hui and the Tongmeng Hui, who published a series of articles including "Zhonghua Minguo Jie" 中华民国解 ("An Explanation of the Republic of China") in *Min Bao* 民报, the organ of the Tongmeng Hui, and delivered motivational speeches to the Chinese students in Tokyo in the 1900s, readying the intellectuals for the revolution and exerting tremendous influence on the thought of an entire generation.<sup>252</sup> In this sense, the scene in this story where Meijianchi and the dark man's heads fought together against the King's and in the end upon victory, the two heads "exchanged glances and smiled",<sup>253</sup> embodies the two organisations' collaboration towards their shared goal – to overthrow the Qing monarchy and establish a republic by means of spiritual revolution and military action. However, the success of the 1911 Revolution did not guarantee the success of a republic. At the end of "Forging the Swords" where the three heads and the King's body were buried together, Lu Xun reminds the readers of the fact that the Manchu regime was overthrown through the cooperation of the Guangfu Hui and the Tongmeng Hui, rather than the Tongmeng Hui only; in other words, the contribution of those pure-hearted intellectuals who devoted themselves to the spiritual

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<sup>252</sup> See Zhang Nianchi 章念驰. *Wo Suozhidao de Zufu Zhang Taiyan* 我所知道的祖父章太炎 (*My Grandfather Zhang Taiyan as I Know Him*). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016, p. 48.

<sup>253</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 145.

revolution should never be forgotten. In this sense, the essay “Fan Ainong” can be deemed as an obituary for this ill-fated intellectual and fellow member of the Guangfu Hui as well as for the organisation itself. Under the purge of the Guangfu Hui by the Tongmeng Hui before and after the 1911 Revolution, the Guangfu Hui is alleged to have disbanded with its leader Zhang Taiyan gradually no longer officially counted as one of the founders of the Republic.<sup>254</sup> This can also explain why Lu Xun in May 1926 recalled his encounter with Tao Chengzhang some 20 years earlier. Tao was living in poverty but persisted in trying to further the cause of the revolution. In this essay, Lu Xun drew a disheartening conclusion that “it is evident that although the present Republic of China was founded through the revolution, many fellow citizens still deem those revolutionists as rebels (luandang 乱党)”.<sup>255</sup> It is most likely the purge and stigmatisation inflicted upon his fellow revolutionists by the Tongmeng Hui and the Kuomintang that triggered Lu Xun to create a political allegory based on the old legend of Meijianchi’s revenge, as part of his own spiritual battle against the authoritarian Kuomintang in power, hoping his agonising reminiscences about his organisation’s members in the revolution could sink in and constitute part of the collective memory of his fellow citizens.

Moreover, this allegory of revolution is so penetrating that it can even be deemed as a prophecy for revolutions in the future in China where ideology, violence and dictatorship are deeply entwined. It needs to be noted that only ten days after Lu Xun finished writing

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<sup>254</sup> See Zhang Nianchi 章念驰. *Wo Suozhidao de Zufu Zhang Taiyan* 我所知道的祖父章太炎 (*My Grandfather Zhang Taiyan As I Know Him*). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016, p. 51.

<sup>255</sup> See Lu Xun. “Wei Bannong tiji Hedian hou, zuo” 为半农题记《何典》后，作” (A Postscript to Liu Bannong’s Preface to *Hedian*). in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 322. The original text is 现在的中华民国虽由革命造成，但许多中华民国国民，都仍以那时的革命者为乱党，是明明白白的。



“Forging the Swords” on 3 April 1927,<sup>256</sup> a bloody purge of the Communist Party members in Guangzhou was initiated by the ruling Kuomintang, with students and teachers from Sun Yat-sen University being arrested,<sup>257</sup> which was almost exactly the same as the Tongmeng Hui’s elimination of the Guangfu Hui members decades ago.<sup>258</sup> Thus, Lu Xun’s allegory of fratricide in the name of revolution immediately proved itself prophetic. In Kuriyagawa’s words, an allegory can be prophetic, when it “grasps the subconscious underlying the consciousness of human beings in a society at the present time, it can hint at their desires for the future”.<sup>259</sup> Unfortunately, Lu Xun’s unparalleled insight into the faithful intellectuals and the treacherous dictators in the Chinese national character also foretells the tragic fate of intellectuals during and after the Communist revolutions in China decades later who had endorsed the Communist Party’s revolution and made contributions but ended up the victims of persecution by the Communist Party. Below, the symbolic value of the swords and heads, together with Lu Xun’s criticism of Daoism and the Chinese heritage will be discussed.

### ***The symbol of the swords***

The original story of Meijianchi from *Lieyizhuan* 列异传 of the Wei Era (220 – 266 A.D.)

was first recorded in *Guxiaoshuo Gouchen* 古小说钩沉<sup>260</sup> (*A Compilation of Rediscovered*

*Ancient Stories*) which Lu Xun edited and compiled in 1921 but was not published until

1990. In a letter to Masuda Wataru in 1936, two months after *Old Tales Retold* was

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<sup>256</sup> See Lu Xun. “Riji shiliu [yijiuerqinian]” 日记十六[一九二七年] (Diary 16 of 1927), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 16. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p.16.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 20. Note 5 records that “The Chiang Kai-shek sect of Kuomintang initiated a purge in Shanghai on 12<sup>th</sup> April, and on the 15<sup>th</sup> launched a large-scale search and arrest of Communist Party members and the left-wing. Some forty faculty and students of Sun Yat-sen University were arrested. Lu Xun in this emergency meeting urged to bail out the arrested but failed.”

<sup>258</sup> See Zhou Leiming. “Guangfu hui yu xinhai Jiangsu guangfu – jianlun guangfu hui de xiaowang” 光复会与辛亥江苏光复—兼论光复会的消亡 (*The Guangfu Hui and The 1911 Revolution in Jiangsu – on the Disbanding of the Guangfu Hui*). *Nanjing Shehui Kexue* 南京社会科学, 2004 (12), p 50.

<sup>259</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 60.

<sup>260</sup> See Lu Xun. *Lu Xun Jilu Guji Congbian* 鲁迅辑录古籍丛编 (*The Collection of Books from Ancient times Edited by Lu Xun*). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1990, p. 124.

published, however, Lu Xun specified *Wuyue Chunqiu* 吴越春秋 or *Yuejueshu* 越绝书 as the origin of “Forging the Swords”.<sup>261</sup> Although Maruo Tsuneki 丸尾常喜 identified other sources of this fantastic legend of Meijianchi,<sup>262</sup> I argue for the significance of Lu Xun’s memory as it hints at the meaning hidden behind the symbol of swords – powerful weaponry forged in the Kingdoms of Wu and Yue, defending justice against tyranny. As a legend in *Wuyue Chunqiu* says, one of the celebrated swords *zhanlu* 湛卢 (pure black) owned by the King of Wu, He Lü (阖闾), flew by itself to the Kingdom of Chu (楚国) due to its detestation of the cruelty of the King of Wu,<sup>263</sup> which endows the precious sword with a spirit, or a noble character of telling right from wrong and taking actions accordingly. This is probably the reason why the sword stands out among all the powerful weapons in the Chinese heritage as the only companion of an honourable fighter for justice. In addition, swords are assimilated by Daoism and turned into one of its key symbols or instruments to expel the evil ghosts. As for Lu Xun, his admiration for the spirit of swords is evident in his agnomen used during the period from 1898 to 1901,<sup>264</sup> *jiajiansheng* 戛剑生, the literal translation of which is “a scholar brandishing a sword”. He called himself *jiajiansheng* from *kuaiji* 会稽, the oldest name of his hometown Shaoxing 绍兴 dating back to the era of Yu 禹, when it belonged to the Kingdom of Yue in present-day Zhejiang Province 浙江省. Therefore, swords symbolise the spirit of freedom in this area.

<sup>261</sup> See Lu Xun. 书信 (一九三六 致外国人士) (Letters to foreigners of the Year 1936), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 14. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 385-386.

<sup>262</sup> See Maruo Tsuneki. *Ren yu gui de jiuge – Lu Xun xiaoshuo lunxi* “人”与“鬼”的纠葛-鲁迅小说论析 (*The Entanglement of “Men” and “Ghosts” – An Analysis of Lu Xun’s Stories*). Translated by Qin Gong. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1995, pp. 296-297.

<sup>263</sup> See *Wuyue Chunqiu* – He Lü sannian 吴越春秋-阖闾三年 (The Third Year of King He Lü of *Chronicles of Kingdoms of Wu and Yue*). Viewed at <https://ctext.org/wu-yue-chun-qiu/he-lv-san-nian/zhs#n47777> on 2 May 2019.

<sup>264</sup> See Lu Xun. “Jiajiansheng zaji” 戛剑生杂记 (Notes from Jiajiansheng), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 8. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 527-528.

Such free spirit in defiance of tyranny as a cultural heritage of Zhejiang finds its most powerful voice in a poem entitled “Baojian Ge” 宝剑歌 (Song to the Precious Swords) by Qiu Jin, leader and martyr of the Guangfu Hui before the 1911 Revolution, in which this female revolutionist, who was also from Shaoxing, wrote that “There was no equal rights but the rule of the strong ... they disregard justice and rule with violence, ... we scholars should shoulder our responsibility to seek righteousness. ... Besides the two treasured swords of Gan Jiang 干将 and Mo Ye 莫邪, nothing could expel the darkness from the world.”<sup>265</sup> In this poem, the legendary swords named after the craftsmen who forged them recorded in *Wuyue Chunqiu* turn into the weapon of the revolutionists at that time against the tyranny of the Manchu regime. In 1904 and 1905, Qiu Jin was in Japan and joined the Guangfu Hui and then the Tongmeng Hui.<sup>266</sup> In addition, the righteousness and noble-mindedness associated with the symbol of the swords in “Forging the Swords” can be identified in the recollection of the birth of the swords by Meijianchi’s mother, and the observation by Meijianchi himself, featuring respectively “a jet of white vapour” billowing up into the sky and “turning into a white cloud”, as well as “a blue, steely light” that made “the moon and stars abruptly lose their brightness”.<sup>267</sup> The “white vapour 白气 (*baiqi*)” reminds one of the celebrated “*haoran zhiqi* 浩然之气” from *Mencius*, a noble spirit of intellectuals to defy injustice, and the “blue, steely light 青光 (*qingguang*)” alludes to the origin of the Guangfu Hui, an organisation of young scholars from gentry families in Zhejiang, as the character “*qing* 青” is the colour of

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<sup>265</sup> See Guo Yanli, Guo Zhen (ed.). *Qiu Jin ji · Xu Zihua ji* 秋瑾集 徐自华集 (*A Collection of Qiu Jin's Works · A Collection of Xu Zihua's Works*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2015. This is a long poem and the above quoted lines are originally 世无平权只强权 ..... 公理不恃恃赤铁 ..... 衣冠文弱难辞责 ..... 除却干将与莫邪, 世界伊谁开暗黑.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, pp. 123, 125.

the East (Zhejiang is located in eastern China), possibly originated from the character “*cang* 苍”,<sup>268</sup> referring to the colour of the grass or plants (a symbol either of vitality or of scholars who originated from common people). What’s more, in the first and only song of Meijianchi’s head in the story, the “bright blue light” repeats three times with a sincere plea of “forget me not”<sup>269</sup> that also endorses Lu Xun’s covert remembrance of the organisation he belonged to. The spiritual forerunners of the Guangfu Hui were also scholars from the Zhejiang area who defied the Manchu invasion over 300 years ago, among whom the most notable are Zhang Cangshui 张苍水 and Zhu Shunshui 朱舜水. What those intellectuals from the Zhejiang area have in common are their persistent fight both in spirit and in action against injustice and tyranny as well as their selfless devotion to defending rights for all rather than their own comfort in life. Such a spirit of faithfulness, though as intangible as the white vapour and the blue light, is the essential element that makes a noble human being and a treasured sword of righteousness. Last but not least, the human quality of earnestness or seriousness that the swords of justice symbolise in “Forging the Swords” can be translated into the Japanese term *shinken* 真剣. Coincidentally, Kuriyagawa Hakuson in *Symbols of Anguish* uses the term *shinken* 真剣 to denote exactly the same characteristic trait of earnestness as the fundamental quality of creators of literature and art.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> See Zhang Taiyan lecturing and Zhu Xizu 朱希祖, Qian Xuanton 钱玄同 and Zhou Shuren 周树人 recording. *Zhangtaiyan Shuowen Jiezi Shouke Biji* 章太炎说文解字授课笔记 (*Notes from the Lecture of Shuowen Jiezi by Zhang Taiyan*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2010, p. 215.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>270</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson. *Kumon no shōchō* 苦悶の象徴 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Tokyo: Kaizō sha (改造社). 大正 13, p. 23. The original text is 換言すれば、人間が一切の虚偽や誤魔化しを棄てて、純真に真剣に生きることの出来る唯一の生活だ (In other words, [literature and arts] is the only form of life in which humans can reject all the hypocrisy and perfunctoriness to live in a serious and earnest way).

### ***The three songs and the symbol of the head***

In this section, two songs by the dark man and one song by Meijianchi in “Forging the Swords” will be discussed to reveal the reason why Lu Xun inserts three ambiguous songs in the story. As previously stated, “Forging the Swords” is an allegory of the 1911 Revolution, and Lu Xun’s membership in the Guangfu Hui most likely put him in danger as the organisation was purged by its former ally, the Tongmeng Hui after the Republic was founded, so Lu Xun’s commemoration of his fellow members had to be covert. This is why in his letter to Masuda Wataru his explanation of the three songs is as ambiguous,

I don’t think there is anything hard to understand in “Forging the Swords”. However, please note that the meanings of the songs are ambiguous because they are sung by a weird man and a decapitated head and thus elude the understanding of us ordinary mortals. The third song is indeed magnificent, but the “Sing hey, sing ho” of “Sing hey, sing *ho*, a royal sight!” is a line adopted from bawdy popular folk music.

在铸剑里，我以为没有什么难懂的地方。但要注意的，是那里面的歌，意思都不明显，因为是奇怪的人和头颅唱出来的歌，我们这种普通人是难以理解的。第三首歌，确是伟丽雄壮，但“堂哉皇哉兮噯噯唷”中的“噯噯唷”，是用在猥亵小调的声音。<sup>271</sup>

Therefore, I argue the third song in the story sung by Meijianchi’s head after it was put into the boiling cauldron by the dark man, is a powerful call to arms against despotism by the Guangfu Hui, which goes:

The Sovereign’s rule spreads far and wide,	王泽流兮浩洋洋
He conquers foes on every side,	克服怨敌，怨敌克服兮，赫兮强！
The world may end, but not his might,	宇宙有穷止兮万寿无疆。
So here I come all gleaming bright.	幸我来也兮青其光！
Bright gleams the sword --- forget me not!	青其光兮永不相忘。
A royal sight, but sad my lot.	异处异处兮堂哉皇！
Sing hey, sing ho, a royal sight!	堂哉皇哉兮噯噯唷，
Come back, where gleams the bright blue light.	嗟来归来，嗟来陪来兮青其光！

<sup>271</sup> See Lu Xun. 书信 (一九三六 致外国人士) (Letters to foreigners of the Year 1936), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 14. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2005, p. 386.

...  
 Heigh ho, for the love we know!  
 I cut one head, one head, heigh ho!  
 I use one single head, not more,  
 The heads he uses are galore!...

.....  
 阿呼呜呼兮呜呼呜呼，  
 爱乎呜呼兮呜呼阿呼！  
 血一头颅兮爱乎呜呼。  
 我用一头颅兮而无万夫！  
 彼用百头颅，千头颅.....<sup>272</sup>

The first three lines are sharply satiric toward despotism, in which the comparison of the autocracy with a river running everywhere exposes an autocratic regime's tight control of the entire country, while the seeming praise for the "strength" of a despot reveals nothing but its cruel eradication of its enemies; the absurdity of despotic rule that aims to last forever culminates in the third line, through juxtaposition of the fact that even the universe has an end and so with wishes for "an eternal life to the emperor". In contrast to the mordacity in the first three lines, the next three are soulful remembrance of the young scholars who fought for the revolution that ended tyrannical monarchy in China, especially the grand heroism in the line of "*yichu yichu xi tangzaihuang* 异处异处兮堂哉皇" where "*yichu*", I maintain, refers to "*shenshou yichu* 身首异处" (the body and the head are in separate places), which can be interpreted as a glorification of the tremendous courage of the young scholars who were executed or died in their fight against despotism. Although several leaders of the Guangfu Hui were executed by the Manchu regime or the Tongmeng Hui, their spirit of defiance against autocracy still continues to inspire other fellow members, among them Lu Xun, in particular, who persevered in a spiritual revolution against autocracy for the rest of his life. In addition, as for the "line borrowed from bawdy songs", it is another irony of despotism by juxtaposing lewdness with the so-called "royal sight", which implies that it is the martyrs and

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<sup>272</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 123, pp. 140-141.

fighters of the Guangfu Hui who deserve the noble titles, and a despot who usurps the title is utterly despicable.

As for the other lines of this song, Meijianchi once again glorifies the spiritual revolution by the Guangfu Hui by chanting “I use one single head, not more; The heads he uses are galore”<sup>273</sup> in which the benevolence of the intellectuals and the brutality of a despot are starkly contrasted. The most puzzling line is undoubtedly “*jielai guilai, jielaipeilai xi qingqiguang* 嗟来归来，嗟来陪来兮青其光 (Come back, where gleams the bright blue light)”. My explanation of this line is that Lu Xun uses *jeu de mots* again to commemorate three leaders and martyrs of the Guangfu Hui in secrecy, in which “*jie* 嗟” refers to Xu Xilin 徐锡麟, “*gui* 归” points to Qiu Jin 秋瑾, and “*pei* 陪” signifies Tao Chengzhang 陶成章. The characters *jie* 嗟 and *lin* 麟 come from “*yujielinxi* 于嗟麟兮” in a song titled “Lin zhi zhi 麟之趾 (Hooves of a kylin)” from *Shijing* 诗经 (*The Book of Songs*),<sup>274</sup> which is interpreted as a gasp of admiration for a legendary animal symbolising peace and prosperity as well as the noble characters of the aristocrats in the original song, and Lu Xun uses this literary quotation to refer to the nobility of Xu Xilin who sacrificed his fortune and life for the masses in Meijianchi’s song. For Qiu Jin, a female revolutionist from a gentry family who left her husband and children for the cause of rebellion against tyranny and led the Guangfu Hui before her death, Lu Xun adopts the character *gui* 归 to denote her, because the traditional form of this character, 歸, originally means “a married woman”. Zhang Taiyan in his lecture on *Shuowen Jiezi* in Tokyo interpreted the character as “a woman” according to Lu Xun’s

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<sup>273</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, pp. 123, 141.

<sup>274</sup> See “Lin zhi zhi” 麟之趾 from *Shijing* 诗经, viewed at <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/lin-zhi-zhi/zh> on 22 May 2019. The entire song runs “麟之趾，振振公子，于嗟麟兮，麟之定，振振公姓，于嗟麟兮，麟之角，振振公族，于嗟麟兮”.

notes from those lectures.<sup>275</sup> This is probably the second time Qiu Jin is alluded to in Lu Xun's stories after Xia Yu 夏瑜 from "Medicine". As for Tao Chengzhang, the character *pei* 陪 is a word play to combine the radicals of his surname *tao* 陶 and one character, *zhang* 章, from his name, i.e. "𠂔", "立" and "日" together, with "日" replaced with "口". Through these word plays Lu Xun carefully and skillfully inserts in the song, it is evident that the song of Meijianchi is an ode dedicated to the martyrs and fellow fighters of the Guangfu Hui that Lu Xun composes. It is a survivor's tribute to his fellow fighters of the spiritual revolution against despotism to honour their determination and nobility.

On the other hand, the two shorter songs by the dark man, a symbol of avengers who are banded into a political party, are all about his criticism of "yifu 一夫 (lit. "one person [alone]," i.e. a despot)". The first one was chanted by the dark man when he took Meijianchi's head and sword immediately after the young man killed himself, which goes:

Sing hey, sing ho!	哈哈爱兮爱乎爱乎！
The single one who loved the sword.	爱青剑兮一个仇人自屠。
Has taken death as his reward.	夥颐联翩兮多少一夫。
Those who go single are galore,	一夫爱青剑兮呜呼不孤。
Who love the sword are alone no more!	头换头兮两个仇人自屠。
Foe for foe, ha! Head for head!	一夫则无兮爱乎呜呼！
Two men by their own hands are dead.	爱乎呜呼兮呜呼阿呼，
	阿呼呜呼兮呜呼呜呼！ <sup>276</sup>

<sup>275</sup> See Zhang Taiyan lecturing and Zhu Xizu 朱希祖, Qian Xuanton 钱玄同 and Zhou Shuren 周树人 recording. *Zhangtaiyan Shuowen Jiezi Shouke Biji* 章太炎说文解字授课笔记 (*Notes from the Lecture of Shuowen Jiezi by Zhang Taiyan*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2010, p. 76.

<sup>276</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, pp. 134-135.



In this song, “those who go single are galore”<sup>277</sup> can be viewed as a criticism of the “lone assassin” strategy of the Guangfu Hui that led to the death of Xu Xilin, Qiu Jin and even Tao Chengzhang, as opposed to the principle of the Tongmeng Hui to merge rebel groups from all walks of life, especially their military force, by fair means or foul to eradicate the powerful leaders who were perceived as a threat to the Tongmeng Hui’s dominance. After the 1911 Revolution, Tao Chengzhang was assassinated, and so were other members, especially the military leaders of the Guangfu Hui, with only scholars like Zhang Taiyan who survived but were expelled from the political arena.<sup>278</sup> Therefore, in the first song of the dark man, he was intoxicated by his effortless success in deceiving Meijianchi into handing over his sword (military force) and head (his spiritual power). In addition, in the second song, the dark man was chanting his own slogan for the revolution, with its significance resting on the spiritual side rather than the military one, as the fourth and fifth lines are “Ten thousand heads in death have bowed. I only use one single head”.<sup>279</sup> Therefore, the head as a symbol in “Forging the Swords” exhibits its full meaning: the spiritual war against tyranny that is rooted in the characteristic traits of the Chinese people. In other words, Lu Xun considers despotism not as a political institution, but as a common trait in the Chinese national character that has been cultivated under long-running despotic monarchies. In this sense, a link between Lu Xun’s spiritual battle and the reform of the national character can be established.

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<sup>277</sup> See Zhang Taiyan lecturing and Zhu Xizu 朱希祖, Qian Xuanton 钱玄同 and Zhou Shuren 周树人 recording. *Zhangtaiyan Shuowen Jiezi Shouke Biji* 章太炎说文解字授课笔记 (*Notes from the Lecture of Shuowen Jiezi by Zhang Taiyan*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2010, p. 135.

<sup>278</sup> See Zhang Nianchi. *Wo Suozhidao de Zufu Zhang Taiyan* 我所知道的祖父章太炎 (*My Grandfather Zhang Taiyan as I Know Him*). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016, p. 56.

<sup>279</sup> See Lu Xun. *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, pp. 123, 139.

### *Criticism of Daoism and the masses*

Moreover, the masses are also the subject of Lu Xun's criticism, not on a personal basis, but certain characteristic traits commonly found in them. It is reflected in the third line of the dark man's second song "*minmeng mingxing xi yifu hulu*" 民萌冥行兮一夫壶卢, as the dark man was performing magic on the head in the cauldron:

Sing hey for love, for love heigh ho!	哈哈爱兮爱乎爱乎!
Ah, love! Ah, blood! Who is not so?	爱兮血兮兮谁乎独无。
Men grope in dark, the king laughs loud,	民萌冥行兮一夫壶卢。
Ten thousand heads in death have bowed.	彼用百头颅, 千头颅兮用万头颅!
I only use one single head,	我用一头颅兮而无万夫。
For one man's head let blood be shed!	爱一头颅兮血乎呜呼!
Blood – let it flow!	血乎呜呼兮呜呼阿呼,
Sing hey, sing ho!	阿呼呜呼兮呜呼呜呼! <sup>280</sup>

The explanation of the character *meng* 萌 by Zhang Taiyan can be found in Lu Xun's note:

"[it] refers to sprouts, ...from which the ancient concept of '*min* 民' is manifest; the ancients considered the masses as grass",<sup>281</sup> and the original *Shuowen Jiezi* explains "*min*" as "*zhongmeng* 众萌 (many a sprout)". Although the masses are large in number, they don't know their goal in life but embrace the "utopia of despotism", which is my interpretation of this line of the song. Such a "utopia" of one man's rule of the entire country, or a totalitarian regime is, I would suggest, symbolised by the term "*yifu hulu* 一夫壶卢 (lit. a perfect world dominated by a despot)", because the term "*hulu* 壶卢" is the archaic form of "葫芦

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-139.

<sup>281</sup> See Zhang Taiyan lecturing and Zhu Xizu 朱希祖, Qian Xuanton 钱玄同 and Zhou Shuren 周树人 recording. *Zhangtaiyan Shuowen Jiezi Shouke Biji* 章太炎说文解字授课笔记 (*Notes from the Lecture of Shuowen Jiezi by Zhang Taiyan*). Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2010, p. 42.

(gourds)”<sup>282</sup> and the plant gourd is a typical symbol of traditional Chinese medicine as well as the world of immortals or a perfect world created by Daoist priests.<sup>283</sup> Unfortunately, this utopia of absolute power gripped by one man, no matter how much paint it brushes on itself, is still a cruel dystopia. However, the masses refuse to honestly and carefully examine their conditions to recognise the delusion of a Daoist Elysium in the human world. What the masses accept is the idea of a strong man ruling the entire country, regardless of how cruel he is; rather, they assume cruelty to be an indispensable quality for such a role so that this man can oppress other more powerful or more cruel rebels to guarantee the safety of the masses. The same perspective can be found in an essay Lu Xun wrote in 1926.<sup>284</sup> Additionally, a scene in “Forging the Swords” where the masses “fell one by one to their knees” in front of the parade of the King’s warriors “carrying batons, spears, swords, bows and flags” ingeniously implies the reason behind the masses’ worship of military force and their endorsement of tyranny. Behind their fervent support for a despot lies their ingrained fear of violence to such an extent that they are willing to trade their own rights and freedom for protection. It is this pathetic condition of the masses that prompts them to indulge in the deceptive idea of a Daoist utopia. Therefore, blind worship of might and one strong-man’s rule is the most significant characteristic trait of the masses.

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<sup>282</sup> See Lu Xun. *Wild Grass*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p 35. Lu Xun uses the exact form of 壶卢 referring to 葫芦 in “回她什么：冰糖壶卢 (A stick of candied haws, her gift from me)”.

<sup>283</sup> See Chen Kaike. “Hulu wenhua jianlun”葫芦文化简论 (A Brief Discussion about the Cultural Representations of Gourds). *Wuling Xuekan* 武陵学刊, 1995 (5), pp. 63-64.

<sup>284</sup> See Lu Xun. “Tan huangdi” 谈皇帝 (About the Emperor), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 268-269. “She [an illiterate woman] maintains there has to be [an emperor], and his acting as a tyrant must be tolerated. As for the benefit of an emperor, probably the masses need to rely on him to suppress other stronger men. Therefore, indiscriminate killing is an indispensable quality for an emperor. (她以为要有【皇帝】的，而且应该听凭他作威作福。至于用处，仿佛在靠他来镇压比自己更强梁的别人，所以随便杀人，正是非备不可的要件)”

Additionally, another level of Lu Xun's criticism of the Daoist influence on the Chinese national character is the characteristic of muddle-headedness, i.e. the inability to tell things apart. The confusion of the masses is the highlight of the fourth section of "Forging the Swords" where neither the queen nor concubines, or the princes and ministers could distinguish the remaining three skulls. The contributing factor to their muddle-headedness is their perfunctory attitudes towards the King, who was never loved or respected by his seemingly submissive subjects. Moreover, from the Daoist apotheosis of the emperors through overly exaggerated glorification of their appearance and their birth, truth is further distorted or even obliterated. For instance, the claim of the third concubine of the King that the King had a very high *longzhun* 龙准 (nose) did not help solve the riddle at all. The term *longzhun* originates from the flattering description of Liu Bang, the first emperor of the Han Dynasty in *Shiji* 史记, "*longzhun er longyan* 隆准而龙颜" (a high nose and a solemn look),<sup>285</sup> which highlights the resemblance of the emperor's facial features to a dragon's and tells nothing about the appearance of Liu Bang himself. Therefore, Lu Xun may suggest that the muddle-headedness of the masses can also be contributed to by inaccurate and false records and teaching material that propagate official ideology and fail to cultivate critical and truth-seeking minds.

Lu Xun's criticism of the national character culminates in the scene at the end of "Forging the Swords" where three heads and the King's body were buried together. In terms of symbolism, the head refers to the spirit or the characteristic traits while the body denotes the identity of an emperor or a dictator. That suggests the possibility that the dark man (the avenger), Meijianchi (the intellectual) and the King (the despot) can be the same person or

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<sup>285</sup> See Sima Qian, *Shiji* – gaozu benji 史记 – 高祖本纪 (A Biography of Liu Bang from *The Records of the Historian*). <https://ctext.org/shiji/gao-zu-ben-ji/zh>, viewed on 21 May 2019.

assume the same identity of being a dictator if any of them grasps all the power in their hand. In other words, Lu Xun reveals the complexity in the characteristic traits of a dictator, who was born a pure-hearted young man and was told to avenge his family or nation's feud, by means of first cooperating with and later eradicating his partners, overthrowing the previous king and taking the throne, and finally dying in the hands of rebels and avengers despite his cruel suppression of them. In this sense, this story is not only an allegory of the 1911 Revolution, but also an allegory of the Chinese national character; Lu Xun warns his fellow men that the characteristic traits of a dictator, i.e. being suspicious and cruel, are rooted in everyone, including himself and his fellow members of the Guangfu Hui, Tao Chengzhang and Wang Jinfa, the latter of whom was among those whom Lu Xun thought would have caused the suspected suicide of Fan Ainong, together with members of the Tongmeng Hui who assassinated Tao Chengzhang. Lu Xun's honest and disinterested reflection on his own experience in the revolution, triggered by his stay in Xiamen where Qiu Jin grew up,<sup>286</sup> makes "Forging the Swords" stand out in *Old Tales Retold* as an excellent work inspired by Kuriyagawa's theory of symbolism and collective human suffering. In this sense, this story suggests Lu Xun's reflections on China's history as marked by a recurrent cycle of peace and turbulence. The root lies in dictatorship, not in the sense of a political institution, but in terms of a common characteristic of the Chinese that is cultivated by an ideology of dictatorship and cruelty hidden in the traditional cultural heritage. This is the reason why in the following five stories in *Old Tales Retold* that Lu Xun wrote in Shanghai, he gives up symbolism and takes up polished sarcasm (*youhua*) to examine ancient Chinese philosophers, not to go back to the ancients, but to pinpoint another imminent crisis – the failed communication between the intelligentsia and the masses. Lu Xun proposes his solution to solving the communication

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<sup>286</sup> See Tang Yuxian. "Qiu Jin queqie shengnian tanxi" 秋瑾确切生年探析 (A Study of the Exact Year when Qiu Jin was Born). *Zhangzhou Shiyan Xuebao* 漳州师院学报, 1997 (1), p. 48.

failure with a new language of *dazhong yu* 大众语 (a language for the masses). On the other hand, his criticism of dictatorship continues and deepens in these stories, with more ancient historical records retold to allude to current affairs.

## Chapter Three

In this chapter, the last five stories of *Old Tales Retold* will be analysed through the potential influence of Lu Xun's translations of *Out of the Ivory Tower* by Kuriyagawa Hakuson, as well as *Thought, Landscape and Characters* 思想、山水、人物 by Tsurumi Yūsuke 鶴見祐輔, two representative works of social and political criticism at that time in Japan, whose common point, the national character of the Japanese as opposed to the Westerners, most likely prompts Lu Xun to take up episodes of orthodox Chinese history in *Records of the Grand Historian* and the pre-Qin and Han philosophers to present his own criticism of the Chinese political and cultural heritage. "Curbing the Flood" and "Gathering Vetch" are political allegories of authoritarianism and the Kingly Way, while "Opposing Aggression", "Leaving the Pass" and "Resurrecting the Dead" examine three stereotypes of the Chinese intelligentsia with Mozi and Zhuangzi representing two opposite types. Compared with the first three stories in *Old Tales Retold*, the last five feature more characters with varied voices, plots with more twists, and the form of a one-act play, suggesting a failure in communication between the characters that sheds light on a fractured society under an authoritarian regime. In these stories, Lu Xun expands the scope of his criticism to the interactions between people from all walks of life to demonstrate the extent to which Chinese society fails due to the inability of various social classes to understand each other. Failed communication, as an evident theme in the first story "Mending Heaven", is renewed especially in "Resurrecting the Dead" and "Leaving the Pass", but from a brand-new perspective of social classes rather

than individuals. Berta Krebsova puts forward that in the last three stories, Lu Xun assigns “a more concrete form and a deeper purpose” to the role of literature in transforming the society” from “the standpoint of a class ideology”. However, this is not to say that Lu Xun emphasises “class struggle” within society; instead, what he reveals is the huge divergence and fracture within it and calls for the intelligentsia to act as a medium connecting the common people with the government through thoughtful actions and legitimate means, like Mozi in “Opposing Aggression”.

*Out of the Ivory Tower* is the second and last of Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s books that Lu Xun translated. It is significantly different from *Symbols of Anguish*, which puts forward a unique theory of literature based on the East Asian Buddhist philosophy and theory of psychoanalysis borrowed from the West. Rather than focusing on the nature of literature and symbolism, in *Out of the Ivory Tower*, Kuriyagawa urges his readers to walk out of their studies to witness and examine the masses, pointing out the flaws in the national character of the then Japanese people and the diseases of the Japanese society through the lens of, again, Western literature, art and social thought. Lu Xun’s translating of the two books by Kuriyagawa, with a switch of perspective from the internal world of writers and artists to the masses and the hustle and bustle of society, coincides with a major change in Lu Xun’s life and work. After he finished writing “Forging the Swords”, Lu Xun resigned from Sun Yat-sen University and moved to Shanghai, a shift from academic research and teaching to an independent writing career in a metropolis with people from all walks of life. It is also the case with *Old Tales Retold*: if the first three stories reflect the writer’s internal struggle triggered by his personal life, then the latter five, wrought with more polished skills, are set against a much larger backdrop with more interactions between a wider variety of characters.



To prove the potential influence of Kuriyagawa's book on *Old Tales Retold*, the first thing is to discuss Lu Xun's view of *Out of the Ivory Tower* in the postscript to his translation.

In the postscript, Lu Xun quotes from Kuriyagawa's other collection *At the Crisscross Streets* to explain the immediate circumstances of a writer or artist who exits the ivory tower, a symbol of artistic supremacy that champions a pure and lofty "palace of arts" detached from the ugly, vulgar mundane world.<sup>287</sup> In his quote, the choices available out of the ivory tower are as many as the crisscross streets, and Kuriyagawa identifies the one taken by "cultural critics aimed at social reform"<sup>288</sup> as preferable. Then Lu Xun points out the first three essays in the collection are of greatest importance where Kuriyagawa, like a warrior, launches pungent criticism of the characteristics of the Japanese, including "listlessness, sitting on the fence, tractableness, hypocrisy, stinginess, arrogance and conservativeness".<sup>289</sup> At the end of the postscript, Lu Xun indicates that the same characteristics can be found in his fellow Chinese and this collection of essays can be "taken by the young Chinese as the medicine to cure the same diseases".<sup>290</sup>

The first three essays that Lu Xun deems to be the most significant are titled "Out of the Ivory Tower", "An Observation of Dilettantism" and "From the Soul to the Flesh as Opposed to From the Flesh to the Soul", each having profound influences on his writing of the last five stories of *Old Tales Retold*. Moreover, the most prominent element, I argue, resides in the seventh and eighth chapters of *Out of the Ivory Tower*, titled "The Clever Men" and "The Idiots" about two stereotypes of the Japanese, which most likely prompts Lu Xun to mould

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<sup>287</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson, *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 80.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

characters of the two types based on celebrated episodes from the ancient history of China, with Mozi from “Opposing Aggression” representing “the idiots”. In addition, the last essay in Kuriyagawa’s collection, discussing the striking differences between Western and Japanese cultures in treating “the material (the flesh)” and “the spirit (the soul)”, casts significant influence on “Resurrecting the Dead” in which Lu Xun satirises some of his fellow writers who fail to recognise the complicated relationship between the material and the spirit.

On the other hand, Lu Xun’s translation of *Thought, Landscape and Characters* by Tsurumi Yūsuke, which is probably the only one about political criticism in his translations, also exerts influence on the last five stories of *Old Tales Retold*, especially on “Curbing the Flood” and “Gathering Vetch” in which autocracy with an iron hand that dominated the Chinese political system for thousands of years is subtly attacked from the perspective of political liberalism Lu Xun absorbs from Tsurumi’s essay collection. In the translator’s note to this collection, Lu Xun points out the importance of an essay titled “On Liberalism”. This is the reason why I argue that the two stories also covertly satirise political figures of his times such as Chiang Kai-shek and Zhang Taiyan, as a warning to his fellow citizens against dictatorship pushed forward by Chiang and an elegy for the intellectuals of high moral principles like Zhang who are victimised by *wangdao* 王道 (the Kingly Way). Lu Xun’s retelling of these historical stories in modern vernacular Chinese, to some extent, reveals his perspectives on Chinese history: it is a stagnant process under the tight control of an authoritarian ideology that unavoidably results in a fractured society, the nature of which can be identified as similar to the “eternal recurrence” of Frederick Nietzsche’s in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, whose translation most possibly inspired Lu Xun to conceive the first story “Mending Heaven” in *Old Tales Retold*.

As summarised in his note, Lu Xun praises Tsurumi's essay collection for its insight into the current situations of Britain and the U.S. as well as its insightful examination of the national characters of Japan and other countries. Therefore, it can be argued that criticism of the national character is a shared focus of *Out of the Ivory Tower* and *Thought, Landscape and Characters* that prompts Lu Xun to compose the last five stories to examine various stereotypes of the Chinese national character including political figures and intellectuals. Below, I will discuss the types of "the clever man", "the idiot" and "the slave" in "Opposing Aggression" and "Gathering Vetch" in detail.

### **The evolution of "the clever man" and "the idiot"**

Two stereotypes of the Japanese are vividly sketched by Kuriyagawa Hakuson in the seventh essay of the collection where he defines the "clever man" as those who gratify their "despicable selfishness" by making use of the loopholes in laws and rules.<sup>291</sup> In the next essay entitled "The Idiot", Kuriyagawa states that "the idiot", like Henrik Ibsen or Leo Tolstoy, is the type that Japan urgently needs before he provides a lengthy definition:

The exact definition of an idiot refers to a person who acts only on his own heart that is not fake or disguised without calculating gains and losses. An idiot is the one who contemplates things for what they are in a downright way to the absolute truth of them and applies this to his own life. An idiot is the one who consistently adds new firewood to the flame of his internal life that blazes hot and never slacks in replenishing himself.

所谓呆子者，其真解，就是踢开利害的打算，专凭不伪不饰的自己的本心而动的人。是本质底地，彻底底地，第一义底地来思索事物，而能将这实现于自己的生活的人。是在炎炎地烧着的烈火似的内部生命的火焰里，常常加添新柴，而不怠于自我的充实的人。<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson, *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 101.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

Kuriyagawa also cites Nietzsche as an example to illustrate his point of view that, from the perspective of the “clever man”, the “idiot” looks foolish and could possibly be condemned as a lunatic by the masses despite the fact that these idiots are those “to carry out reform, to revolt and to be awakened earlier just like Prometheus who fights for humankind”.<sup>293</sup> Since the whole of human history is advanced by these “idiots”, Kuriyagawa is proud of himself being labelled as one, and denotes that the democratic modern times of the masses rely on individuals who resemble that “idiot”, rather than heroes and prophets, to carry out the causes that usually were achieved by a handful of great men.<sup>294</sup>

Then, in the next two essays many of his fellow Japanese are singled out as being “frivolous and superficial” because there are too few “idiots, fools and crackpots”.<sup>295</sup> Furthermore, he maintains that the French and the Russians are two equivalent but opposite forces, representing the urban culture and the rustic culture respectively, both of whom have benefited the world with their unique ideas and movements. Furthermore, the type of “idiot” that Kuriyagawa praises highly is more commonly found in the rustic culture of “barbarian Russia”, and this is the reason why he composes a full-length essay to describe the nation that keeps the power of the “idiot”.<sup>296</sup> Most likely, Kuriyagawa’s criticism of the defects of his fellow Japanese strikes a chord with Lu Xun, thus prompting him to write a very long postscript to clarify his purpose to translate *Out of the Ivory Tower* into Chinese – to introduce to the Chinese readers “the serious diseases of the Japanese people that Kuriyagawa diagnoses as well as his prescriptions” to the “Chinese people who suffer from the same diseases”, on the ground that quinine can cure malaria no matter whether the patients are

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., pp. 106-107.

Japanese or Chinese.<sup>297</sup> Although the essay on the “idiot” is not mentioned in this postscript, I would still argue for its thoroughgoing influence on Lu Xun’s work and Lu Xun’s efforts to accommodate the stereotypes identified by Kuriyagawa in the Japanese to the national character of the Chinese, so that the “localised” characters can penetrate the subconscious of his fellow citizens.

The first of Lu Xun’s “localisation” efforts can be identified in one essay titled “Congmingren he shazi he nucai” 聪明人和傻子和奴才 (The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave) in *Wild Grass*, written on Dec 26 1925,<sup>298</sup> 12 days after he wrote the postscript for his translated collection of *Out of the Ivory Tower*, published in the same month. This short essay centres around a slave who complained to a fool and a wise man how miserable his life and work to serve his master was, and the wise man showed his sympathy with a sigh. However, when the fool acted to knock down the wall of the slave’s abode to open a window for him, the slave not only prevented him from doing so but also summoned other slaves to drive the fool away. Finally, his master recognised his “good” behaviour and praised the slave, who was also lauded by the wise man. If set in comparison with Kuriyagawa’s “clever man” and “idiot”, this short piece sketches two identical personalities among the Chinese and features another that is typical among Lu Xun’s fellow citizens – “the slave”, who takes the leading role in this allegory and exhibits pathetic servility to sacrifice his own rights to defend the property of his master and becomes inebriated by the master’s praise. This slavish stereotype of the Chinese national character is the core of Lu Xun’s criticism of his fellow citizens during his early years in his essay collection *Fen 坟* (*Grave*) and culminates in his vivid sketch of Ah Q in 1921. Its origin can probably be traced back to “Moluo shilishuo” 摩罗诗

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>298</sup> See Lu Xun, *Wild Grass*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, pp. 157-161.

力说 (On the Power of Mara Poetry)<sup>299</sup> written in classical Chinese in 1907 in Japan, in which Lu Xun quotes Byron's characterisation of the Greeks he encountered when attempting to aid their war for independence against Turkey as "hereditary slaves" and rejection of their national character as tragically beyond remedy.<sup>300</sup> The influence of Byron's accusation of the Greek national character on Lu Xun's criticism of his fellow citizens can be found crystalised in his most celebrated novella "The True Story of Ah Q" where the satire of the slavishness lurking inside the Chinese national character has aroused immense resonance in generations of readers.

Moreover, beyond this culmination, Lu Xun probes national character of the Chinese even further in an essay written three years later – "Lun zhaoxiang zhilei" 论照相之类 (Thoughts on Taking Photos and Other Matters). In this essay, Lu Xun cites Theodor Lipps's comment on the characteristics of a slave from *Die Ethischen Grundfragen* 伦理学的根本问题 (*The Fundamental Questions of Ethics*) that being a slave and being a master is indeed opposite sides of the same coin, in that if one recognises the possibility of being a master, then he/she naturally assumes the opposite side of servility. Therefore, when this person loses his power of being a master, he immediately becomes a loyal slave of his new master. Then, Lu Xun employs an example of Sun Hao 孙皓, the last king of Wu during the Three Kingdoms Period (220 – 280 A.D.) to support Lipps's theory of such a slave/master dichotomy.<sup>301</sup> Moreover, another essay, "Dengxia manbi" 灯下漫笔 (Random Thoughts under the Lamplight) written six months later can be cited as another example of Lu Xun's examination

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<sup>299</sup> See Jon von Kowallis, "Translating Lu Xun's Māra: Determining the 'Source' Text, the 'Spirit' versus 'Letter' Dilemma and Other Philosophical Conundrums". *Front Lit. Stud. China*, 2013, 7(3); pp. 422-440.

<sup>300</sup> See Lu Xun, "Moluo shilishuo" 摩罗诗力说 (On the Power of Mara Poetry), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 83.

<sup>301</sup> See Lu Xun, "Lun zhaoxiang zhilei" 论照相之类 (Thoughts on Taking a Photo and Other Matters), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 193-194.

into the servility of the Chinese national character – the desire of being a slavish subject to a master in the Chinese national character as well as their complacency when their wish to succumb to a powerful force is gratified. In addition, in the second section of the essay, Lu Xun discusses the nature of the “man-eating” culture as well as its deeply ingrained origin – the rigid social hierarchy that represses inferiors, with children and females at the bottom of the system bearing the most profound tragic fate of being “consumed” by those superiors. This important essay was written in April of 1925, shortly after his translation of the first 16 essays of Kuriyagawa’s *Out of the Ivory Tower* that was published in *Jingbao Supplement* 京报副刊 in February and March. To sum up, I argue that servility is a significant element in Lu Xun’s criticism of the Chinese national character, and his translation of Kuriyagawa’s essays “The Clever Man” and “The Idiot” most likely triggered him to add two stereotypes into his exploration of his own psyche as well as his fellow men. His first attempt is a short piece, “The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave” in *Wild Grass* written at the end of 1925, and his second efforts, more mature in terms of length and depth, are “Opposing Aggression” and “Gathering Vetch” in *Old Tales Retold*, written nearly 10 years later. In the following section, the two stories will be analysed in detail in terms of their brilliant characterisation of the epitomised “slave”, “idiot” and “clever man” as part of Lu Xun’s ongoing efforts in his criticism of the Chinese national character, which also serves as a microscopic example of how Lu Xun, through his translations, polished his writing skills by drawing inspiration from them.

### **“Opposing Aggression”**

Berta Krebsova associates “good and justice” as the core of Mozi’s teaching in her analysis of this story. She also links the story with the Japanese invasion of China in the 1930s. Wang Yao identifies Mozi in this story as representatives of “the toiling people”. I agree more with

Pearl Hsia Chen's point of view that this story reveals "some of the fundamental aspects of Mohism as elements of Chinese culture and socialistic ideology that must be preserved". I argue that such elements are the characteristic traits of the national character that Lu Xun aims to preserve. In this section, a positive example of the "idiot" represented by Mozi in "Opposing Aggression"<sup>302</sup> will be analysed. Mozi is the second, most possibly the last, positive character in *Old Tales Retold* after Nü Wa. His "idiocy" lies in his steadfastness in action, his humanitarianism and his use of logical thinking in debate. First of all, Mozi in this story fits the definition Kuriyagawa proposes in *Out of the Ivory Tower* – "an idiot refers to a person who acts only on his own heart that is not fake or disguised without calculating gains and losses".<sup>303</sup> This "idiot" applies his anti-war principle to action at his own expense without asking for any reward from the Kingdom of Song. That is to say, he is aware that his efforts to persuade the King of Chu out of his planned attack against another kingdom may cost him his own life, as he confessed to the King at the end of the fourth section. Ironically, what Mozi received in the end from the Kingdom of Song that he helped to save is nothing but rude treatment. In this sense, his idiocy is the same as Boyi and Shuqi in persisting with their own moral principles at the risk of their lives, though their actions differ significantly: the two brothers' way of preserving their principles is characterised by "withdrawal", while Mozi's way can be described as demonstrating the spirit of enterprise – to reach the goal despite all the setbacks on the way including opposition from a Confucian disciple, inadequate equipment such as meagre food and fragile straw sandals, one of his disciples' betrayal, and Gongshu Ban's initial declination to introduce Mozi to the king. It is Mozi's

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<sup>302</sup> This story tells the journey of Mozi to the Kingdom of Chu to talk the king out of a war against the Kingdom of Song. It starts with Mozi's conversation with a Confucian disciple and his own disciple about his preparation for the journey. In the second section, several of Mozi's disciples staged their own ways of opposing aggression in the weak and poor Kingdom of Song. The third and fourth sections feature Mozi's conversations with Gongshu Ban and the King of Chu and his success in stopping the upcoming war. The story ends with Mozi's elaboration on his principle of justice during his farewell with Gongshu Ban and his return journey.

<sup>303</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson, *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 103.



steadfastness in his belief of helping others to resist aggression that marks the “positive idiocy” of this type as opposed to Boyi and Shuqi, who simply withdrew all the way to their demise.

### ***Love and respect***

Love is another element the character Mozi harbours in this story, in his original words “now righteousness can benefit men, so it is said that righteousness is a treasure to the world”,<sup>304</sup> which reveals Lu Xun’s understanding of the principles of “love and respect” upheld by the ancient master. Mozi’s love differs from the Confucian benevolence in that it is characterised by pity and sympathy for the weak that trigger solid actions to seek justice for the disadvantaged, which can be supported by Mozi’s motive he revealed to his disciple at the beginning of the story: “how can a small country like Song hold out against Chu? I must put a stop to this”<sup>305</sup>. In addition, the clever trick Mozi played when he met Gongshu Ban, that he offered gold to hire Gongshu Ban to kill someone, prompted him to become aware of the inhuman nature of warfare. In the final section, Mozi explains his principle of love in his conversation with Gongshu Ban as “all that benefits mankind is ingenious and good; all that doesn’t is clumsy and bad.”<sup>306</sup> In the same conversation, the specific means to achieve it are pointed out as “love and respect” that can nurture affection and avoid *youhua* (glibness or insincerity) between people, and therefore can bring along “mutual benefit” for everyone.<sup>307</sup>

This paragraph, together with Mozi’s other conversations with Gongshu Ban and the King of Chu, is a literal translation from the original *Writings of Mozi* in classical Chinese. Here, Lu

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<sup>304</sup> See *Writings of Mozi*. <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=812#s10010182>. Viewed on 20 September 2019. The original Chinese text is 而义可以利人，故曰义，天下之良宝也。

<sup>305</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 177.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p.191.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

Xun translates “*xia* 狎 (take liberties with something)” into “*youhua* 油滑 and the key word “*youhua*” from Lu Xun’s preface of *Old Tales Retold* is highlighted. Therefore, I argue, “*youhua*” serves as the fundamental element in Lu Xun’s criticism of the Chinese national character that he derives from Mozi. In addition, identifying lack of “respect” as the contributing factor to “*youhua*” can be deemed as Lu Xun’s adaptation of Mozi’s doctrine of “*minggui*” 明鬼 (on punitive ghosts)<sup>308</sup> into the modern Chinese language, by way of keeping the functions of the ghosts and spirits while rejecting the images of them. In this chapter of *Writings of Mozi*, what the master argues is not only the existence of ghosts but their role in punishing those who do evil deeds. Mozi cites the overthrow of King Jie of Xia 夏桀 as well as King Zhou of Shang 商纣 as punishment from ghosts and spirits and concludes that “this is why I say wealth and numbers, daring and strength, strong armour and sharp weapons cannot defend against the punishment of ghosts and spirits”.<sup>309</sup>

Evidently, the punitive ghosts and spirits are the embodiment of justice that defends and guarantees the interests of the weak and disadvantaged. Their existence and functions do not aim at intimidating the general public but at restraining the powerful from oppressing and persecuting others. The ritual of offering sacrifice to them can “befriend the neighbourhood” so that “to bless the ghosts above” can be a “great blessing to the sentient beings of the world”.<sup>310</sup> Therefore, to believe in the existence of punitive ghosts and spirits, or to respect such a mysterious and higher entity that can enforce justice, is crucial to a society. As humans turn into ghosts after death, to respect ghosts is to respect every single human being

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<sup>308</sup> See Piotr Gibas, “Mozi and the Ghosts: The Concept of Ming 明 in Mozi’s Minggui 明鬼”. *Early China* (2017) Vol. 40, pp. 89-123.

<sup>309</sup> See *Writings of Mozi*. <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=767>. Viewed on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2019. The original Chinese text is 此吾所谓鬼神之罚，不可为富贵众强，勇力强武，坚甲利兵者，此也。

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. The original Chinese text is 今吾为祭祀也 ... 上以交鬼之福，下以和驩聚众，取亲乎乡里 ... 则此岂非天下利事也哉。

regardless of their wealth, power or social status. To sum up, “love and respect”, the core principles of Lu Xun’s understanding of Mohist thought in this story, stem from the Mohist conviction of the higher principle of justice without which the human world will be eroded by “*youhua*” or insincerity. Although ghosts and spirits are absent from Lu Xun’s rewriting of the stories recorded in *Writings of Mozi*, they appear in the last story “Resurrecting the Dead” and have a conversation with Zhuangzi.

### ***Logical thinking and debate tactics***

In the previous section, Mozi’s defence of his principle of justice through genuine and thoughtful actions is discussed, and his other legacy that Lu Xun identifies with will be presented in this section, i.e. his logical thinking, superior tactics and steadfastness, especially his ability to pinpoint the inconsistencies or contradictions within an argument to win a debate. To start with, at the beginning of the story, confronted with three arguments, Mozi skillfully spotted the inconsistencies in the first two and brushed off the third with a smile. In the first instance, contradictions between the talk and the actions of Confucian disciples are pinpointed, so that their argument falls apart; the second is Mozi’s correction of the faulty reason in his disciple’s claim that he felt angry towards others who gave him less money than promised. As for the last instance where the Confucian disciples vilified Mohists as “wild beasts” because Mohists “love everyone indiscriminately with no special respect” for their own fathers,<sup>311</sup> it is indeed a harsh attack from the prominent Confucian thinker, Mencius. Mencius’s attack is probably triggered by the equally relentless critique of Confucian disciples in *Writings of Mozi* where discrimination in the Confucian principles of love and honour is singled out as ridiculous and perverse at the beginning of the chapter entitled

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<sup>311</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 177.

“Criticism of the Confucian Principles”.<sup>312</sup> Most probably, in Lu Xun’s rewriting of this debate, Mozi’s smile indicates the Mohist debate tactic that the Confucians are wrong in the first place to base their doctrine on kinship rather than the Mohist’s justice and love, so it is not even worth a rebuttal.

Additionally, two examples from “Opposing Aggression” can be cited as Lu Xun’s covert satire of the Confucian hierarchy and hypocrisy in defence of Mozi’s principles of actions and love in an unbiased way. The first instance is in the fifth section where Gongshu Ban was bidding farewell to Mozi and trying to persuade Mozi into giving up the way of talking about justice to “the great” such as kings and lords because “wearing yourself out, body and mind, to help those in danger and distress” was the principle of “the lowborn” that would never be followed by “the great”.<sup>313</sup> In response to this, Mozi retorted that since “the great” desired “silk, hemp, rice and millet ... produced by the lowborn”,<sup>314</sup> they shall also follow the principle of justice and benefit the common people. Again, contradictions of the Confucian hierarchy in viewing the physical labourers as inferior regardless of the fact that they labour to feed the entire population, are laid bare. Moreover, Mozi’s principle of love is made clear in this conversation that champions love and respect for the weak, the low and the oppressed, shaping a stark contrast against the Confucian principle that love is reserved only for those of blood relations, and respect only for the superior. In addition, in this story, Mozi’s former disciple Cao Gongzi serves as another example of Lu Xun’s covert criticism of Confucianism from a Mohist standpoint. In terms of defending Song against Chu, Cao Gongzi is in agreement with Mozi but their methods differ: Cao’s way of opposing aggression is to make a public speech to call on the people of Song to be ready to die to show the enemy the “fine

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<sup>312</sup> See *Writings of Mozi*. <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=gb&id=794>. Viewed on 20 September 2019.

<sup>313</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 189.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

morale of the men of Song”,<sup>315</sup> featuring the typical use of empty and obscurantist terms of “morale” and “death” by Confucians without adopting concrete tactics and practical strategies. Here, Lu Xun’s criticism of the Confucians for their “*nong xuanxu*” 弄玄虛 (playing obscurantist tricks) is elucidated because fending off enemies relies on solid actions not empty words, and death is only meaningful when it is to the benefit of the people.

To continue with the topic of Mozi’s debate tactics to oppose aggression of a strong kingdom over a weak one, examples of Mozi’s debate with Gongshu Ban and the King of Chu will be analysed in this section. A similar polemic tactic as the one at the beginning of the story is employed that leads to the victory of Mozi – asking a “trick question” to make the opponent himself expose contradictions between his own principles and deeds. For example, to make Gongshu Ban realise that his moral prohibition against homicide would be breached if he helped the king to initiate a war against another kingdom that could kill thousands, Mozi, upon their meeting, pretended to offer him 100 pieces of gold to kill someone else. The moment Gongshu Ban refused the offer, he realised that the aftermath of a war was morally even worse than to kill his friend’s enemy, therefore losing the point to Mozi in the debate. Exactly the same tactic is once again used in Mozi’s dissuasion of the king at the beginning of their meeting, where Mozi adopted an analogy between a kleptomaniac coveting his neighbour’s inferior property and the king of the rich Kingdom of Chu’s attack on the impoverished Song Kingdom, switching the focus of his argument from morality to material wealth or benefits due to his insight on the mindset of a sovereign. The second tactic Mozi adopts is demonstrating the superiority of his defence and attack strategies to be employed in the war, and the last tactic that leads to the final victory is again Mozi’s insight into the dark side of human nature as he revealed to the king that, even if Gongshu Ban killed Mozi, he

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., p.179.

would not be able to win the war as Mozi had already made thorough plans for his disciples to defend Song without him. The tactics of Mozi, both for the defence preparation of Song and in his conversations with Gongshu Ban and the king, embody Lu Xun's moulding of a type of the "idiot" in a positive sense as a role model for his fellow men, inspired by Kuriyagawa's definition of such an epitome, especially the characteristic of contemplating "things for what they truly are in a downright way and apply this principle to their own lives".<sup>316</sup> This is a typical example of Lu Xun's painstaking efforts to "localise" ideas and concepts borrowed from foreign literature into Chinese literary works.

### *A language for the masses*

Apart from the influence of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's national character of the "idiot" in *Out of the Ivory Tower*, "Opposing Aggression" can also be viewed as Lu Xun's first attempt during the 1930s to sketch certain types among Chinese intellectuals for modern readers, and the reason why Mozi is chosen as a "perfect" representation of this positive type can be identified in a long essay written simultaneously with this short story – "Menwai wentan" 门外文谈 (A Layman's Remarks on Writing) on August 16, 1934. In the conclusion of this important essay about Lu Xun's view of *dazhongyu* 大众语 (a language for the masses), Lu Xun summarises the essential qualities of a *juewu de zhishizhe* 觉悟的智识者 (an enlightened intellectual), who is supposed to take up the task of creating a language for the masses, as follows:

However, these intellectuals must carry out studies, can contemplate and be able to make decisions, and persevere. He makes use of power but never cheats; he leads but never caters to. He doesn't look down upon himself by entertaining the masses, nor does he disrespect others by reducing them to his flunkys. He is but an individual among the masses, and I reckon an intellectual with these qualities can undertake the cause for the masses.

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<sup>316</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson, *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 103.

这些智识者，却必须有研究，能思索，有决断，而且有毅力。他也用权，却不是骗人，他利导，却并非迎合。他不看轻自己，以为是大家的戏子，也不看轻别人，当作自己的喽罗。他只是大众中的一个人，我想，这才可以做大众的事业。<sup>317</sup>

It is evident that Mozi in “Opposing Aggression” is modelled after this type of intellectual who contributes to the welfare of the common people, as Mozi’s entire journey to and back from the Kingdom of Chu is a story of intellect, judgment and perseverance guided by his unbiased love and respect for his fellow men. Moreover, Mozi’s successful dissuasion of Gongshu Ban and the king not only stems from his superior polemic tactics but also, on a higher level, his selfless stance to defend the life of common people.

On the other hand, Gongshu Ban is modelled after another type of intellectual who uses the “knack he has to make trouble”<sup>318</sup> and serve the king in exchange for a luxurious lifestyle and a higher social status, an epitome of the majority of Chinese intellectuals who identify themselves with the establishment unconditionally. What these intellectuals defend is the interests of the bureaucrats and the establishment, thereby losing their independent stance, not to mention their right to speak for the “lowly” masses. Therefore, I argue, to sketch a modern portrait of Mozi as an ideal representative of Chinese intellectuals is potentially what triggers Lu Xun to compose short stories about representative characters of the intelligentsia based on both the ancient masters and his modern peers, among whom there are Laozi and Zhang Taiyan from “Leaving the Pass”, Zhuangzi and Shi Zhecun from “Resurrecting the Dead” and others such as Gu Jiegang who debuts at the beginning of “Curbing the Flood”. In the following section, the three stories, as Lu Xun’s criticism of the Chinese intelligentsia

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<sup>317</sup> See Lu Xun, “Menwai wentan” 门外文谈 (A Layman’s Remarks on Writing), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 104-105.

<sup>318</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 177.

using the technique of caricature most likely inspired by Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Out of the Ivory Tower*, will be interpreted.

### **“Leaving the Pass”**

This story,<sup>319</sup> written in December 1935 and published in January 1936, sparked much criticism and several interpretations soon after, so Lu Xun himself wrote an essay in April to refute two misinterpretations, one of which claims this story is an attack on one particular person, and the other which interprets it as a self-portrait of the writer himself, by accusing them of “narrowing down” this short story.<sup>320</sup> In his rebuttal of the first point of view, Lu Xun makes clear that his way of modelling a character is a combination of an array of qualities from a variety of persons in real life, and, as for the latter view, while denying this story is a self-portrait of himself in desolate solitude, Lu Xun reveals the origin of the background material of the story – comments on Confucius and Laozi by Zhang Taiyan and himself. In this sense, I argue, this story is triggered by a real-life event concerning Lu Xun and the League of Left-wing Writers, and above that level it is also about a type of Chinese intellectual who chooses to withdraw from their social responsibilities and go back into their enclosed studies of the classics when confronted with setbacks in their political career rather than to adapt themselves to the ongoing changes of the times. This stereotype shapes a contrast with another represented by Gongshu Ban in “Opposing Aggression”, who sides with the establishment for a career, personal glory and a comfortable lifestyle. The conflicts

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<sup>319</sup> The plot can be summarised as the reason for and process of Laozi's departure from his home kingdom. It begins with two visits Confucius paid at Laozi's place with an interval of three months, and upon the second visit Laozi decided to leave, as he thought Confucius already learned Laozi's philosophy of “change” and might play tricks behind his back. The latter half of the story details how Laozi was forced to give a lecture and write down the text of his lecture by officials working at the pass before his leaving. The story ends with various comments on Laozi and his lecture by his audience.

<sup>320</sup> See Lu Xun, “Chuguan de Guan” 《出关》的 “关” (About the Misinterpretations of ‘Leaving the Pass’), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 536-540.



between the two types naturally resulted in sectarianism within the Chinese intelligentsia, which potentially triggered Lu Xun's rewriting of this ancient legend recorded in *Zhuangzi*.

Sectarianism most probably occurred to Lu Xun as an epiphany with the arrival of a letter from Xiao San 萧三 in the Soviet Union, at Uchiyama Bookstore on November 8, 1935,<sup>321</sup> exactly the same time Lu Xun wrote "Leaving the Pass".<sup>322</sup> In this letter, Xiao San referred to sectarianism as "*guanmen zhuyi*" 关门主义,<sup>323</sup> which can be literally translated into a principle of "closing the door" of the League to exclude writers from other walks of life. It is this term that Xiao San used to refer to sectarianism in the League in this letter, I argue, that prompts Lu Xun to rewrite the legend of Laozi's exit of the pass, as the term "*guanmen*" 关门 (closing the door) can also be interpreted as a noun, i.e. "the gate of a pass", which explains the synchronisation of Lu Xun's receipt of the letter and his writing of "Leaving the Pass". Moreover, Lu Xun rewrites this legend to address sectarianism in the Chinese intelligentsia that leads to Zhang Taiyan's withdrawal from the academic arena and surrender to "*yigu pai*" 疑古派 (the school of questioning antiquity), a major turning point for Zhang's school and his disciples. Most likely, Zhang Taiyan's interpretation of Laozi's departure as the result of being edged out by Confucius, that Lu Xun mentions in his rebuttal, is suggestive of certain characteristics Laozi and Zhang Taiyan have in common, both of whom choose to withdraw from a sectarian clash of views rather than to confront it.

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<sup>321</sup> See Tian Gang. "Guanyu Xiao San Mosike laixin de jidian bianzheng" 关于萧三莫斯科来信的几点辩证 (Corrections on the Letter from Moscow by Xiao San). *Lu Xun Yanjiu Yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Issue 2, 2008, pp. 67-72.

<sup>322</sup> See Liu Xiaoqing. "Lu Xun yu Zuolian jiesan" 鲁迅与左联解散 (Lu Xun and the Disbandment of the League of Left-wing Writers). *Yanhuang Chunqiu* 炎黄春秋, Issue 10, 2002, p. 61.

<sup>323</sup> *ibid.*

### ***Laozi and Zhang Taiyan***

The plot of “Leaving the Pass” is taken from the last section of a chapter from *Zhuangzi* where three episodes of Confucius’ visit to Laozi are recorded regarding Confucius’ questions about the *Tao*, benevolence and justice, as well as how to inform the kings of teachings from the Six Classics.<sup>324</sup> Lu Xun’s selection of the raw material reveals his motive of rewriting this particular episode – the two masters, despite their differences, share the same focus, i.e. developing power tactics for the kings to dominate their subjects (in Laozi’s own words in the story, “We may wear the same sandals”), though Laozi chooses to quit office (“travelling the deserts”)<sup>325</sup> while Confucius’ goal is to “go to the court” to serve the rulers. Since the early Han era, Confucianism became the only official ideology of the ruling regime in China, symbolising a victory of Confucius over Laozi by employing Laozi’s tactic of being “soft” to defeat the old master himself. Therefore, I argue, Lu Xun uses this story about sectarianism in *Zhuangzi* to allude to Zhang Taiyan’s withdrawal from the academic arena into an isolated study of the Confucian classics in 1933 after his speaking tour in Beijing in March 1932.<sup>326</sup> Although Zhang Taiyan’s tour was a watershed event among intellectuals then, it also signalled the decline of his influence in the top-notch universities and of his status in the Republic’s capital of academic research, with the rise of a school led by Hu Shi 胡适, Fu Sinian 傅斯年 and Gu Jiegang 顾颉刚, the so-called school of questioning antiquity. Moreover, Zhang Taiyan’s retreat also symbolises the decline in the influence of scholars from southern China, the alleged *zhangmen dizi* 章门弟子 (disciples of Zhang Taiyan), as well as the dominance of those from northern China,<sup>327</sup> which coincides

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<sup>324</sup> See *Zhuangzi – Tianyun* 庄子-天运. <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/revolution-of-heaven/zh>. Viewed on 2 October 2019.

<sup>325</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 159.

<sup>326</sup> See Jiang Yihua, *Zhang Taiyan*. Taipei: Grandeast Book Co 东大图书公司, 1991, p. 272.

<sup>327</sup> See Sang Bing, “Zhang Taiyan wannian beiyou jiangxue de wenhua xiangzheng” 章太炎晚年北游讲学的文化象征 (On the Cultural Significance of Zhang Taiyan’s Speaking Tour in Beijing in his Late Years in China’s

with the retreat of Laozi who was from the southern kingdom of Chu 楚 and the rise of Confucius who came from the northern kingdom of Lu 鲁. This is probably the reason why Lu Xun mentioned Zhang Taiyan in his rebuttal of the misleading interpretations of the story,<sup>328</sup> and, if viewed from this perspective, two other stories written in the same period of time in *Old Tales Retold*, i.e. “Resurrecting the Dead” and “Curbing the Flood”, can be deemed as a one-man battle Lu Xun launches against the rising school of questioning antiquity spearheaded by Gu Jiegang. Therefore, back in the story of “Leaving the Pass”, it is most likely that Lu Xun himself poses as Gengsang Chu 庚桑楚, disciple of Laozi, proposing to his teacher to “fight it out with” Confucius and his followers rather than retreat into the desert,<sup>329</sup> which is another evidence of Lu Xun’s covert disagreement with and criticism of his teacher Zhang Taiyan.

In addition, striking similarities between Zhang Taiyan and Laozi in “Leaving the Pass” can be identified. First, just like Laozi who was forced to give up lecturing and ended up writing his lectures down because of his heavy accent that baffled his audience,<sup>330</sup> Zhang Taiyan was also known for his broad accent that made his speech only understandable by his fellow townsmen from the Zhejiang area. During his lecture tour in Beijing, his disciple Qian Xuantong 钱玄同 acted as his interpreter and Liu Bannong 刘半农 wrote down his lecture on the blackboard.<sup>331</sup> Moreover, even back in Suzhou and Wuxi of the Jiangsu area

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Academia). *Lishi Yanjiu* 历史研究, Issue 4, 2002, pp. 3-4. The author examines Zhang’s speaking tour from the perspective of the conflicts between the new northern school and the old southern school of scholars.

<sup>328</sup> See Lu Xun, “Chuguan de Guan” 《出关》的“关” (About the Misinterpretations of ‘Leaving the Pass’), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 536-540.

<sup>329</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 159.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., pp. 163-165.

<sup>331</sup> See Sang Bing, “Zhang Taiyan wannian beiyou jiangxue de wenhua xiangzheng” 章太炎晚年北游讲学的文化象征 (On the Cultural Significance of Zhang Taiyan’s Speaking Tour in Beijing in his Late Years in China’s Academia). *Lishi Yanjiu* 历史研究, Issue 4, 2002, p. 4.

neighbouring Zhejiang where Zhang Taiyan lectured in his late years, audiences complained that they didn't understand his dialect, not to mention his opinions in the lecture.<sup>332</sup> Second, both Laozi and Zhang Taiyan are hailed as masters of learning and philosophy in their times and the younger generation of scholars significantly benefit from their teachings. For example, Zhang Taiyan, undoubtedly a master of scholarly research on the classics and history, with his proposition of *zhengli guogu* 整理国故 (sorting out China's cultural heritage), inspired scholars including Hu Shi and Gu Jiegang to establish their own school of questioning antiquity,<sup>333</sup> in the same way that Confucius learned Laozi's tactic of transformation<sup>334</sup> and later developed it into the principle of concealing the truth which is attacked by *Dao Zhi* 盗跖 (the Robber Zhi) in *Zhuangzi*.<sup>335</sup> Exactly the same pattern can be identified in the way the school of questioning antiquity obtains inspiration from Zhang Taiyan but somehow takes their assumptions too far to deny proven historical facts. Third, in "Leaving the Pass", when Laozi confided to his disciple Gengsang Chu the reason why he decided to leave, he emphasised that he and Confucius belonged to different schools and rejected Gengsang Chu's proposal to "fight it out with him",<sup>336</sup> which embodies one of the major Daoist principles of withdrawal commonly found in Chinese intellectuals confronted with setbacks and failure. Zhang Taiyan's own statement for the establishment of a *guoxuehui* 国学会 (Association of Chinese Classics Studies) in the wake of his speaking tour in Beijing can be cited as evidence, in which his disappointment toward the rising generation of scholars in Beijing stands out: "While I'm sure there must be scholars of good learning here in Beijing, I still find it regrettable that with scholars of admirable learning and those of

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>334</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 156.

<sup>335</sup> See *Zhuangzi – Daozhi* 庄子-盗跖. <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/robber-zhi/zhs>. Viewed on 17 October, 2019.

<sup>336</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 159.

shallow and prejudiced opinions there. It's difficult to probe into problems with them. It's a pity that Robber Zhi-like people are capitalising on the honourable cause of the ancient sages. Some propose that an association shall be established to correct their misconceptions, but the suggestion has not been taken up. Therefore, I have changed my mind and prepare to head south...".<sup>337</sup>

In Lu Xun's eyes, this is another major retreat of Zhang Taiyan after the previous one he was forced to make in 1927 when he was listed as a wanted criminal due to his targeted campaign against Chiang Kai-shek's policy.<sup>338</sup> If his first retreat deprived him of a position in the Kuomintang regime and his political career, this withdrawal cost Zhang Taiyan his authority in the academic world, which can be deemed as a total withdrawal, voluntary or involuntary, from the leadership of the Guangfu Hui and from the stage of the Republic it contributed to establishing. Therefore, it's justifiable to assume that Lu Xun decides to undertake his lone fight against the rising school of scholars and to defend the original gains of the Guangfu Hui. That said, it is not to say that Lu Xun wrote the story of "Leaving the Pass" only to defend his own group against the school of questioning antiquity; rather, he goes beyond sectarianism and foresees the imminent danger of nihilism that unreasonable denial of the ancients and history is destined to bring about. This can be supported by the case Zhang Taiyan made regarding why he was strongly opposed to the school of questioning antiquity:

Since the establishment of the Republic, the study of the Classics has been in decline and replaced by the school of "doubting the ancients" that claims the ancient kings of Yao, Shun,

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<sup>337</sup> See Tang Zhijun ed., *Zhang Taiyan Zhenglun Xuanji – xiace* 章太炎政论选集 – 下册 (*A Selected Collection of Zhang Taiyan's Essays on Politics – the Second of Two*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, p. 833. The quoted section is from an article entitled "Announcement for the Establishment of the Association of Chinese Classics Studies" published in January 1933, which says 唯教师亦信有佳者，苦于熏莸杂糅，不可讨理，惜夫圣智之业而为跖者资焉。或劝以学会正之，事绪未就，复改辙而南....

<sup>338</sup> See Zhang Nianchi, *Wo Suozhidao de Zufu Zhang Taiyan* 我所知道的祖父章太炎 (*Zhang Taiyan: My Grandfather as I Know Him*). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016, p. 70. Zhang Taiyan was among the 66 scholars listed as wanted by the KMT in May 1927, and in June the KMT's Zhejiang branch was ordered to confiscate Zhang Taiyan's residence.

Yu and Tang are merely fabricated by Confucian disciples. Such a trend of denial of the nation's origins will result in the total subversion of the history that holds together an entire nation, and then the Republic will collapse and can never be revived as its people will be unable to remember their history.

民国以来，其学虽衰，而疑古之说代之，谓尧舜禹汤皆儒家托伪。如此惑失本原，必将维系民族之国史全部推翻，国亡而后，人人忘其本来，永无复兴之望。<sup>339</sup>

Evidently, Zhang Taiyan's grave concern about the devastating aftermath of that school, led by Gu Jiegang, stems from his conviction of the spiritual heritage of the Chinese as a nation embodied in its national history that can glue together diverse groups of people across the country to form a unified body. As one of the founders of the Republic, Zhang Taiyan had already devoted himself to the intellectual and spiritual revolution against the Manchu regime well before the Qing era ended, and after 1911 members of the Guangfu Hui occupied positions in the Department of Education and Peking University, such as Cai Yuanpei and disciples of Zhang Taiyan including Lu Xun. In terms of academic research, Zhang Taiyan's school of classical studies was well-known for their in-depth research in philology, i.e. the meticulous study of Chinese characters and the changes in their pronunciation, character pattern and meaning through time to clarify the exact meaning of texts written in ancient times. In a word, the school of Zhang Taiyan sought to right the wrong interpretations of the classics, while the school of questioning antiquity aimed at rewriting historical records. With the withdrawal of Zhang Taiyan, his disciples at Peking University were losing influence while scholars such as Hu Shi and Fu Sinian were gaining ground. In Lu Xun's eyes, Zhang Taiyan's forming the Association of Chinese Classics Study indeed marked a failure for the scholars of southern China and the Guangfu Hui, just like Laozi's exit of the pass. It is a great

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<sup>339</sup> See Zhang Taiyan, *Zhang Taiyan Zishu* 章太炎自述 (*An Account in Zhang Taiyan's Own Words*). Beijing: renmin ribao chubanshe, 2012, p. 69.

pity that Zhang Taiyan didn't deign to fight against sectarianism in both fields of politics and academia to prevent his principles and approaches from being negated and obliterated.

### *The technique of caricature*

The last section of my analysis of "Leaving the Pass" will be dedicated to the technique of caricature to demonstrate Kuriyagawa Hakuson's influence on Lu Xun through his translation of Kuriyagawa's *Out of the Ivory Tower*. In an essay entitled "Caricature for the Sake of Art", Kuriyagawa defines the nature of caricature, despite its varied forms, "[it] pretends to laugh on the outside while harbouring serious criticism of life on the inside. The true meaning behind caricature is sadness, taunt and indignation but on the surface, [the artists] seem to keep a distance from the characters and employ sarcasm and humour to convey their meaning...".<sup>340</sup> Moreover, Lu Xun himself admitted in his defence against the misinterpretations of this story that he "caricaturised the character of Laozi, and sent him out of the pass".<sup>341</sup> In "Leaving the Pass", three examples can be cited to prove Lu Xun's criticism of Zhang Taiyan and scholars like Zhang Taiyan underlying his caricature of Laozi. The first is the episode of Laozi delivering a speech to the audience at the pass, probably the most humorous scene in the entire story featuring the vivid descriptions of various responses from his audience baffled and bored by Laozi due to his broad accent and obscure content.<sup>342</sup> Lu Xun adopts the technique of exaggeration to amplify the difficulty dialects bring about to Laozi's audience, and particularly inserts responses from his audience in their own dialects of Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas that vexed Laozi himself.<sup>343</sup> Underlying this episode of sarcasm

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<sup>340</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson, *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 194. The original text is 但不拘什么种类，凡漫画的本质都在里面含有‘严肃的人生的批评’而外面却装着笑这一点上。那真意，是悲哀，是讽骂，是愤慨，但在表面上，则有绰然的余裕，而仗着滑稽和嘲笑，来传那真意的。

<sup>341</sup> See Lu Xun, "Chuguan de Guan" 《出关》的“关” (About the Misinterpretations of 'Leaving the Pass'), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 540.

<sup>342</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 163.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

is Lu Xun's criticism of Zhang Taiyan's failure in solving the problem of myriads of dialects posing as a hindrance to oral communications between people from different areas. As a philologist, before the establishment of the Republic, Zhang Taiyan created 58 phonetic symbols to denote the pronunciation of Chinese characters based on his unparalleled study in this field, which laid the foundation for a set of phonetic symbols officially adopted by the Republic.<sup>344</sup> However, Zhang's tremendous knowledge concerning the dialects of China does not automatically render itself into specific, feasible and effective ways to solve the problems they cause in daily communication; ironically, Zhang Taiyan could not even make himself understood to his audience despite his profound knowledge of the study of dialects.

This is probably why Lu Xun inserts another episode in "Leaving the Pass" to satirise his former teacher that depicts the desperation of Laozi trying to circumvent the pass by climbing over it with his ox, where the writer mocks Laozi by describing "hard as he racked his philosopher's brain, he could think of no way out" and he couldn't devise a machine like cranes or hoists to solve the conundrum.<sup>345</sup> What Lu Xun jests at is the inability of scholars of unfathomable philosophical thought to address specific problems in real life, which resembles the failure of Zhang Taiyan's contribution in the academic research of phonology of the Chinese language to materialise into concrete plans to help the masses and himself to overcome the hindrance of dialects. In addition, in Lu Xun's essay to clarify the meaning of this story, he labels these scholars as "*tuzuodayan de kongtanjia* 徒作大言的空谈家 (pedants mongering empty talk)".<sup>346</sup> Unfortunately, Zhang Taiyan is surely among them as in June 1935, half a year before Lu Xun wrote "Leaving the Pass", Zhang Taiyan claimed in an essay

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<sup>344</sup> See Jiang Yihua, *Zhang Taiyan*. Taipei: Grandeast Book Co. 东大图书公司, 1991, p. 62.

<sup>345</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 161.

<sup>346</sup> See Lu Xun, "Chuguan de Guan" 《出关》的“关” (About the Misinterpretations of 'Leaving the Pass'), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 540.



“Lun dujing youli er wubi” 论读经有利而无弊 (Reading Confucian Classics Brings about Benefits and No Harm) that the Chinese classics can benefit the society and help build up a nation as well as the ethos of the nation, and thus all the entrenched problems can disappear without the need to make any particular efforts to eradicate them.<sup>347</sup> Such doctrinaire attitudes with their root in the empty talk in *Zhuangzi* (one of the focuses of Zhang Taiyan’s study of the classics) appear to be sensational but fail to offer any solid solution to problems in the real world due to their lack of proper tools. Doctrinairism can be deemed as the core of Lu Xun’s criticism of this type of Chinese intellectual epitomised by Laozi and Zhang Taiyan.

Moreover, caricature of Laozi can also be found at the beginning of the story where the ancient master is portrayed as “a senseless block of wood” and, when he bade farewell to his visitor Confucius, he is depicted as “murmuring mechanically”.<sup>348</sup> The literary device of repetition is again adopted in this section to describe Confucius’ reaction to Laozi’s teaching as well as their bidding farewell to each other, highlighting the quality of “*dai*” 呆 (dullness) of Laozi. This quality is reflected in his lecture in the story whose dullness was complained about by his audience. The caricature of Laozi’s dullness contains Lu Xun’s subtle criticism of Zhang Taiyan’s written works: due to Zhang’s obscure style of writing and his use of obsolete characters and phrases, his works are too obscure to reach a larger audience, even among the intellectuals, not to mention the masses.

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<sup>347</sup> See Tang Zhijun ed., *Zhang Taiyan Zhenglun Xuanji – xiace* 章太炎政论选集 – 下册 (*A Selected Collection of Zhang Taiyan’s Essays on Politics – The Second of Two*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977, p. 868. The original text is 夫如是【读经】，则可以处社会，可以理国家，民族于以立，风气于以正。一切顽固之弊，不革而自祛。

<sup>348</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 155.

That said, it does not mean that Lu Xun denies the value of Zhang Taiyan's thought and learning; rather, what Lu Xun suggests is that Zhang Taiyan does not use adequate means to spread his knowledge and principles to reach a wider audience. In other words, the classical Chinese Zhang Taiyan uses and his abstruse style need to give way to a brand new style that can deliver ideas and concepts directly to the masses, and this new language shall prioritise speech over written form to gain acceptance among the poorly educated and even the illiterate. There is an episode in "Leaving the Pass" where upon his second visit to Laozi, Confucius said "How can I, long removed from the cycle of transformations, succeed in transforming others?".<sup>349</sup> Lu Xun's implication here can be interpreted as: if a scholar refuses to change the style of language they use to relate to the masses, how can they change the entire society or the nation? Most likely, this casts light on the motive of Lu Xun's participation in a wide discussion about the adoption of the term "*dazhong yu*" 大众语 (a language for the masses) in 1934<sup>350</sup> to replace the original campaign of "*baihua wen*" 白话文 (colloquial Chinese) initiated by Hu Shi in January 1917 but caught in stagnation 20 years later, against the classical Chinese advocates including Zhang Taiyan. In his letter in response to Cao Juren 曹聚仁 on 29 July 1934, Lu Xun points out that "the most significant task in promoting *dazhong yu* is at least to enable the masses to read materials written in this particular language, or else it'll still be a tool dominated by a special social class",<sup>351</sup> to answer Cao's question "Why has *baihua wen* turned into a tool dominated by a special class – intellectuals – without relevance with common people?".<sup>352</sup> If compared with the last episode of "Leaving the Pass" detailing the jeers and jibes from the audience of Laozi at this learned scholar, Lu Xun's answer in the letter is illustrated with opinions of people from

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 157. The original text is "我自己久不投在变化里了，这怎么能够变化别人呢？".

<sup>350</sup> See Lu Xun, Note 1 to "Letter to Cao Juren 340729", in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 13. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 189.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

other walks of life that reveal a deep divide between different social classes, and the contributing factor to this gap is, as Lu Xun suggests, none other than the Chinese characters. The language has an overly difficult writing system, which can only be mastered by a minority who, with their mastery of the characters, are isolated from the masses they originally come from, and even end up turning against ordinary people.

In this case, the promotion of *dazhong yu* and Lu Xun's reflection about the Chinese language, as he does in "Mending Heaven" of *Old Tales Retold*, can be counted as another theme of "Leaving the Pass", in addition to sectarianism in the Chinese intelligentsia. As shown in the first chapter of my thesis, language as a barrier to the communication between Nü Wa and the "little creatures" in various styles of clothes points to an important theme of "Mending Heaven"; in "Leaving the Pass" written 13 years later, the theme reappears with its focus shifting to the failure of both oral and written communication between intellectuals and the masses. As for the reason why the theme of linguistic barriers re-emerges in "Leaving the Pass", my argument is that this story, together with "Opposing Aggression", are inspired by Lu Xun's 10 essays about *dazhong yu* and the Chinese language written during July to September 1934, particularly his long essay about the development of the Chinese language entitled "Menwai wentan" 门外文谈 (A Layman's Remarks on Writing). In other words, "Opposing Aggression" is Lu Xun's experiment with *dazhong yu* – to revive Mozi, both his principles and his most heroic deeds, through a short story written in plain language suitable for common readers. This argument can be supported by Lu Xun's conclusion at the end of "A Layman's Remarks on Writing" written in the same month that "To sum up, only empty talk about *dazhong yu* is not enough; it's imperative that we practice it. ... Although we can

talk about ways to guide this campaign, experiments can be most beneficial.”<sup>353</sup> Although Mozi’s principles and methods have long remained on the periphery of the mainstream academic field in China, Lu Xun recognises Mozi’s deeds and thought as fundamental to the reformation of the Chinese national character, i.e. the image of a positive “idiot” of action and rational thinking he borrowed from Kuriyagawa Hakuson. Moreover, the plot of “Opposing Aggression”, including the scenes of conversations between Mozi and King of Chu and with Gongshu Ban, is directly taken from *Writings of Mozi* and rendered into *dazhong yu*; therefore, this story is indeed an experiment by Lu Xun to rewrite an old tale with the language of the masses as an example without using technical terms or expressions from various dialects. On the contrary, “Leaving the Pass” highlights the hindrance that terms of abstract concepts together with a variety of dialects pose to the communication between the intelligentsia and the masses.

To sum up, one of the reasons why Lu Xun resumed writing short stories based on ancient tales can be attributed to his intention to further the campaign for *baihua wen* which was caught in stagnation, probably due to the “*fugu*” 复古 (return to antiquity) campaign among the then intellectuals,<sup>354</sup> with an effort to counteract the intellectuals who “endeavour to make the Chinese language harder in order to prove they are entitled to a higher status over their peers”.<sup>355</sup> Zhang Taiyan was a prime example of the latter, especially his late years when he withdrew from the political arena into his study of the Confucian classics in Suzhou. Lu Xun described the founding member of the Republic’s retreat into his study as “he later retired to

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<sup>353</sup> See Lu Xun, “Menwai wentan” 门外文谈 (A Layman’s Remarks on Writing), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 105.

<sup>354</sup> See Note 1 to “Letter to Cao Juren 340729”, in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 13. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 189.

<sup>355</sup> See Lu Xun, “Menwai wentan” 门外文谈 (A Layman’s Remarks on Writing), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 95.

live as a quiet scholar cut off from the age by means of a wall built by himself and others”.<sup>356</sup> Probably, this “wall” is the wall of the pass in the story of “Leaving the Pass”, beyond which lies a huge desert where human beings perish; the desert itself serves as a metaphor for the tremendous amount of ancient Confucian classics that claim to be able to cultivate individuals and solve all the social and political problems but end up devouring every living creature.

### “Resurrecting the Dead”

Berta Krebsova points out that Lu Xun’s interpretation of Zhuangzi in this story is not from the time when the philosopher was alive, but from Lu Xun’s own time. Gao Yuandong specifies that Zhuangzi in this story is “a vulgarised image that sank deep into Lu Xun himself”, rather than the real and academic one. I agree with Gao and deem this story as another piece of Lu Xun’s satire of the Chinese intelligentsia. “Resurrecting the Dead”<sup>357</sup> borrows the form of a play and retells a celebrated fable about a conversation between Zhuangzi and a skull. My argument in this section will focus on, first, the potential influence of an essay titled “From the Soul to the Flesh versus From the Flesh to the Soul” in Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s *Out of the Ivory Tower*, and second, Lu Xun’s efforts to add lively terms from vernacular Chinese to the vocabulary of *dazhong yu*.

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<sup>356</sup> See Lu Xun, *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*. Vol. 4, translated by Gladys Yang and Yang Xianyi <https://www.questia.com/read/20987712/selected-works-of-lu-hsun>. Viewed on 14 April, 2020.

<sup>357</sup> This story stands out in the collection with its unique form of a one-act play that features conversations between Zhuangzi, ghosts, the god of fate, a man whom Zhuangzi revived from a skull, and a constable. The plot, adapted from a fable recorded in *Zhuangzi*, tells the conundrum Zhuangzi threw himself into after he summoned the god of fate to resurrect a dead man from a skull he came across on a roadside. While Zhuangzi only cared about determining the specific period of time the revived man lived, what the man cared about was his belongings, which had been stolen when he was killed by robbers and asked Zhuangzi for compensation. In the end, with the help of a constable who recognised Zhuangzi as a government official, Zhuangzi managed to break away from the man he resurrected but failed to make him disappear (which he asked the god of fate to do), and left the constable in a struggle with the man.

### *From the soul to the flesh*

The original fable in *Zhuangzi* records a short conversation in Zhuangzi's dream between him and a skull by the roadside in which the skull rejected Zhuangzi's offer to resurrect him because he enjoyed the happiness after death much more than the suffering he endured when he was alive.<sup>358</sup> Lu Xun's adaptation is faithful to the original story – it is but a nightmarish dream of Zhuangzi, and adds an interesting sequel to the original fable. The brilliant anti-climax lies in Zhuangzi's inability to summon the god of fate to make this resurrected man dissolve after he regretted bringing him back to life – it turns out that the same spell Zhuangzi chanted and succeeded in conjuring up the deity to help revive the skull a moment ago, didn't work at all. This highlight of the story, I argue, can be attributed to Kuriyagawa's cultural critique of the incapability of his fellow Japanese to cultivate “the heart” based on “things”, i.e. to give rise to “love and care on the basis of the unpleasant rights and obligations”.<sup>359</sup> On the contrary, Kuriyagawa points out that the Japanese invert the order of “from the things (flesh) to the heart (soul)” and wrongly believe in the existence of “the fleshless soul” or “the heart based on nothing”, which reduces them to “ghosts without an abdomen, waist or feet”.<sup>360</sup> This perspective on the Japanese mentality as opposed to the Western one is in itself insightful and original, and can cast light on the fundamental differences between the Eastern and Western national characters. Most importantly, Kuriyagawa concludes at the end of the essay that his fellow Japanese will not cultivate an extensive and profound spiritual life unless they have a thorough experience of the flesh, encounter frustrations on the material

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<sup>358</sup> See *Zhuangzi – Zhile* 庄子-至乐. <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/perfect-enjoyment/zhs>. Viewed on 13 November, 2019.

<sup>359</sup> See Kuriyagawa Hakuson, *Kumen de Xiangzheng* 苦闷的象征 (*Symbols of Anguish*). Translated by Lu Xun. Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 2008, p. 152. The original text is 从物质涌出来的精神，从‘物’涌出来的‘心’，从杀风景的权利义务关系涌出来的温情。

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., p. 159. The original text is 是有肉体的精神，有物的心。倘若将这颠倒转来，以为有着无肉体的精神，无物的心，则这就成为无腹无腰又无足的幽鬼。

side, and create substantial content<sup>361</sup>. As the translator of *Out of the Ivory Tower*, Lu Xun agrees with Kuriyagawa and concludes in the postscript of his translation of this essay collection that Kuriyagawa's critique, to a large extent, reveals the "concealed chronic disease of the Chinese at the moment, especially our conceit about our spiritual heritage".<sup>362</sup> Lu Xun stops short of specifying what particular disease the Chinese spiritual heritage suffers from, but I argue Kuriyagawa's description of "ghosts without an abdomen, waist or feet" inspires Lu Xun to take up the famed fable about a skull – a talking spirit without a body – as the symbol of the disease.

In this sense, the two levels underlying "Resurrecting the Dead" can be identified: first, Zhuangzi follows the same mentality Kuriyagawa describes as being skilful at using incantations to create a person with flesh and bones, while absolutely unable to gratify the person's material needs simply with his charms; second, members of the Chinese intelligentsia, who advocate that by reading Confucian classics as well as other ancient books like *Zhuangzi* the Chinese can eradicate all the existing problems, make the same error as Zhuangzi did in this story, in that their empty talk or rhetoric, no matter how brilliant on the surface, is not feasible at all in solving practical problems in real life, and their attempt to build a spiritual life for the masses who have to toil to make a living is destined to fail.

Furthermore, Zhuangzi can be viewed as another type of the "clever man" proposed by Kuriyagawa in the essays in the same book, who is characterised as clever, glib and even

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., pp. 163-164. The original text is 于肉不彻底，于物质未尝碰壁，于内容并不充实的日本人，是没有大而深，而且广的精神生活的。

<sup>362</sup> See Lu Xun, "Cong lingxiangrou he cong rouxiangling yizhe fuji" 《从灵向肉和从肉向灵》译者附记 (Translator's Note on "From the Soul to the Flesh versus From the Flesh to the Soul"), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 278. The original text is 切中我们现在大家隐蔽着的痼疾，尤其是很自负的所谓精神文明。

vulgar. It's evident that Zhuangzi in this story is curious and intelligent: upon seeing a skull by the roadside, he was curious about the cause of the death; with a short conversation with the man resurrected from the skull, he was able to determine the specific period of time the man lived, by using simple language the man could understand; and he quickly summoned a constable to help him out after he failed to conjure up the god of fate again to make the man disappear. His cleverness, like that of Lord Xiaobing in "Gathering Vetch", is used to gratify his own desire, be it for knowledge or for wealth or glory, and thus such a personality can be labelled as "egoist",<sup>363</sup> the term Zhuangzi in the story employed to describe the resurrected man on hearing of his search for his own belongings. Therefore, self-aggrandisement can be deemed as the very characteristic in his fellow intellectuals who are clever but vulgar, as Mozi warned in "Opposing Aggression" that absence of affection and respect for each other gave rise to vulgarity and insincerity among the masses.<sup>364</sup> In this sense, the vulgarised Zhuangzi in "Resurrecting the Dead" constitutes the antithesis to the noble-minded character of Mozi in "Opposing Aggression", both of whom are inspired by Kuriyagawa's binary opposition of the "clever man" and the "idiot".

Moreover, evidence of the clever Zhuangzi's vulgarity can be identified from descriptions of his costume and his conjuration in the story. At the beginning of the story, he was "wearing a Daoist cap and cloth gown" that suggest he is most likely a Daoist priest, which is the second time Daoist priests appear in *Old Tales Retold* after the little creatures who "covered their bodies in the most curious fashion"<sup>365</sup> in "Mending Heaven". Those Daoist priests or alchemists, who were saved by Nü Wa and later offered to find the Fairy Islands for the emperors of Qin and Han eras in "Mending Heaven", in "Resurrecting the Dead" pose as

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<sup>363</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 203.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid., p. 15.



scholars. The Daoist costume serves as a reminder that the character of Zhuangzi is indeed a Daoist priest rather than a scholar. On the other hand, the incantation Zhuangzi used twice in this story to conjure up the god of fate, a merger of fragments from Daoist spells as well as those from elementary Chinese textbooks such as *Qianziwen* 千字文 (*The Thousand Character Text*) and *Baijiaxing* 百家姓 (*The Hundred Family Surnames*), suggests that the Confucian classics themselves, like castles in the air that can only be conjured up, are too lofty and abstract to be employed as solutions to the problem of education of the masses, not to mention other social problems. That's why in this story Zhuangzi succeeded in resurrecting the skull with this incantation, but failed when he tried to make a living man disappear with the same trick. Such poignant satire of Chinese intellectuals can be traced back to Kuriyagawa's criticism of the flawed one-way relationship between the material and the spirit of the Japanese national character.

Another element of Lu Xun's satire of his fellow intellectuals in "Resurrecting the Dead" is Zhuangzi's hypocrisy. The genuine motive of Zhuangzi's resurrection of the skull by the roadside is to gratify his own curiosity about the man's cause of death and the period of time the man lived in. However, in Zhuangzi's monologue at the beginning of the story, he only admitted he wanted to "have a chat with him"<sup>366</sup> before this man returned home to his family. Additionally, when Zhuangzi appealed to the god of fate, he confessed only the second motive – "to bring him back to life so that he can go home", pretending to be caring for this man's and his family's interest rather than his own. The hypocrisy of such a type of the "clever man" under the guise of sympathy for the masses can also be identified in Lu Xun's first experiment to depict such a stereotype of the Chinese national character in "The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave" in *Wild Grass* where the wise man's "eyes looked a little red as

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

if he were going to shed tears”<sup>367</sup> while listening to the slave talking about his miserable life. In “Resurrecting the Dead”, Zhuangzi is indeed a hypocrite as his claim and his deeds are inconsistent: he even concealed his real motive before the god of fate, which suggests he has no respect for the deity at all. It is in his conversation with the resurrected man that his purpose is finally laid bare, as the dialogue is almost entirely dominated by Zhuangzi who managed to obtain information from the man concerning the cause of his death and the period of time he lived in. When Zhuangzi reached the conclusion that the man was killed by robbers and he lived under the reign of King Zhou of Shang, he was satisfied and ready to dismiss the man, ignoring the man’s demand for his belongings. Moreover, the moment his hypocrisy is fully exposed lies in the episode where Zhuangzi was warding off the man by revealing his official rank to demonstrate his superiority over the man but to no avail, and then threatened to ask the god of fate to “kill” this man again. Therefore, Zhuangzi’s claim to send this man back to his family out of pity for him is indeed a blatant lie; he does not sympathise with this man, and even worse he assumes that he has the power to dictate the man’s life and death, which exposes the underlying egotism and authoritarianism in the personalities of Zhuangzi and scholars of his ilk who prioritise their own needs over others’. That’s why these scholars are always seen on the path of seeking a position in the government that renders them the power to lord it over the masses like Zhuangzi did at the end of the story where the constable changed his attitude when he found out Zhuangzi was indeed a government official whose writing his superior had always acclaimed.

### ***The school of questioning antiquity***

Evidently this type of scholar points to those from the school of questioning antiquity, as the majority of the conversation between Zhuangzi and the resurrected man focuses on

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<sup>367</sup> See Lu Xun, *Wild Grass*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 159.

Zhuangzi's efforts in finding out clues that can help pinpoint the period of time the man lived in. Although Zhuangzi's method and his conclusion of the man's possible cause of death and lifetime are correct and accurate, it reflects Lu Xun's criticism of their vain attempt to accumulate "real" knowledge but failure to solve imperative problems in real life. Therefore, Lu Xun's sarcasm toward Zhuangzi's curiosity, or that of the school of "questioning antiquity", can be summarised as: identifying the date of a person or an event is indeed the research work of scholars; failure to relate one's study to urgent realities, like Zhuangzi who, despite his success in determining the period of time the man lived in, ended up in a fight with the man he resurrected, will only deepen misunderstandings or cause conflicts between the intelligentsia and the masses. This is also the reason why Lu Xun adapts the original fable about a dream in *Zhuangzi* into a one-act play about Zhuangzi's nightmare, sending a warning to his fellow intellectuals against their turning a blind eye to the pressing needs of the masses, a message the original fable is meant to deliver.

Sun Yu, in his analysis of this story, identifies that Lu Xun aims to criticise intellectuals of the so-called "third category" who claims themselves to be "politically impartial". In my analysis of the story, focus will be given to one of Lu Xun's contemporaries and some of the characteristic traits he epitomises. The specific scholar who misunderstands the genuine messages hidden in *Zhuangzi* can be determined to be the writer Shi Zhecun 施蛰存 who was involved in a debate with Lu Xun during October and November of 1933,<sup>368</sup> mainly in *Shen Pao* 申报,<sup>369</sup> comprised altogether of eight essays. In the first one that ignited the debate, Lu

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<sup>368</sup> The eight essays are "Chongsan ganjiu 重三感旧" (1933.10.1), "Ganjiu yihou 感旧以后" (10.12), "Pukong 扑空" (10.20), "Da 'jianshi 答 '兼示' " (10.21), "Zhongguowen yu zhongguoren 中国文与中国人" (10.25), "Fanchu 反刍" (11.4), "Nande hutu 难得糊涂" (11.6), and "Gushu zhong xun huo zihui 古书中寻活字汇" (11.6).

<sup>369</sup> The essays of Shi Zhecun in this debate are "Zhuangzi yu Wenxuan" 《庄子》与《文选》 (10.8), "Tuijianzhe de lichang" 推荐者的立场 (10.18), "Tuwei" 突围 (10.27) and "Zhi Li Liewen xiansheng shu" 致黎烈文先生书 (10.19).

Xun cited the examples of a group of scholars called *xindang* 新党 (reformists) in the late-Qing era who endeavoured to learn foreign languages and new knowledge from the West, to criticise the then-prevalent trend of “returning to antiquity” – scholars who encouraged the younger generation to read *Zhuangzi* rather than scientific knowledge from other countries – and satirised this regressive trend among the intelligentsia as “*haigu de milian*” 骸骨的迷恋 (an obsession with skeletons).<sup>370</sup> Evidently, this is in line with Lu Xun’s criticism of *Zhuangzi* in “Resurrecting the Dead”, in which the ultimate contributing factor to the clash between *Zhuangzi* and the resurrected man is *Zhuangzi*’s obsession with the skull of a man who died long ago such that he even employed supernatural powers to gratify his curiosity. In addition, in the second essay “*Ganjiu yihou*” 感旧以后 (My Rebuttal of Shi Zhecun’s Comment on My Essay about the Late-Qing Era), Lu Xun maintained that to search for “*huo zihui*” 活字汇 (lively vocabularies) in books such as *Zhuangzi* is more than foolish,<sup>371</sup> disapproving of Shi Zhecun’s claim that, without learning from ancient books, Lu Xun’s literary works would never have achieved this level.<sup>372</sup> Moreover, Lu Xun reemphasised this point of view in the last essay of this debate: that lively vocabularies are those a modern man can understand without the help of annotations, so there are definitely few in these ancient books that can enrich and build a new language for modern man.<sup>373</sup> Therefore, in “Resurrecting the Dead”, the conflict between the revived dead-man and *Zhuangzi* is an

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<sup>370</sup> See Lu Xun, “Chongsan ganjiu” 重三感旧 (My Recollection of the Late Qing Era in 1933), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集* (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 5. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, pp. 342-343.

<sup>371</sup> See Lu Xun, “Ganjiu yihou (shang)” 感旧以后 (上) (My Argument of Shi Zhecun’s “*Zhuangzi* and *Wenxuan*”, part one of two), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集* (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 5. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 348.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>373</sup> See Lu Xun, “Gushu zhong xun huozihui” 古书中寻活字汇 (Searching for Lively Vocabularies in Ancient Books), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集* (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 5. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 395.

allegory of the vain and foolish attempt of scholars such as Shi Zhecun to try to use the ancient books to solve modern problems.

### ***Daoist sophistry***

Thirdly, apart from anachronism, sophistry can be identified as another characteristic of Lu Xun's satire of the Daoist priest and Shi Zhecun. A quotation from *Zhuangzi* – “*biyi yi shifei, ciyi yi shifei*” 彼亦一是非, 此亦一是非 (This may be right, but the reverse may not be wrong)<sup>374</sup> – is Zhuangzi's argument to dissuade the man from demanding compensation for his clothes and belongings. The interpretation by Zhuangzi the Daoist priest of the quotation is wrong as he blurred the distinction between right and wrong in order to exempt himself from his responsibilities. Moreover, this is also an utter distortion of the original meaning of the quote from *Zhuangzi*, as the original text does not deny the distinction between right and wrong; instead, it encourages scholars to transcend their respective arguments or parochial theories towards a higher common ground, possibly therefore being able to view others' opinions as equal to their own. In this episode of “Resurrecting the Dead”, the erroneous interpretation of *Zhuangzi* by Zhuangzi the Daoist priest suggests the vulgarisation of Zhuangzi's thought among the Chinese intellectuals due to their insincerity that leads to the decay of truth. Coincidentally, Shi Zhecun indeed adopted this quote in one of his essays during that debate with Lu Xun, where he added two more lines to it saying “*weiwu shifeiguan, shuji mianshifei*” 唯无是非观, 庶几免是非 (Only by denying the distinction between right and wrong, can one probably exempt himself from trouble).<sup>375</sup> Five days later, on October 25<sup>th</sup>, Lu Xun argued back with an essay to satirise Shi Zhecun's efforts in confounding right and wrong by citing Bernhard Karlgren's comment on the Chinese

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<sup>374</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 207.

<sup>375</sup> See Shi Zhecun, “Zhi Li Liewen xiansheng shu” 致黎烈文先生书 (A Letter to Mr Li Liewen), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 5. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 380.

language from the Swedish sinologist's monograph *Sound and Symbol in Chinese* that the ambiguity of the Chinese language does not baffle the Chinese; rather, they like to cultivate such ambiguity. Lu Xun ended his essay with an irony that "it's better for us Chinese to be vague, or else we'll have trouble".<sup>376</sup> Apparently, what Lu Xun criticises in both this essay and "Resurrecting the Dead" is the absurdity in Shi Zhecun's added lines and Zhuangzi the Daoist priest's opinion in the story that the only way to avoid trouble is to not distinguish right and wrong. However, this is but a trick of self-deception as one cannot dissolve trouble simply by denying its existence.

The same can be said about the episode of Zhuangzi's plea for the god of fate's help by citing his dream in which he turned into a butterfly and confused the difference between dream and reality, to urge the god to ignore his principles and offer help. In fact, in *Zhuangzi*, the original argument rests on the concept of *wuhua* 物化 (to dissolve the distinctions between dream and reality) that urges readers to look beyond themselves and arrive at a wholistic, thus more objective, perspective to see things.<sup>377</sup> To interpret *wuhua* as to confuse dream and reality is again erroneous, and this blunder even causes Zhuangzi in the story to blur the distinction between life and death as he tried to persuade the god of fate to revive the skull by claiming "how can we tell whether this skull is alive now or not, and whether what is called a return to life is not actually death?".<sup>378</sup> It's fair to say that such interpretation itself amounts to an outright distortion of the original fable, as in the original text the question whether it is Zhuangzi who dreamt of becoming a butterfly or it is a butterfly who dreamt of becoming

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<sup>376</sup> See Lu Xun, "Zhongguo wen yu Zhongguo ren" 中国文与中国人 (The Chinese Language and the Chinese People), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集* (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 5. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 383. The original text is 我们还是含混些好了。否则，反而要感受困难的。

<sup>377</sup> See Chen Guying ed., *Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi* 庄子今注今译 (*Modern-day Annotations to and Translation of Zhuangzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983, p. 92.

<sup>378</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 201.

Zhuangzi is answered by the author of *Zhuangzi* that “there must be differences between Zhuangzi and a butterfly”.<sup>379</sup> However, the Daoist priest Zhuangzi in the story not only failed to understand the quote by putting it in the full context, but also extended his confusion too far to blur the difference between fundamental concepts of life and death. It is the Daoist priest’s insincerity – lack of respect for the original text – that leads to his outright distortion of the ancient allegory. In this sense, “Resurrecting the Dead” borders on a parody of the original allegory in which Zhuangzi treats the skull with sympathy and carries on a peaceful and respectful talk with it in his dream without employing spiritualism to manipulate its life and death. As for the meaning of the original dialogue between Zhuangzi and the skull, some scholars interpret it as a parable for the tremendous suffering of human life compared with which even death seems more bearable. In stark contrast, the Daoist priest Zhuangzi in “Resurrecting the Dead” turned a blind eye to the suffering of the common people and deemed himself entitled to dictate their life and death; it is his lack of sympathy or compassion as well as his false sense of superiority over the masses, vividly represented by his costume, his incantation, his diction and his buck-passing behaviour at the end of the story, that makes him a perfect epitome of the type of the Chinese intelligentsia who seek self-aggrandisement more than anything else.

### *A language for the masses*

In the last section of the analysis of “Resurrecting the Dead”, my argument that this one-act play is Lu Xun’s experiment to create *dazhong yu* (a language for the masses) will be presented. “Resurrecting the Dead” can also be deemed as Lu Xun’s efforts to rewrite stories of the ancient scholars in *dazhong yu* to reach a wider audience. The story’s unique form of dialogue highlights Lu Xun’s attempt to integrate meaningful expressions from various

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<sup>379</sup> See *Zhuangzi – Qiwulun* 庄子-齐物论. <https://ctext.org/zhuangzi/adjustment-of-controversies/zhs>. Viewed on 10 December, 2019.

dialects into *dazhong yu* designed for general readers from all over China. Dialects of Chinese, especially those used in Shanghai and Suzhou areas, appear in “Leaving the Pass”, to emphasise the difficulties they pose to people from various parts of China. If the baffling Suzhou dialect in that story is mainly employed as light-hearted humour, to remind the readers of such an imperative problem, “Resurrecting the Dead” demonstrates Lu Xun’s endeavour to address this problem of dialects as he points out in “A Layman’s Remarks on Writing” that various dialects in their written form, that cannot be easily understood by speakers of each other dialects, can evolve into a commonly accepted written form of *dazhong yu*. The means to achieve this is an eclectic one, as Lu Xun concludes in the essay that “using dialects in children’s primers while gradually adding into commonly used grammar and vocabulary”<sup>380</sup> can contribute to the formation of a commonly accepted *dazhong yu* that is “rooted in natural dialects and wrought with artificial elements”.<sup>381</sup> He also emphasises that the “meaningful and eloquent” terms and expressions in various dialects are equally important as literary quotations in classical Chinese.<sup>382</sup> Although in this long essay, Lu Xun doesn’t cite any example to endorse his argument, a perfect example can be found in a separate shorter article written in the same period of time (August of 1934) about an expression – *daxue fenfei* 大雪纷飞 (a blizzard with snow flying everywhere). The point of this article as Lu Xun’s rebuttal of attacks against *dazhong yu* is his argument that “the colloquial Chinese is not literal translation of the classical, nor is *dazhong yu* literal translation of the classical or the colloquial Chinese”.<sup>383</sup> Regarding the point of view

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<sup>380</sup> See Lu Xun, “Menwai wentan” 门外文谈 (A Layman’s Remarks on Writing), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 100. The original text is 启蒙的时候用方言，但一面又要渐渐的加入普通的语法和词汇去。

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., p. 101. The original text is 出于自然，又加入人工的话。

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>383</sup> See Lu Xun, “Daxue fenfei” “大雪纷飞” (About the Expression of “A Blizzard with Snow Flying Everywhere”), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 5. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 581. The original text is 白话并非文言的直译，大众语也并非文言或白话的直译。



proposed by those against *dazhong yu* that the expression of “*daxue fenfei*” from classical Chinese is more succinct and expressive than the colloquial rendering of “*daxue yipian yipian fenfen de xiazhe*” 大雪一片一片纷纷地下着 (the snowflakes are falling down one by one), Lu Xun rejects the claim and cites examples from his own dialect used in Jiangsu and Zhejiang areas and from *Shuihuzhuan* 水浒传 (*Outlaws of the Marsh*) to endorse his argument. He notes that, in his dialect, adverbs such as “*xiong* 凶”, “*meng* 猛” or “*lihai* 厉害 (heavily or strongly)” are often employed to describe the meaning of “*daxue fenfei*”, and he handpicks the expression of “*xue zheng xiade jin* 雪正下得紧” from the famed popular novel written in colloquial Chinese as a far more indictive and lively expression than “*daxue fenfei*”, its classical equivalent.<sup>384</sup> This short article indicates that the ideal *dazhong yu* Lu Xun endeavours to build up is a lively language absorbing nutrients from natural sources including various dialects and stories written in colloquial Chinese, as these terms and expressions used in everyday life can breathe life into the largely listless and over-complicated classical Chinese. In other words, on the ground that loan words are proven to be vital to the enrichment and evolution of a native tongue, Lu Xun aims at borrowing appealing and meaningful expressions from dialects to salvage the dying language of Chinese.

Moreover, Lu Xun’s eclectic insight of incorporating various elements into a language can possibly be traced back to an essay on classical Chinese literary studies he translated and published in 1927 – “Yunyong kouyu de tianci” 运用口语的填词 (The Use of Colloquial Terms in the Composition of Lyrics to the Given Tunes of *Ci*) by Suzuki Torao 鈴木虎雄, a Japanese scholar of Chinese classical literature. Citing abundant examples of the use of colloquial words and expressions in *ci* 词 (lyrics) and *qu* 曲 (songs), styles of poems in more

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., pp. 581-582.

popular language than *shi* 诗 (poems), Suzuki Torao compares three types of *ci*, i.e. those written almost entirely with colloquial expressions, those using relatively more and those dotted with a few. He reaches a conclusion that the best *ci* falls into the second category, with 60% terms from *yayu* 雅语 (the elegant or written style) and 40% from colloquial style,<sup>385</sup> while those completely using colloquial expressions are of little value due to the flippant attitude of composers: this style is only adopted when composers are describing something funny and despicable.<sup>386</sup> In addition, Suzuki points out that colloquial expressions, when employed occasionally in lyrics, can “breathe life” into them so that these *ci* and *qu* are of great value, while poets from the Ming and Qing eras only copied those “live” expressions from hundreds of years ago into their lyrics and poems without realising that those terms were already “dead” in the periods of time they lived in.<sup>387</sup> Undeniably, the blunder Ming and Qing poets made by copying terms from the works of ancients, that Suzuki demonstrates in this article, prompts Lu Xun to reflect upon the role of dialects in forming a new language for the masses in “A Layman’s Remarks on Writing”, and to act accordingly in rewriting the stories of ancient masters, in which Mozi, Laozi and Zhuangzi speak in a new tongue.

In the following paragraph, examples of terms and phrases from dialects of various areas adopted in “Resurrecting the Dead” will be presented to support my argument that Lu Xun’s adoption of the form of a one-act play is to experiment with expressions from dialects to create a language suitable for the masses. To start, Zhuangzi in the story, judging by the terms he uses, must be from Beijing, or the northern part of China. The following is a list of expressions from Beijing dialect:

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<sup>385</sup> Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun’s Translations*) Vol. 10. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958. p. 123.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

wanyer 玩意儿 (things) <sup>388</sup>

haizi 海子 (ponds or lakes) [dialects] <sup>389</sup>

juer 角儿 (a character or role in an opera) <sup>390</sup>

Secondly, Lu Xun also borrows terms from operas and novels of the Yuan, Ming and Qing eras written in *baihua* (colloquial language):

daizhu 带住 (to seize or take hold of) [from *Sanguo yanyi* 三国演义 and *Shuihuzhuan* 水浒传] <sup>391</sup>

daibian 带便 (passingly) [from *Shenluanjiao · jufeng* 慎鸾交·橘讽 by Li Yu 李渔] <sup>392</sup>

hundan 昏蛋 (abusive, referring to a mean person) [from *Guanchang xianxing ji* 官场现形记 by Li Boyuan 李伯元] <sup>393</sup>

jifeigouzou 鸡飞狗走 (chaotic situation caused by fear) [from *Tongshi* 痛史 by Wu Woyao 吴沃尧] <sup>394</sup>

jingchitiaotiao 精赤条条 (with nothing on) [from *Xiaoxiangyu* 潇湘雨, a Yuan-era drama by Yang Xianzhi 杨显之] <sup>395</sup>

yitahutu 一塌糊涂 (extremely messy situation) [from *Niehaihua* 孽海花 by Zeng Pu 曾朴] <sup>396</sup>

zeigutou 贼骨头 (abusive, referring to a criminal) [from *Shuihuzhuan* 水浒传] <sup>397</sup>

zhiren zhimian buzixin 知人知面不知心 (difficulty in fathoming the inner thoughts of human beings despite knowing the appearance of them) [from a Yuan-era drama entitled *Danbian duoshuo* 单鞭夺槊 by Shang Zhongxian 尚仲贤] <sup>398</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Jia Caizhu ed., *Beijingshua Erhua Cidian* 北京话儿话词典. Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 1990, p. 233.

<sup>389</sup> *Hanyu Dacidian* 汉语大词典 Vol. 5. Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1990, p. 1219.

<sup>390</sup> Jia Caizhu ed., *Beijingshua Erhua Cidian* 北京话儿话词典. Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 1990, p. 289.

<sup>391</sup> *Hanyu Dacidian* 汉语大词典 Vol. 3. Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1990, p. 730.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., p. 731.

<sup>393</sup> *Hanyu Dacidian* 汉语大词典 Vol. 3. Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1990, p. 626.

<sup>394</sup> *Chengyu Dacidian* 成语大词典. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2004, p. 543.

<sup>395</sup> Long Qian'an ed., *Songyuan Yuyan Cidian* 宋元语言词典. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1985, p. 975.

<sup>396</sup> *Chengyu Dacidian* 成语大词典. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2004, p. 1475.

<sup>397</sup> *Hanyu Dacidian* 汉语大词典 Vol. 10. Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1990, p. 186.

<sup>398</sup> *Chengyu Dacidian* 成语大词典. Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2004, p. 1643.

Many of these expressions are still widely used in a variety of dialects that Lu Xun refers to as *lianhua* 炼话 (expressive terms) in his own dialect of Shaoxing,<sup>399</sup> i.e. expressive and succinct terms created and used by the masses and thus constituting an indispensable element of a new language for the masses.

Moreover, for the three characters in the play, each employs particular expressions to indicate their social status. For Zhuangzi, expressions exclusively used in classical Chinese, such as *wuhu aizai* 呜呼哀哉 (what a pity), *yi* 矣 (an interjection) and *an* 安 (an interrogative pronoun), indicate his attachment to the intelligentsia, while abusive expressions used by the resurrected man including *fang nima de pi* 放你妈的屁 (bullshit) exposes his peasant upbringing. Additionally, humble terms employed by the constable when he discovered the identity of Zhuangzi as a government official, such as *ninlao* 您老 (“you” in a respectful way) and *bi* 敝 (“me” or “mine” in a humble way), suggest his inferiority to Zhuangzi in the bureaucratic hierarchy. These examples might indicate Lu Xun’s understanding of the social classes: the vital distinction between them does not lie in material possession as Marxist theory claims, but in the style of language each class employs, a more widely recognised view of the social classes.

To sum up, in the previous analysis of “Opposing Aggression”, “Leaving the Pass” and “Resurrecting the Dead”, evidence of inspiration from Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s criticism of the national character of the then Japanese is presented, so is evidence of Lu Xun’s efforts to re-write stories originally in classical Chinese in *dazhong yu* (a language for the masses) as

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<sup>399</sup> See Lu Xun, “Menwai wentan” 门外文谈 (A Layman’s Remarks on Writing), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 100.

his perspective on how to treat cultural heritage. This explains why Lu Xun uses *yongsu* 庸俗 (vulgarity) to describe his motive in the preface of *Old Tales Retold*, by claiming “I have no contempt for vulgarity: I delight in being vulgar”.<sup>400</sup> In fact, the term “vulgarity” is an irony; it refers to the masses, or to be specific, lively expressions created by the masses but rejected by the intelligentsia as “lowly and vulgar”. This is also where Lu Xun deviates from the elite intelligentsia he himself belongs to: he puts himself on an equal footing with the masses in terms of language use and treats language as a living thing.

### “Curbing the Flood”

The first three sections of “Curbing the Flood” unfold a long *ukiyo-e* style scroll of stereotypes from the Chinese national character and their interactions, including members of the intelligentsia, the “lower orders” and the bureaucratic hierarchy. The last section of the scroll describes a power struggle behind the succession to the throne, featuring an ambiguous conversation between Yu, the popular candidate, and Emperor Shun. This conversation, a faithful translation of the original text from *Records of the Grand Historian*, is suggestive of Lu Xun’s doubt about Yu’s role in the significant transition in China’s political system from crown abdication to hereditary dictatorship. This assumption is inspired by Berta Krebsova’s view that Lu Xun “develops and gives a new formulation” to the thoughts Sima Qian already expressed in *Book of the Grand Historian*. Moreover, Krebsova posits that Lu Xun also “works out the analogies that the story provides with the present as a cover for criticism of certain features of present-day life”. In my opinion, Lu Xun casts what he draws from Sima Qian’s record of history onto political affairs of the immediate present in this political allegory. The case for associating historical events with his contemporaries stems from Lu

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<sup>400</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 3. The original text is 我是不薄‘庸俗’，也自甘‘庸俗’的。

Xun's unique view of China's history that can be found in an essay written in 1925 entitled "Huran xiangdao" 忽然想到 (An Epiphany) :

China's collective character is recorded in its history that points to its destiny in the future; the truth of China's history is difficult to detect because the records are whitewashed and redundant. ... If you compare the records of the events from periods of Five Dynasties, the Southern Song and the late Ming eras with those of the current times, you'll be appalled by their striking similarities and can't help thinking that China remains unchanged despite time lapses. The present Republic of China is exactly the same as the Five Dynasties, the late Song and Ming eras.

历史上都写着中国的灵魂，指示着将来的命运，只因为涂饰太厚，废话太多，所以很不容易察出底细来。……试将记五代，南宋，明末的事情的，和现今的状况一比较，就当惊心动魄于何其相似之甚，仿佛时间的流逝，独与我们中国无关。现在的中华民国也还是五代，是宋末，是明季。<sup>401</sup>

At the end of this essay, Lu Xun cites the term *lunhui* 轮回 (Samsāra) to question whether "eternal recurrence" can be used to define the nature of China's history. If in 1925 Lu Xun already linked the events of current times with those in the past 1000 years, then, at the time he wrote "Curbing the Flood" in 1935, most probably he also associated then political leader Chiang Kai-shek with the legendary emperor Yu from more than 2000 years ago, weaving a covert satire of Chiang's rise to power and raising the alarm against Chiang's handover of power to his son in the near future.

### ***Yu and Chiang Kai-shek***

Similarities between the two famed political leaders can be, first of all, pinned down to their unparallel political achievements. Like Yu, the legendary hero who curbed a tremendous flood with an innovative method and resumed production, Chiang Kai-shek saw his reputation and power peak in 1928 when he reunited China through the Northern Expedition

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<sup>401</sup> See Lu Xun, "Huran xiangdao" 忽然想到 (An Epiphany), in *LXQJ 鲁迅全集 (The Complete Works of Lu Xun)*. Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 17.

(1926–1928) and became a de facto dictator in the 1930s. Military conquest of a vast territory in the name of “unification” is often considered the greatest achievement of a political leader. Moreover, even the description of Yu as a “tall, thin” man in “Curbing the Flood” resembles the appearance of Chiang Kai-shek. The “rough, beggarly-looking fellows with black faces and ragged clothes” who “neither moved, spoke nor smiled as if cast in iron” are most likely the embodiment of the characteristics of Generalissimo Chiang’s army men (“solidarity and perseverance”) who “shall suffer the pain that no one can bear and toil the labour that exceeds anyone’s capacity”.<sup>402</sup> It is with this army that Chiang Kai-shek gained victories in the battles during the Northern Expedition and summoned the warlords from all over China to rally around the new Kuomintang flag of the Republic of China.

In addition, Lu Xun’s choice of words for the title of the story can serve as another clue to the writer’s opinion about his fellow provincial Chiang. Generally speaking, when the legendary story of Yu’s curbing the flood is mentioned, the term “*zhishui*” 治水 is used rather than “*lishui*” 理水. Multiple levels of connotations can be identified in Lu Xun’s choice of words for the title of the story: the radical “王” from “理” originally refers to jade but here denotes “the king”, and when combined with “里” that means “the inside” this character “理” represents a wordplay suggesting “there is a king or dictator hidden inside”; according to another Chinese dictionary *Yupian* 玉篇, the verb “理” can be interpreted as “*zhiyu* 治玉 (to analyse jade)” or “*zheng* 正”,<sup>403</sup> which alludes to Chiang Kai-shek’s courtesy name – Jiang

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<sup>402</sup> See Chiang Kai-shek, “Zhonghua minguo ershiyi nian siyue bari dui bashijiu shi quanti guanbin jiang” 中華民國二十一年四月四日對八十九師全體官兵講 (An Address to No. 89 Division on April 4<sup>th</sup> 1932), in *Zongtong Jianggong Sixiang Yanlun Zongji* 總統蔣公思想言論總集 *The Complete Collection of President Chiang Kai-shek’s Thought and Speeches*. Vol. 10.

[http://www.cfd.org.tw/ccf001/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=455:0002-16&catid=130&Itemid=256](http://www.cfd.org.tw/ccf001/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=455:0002-16&catid=130&Itemid=256). Viewed on 10 Feb 2020.

<sup>403</sup> See *Yupian* 玉篇. <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=470060&remap=gb#提要>. Viewed on 11 Feb 2020.

Zhongzheng 蔣中正; and possibly the term “*zongli zhuyi*” 总理主义 (Our Leader’s Thought)

Chiang Kai-shek employed in a speech delivered to the Ministry of Education in 1931 to summarise his interpretation of the very core of Sun Yat-sen’s “*sanmin zhuyi*” 三民主义 is also involved in Lu Xun’s word play of “理” to satirise Chiang’s covert ambition to be a dictator, as the term “总理”, literally referring to the former President Sun Yat-sen, can also be rendered as “to take charge of everything or to dictate”. Thus, Chiang’s association between the origin of Sun’s “*zongli zhuyi*” and the “orthodox moral principle upheld by emperors Yao, Shun, Yu, Tang, Wen, Wu, Zhougong and Confucius”,<sup>404</sup> most likely inspires Lu Xun’s double entendre and his critique of Chiang’s hypocrisy in whitewashing dictatorship with Confucian principles of morality, as well as his warning against Chiang’s political rhetoric to prepare the administration for the legitimacy of his dictatorship.

That is why, in the last section of “Curbing the Flood”, Lu Xun faithfully translates almost every word of Sima Qian’s account of a conversation between Yu and Emperor Shun in classical Chinese into *dazhong yu*; both Sima Qian and Lu Xun strive to unveil the not-so-rosy truth of a power struggle behind the Confucian varnish of *shanrang* 禅让 (abdication in favour of the worthy) and *wangdao* 王道 (the Kingly Way). For instance, by saying “to rule, one must be prudent and calm”,<sup>405</sup> Yu is indeed sending a threat to Emperor Shun to force him to quietly abdicate the throne, and, Shun who saw through Yu’s ruse, on hearing Yu’s words, “with a sigh, entrusted affairs of state to him”.<sup>406</sup> The sigh of Shun indicates his

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<sup>404</sup> See Chiang Kai-shek, “Zhongguo jiaoyu de sixiang wenti” 中國教育的思想問題 (About the Ideological Issue of China’s Education), in *Zongtong Jiangong Sixiang Yanlun Zongji* 總統蔣公思想言論總集 *The Complete Collection of President Chiang Kai-shek’s Thought and Speeches*. Vol. 10. [http://www.ccf.org.tw/cccf001/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=444:0002-15&catid=129&Itemid=256](http://www.ccf.org.tw/cccf001/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=444:0002-15&catid=129&Itemid=256). Viewed on 11 Feb 2020.

<sup>405</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 75.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., p. 77.



reluctance to do so. Moreover, Emperor Shun's mention of Danzhu, son of Shun's predecessor Emperor Yao, can also be deemed as a warning to Yu, asking Yu not to let Yu's own son inherit the throne; Yu's clever answer, that he left home four days after the wedding and was never a proper father to his own son Qi 启, aims to reassure Shun that he works on a higher moral principle as he treats his work as more important than his family. The higher moral principle Yu claims he himself upholds works overtly against a natural relationship between father and son, thus becoming hypocritical. On the other hand, Lu Xun associates this moral rhetoric of a political leader of great achievement with Chiang Kai-shek's "*zongli zhuyi*", in order to reveal the same behavioural pattern between Yu and Chiang, both of whom were seemingly submissive to their predecessors and promised to transfer power later to someone other than their own sons, but in the end failed to do so. The fact that Chiang Kai-shek did pass down power to his son after his death in 1975 proves that Lu Xun's warning against Chiang's ambition in 1935 was not a false alarm. Coincidentally, Chiang is from the Zhejiang area where Yu has been worshipped by the local people as a hero for thousands of years. In "Curbing the Flood", Lu Xun describes the "acclamations and comments" from the people showing their support when Yu entered the imperial palace as sounding "like the roar of the waves of the River Zhe 浙水",<sup>407</sup>

### ***Dictatorship as a disaster***

In this sense, the term "*lishui*" unfolds another level of meaning – it alludes to the catastrophe brought about by dictatorship, or the "Kingly Way". To be specific, although Yu relieved the suffering of the people by curbing the huge flood, just like Chiang Kai-shek upended the battles between warlords with military victories and ushered in the prosperous "Nanking decade" from 1927 to 1937, such a type of "strong man", revered by his people (with

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<sup>407</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 75.

political propaganda), is indeed a dictator who longs for gripping power in the hands of himself by eliminating rivals and dissidents. Despotism, control of a country, clad in the name of “the Kingly Way”, is the ultimate catastrophe of China running throughout every period of history like recurrent floods that never end. Lu Xun eye-witnessed only 20 years ago that Yuan Shikai staged a farce to restore autocratic monarchy, and now Chiang Kai-shek was once again practising autocracy. He covertly attacked Chiang in an essay written in Japanese and published in Japan in 1934 which was later translated into Chinese by himself and published the same year. With the pen name of Shijie 石介, a fairly overt allusion to Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石, Lu Xun describes his impressions of Shanghai in 1933 where secret operations prevailed against free speech, and Fascist dictators such as Mussolini and Hitler were complimented in newspapers as model saviours of their countries, suggesting China had an equally great leader. Apart from this reference to Chiang, in this essay Lu Xun launches his attack on Chiang’s dictatorship that forces “freemen like me to surrender to slavery”,<sup>408</sup> traces Chiang’s *yumin zhengce* 愚民政策 (policy of keeping the people in ignorance) back to the First Emperor of Qin, and laments how appalling it is that the modern-day dictator is still implementing such a policy from over 2000 years ago.<sup>409</sup>

All in all, Lu Xun does not target his attack at Chiang Kai-shek as a person but at dictatorship that aims at enslaving the masses with draconian laws. His reflection on autocracy and the national character under despotism, both in this essay and in “Curbing the Flood”, can be seen as inspired by his translation of *Thought, Landscape and Characters* by Tsurumi Yūsuke, an essay collection about political figures from Britain and the U.S. as well as

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<sup>408</sup> See Lu Xun, “Shanghai suogan” 上海所感 (My Impressions of Shanghai), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 7. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 430.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

Tsurumi's in-depth reflections on liberalism. Lu Xun's sharp vigilance about Generalissimo Chiang's militarism stems from Tsurumi's insight into autocracy at the beginning of his collection: "Surprisingly, nations that rise with a continental army are destined to end up in autocracy, with various talents of their people withering", as "curbing the freedom of the nationals will not bring about prosperity of the nation because a nation equals a summation of the efforts of its people".<sup>410</sup> In this sense, I argue, Lu Xun's critique of Chinese national character in the last five stories of *Old Tales Retold* comes down to China's cruel authoritarian political heritage that continues to plague the national character and stifle individuality.

#### **"Gathering Vetch"<sup>411</sup>**

If "Curbing the Flood" presents a humourous satire of dictators and their subjects celebrating an achievement, "Gathering Vetch" is, on the contrary, a tragedy about the miserable fate of high-minded members from the intelligentsia and the gentry class under a regime that practices the so-called "Kingly Way" which aims at eliminating all dissidents and resistance, and forces everyone into submission. Wang Yao, probably the first scholar who identifies "the Kingly Way" as the theme of the story, claims that in "Gathering Vetch", the Kingly Way reduces the sincerity of the two brothers into "pedantry and folly". I'll take Wang Yao's argument further by arguing that the Kingly Way is so systemic that it is rooted in the heart

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<sup>410</sup> See Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun's Translations*) Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, pp. 303-304.

<sup>411</sup> This story narrates the tragic experience and death of two self-exiled brothers Boyi and Shuqi during the maelstrom of the war initiated by the king of Zhou to conquer the Shang dynasty. The first three sections describe the two brothers' decision to leave the Kingdom of Zhou, the shelter for them since they refused to succeed to the throne of their home kingdom, and to go into exile. The highlight on their way is the scene where they impeded the path of King Wu of Zhou and reprimanded him for starting an unjust war against the Shang dynasty. The fourth section tells how the two brothers escaped from the disbanded soldiers of the King of Zhou as well as the bandits, and how they survived by collecting vetch in Mount Shouyang when the Zhou dynasty was established. However, in the end the two brothers starved themselves to death because they had been accused of violating their own moral principles by a maid named A Jin whose master is highly critical of the two brothers. The last section features various comments and actions among the villagers and A Jin upon the death of the two brothers.

of every subject under the regime and prevails everywhere in its territory. On the surface, Boyi and Shuqi died of self-initiated starvation, that is, of suicide; the ultimate cause behind their tragic deaths is systemic cruelty brought about by an authoritarian regime, and the culprits are Lord Xiaobing and his maid A Jin.

It is true that Boyi and Shuqi did not die from the swords of King Wu of Zhou; however, the doctrine of “the Kingly Way” is more effective than knives and swords. Boyi and Shuqi starved themselves to death after the accusation of the maid A Jin who copied her master Lord Xiaobing’s condemnation of the brothers who vented their grievances in a poem while struggling to survive in their exile. It is Lord Xiaobing, the opportunist who pledged loyalty to the new king in exchange for a comfortable lifestyle, that caused the noble-minded brothers to die by introducing the doctrine of “the Kingly Way” to the illiterate, creating potential accomplices for the dictators. It is evident that Lord Xiaobing is indeed a “clever man” who can always make optimal choices based on his shrewd judgment of the status quo to aggrandise his personal benefit, which indicates that this “clever man” is not loyal to any particular king; rather, he is loyal only to his desire for material possessions and enjoyment. The selfishness this stereotype exemplifies is, to a large extent, the same as the one described by Kuriyagawa in *Out of the Ivory Tower* of a man who took the seat on a crowded train in a way so clever that his seemingly justifiable behaviour was not challenged by other fellow passengers.

Additionally, if compared with the same type in Lu Xun’s “The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave” in *Wild Grass*, Lord Xiaobing is undoubtedly more advanced in that he “had a taste for letters ... and was a poet himself”, and most importantly his cleverness helped him to pinpoint not only the flaws in Boyi and Shuqi’s poorly-written poems but also the most

deplorable element in the pair's characters – that they were “full of contradictions” – with the insight that “since ‘all under the sky is our sovereign's territory’, isn't the vetch they eat our king's property too?”,<sup>412</sup> which turns out to be the last straw, borrowed by A Jin and thrown at the brothers, that leads to their suicide. In addition, the clever man's harsh criticism of the two brothers' poetry as lacking “*dunhou*” 敦厚 (moderation) and “*wenrou*” 温柔 (tolerance),<sup>413</sup> is biased as the claim rejects literary works that vent grievances and expose injustice as bad. Moreover, what Lord Xiaobing cited as the reason why he refused to write on the tombstone of Boyi and Shuqi is but another example of his typical “cleverness”. His condemnation of the two as fools because they “wouldn't steer clear of politics”, but “expressed resentment” in their poems while failing to produce “art for art's sake”, as well as censuring government policy, reveals the secret of his “clever” survival tactics: total submission to the new regime. Compared with the “clever man” in Kuriyagawa's essay as well as the one who shed tears for the miserable life of the slave in “The Wise Man, the Fool and the Slave” in *Wild Grass*, Lord Xiaobing stands out with his apathy towards the suffering of his fellow men, his unswerving support for whoever is in power and the resulting hatred against dissidents and resistance.

On the other hand, the national character of the “slave”, epitomised by A Jin the maid in “Gathering Vetch”, showcases the same trajectory of evolution as that of the “clever man”. A Jin serves as a perfect example of an accomplice to her master, implementing her master's intention on her own initiative, and confidently exonerating herself from the blame that her accusation led to the death of Boyi and Shuqi by vilifying the brothers with a story she fabricated. She claimed that the two brothers died of their own “greed and hoggishness”, and

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<sup>412</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 107.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

this vividly narrated recital aroused resonance in her fellow villagers so that “a great weight had been lifted from their shoulders”.<sup>414</sup> This is, I argue, a “vulgarised” catharsis where the aesthetic value or the cathartic effect of a tragic event on the audience fails to cultivate great empathy for others; instead the tragedy is used as an excuse to shift the blame to others or to the victims themselves. A Jin’s vilification of Boyi and Shuqi deprives the two brothers’ miserable death of its moral poignancy. Therefore, the natural emotions of pity and empathy in the villagers for their miserable deaths do not take hold in their consciences, and the villagers’ moral sentiments are not lifted but lowered.

### ***Victimisation of the noble***

In this sense, “Gathering Vetch” focuses on the cruel victimisation of those with high moral principles by any member of the society in a dictatorship where submission to the regime is valued as the highest moral principle rather than the universally recognised virtues. On the other hand, the allegory also reveals the inability of Confucian morality to curb cruelty and violence that prevail in a dictatorship; rather, upholders of such moral principles quickly perish under the iron hand of dictators and are martyred for their faith. Leaders of the Guangfu Hui are martyrs of this type and suffer the same fate of being vilified after death. Both Lu Xun and his former teacher Zhang Taiyan were victims of the Kuomintang’s dictatorship: they were both listed as wanted by the Kuomintang regime in the 1920s<sup>415</sup> and 1930s.<sup>416</sup> It is their belief in justice, in particular their condemnation of cruelty, that renders

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<sup>414</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 113.

<sup>415</sup> See Zhang Nianchi, *Wo Suozhidao de Zufu Zhang Taiyan* 我所知道的祖父章太炎 (*Zhang Taiyan: My Grandfather as I Know Him*). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2016, p. 70. Zhang Taiyan was among the 66 scholars listed as wanted by the KMT in May 1927, and in June the KMT’s Zhejiang branch was ordered to confiscate Zhang Taiyan’s residence.

<sup>416</sup> See Lu Xun, “Zizhuan” 自传 (A Brief Account of My Life), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 8. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 402. Lu Xun mentions that he was told the KMT put him on the wanted list so he left home and went into hiding; and

see Lu Xun, “Guanyu Xu Shaodi, Ye Suzhong, Huang Pingsun” 关于许绍棣叶溯中黄萍荪 (About Xu Shaodi, Ye Suzhong and Huang Pingsun), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 7. Beijing:

them victims of a dictatorship. Such condemnation was heard in the line of the song that Boyi and Shuqi allegedly composed and was recorded by Sima Qian in his record of history; Lu Xun quoted and translated this song into *dazhong yu* in “Gathering Vetch” that says “a brigand replaces a brigand, not seeing his own fault”, alludes to “strong men” such as Chiang Kai-shek and Yuan Shikai seeking authoritarian rule by cruelty and terror from the 1910s to the 1930s that Lu Xun lived through. In this sense, Lu Xun’s “Gathering Vetch” is a salute to Sima Qian’s “A Biography of Boyi and Shuqi”, both stories highlighting the two brother’s moral courage to resist injustice and to accuse the powerful of cruelty and immoral behaviour. Boyi and Shuqi are definitely not “full of contradictions”: they sacrifice their life to defend their faith in Confucian morality. It is the dictators who are truly “full of contradictions”: they claim they are practising the benevolent Confucian Kingly Way while under the table they rule by oppression and tyranny. “Gathering Vetch” and “Forging the Swords” in *Old Tales Retold* are widely recognised as brilliant fiction, both of which are political allegories about the Guangfu Hui and the spirit of the high-minded members and martyrs. If “Forging the Swords” is a battle song dedicated to the Guangfu Hui, covertly criticising Yuan Shikai who restored autocratic monarchy, “Gathering Vetch” is an elegy Lu Xun composes with great sympathy and sober self-criticism of his fellow intellectuals.

### ***Questioning antiquity***

The truthfulness of orthodox Confucian history is brought into examination in “Gathering Vetch”, as in the officially edited history that is heavily censored in favour of the victors, where cruelty of the autocrats is omitted or whitewashed. For example, Boyi and Shuqi at the beginning of the story were convinced of the tyranny of King Zhou of Shang’s rule simply from the account of the blind musicians from the court of Shang, which is clearly Lu Xun’s

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Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 450. Lu Xun named the three government officials named Xu Shaodi, Ye Suzhong and Huang Pingsun as culprits who helped list him as wanted and vilified him in newspapers.

sarcasm about the gullibility of the scholars, and Lu Xun's doubt about the reliability of the orthodox historical record of King Zhou of Shang. Besides, in the middle of the story, two contradictory descriptions about the battle of Muye 牧野 reflect Lu Xun's serious suspicion about the truthfulness of different historical records of this significant battle that marks the collapse of the Shang Dynasty. Lu Xun's doubt is inspired by Wang Chong's *Lunheng*.<sup>417</sup> In a chapter entitled "Yuzeng" 语增 (Exaggerations), Wang Chong made a comment on the two contradictory versions of the battle:

According to Chapter Wucheng of *Shangshu*, during the battle of Muye, blood could float pestles and spread thousands of miles. Therefore, the Dynasty of Zhou replacing that of Shang was similar to the overthrow of Qin by founders of the Han Dynasty. On the other hand, claims that it didn't cost King Wu of Zhou any human life to defeat the King of Shang, because the latter's army changed sides, do not tell the truth and are only an exaggeration to extol the virtue of King Wu of Zhou.

察《武成》之篇，牧野之战，血流浮杵，赤地千里。由此言之，周之取殷，与汉秦一实也。而云取殷易，兵不血刃，美武王之德，增益其实也。<sup>418</sup>

Unlike Wang Chong who peeled off the gloss of the orthodox version recorded in Sima Qian's record of history,<sup>419</sup> Lu Xun stops short of making such judgements by saying "Despite the discrepancy between these accounts, one thing was certain – a victory had been won",<sup>420</sup> which possibly suggests that Lu Xun's sarcasm lies in the fact that the masses care more about the result of a war rather than its truth. In this way, Lu Xun brings Wang Chong's criticism up to a higher level: whether the means of cruelty can be justified by the victorious end.

<sup>417</sup> Another example I identify in *Old Tales Retold* of Lu Xun's references to *Lunheng*. See other references in my analysis of "Mending Heaven" in the first section of my thesis.

<sup>418</sup> See Wang Chong, *Lunheng*. <https://ctext.org/lunheng/yu-zeng/zhs>. Viewed on 18 Feb 2020.

<sup>419</sup> See Sima Qian, *Shiji*. <https://ctext.org/shiji/zhou-ben-ji/zhs>. Viewed on 18 Feb 2020. The original text is 纣师虽众，皆无战之心，心欲武王亟入。纣师皆倒兵以战，以开武王。

<sup>420</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 91.



Furthermore, a victory through cruelty is subtly denounced in the story through the conversation between a wounded soldier, a porter and someone else that Shuqi overheard. This episode is borrowed from Wang Chong's comment on the cruelty of King Wu who shot three arrows at the dead body of King Zhou of Shang, cut off his head with an axe and hung it from a huge white banner.<sup>421</sup> In the latter half of the conversation, Lu Xun faithfully retells Sima Qian's account of the same miserable fate of two concubines of King Zhou that Wang Chong did not comment on, and shows Shuqi's accusation that King Wu is "lacking in humanity".<sup>422</sup> In "Gathering Vetch" and "Mending Heaven", Wang Chong's perspectives that Lu Xun borrows are characterised by his critical thinking, his objective judgment of the "orthodox" records, his ability to re-evaluate the ancients and their works, and his courage to speak the truth from a humanistic perspective. Therefore, I argue, critical thinking and the humanism in Chinese cultural heritage are the elements Lu Xun values and strives to salvage, as they are the most powerful weapon the masses can have to counteract obscurantism and cruel authoritarianism.

To sum up, "Curbing the Flood" and "Gathering Vetch" are political allegories of autocracy, with the former story featuring the national character of a capable military leader of great accomplishment longing for the throne, exemplified by Yu (stand-in for Chiang Kai-shek), and the latter showcasing a miserable encounter of a type of men with high moral principles, usually intellectuals, represented by Boyi and Shuqi as well as intellectuals such as Zhang Taiyan and Lu Xun himself, victimised by the "Kingly Way" (hypocritical autocracy), i.e.

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<sup>421</sup> See Wang Chong, *Lunheng*. <https://ctext.org/lunheng/hui-guo/zhs>. Viewed on 18 Feb 2020. The original text is 或云：“武王伐纣，纣赴火死，武王就斩以钺，悬其首于大白之旌。”…纣尸赴于火中，所见凄沧，非徒色之齟齬、袒之暴形也。就斩以钺，悬乎其首，何其忍哉？

<sup>422</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 95.

persecution from the dictator, the bandits, the hired hacks and apologists for dictators together with their accomplices. Compared with another political allegory in *Old Tales Retold*, “Forging the Sword”, these two reflect Lu Xun’s deeper and wider contemplation of the Chinese political legacy – eternal recurrence of dictatorship marked by bloodshed and cruelty. On top of Wang Chong’s accusation of fraudulent censorship of history and excessive violence, two more possible influences can be pinned down: one is Lu Xun’s personal experience of persecution under a dictatorship that aims at eliminating all political rivals; the other is the inspiration of his translation of Tsurumi Yūsuke’s *Thought, Landscape and Characters* that examines politics from the perspectives of political figures and national character of the U.S. and Britain.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis focuses on the influence of Lu Xun’s translations on his short story collection *Old Tales Retold*, especially his translations of Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s *Symbols of Anguish* and *Out of the Ivory Tower* as well as Tsurumi Yūsuke’s *Thought, Landscape and Characters*. The inspiration of *Symbols of Anguish* can be found in the symbols used by Lu Xun, i.e. the swords, the heads, the dark man etc. in “Forging the Swords”, while the influence of his

translations of *Out of the Ivory Tower* and *Thought, Landscape and Characters*, can be summarised as exploring issues involved in the “national character” (*guominxing/kokuminsei*), a theme of all the eight stories in this collection. The first scholar who assigned the national character as the theme of this collection is probably Katayama Tomoyuki. Katayama posits that “slacking off” or “passiveness” is the characteristic trait in the Chinese national character Lu Xun discovers during his study in Japan and criticises in *Old Tales Retold*. In my thesis, I demonstrate a wider scope of characteristic traits in Lu Xun’s criticism of the national character, and other potential inspiration of his translation of cultural and social critiques by Kuriyagawa and Tsurumi. In *Out of the Ivory Tower*, Kuriyagawa not only features two stereotypes of his fellow Japanese – “the clever man” and “the idiot”, but also points out that the transformation of the national character of Japan is the very task the Japanese living in the new era should undertake<sup>423</sup> to address their defects such as provincialism, superficiality and lack of vitality. On the other hand, Tsurumi Yūsuke, in his essay collection, profiles the characters of American and British statesmen and cultural critics such as Woodrow Wilson, Matthew Arnold and John Morley. Lu Xun, in his translator’s note, praises Tsurumi’s insights into British and American politics as well as his observations of the national characters of the two countries as “so lively and lucid, in a bold and flowing style that readers can hardly tear themselves away from”.<sup>424</sup> Apparently, Tsurumi’s brilliant style of profiling political figures in a concise and appealing way inspired Lu Xun’s characterisations in the last five stories of members of the Chinese intelligentsia he himself knew. Such a style is what Lu Xun calls “*suxie* 速写 (sketches)”<sup>425</sup> in the preface of

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<sup>423</sup> See Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun’s Translations*) Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, p. 289.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., p. 147. The original text is 其中关于英美现势和国民性的观察，关于几个人物……都很有明快切中的地方，滔滔然如瓶泄水，使人不觉终卷。

<sup>425</sup> See Lu Xun, *Old Tales Retold*. Translated by Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2010, p. 4.

*Old Tales Retold*. The “hastiness” of sketching, in fact, refers to a succinct descriptive style of characters wherein their quintessential characteristics are highlighted. For example, Lu Xun’s description of a series of Mozi’s actions on his departure at the beginning of “Opposing Aggression” that “Taking no change of clothes, not even a towel, he tightened his leather belt, walked down the steps, put on his straw sandals, shouldered his bundle and left without a look behind. His bundle was still emitting puffs of steam.”<sup>426</sup> The terseness and rhythm in this sentence mark not only the urgency of the task Mozi was to undertake, but also the essential qualities of Mozi as a steadfast man of action and sound judgment, which is highlighted by the ingeniously arranged detail at the end of the sentence about freshly steamed buns prepared for his journey that hadn’t cooled down. In addition, Lu Xun changed the name of the first story from the original “The Broken Mountain” into “Mending Heaven”, as he mentions in the preface of *Old Tales Retold*.<sup>427</sup> Therefore, the titles of all the eight stories are phrases describing actions with only two Chinese characters, accentuating the power of actions and connoting the urgency of taking actions. To sum up, the inspiration Lu Xun draws from his translation of Kuriyagawa and Tsurumi’s essay collections are two-fold: examination of the national character, and the succinct style of sketching such characters to bring out their uniqueness. Also, borrowed techniques such as caricature and exaggeration detailed in Kuriyagawa’s essay, enhance the artistic effects of characterisation in the last five stories in *Old Tales Retold*. Characteristic traits such as Laozi’s withdrawal and Zhuangzi’s glibness are accentuated through pithy descriptions of their costumes, actions and conversations, contributing to a more powerful dissection of the Chinese national character. Lu Xun’s criticism of the Chinese national character in *Old Tales Retold* can be traced back to Nü Wa and “the true descendants of the goddess”<sup>428</sup> in the first story “Mending Heaven”.

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

Stereotypes of the national character that are roughly moulded in this story evolve into an array of characters more vividly portrayed in the following ones. Firstly, Mozi can be deemed as a genuine “descendant of Nü Wa” in that both of them represent a type of individual who sacrifices their own interests or even lives through solid actions and toil for the well-being of others without asking for anything in return. Secondly, the four types of “little creatures” Nü Wa created i.e. the Daoist priests, the warlords, the plain folk and the scholars in “Mending Heaven” stage their own comeback in the rest of the stories. For example, the Daoist priest who begged Nü Wa to save his life and asked for an elixir of immortality in the first story, assumed the identity of Zhuangzi and did exactly the same thing in the last story “Resurrecting the Dead”, by pleading with a deity to bring a skull back to life simply to gratify his curiosity. This is the reason why Lu Xun dresses Zhuangzi in this story in “a Daoist cap and cloth gown”, suggesting that the true feature of Zhuangzi is to “seek the source of life”.<sup>429</sup> The message Lu Xun intends to deliver is that Daoist priests are always obsessed with resorting to supernatural powers to manipulate human life, despite that times and circumstances have changed. Moreover, their attachment to the establishment also remains unchanged because the Daoist priests and alchemists in “Mending Heaven” hoped to win favour of the First Emperor of Qin, while at the beginning of “Resurrecting the Dead” Zhuangzi was on his way to the Kingdom of Chu to make his fortune. In other words, the stereotype of Daoist priests in this Chinese national character discourse highlights traits such as self-aggrandisement and egotism that drive them to fawn upon their superiors and insult their subordinates, lacking sincerity and respect for their fellowmen and for the deities. This is where glibness and vulgarity, the two key words in the preface of *Old Tales Retold*, are accentuated as two prominent characteristic traits in the national character that sharply contrast with the love and sincerity embodied in Nü Wa and Mozi. Therefore, it is fair to

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

conclude that Lu Xun's criticism of Daoism in this collection focuses more on certain traits in the national character associated with Daoist disciples than on this indigenous religion itself.

Furthermore, the same perspective can be applied to the other three types of "little creatures" in "Mending Heaven", especially to the scholar who held a highly-polished green bamboo tablet carved with characters and accused the naked Nü Wa of being immoral by virtue of her nudity, although it chose to stand between her legs and look up. This little creature features its cleverness (being able to make intricately carved writings) and conservativeness (making undue moral judgment and offering no solution but crying) in this story. These exact two traits can be found in the character Gongshu Ban in "Opposing Aggression" who was able to make intricately designed toys but unable to see the immorality of the king's decision to initiate a war against a small kingdom. Gongshu Ban's ineptness in failing to make a sound moral judgment about a war and take actions to stop it can be deemed as one of the focuses in Lu Xun's criticism of the Chinese intellectuals in *Old Tales Retold*. In "Leaving the Pass", Laozi made the same mistake in that he didn't make a sound judgment on his own situation or couldn't devise a viable solution; it is also his lack of spontaneity that leads to his withdrawal from the scholarly world into the desert. Besides Laozi's physical withdrawal from "the cycle of transformations",<sup>430</sup> there's another type of withdrawal, that is to "not change [from] your father's way"<sup>431</sup> as suggested by Yu's officials to the legendary ruler in "Curbing the Flood". No matter how fine a gloss, such as *xiao* 孝 (filial piety), the officials put on their stubborn resistance to change, their ineptness in assessing the existing solutions and devising new ways to improve them is laid bare. Lacking sensible judgment prompts one to cling to whatever one is accustomed to, which is indeed a withdrawal into the conventions

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

that inhibit any change or progress and, in turn, impede creativity. Therefore, my conclusion is that conservativeness is an innate characteristic trait of Chinese intellectuals that Lu Xun aims to reprove, as opposed to the abilities to think logically and make reasonable judgment exemplified by Mozi, the ideal type of intellectual in *Old Tales Retold*.

Moreover, the original type of warlords/warriors in “Mending Heaven” make their grand return in the story “Gathering Vetch” as King Wu of Zhou and his “ranks of men in armour” put up official edicts written in a rigid style that justify the war they initiated against the King of Shang as “a just punishment”<sup>432</sup> for the king’s immoral actions. This is exactly the same as the little creature “covered with strips of metal” who complained to Nü Wa in rigid classical Chinese about their immoral rival Kang Hui whose “heart harbours evil”.<sup>433</sup> In both cases, moral failings of their rivals are adopted as a legitimate reason for the warlords to initiate wars against them. Also, in “Gathering Vetch”, to reinforce a positive moral reputation of the Zhou clan, King Wu of Zhou’s advisor ordered the release of Shuqi and Boyi who were brave enough to impede the path of the king and accused him of breaching the moral principles of filial piety and righteousness in front of a large group of people. However, in the latter half of the story, the cruel killing of the former king by King Wu of Zhou further attests to his and his army’s disregard of moral principles. Then the truth about the war is censored by the victors or even distorted to whitewash their inhumanity, which exposes the hypocrisy of the warlords in claiming themselves to be the upholders of the moral principles while “not seeing [their] own fault”.<sup>434</sup> As a result, the moral principles are reduced to rhetoric that can no longer exert influence on people. That said, not all warriors in this collection are characterised with hypocrisy. Both Yi in “The Flight to the Moon” and Meijianchi in

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

“Forging the Swords” can be deemed as representing a type of truly moral warriors who are honest and true to themselves, never unnecessarily resorting to violence. In this sense, cruelty or undue violence that causes human suffering is the criterion Lu Xun uses in determining whether warriors employ violence legitimately. This further attests to Lu Xun’s humanist perspective in the re-evaluation of the traditional Chinese morality.

On the other hand, the representative of the common people who survived the war but could only repeat every word Nü Wa said in “Mending Heaven”, transforms as the maid A Jin in “Gathering Vetch”. She repeated exactly her master’s condemnation of Boyi and Shuqi, serving to compel the two brothers toward their demise. Parroting the words or terms that ordinary folks don’t understand at all can be found among “the lower orders” in “Curbing the Flood”. Just like A Jin who repeated the cliché “all under the sky is our sovereign’s territory”<sup>435</sup> which she picked up from her master Lord Xiaobing, the lower orders copied terms coined by the intellectuals, such as “the public interest”, “a selfish individualist”, “*huaxia* 华夏 (a laudatory word for China)” and “the human heart abounds with evil”, to either hound their fellow men into presenting at a summons as their representative, or to flatter government officials. With these examples, Lu Xun may suggest that the way ordinary people learned expressions or new terms itself is flawed because they only parrot the sounds of them without understanding their exact meanings. This is where the glibness of the ordinary people lies: only by mimicking the sounds of the terms and expressions can they assume the identity of the users of these terms, and thus their social status is elevated so that they can force their opinions on their peers. In other words, the masses treat terms and expressions as power that can be transferred to themselves once they use them. In this sense, they are doing exactly the same thing as Zhuangzi in “Resurrecting the Dead” when he

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid., p. 109.



chanted paragraphs from elementary textbooks as incantations to summon the god of fate to gratify his needs. Both of them treat the Chinese language as if it had a certain kind of innate power that can be manipulated at will. In summary, to underscore glibness or insincerity as a characteristic trait in both the Chinese intellectuals and the masses, Lu Xun inserts in these stories details of misuse or mere mimicking of terms and expressions to suit one's own purposes, enhancing the satirical effects of such characters as well as his criticism of the glibness in the national character.

The Chinese language also marks a significant aspect of Lu Xun's probe into the Chinese national character – the role of language in shaping the national character. An overview of all the eight stories in terms of style can reveal Lu Xun's view of the role of language in creating his characters in the stories. In "Mending Heaven", the little creatures are distinguished from each other by their different styles of costume and speech. Additionally, the amount of dialogue increases in the rest of the stories after "Mending Heaven" and culminates in "Resurrecting the Dead" as a change in genre – from short stories to a one-act play. Indeed, the use of dialogue increases dramatic conflicts and tensions in stories, giving them greater appeal; however, Lu Xun's adoption of dialogue in *Old Tales Retold* also aims at lending voices to the characters themselves and revealing their true traits. Defining his characters with their distinct linguistic style rather than their appearances unveils the undertone of Lu Xun's criticism of the national character – men are defined by language and language reform is an effective pathway to reform the national character. This point of view can be traced back to Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Out of the Ivory Tower*, where Kuriyagawa criticises the Japanese language as "underdeveloped" and "unsuited for public speaking", and therefore in

need of reform.<sup>436</sup> Kuriyagawa's perspective on the urgency to conduct a language reform in Japan convinces Lu Xun of a pressing need to improve the Chinese language. What's more, Kuriyagawa specifies that his purpose to make the Japanese language more suitable for public speaking is to change a deeply ingrained mentality of his fellow citizens – “out of the mouth comes evil” that gives rise to a characteristic trait of being reluctant to express one's own opinion.<sup>437</sup> Lu Xun borrows the same method but with a different target, which can be identified in an essay written in October 1933, titled “The Chinese Language and the Chinese People”. In this essay, Lu Xun quotes the Swedish linguist Bernhard Karlgren and emphasises it is the upper-class people in China who intentionally keep the language ambiguous and difficult as a means to maintain their own privilege over their peers and the masses.<sup>438</sup> Evidently, Lu Xun attempts to establish a link between the vagueness of the Chinese language with a characteristic trait of the intelligentsia – egotism. Nearly a year later in 1934, Lu Xun dedicated an entire section titled “How literature became something for the elite”<sup>439</sup> in his celebrated long essay about the Chinese characters, reasserting the literati's efforts to aggrandise themselves as the factor that makes it difficult for the masses to grasp the Chinese characters and the literary language. Lu Xun concludes at the end of this section that, with a reformed language easier to grasp, the Chinese characters and the literati are no longer privileged.<sup>440</sup> In other words, Lu Xun's aim of language reform can be deemed as removing the mysteriousness or sacredness the Chinese literati impose on the Chinese writing system, which is detrimental to the development of the language as it is increasingly

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<sup>436</sup> See Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun's Translations*) Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, pp. 145-146.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>438</sup> See Lu Xun, “Zhongguo wen yu Zhongguo ren” 中国文与中国人 (*The Chinese Language and the Chinese People*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 5. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 383.

<sup>439</sup> See Lu Xun, *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, translated by Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang, Vol. 4. Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1960, pp. 109-111.

<sup>440</sup> See Lu Xun, “Menwai wentan” 门外文谈 (*A Layman's Remarks on Writing*), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 6. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005, p. 95.

monopolised by a minority in society – the egotistic elite. Lu Xun’s humanistic perspective on the Chinese writing system enables him to see the fundamental flaw in it – it benefits a minority of people at the expense of the welfare of the majority. Therefore, his endeavour to reform the Chinese language is not only for the sake of the language itself, but also for the purpose of *liren* (cultivating individuals), individuals like Mozi in “Opposing Aggression” characterised as an altruistic man of action, of logical thinking and of justice and courage. On the other hand, in the same essay Lu Xun urges the readers to put *dazhong yu* (a language of the masses) into action, and he takes the lead himself – resuming writing the last five stories in *Old Tales Retold*. In the previous chapter, detailed examples are cited to support my analysis of how Lu Xun incorporates selected expressions and words from a wide range of dialects and popular literature into these stories, especially in “Resurrecting the Dead”. In summary, inspired by Kuriyagawa’s proposal to reform the Japanese language to change the national character, Lu Xun seeks to popularise Chinese writing to break the elite’s monopoly of the language and to empower the masses so that individuals can be cultivated from among the masses who can finally guide the masses out of this morass of glibness and vulgarity.

In addition to his penetrating examination of the Chinese national character and advocacy of *dazhong yu* to change it, Lu Xun in *Old Tales Retold* goes deeper and exposes the ultimate contributing factor to the national character – tyranny. This, again, can be attributed to the influence of *Out of the Ivory Tower* and *Thought, Landscape and Characters*. First of all, Kuriyagawa Hakuson explicitly states in his essay collection that the reason why the Japanese are not good at public speaking is none other than the autocratic regime that deprives them of their free speech, and laments that his fellow citizens don’t deem a lack of free speech

painful.<sup>441</sup> In addition, he also specifies that it is the three hundred years of autocratic policies of the Tokugawa Shogunate that stripped the Japanese of their principles thus the “clever-man” type were getting even more clever while the “idiots” were becoming obsolete.<sup>442</sup> Apparently, Kuriyagawa associates autocracy with the typical characteristics of its subjects. On the other hand, Tsurumi Yūsuke in *Thought, Landscape and Characters* also points out that under a tyrannical regime, people who are sensitive and frank would become angry with it and therefore be unable to survive.<sup>443</sup> Such a link between tyranny and the national character can be easily found in a political allegory, “Gathering Vetch”, in *Old Tales Retold* where the two “idiots”, Boyi and Shuqi, died while the “clever” master Lord Xiaobing and the even more “clever” maid A Jin thrived. The implication is that characteristic traits such as honesty, principle and righteousness embodying noble-mindedness are usually replaced by the vices of vulgarity and egotism under a tyranny. The culprit behind this tragedy is indeed tyranny in the name of *wangdao* 王道 (the Kingly Way) that aims at imposing the will of the ruler onto everyone while eliminating dissidents with an iron hand. Beneath the gloss of grandeur and benevolence that the name of the Kingly Way paints onto itself, lies its core – the cruelty of tyranny. The same hypocrisy can be identified in another political allegory in this collection – “Curbing the Flood”, where the much-lauded ancient Chinese political tradition of *shanrang* 禅让 (abdication in favour of the worthy) proves to be achieved by coercion rather than by moral integrity. Characters representing scholars, government officials and the lower orders converge in this story and demonstrate how egotistic, hypocritical, insincere and vulgar they can be in a hierarchical society under a tyrannical regime. In this sense, Lu Xun’s criticism of the national character in the political allegories in

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<sup>441</sup> See Lu Xun, *Lu Xun Yiwenji* 鲁迅译文集 (*A Compilation of Lu Xun’s Translations*) Vol. 3. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1958, p. 145.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid., p. 444.

*Old Tales Retold* is focused on tyranny and the moral failings the cruelty of tyranny causes to the society.

On the other hand, the root of moral failings in people subject to a tyranny is further clarified by Tsurumi Yūsuke in his essay collection. In an essay titled “About Liberalism”, Tsurumi argues that it is lack of liberalism rather than militarism that leads to the collapse of Germany during World War I, as liberalism, marked by tolerance, can neutralise extremist ideologies of militarist autocracy and social revolution, and therefore prevent a society from breaking down.<sup>444</sup> Then he cites the term *pāsonariti* パーソナリティー (character or individuality) and points out that “individuality” constitutes the foundation of liberalism, and the aim of liberalism is to create a society that offers the optimum conditions for the cultivation of individuality.<sup>445</sup> He further asserts that any ideology marked by intolerance is against liberalism and can be defined as tyranny.<sup>446</sup> In summary, Tsurumi highlights a vicious cycle of tyranny that institutionalises intolerance and strangles individuality, and in turn a lack of fresh individualistic perspectives to promote the society to renew itself naturally results in social stagnation or collapse. In this case, “Resurrecting the Dead” can be deemed as a political allegory about lack of tolerance due to the inability of the literati and the masses to truly understand each other, hinting at a potential collapse of a tyrannical society that uses violence (the police force) to address disputes. Clearly, Lu Xun absorbs Tsurumi’s perspective on the significance of liberalism, and puts forward his own pathway of doing it: to create *dazhong yu* to equip the masses with an effective tool to develop their own individuality, and thus diversified opinions can contribute to a liberal society.

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., p. 452.

As for another political allegory in *Old Tales Retold* “Forging the Swords”, beyond its association with Lu Xun’s personal experience as an alleged member of the Guangfu Hui, this allegory also features a significant metaphor with the skulls. At the end of the story, since no one could distinguish which skull belonged to the king, the dark man and Meijianchi, the three skulls and the body of the king were finally buried together, which implies that avengers (Meijianchi) or assassins (the dark man) could possibly turn into tyrants in their defiance of tyranny. In Lu Xun’s eyes, tyranny is not just a political term, but a characteristic trait commonly found in the Chinese that typifies intolerance of different opinions and cruel crackdowns on adversaries or dissidents. It is this very character that gives rise to China’s longstanding tyrannical rule and under that rule such character deepens and prevails. To unlock the vicious cycle of tyranny, Lu Xun proposes his own way of reforming the national character through the Chinese language and literature to bring about gradual changes in the society towards a more tolerant and liberal one, rather than violent revolution, which he thought could serve to perpetuate tyrannical rule. Therefore, Lu Xun’s criticism of the Chinese national character is indeed a theme of *Old Tales Retold* that runs throughout the entire collection; it points to China’s tyrannical political tradition as a critical contributing factor but it never rests there. Lu Xun sees through the multifarious political and social activities and pinpoints characters and individuals; he abstracts their characteristic traits from their actions and speech and paints a *ukiyo-e* style of scroll of the Chinese to account for both his view on China’s history and heritage, and his solution to the social and political problems in his day. His inspiration is, again, from Tsurumi’s essay about liberalism where Tsurumi first proposes that liberalism comes down to a term *kokoro mochi* 心持ち (mental attitude)<sup>447</sup> that Lu Xun translates into *juxin* 居心 (intention or mentality), and then sums up as

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<sup>447</sup> See Tsurumi Yūsuke, *Thought, Landscape and Characters*. <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1021502>. Viewed on 12 February 2020, p. 279. The original text is 自由主義とは心持ちである (Liberalism can be defined as a mental attitude).

*pāsonariti* (character). Moreover, the very idea that to cultivate true individuals from among the masses is the key to liberalism, can be also considered as an inspiration from Tsurumi Yūsuke, who wrote a long essay about the American President Woodrow Wilson and hailed him as a “*idainaru heibonjin* 偉大なる平凡人 (great commoner)”<sup>448</sup> in *Thought, Landscape and Characters*. Tsurumi quotes Wilson’s own words about the importance of ordinary men at the beginning of this essay:

...that the nations are renewed from the bottom, not from the top; that the genius which springs up from the ranks of unknown men is the genius which renews the youth and energy of the people.<sup>449</sup>

This type of ordinary man appears in *Old Tales Retold* as the anonymous villager who voiced his own opinion against that of a scholar named Mr Bird-Head<sup>450</sup> at the beginning of “Curbing the Flood”. Evidently, Lu Xun’s advocacy of *dazhong yu* corresponds perfectly to the principle of liberalism to reform the society from the bottom up rather than from the top down. This is also where Lu Xun differs from his fellow intellectuals who are convinced that serving whoever is in power is the only way to make a change.

To conclude, this thesis analyses *Old Tales Retold* from the perspective of the influence of Lu Xun’s translations of short stories and literary criticism by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Nietzsche, Kuriyagawa Hakuson and Tsurumi Yūsuke, as well as ancient Chinese books such as *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, *Records of the Grand Historian*, *Lunheng*, *Zhuangzi*, *The Writings of Mozi* etc. First of all, the inspiration Lu Xun absorbed from foreign writers were mainly new techniques, novel images and symbols and insightful perspectives in order to modernise

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<sup>448</sup> See Tsurumi Yūsuke, *Thought, Landscape and Characters*. <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1021502>. Viewed on 12 April 2021, p. 42.

<sup>449</sup> See Woodrow Wilson, *The New Freedom* – Chapter IV Life Comes from the Soil. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/14811/14811-h/14811-h.htm#IV>. Viewed on 13 Feb. 2020.

<sup>450</sup> This character is thought to be a stand-in for Gu Jiegang.

Chinese literature and reform the national character, while his rendering of domestic literature reflects both his efforts in creating written vernacular Chinese and his criticism of the Chinese character through re-evaluation of historical figures and events as well as traditional morality. Secondly, anachronism as a style of the stories in *Old Tales Retold*, inspired by Akutagawa Ryunosuke's short stories, is double-edged in that it is not only employed to circumvent censorship of the satire of the follies of Lu Xun's contemporaries, but also to reflect his perspective on China's history – a vicious cycle of tyranny that repeats itself without any progress. Thirdly, Lu Xun's criticism of China's cruel tyrannical rule is from a humanistic perspective: that is, the character or mentality of the Chinese who contribute to tyranny, persist with it and fail to cultivate individual opinions and independent views. Such an acute observation of this critical problem can be traced back to Lu Xun's powerful advocacy of individuality in his early essays written in classical Chinese. For example, in “Wenhua pianzhi lun” 文化偏至论 (On Imbalanced Cultural Development), Lu Xun maintains that China has always worshipped material wealth and detested individuals<sup>451</sup> and he proposes that if every Chinese can achieve self-awareness and develop their own individual strengths, then this “nation of loose sand” can finally turn into a society of individuals with integrity.<sup>452</sup> As early as in 1907, Lu Xun embarked on his lifelong cause to cultivate individuality in his fellow citizens as real people (*liren* 立人). Towards the end of his life, the same cause can be identified in his last story collection *Old Tales Retold* in the form of short stories and in modern vernacular Chinese.

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<sup>451</sup> See Lu Xun, “Wenhua pianzhi lun” 文化偏至论 (On Imbalanced Cultural Development), in *LXQJ* 鲁迅全集 (*The Complete Works of Lu Xun*). Vol. 1. Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2005, p. 58. The original text is 中国在昔，本尚物质而疾天才矣。

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p. 57. The original text is 国人之自觉至，个性张，沙聚之邦，由是转为人国。



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