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Reconstructing Lu Xun: The Shifting Image of a Chinese Icon in the Anglophone World

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This paper explores the divergent receptions of Lu Xun in China and the Anglophone world, examining how his image has been constructed, exalted, and contested across ideological and cultural boundaries. In China, Lu Xun is revered as a literary saint and revolutionary prophet, with his contributions to the New Culture Movement and critiques of feudalism canonized in public memory. In contrast, Anglophone scholarship has deconstructed his figure, focusing on translation politics, Cold War anxieties, postcolonial theory, and aesthetic modernism. Western critics have examined his ethical ambiguities, ideological complexities, and the aesthetic tensions in his work. This comparative analysis highlights how Lu Xun's legacy reflects both the complexity of his work and the cultural, theoretical, and political contexts of his interpreters.

Keywords: Lu Xun, literary reception, cultural criticism, aesthetic modernism, Chinese enlightenment

Introduction

Lu Xun (1881-1936) is a central figure in modern Chinese literature, celebrated in China as a moral compass and literary genius. However, in Anglophone scholarship, his legacy has been interpreted through radically different lenses, from aesthetic reevaluation to ideological deconstruction. This study explores the divergent constructions of Lu Xun's legacy in Western contexts, focusing on his transformation into a revolutionary cultural figure in China and the broader concerns surrounding his reception in the Anglophone world, including translation, ideology, and global modernity.

The paper is divided into three chapters: Chapter One examines Lu Xun's canonization in China, tracing his rise through the New Culture Movement, Maoist ideology, and cultural critique. Chapter Two analyzes how Lu Xun's image is deconstructed in Anglophone scholarship, particularly through Cold War politics, poststructuralist theory, and postcolonial critique. Chapter Three explores the motivations behind these reappraisals, examining translation politics, universalism vs. cultural specificity, and Lu Xun's role in Western critiques of Chinese modernity.

This paper will explore the evolution of Lu Xun's image in both China and the Anglophone world, examining how he transformed from a revolutionary hero to a complex intellectual figure, and how his works have been reinterpreted in different political and cultural contexts.

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Forging a Cultural Saint: The Making of Lu Xun in Modern China

Lu Xun (1881-1936), considered the father of modern Chinese literature, occupies a central role in China's cultural and ideological landscape. Revered as a literary genius, revolutionary thinker, and critic of feudalism, his image has been solidified as the "cultural saint" of modern China since the May Fourth Movement. This chapter explores how Lu Xun's image was constructed in China, focusing on four key aspects: his role in the New Culture Movement, his revolutionary status, his literary influence, and his critique of traditional Chinese culture.

The Standard-Bearer of the New Culture Movement

The New Culture Movement was an enlightenment movement focusing on human rights, women's liberation, education, and children's importance. It sought to reform and inherit traditional culture while making bold efforts in ideological and literary reforms. The pioneers of this movement were key witnesses and participants in China's cultural transformation, strengthening cultural confidence amid East-West interactions and paving the way for the nation's revival.

Lu Xun emerged as a leading figure of the New Culture Movement. This was a pivotal intellectual campaign in the 1910s and 1920s. It sought to overthrow Confucian orthodoxy and promote democracy, science, and vernacular writing. His short story "*Diary of a Madman*" (1918) is often considered China's first modern short story. It famously diagnosed traditional Chinese culture as cannibalistic: "我翻开历史一查，这历史没有年代，歪歪斜斜的每页上都写着'仁义道德'几个字。我横竖睡不着，仔细看了半夜，才从字缝里看出字来，满本都写着两个字是'吃人'！" (Lu, 1918, p. 34). The metaphor of cannibalism symbolized the spiritual and moral oppression embedded in China's feudal society. For this reason, Mao Zedong praised Lu Xun as "the chief commander of China's cultural revolution". Lu Xun's works were both ideologically and aesthetically aligned with the national struggle for transformation. Chinese scholars widely affirm Lu Xun's centrality to the New Culture Movement.

Lu Xun, as a representative of the New Culture Movement, holds a prestigious place in modern Chinese cultural history, a well-deserved honor (Huang, 2019). Huang Qiaosheng praised Lu Xun's role in the New Culture Movement, highlighting his unique literary talent and innovation. Lu Xun's works, blending literary expression with deep philosophical content, criticized old culture and societal flaws. He addressed important issues like women's and children's rights, advocating for empowerment through works such as *My Views on Female Chastity* and *How Should We Be Fathers Now*. Huang emphasized that Lu Xun's distinct style and critical realism were key to advancing the movement (Huang, 2019). Hu Feng and others recognized Lu Xun's spirit and value from a cultural perspective. Hu Feng blurred Lu Xun's ideological evolution, emphasizing his fight for national liberation and people's equality. He viewed Lu Xun as continuously pursuing both "liberation" and "progress," arguing that without progress, liberation wouldn't last. Hu Feng highlighted how Lu Xun's attacks on darkness and stupidity had hindered the broader resistance development, underscoring the importance of balancing "liberation" with "progress" to avoid hindering national development (Tian & Liu, 2021, p. 109).

Lu Xun's leadership in the New Culture Movement was foundational in challenging traditional values and promoting reform. This set the stage for his evolving role as a critic of tradition, explored further in the next section.

A Relentless Critic of Traditional Culture

Lu Xun is celebrated for his piercing critique of Chinese tradition. In works like "*The True Story of Ah Q*" and "*Medicine*", he dissects Chinese society's complacency and ritualism, challenging its deep-seated norms. His literary project aimed at cultural deconstruction, exposing the old world's cruelty and advocating for a new ethical consciousness based on egalitarianism and critical thought. Beyond literature, Lu Xun is a cultural monument in China, his legacy is a mix of literary reverence and political utility. While he's a foundational figure in China's cultural identity, his image invites continuous reexamination. Internationally, his reception contrasts with his domestic status, reflecting a complex interplay of admiration and critique that highlights his transnational impact. Hu Feng argues that Lu Xun's "Soap" critiques traditional culture by revealing Simin's misinterpretation of Western culture through his misuse of soap and his repressed sexual fantasies. Simin's facade of upholding traditional morals while driven by selfish desires epitomizes the hypocrisy of feudal morality. Thus, "Soap" uncovers deeper issues within traditional culture, such as the suppression of human nature and the insincerity of feudal morality (Hu feng, 2019, p. 50).

Lu Xun's critique of traditional culture exposed societal flaws and called for transformation, establishing him as a central intellectual figure. His literary genius, discussed next, was a direct result of this critical stance.

A Literary Giant of the Modern Chinese Canon

Lu Xun's contribution to literature is universally acknowledged in Chinese academia. His collections *Call to Arms (1923)* and *Wandering (1926)* are considered milestones in modern Chinese prose. His unique narrative voice, deep psychological insight, and symbolic imagery have been widely studied and admired. Lu Xun created an artistic style that balanced emotional resonance with sharp social critique, a fusion rarely achieved in early 20th-century Chinese writing. Moreover, Lu Xun's role as a translator and curator of foreign literature further broadened his influence. He introduced Chinese readers to works by Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, and Russian realists, thereby expanding the intellectual horizons of a generation. He translated over 225 works from 77 authors across 15 countries, reflecting his cosmopolitan vision and literary acumen.

Lu Xun's status as a literary giant consolidates his place in Chinese cultural history. His contributions to modern Chinese literature transcend political utility and speak to the lasting impact of his narrative innovation and intellectual breadth. His dual role as a writer and translator further elevates him as a cultural bridge between China and the wider world. His literary legacy, rich in both domestic significance and international influence, solidifies him as a foundational figure in modern Chinese literature, complementing his revolutionary and cultural reform roles. Lu Xun's literary contributions reshaped Chinese literature, combining innovation with social critique. His influence, which continued to grow, paved the way for his iconic status in both literature and revolution.

Lu Xun as a Revolutionary Icon

After Lu Xun's death, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Central Government of the Chinese Soviet Republic immediately issued three messages of condolence. From the

perspective of literary and artistic thought, although these three documents were issued in the name of the central government, they actually to a great extent reflect the attitude of the Chinese Communist Party leaders represented by Zhang Wentian towards the alliance and struggle with cultural figures and intellectuals. They "fully affirmed the progressive and revolutionary nature of the bourgeois intellectuals in the cultural movement of the democratic revolution," and opposed the "suspicion" and "contempt" towards intellectuals (Cheng, 1987, p. 295). Zhang Wentian, based on this, highly praised Lu Xun's significance to the proletarian revolution, which is also an implicit recognition of the "enlightener" status of intellectuals (Tian & Liu, 2021, p. 108).

Mao Zedong first saw Lu Xun's "assistance" to "revolution" and "political foresight" from a political standpoint. This difference is precisely the division between literary figures and politicians. In the early years of the Liberation Zone, Lu Xun was constructed as an "enlightenment figure," central to the promotion of national awakening and social progress. His concept of "立人" emphasized individual spiritual awakening as essential for societal progress. Lu Xun's critical spirit, which challenged traditional culture and national weaknesses, positioned him as a key intellectual driving social and cultural transformation. His ideas were seen as vital during the resistance period, serving to awaken the masses and fuel national spirit. Overall, Lu Xun was depicted as a pivotal figure in shaping China's intellectual and political future (Qin, 2023, pp. 96-97).

Lu Xun's image as a revolutionary icon underscores his political and cultural importance in shaping modern Chinese identity under Communist rule. His alignment with the revolutionary struggle added political significance to his literary legacy, complementing his earlier role as a critic of tradition. His revolutionary iconography reinforced his status as both a moral and political figure. While his legacy in China is firmly established, Lu Xun's image abroad has evolved. In the West, his works are analyzed through various theoretical lenses, challenging his moral clarity and revolutionary intent. The next chapter explores how his reputation was reshaped in Anglophone scholarship, turning him into a more complex and contested figure.

Unfamiliar Familiarity: The Western Reception of Lu Xun

However, as political dynamics shifted, Lu Xun's image in the Anglophone world began to be interpreted through different lenses, particularly in the context of Cold War politics and ideological concerns. In Anglophone literary scholarship, Lu Xun has been reframed from a national icon to a more complex figure. Western scholars have moved beyond his image as the "conscience of the Chinese nation" and revolution's spiritual precursor, critiquing the ethical, aesthetic, and political aspects of his work. These revisionist readings challenge the Maoist portrayal of Lu Xun as a revolutionary saint, showing him as both shaped by and resistant to his time.

In the late 1950s to 1970s, Soviet literary critics revised Lu Xun's legacy in response to the ideological split between the USSR and the People's Republic of China. Moving away from the CCP's portrayal of Lu Xun as a revolutionary icon, they emphasized his humanist ethics, psychological realism, and individualism. Soviet critics rejected Lu Xun as a proletarian writer, portraying him instead as a moral observer of human suffering. Scholars like Eidlin and Semanov argued that *The True Story of Ah Q* reflected existential isolation and ethical disillusionment, with Ah Q's passivity and tragic end symbolizing the collapse of individual agency under oppression (Medvedev, 1977, pp. 5-6). Lu Xun's fiction was also viewed as psychologically complex, focusing on introspection over ideology. In *Diary of a Madman*, the discovery of "吃人" was seen as a symbol of social

cannibalism and moral decay, not a Marxist critique but a universal metaphor for institutional violence (Medvedev, 1977, p. 9-10). Soviet critics highlighted Lu Xun's internationalism, especially his admiration for Russian authors like Tolstoy and Chekhov, positioning him within a global humanist tradition, not a nationalist or Marxist one. His promotion of Russian literature was seen as cultural solidarity, not political expediency (Medvedev, 1977, pp. 12-13). These reappraisals contributed to the "de-ideologizing" of Lu Xun, anticipating later Western readings of him as a reflective intellectual, not a revolutionary mouthpiece. This shift helped restore his status as a global literary figure grounded in humanist critique rather than propaganda.

In the 1970s, C. T. Hsia's *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction (1971)* significantly shifted the view of Lu Xun from a national hero to a conflicted intellectual. Hsia argued that Lu Xun's work reflected personal anguish and psychological dislocation due to early 20th-century Chinese turmoil. He described Lu Xun as "less the master of his time than its victim", noting his moral indignation was subjective, inconsistent, and self-destructive. Hsia suggested that Lu Xun's satire lacked the clarity of writers like Swift and Voltaire, focusing more on personal conflict. This interpretation shifted the focus from Lu Xun as a progressive figure to one defined by internal contradictions. C.T. Hsia's evaluation of Lu Xun challenges the narrative of him as a consistent moral guide and literary innovator. Hsia highlights emotional subjectivity and moral inconsistency in Lu Xun's work, asserting that his vision stemmed from personal anguish rather than a coherent ethical framework (Hsia, 1971, pp. 101-102). This became more evident in his later years, as his creative powers declined, and he shifted from fiction to polemical essays (Hsia, 1971, pp. 114-115). Hsia criticizes Lu Xun's "warm-feeling-ism" (温情主义), which idealized youth while scorning the common people's ignorance, thus compromising his critique's objectivity (Hsia, 1971, p. 110). Ultimately, Hsia argues that Lu Xun's later essays lacked the symbolic richness of his early work and devolved into transient commentary with diminished literary value (Hsia, 1971, p. 118).

Hsia reassesses Lu Xun's moral consistency, creative trajectory, and literary value, especially in his later years. He questions the objectivity of Lu Xun's moral vision, highlighting his emotional bias toward youth and marginalized individuals, leading to sentimentalism. In (*The Misanthrope*, Lu Xun idealizes children as China's future: "孩子总是好的……我以为中国的可以希望，只在这一点。" Hsia sees this as evidence of "warm-feeling-ism", weakening his critique (Hsia, 1971, p. 110). Hsia asserts that Lu Xun's creative energy waned after 1926, prompting him to abandon fiction for polemical essays (Hsia, 1971, p. 114). Hsia notes that Lu Xun's later essays became narrow and aggressive, often targeting enemies with excessive hostility. In works like *Regret for the Past*, Lu Xun projects emotional despair onto shallow characters, resulting in heavy-handed symbolism: "我们都不是自由的人，我不过是一个逃出牢笼的囚犯." Hsia argues these works read more like catharsis than literature (Hsia, 1971, p. 110). Finally, Hsia argues that Lu Xun's later essays suffered from ideological repetition and literary fatigue, becoming political pamphlets rather than lasting works (Hsia, 1971, p. 118). By emphasizing his contradictions and psychological complexity, Hsia challenged Lu Xun's image as a consistent revolutionary figure, suggesting that his later works were less effective due to ideological constraints.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, Anglophone scholarship on Lu Xun shifted from reverence to critical reassessment. Scholars like David Der-wei Wang and Leo Ou-fan Lee emphasized the symbolic nature of Lu Xun's self-narratives, while Patrick Hanan highlighted the ironic distance between narrator and author. Cultural

critics Lydia Liu and Rey Chow argued that Lu Xun's portrayal of the masses reflected intellectual dominance, not democratic representation. Meanwhile, C.T. Hsia criticized Lu Xun's later essays as emotionally repetitive and ideologically rigid. Western critics argue that Lu Xun's role as a national enlightener and representative of the people is more a product of political mythology than historical reality. David Der-wei Wang suggests that Lu Xun, although critical of traditional culture, ultimately attempts to erect a new ideological edifice through rational discourse. This reinterpretation casts Lu Xun not as a revolutionary breaker of tradition but as an ideological builder within modern nationalist discourse. It shifts the critical focus from his perceived moral authority to his complicity in shaping a new hegemonic culture. Moreover, C.T. Hsia, Leo Ou-fan Lee, and Mills have argued that Lu Xun's late career marked a significant decline in literary innovation. These critiques contributed to the marginalization of Lu Xun's essays in Western literary criticism, framing them as political documents with limited aesthetic value. This binary—fiction as literature, essays as propaganda—has shaped much of the discourse on Lu Xun's late period. These critiques introduced a deconstructive approach that emphasized narrative ambiguity, authorial strategy, and ideological complexity. They repositioned Lu Xun not as a fixed cultural icon but as a conflicted modernist figure, shaped by the contradictions of his time. This shift moved scholarship beyond nationalist and Marxist frameworks, opening new avenues in global modernity, textual politics, and representational ethics. It expanded Lu Xun studies, laying the foundation for postcolonial, cultural, gender, and transnational literary approaches. By reframing Lu Xun as a writer grappling with modernity's crises, these scholars redefined his literary legacy.

During the Cold War, China's Taiwan region people scholar Su Xuelin launched a personal and ideological campaign against Lu Xun, attacking his character and literary legacy. Su accused Lu Xun of being morally vicious, psychologically unstable, and unworthy of intellectual respect, calling him "a philosopher of hate". She dismissed most of his works, claiming that only *The True Story of Ah Q* had literary merit and revived refuted allegations of plagiarism. Su's assertion that "opposing Lu Xun has taken up nearly half of my life" highlights the personal nature of her campaign. She warned that Lu Xun's influence in Taiwan region would destroy its cultural foundations, claiming, "If the Lu Xun cult enters Taiwan region, I can guarantee that… the entire intelligentsia will capitulate in spirit to Communism" (Kowallis, 2010, pp. 496-500). Kowallis notes that Su's critiques relied more on rumor and ideological paranoia than textual analysis, making them more about cultural policing than literary criticism (Kowallis, 2010, pp. 519-520). Su's campaign influenced Taiwan region's literary education and anti-communist policy, politicizing literary history rather than contributing to scholarly discourse.

From the 2000s to the 2010s, recent Anglophone scholarship has moved beyond Cold War ideological frames, presenting Lu Xun as a complex figure deeply embedded in the crises of modernity. Scholars emphasize his ambivalence, aesthetic experimentation, and philosophical skepticism, exploring his complex relationship with evolutionary progress, revolutionary violence, and language reform. This shift presents Lu Xun not as a progressive hero but as a melancholic critic of modernity's crises, engaged with both the failures of tradition and the contradictions of revolution. Eva Shan Chou critically examined Lu Xun's use of queues and violence, arguing that his depiction of political transformation reflects historical repetition and traumatic memory rather than revolutionary certainty. In *Medicine*, the scene where a child eats a martyr's blood-soaked bun is not a glorification of sacrifice but a grotesque ritual that reflects political violence. Chou argues that the

queue symbolizes ideological residue, showing how old cultural markers persist in revolutionary contexts (Chou, 2012, pp. 10-15). She also critiques the Chinese Communist Party's canonization of Lu Xun, particularly his later satirical essays, which she believes have been politicized to serve state agendas (Chou, 2012, pp. 21-22). Ultimately, Chou presents Lu Xun as a fragmented chronicler of cultural trauma and failed modernity, positioning him within global modernist discourse rather than Marxist realism.

From the 2010s to the present, Gloria Davies offers a nuanced interpretation focusing on Lu Xun's ethical struggle under political pressure. In Lu Xun's *Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence*, Davies highlights how Lu Xun rejected the leftist tendency to equate literature with revolutionary aggression, preferring subtler symbols like "daggers" and "javelins" over "machine guns" and "cannons" to imply precise, critical engagement (Davies, 2013, pp. 55-56). Davies highlights Lu Xun's 1927 satirical critique of leftist slogans like "打打打，杀杀杀，革命革命革命", which he saw as reducing literature to a lifeless formula devoid of introspection. Lu Xun clarified his stance by writing: "一切文学都是宣传，但宣传却不都是文学"—distinguishing literary form from political utility (Davies, 2013, pp. 57-59). Although Lu Xun accepted an honorary position in the League of Left-Wing Writers, his relationship with the movement grew strained. In his final years, he rejected efforts by leftist theorists to portray him as a compliant revolutionary figure (Davies, 2013, pp. 62-64).

Eileen J. Cheng's *Literary Remains (2013)* examines Lu Xun's literary aesthetics through his "refusal to mourn", rejecting conventional commemorative narratives and redemptive closure. Cheng argues that Lu Xun's treatment of death reveals "the impossibility of mourning" in modernity (Cheng, 2013, p. 19). In the preface to *Call to Arms*, Lu Xun recalls witnessing an execution, which led him to abandon medicine and "change their spirit". Cheng suggests this episode symbolizes the intellectual's role as a spectator, not a participant. She further analyzes Lu Xun's ambivalent stance in works like *Fujino-sensei*, where he deconstructs his identity as an "enlightener", noting that writing began not from heroic conviction but because "朋友要我写小说" (Cheng, 2013, pp. 22-25). Cheng critiques the view of Lu Xun as a radical iconoclast, highlighting his engagement with classical Chinese literature to reconfigure tradition amid modern existential crises (Cheng, 2013, p. 14). She presents Lu Xun as a modernist grappling with the ethics of writing in a time of symbolic collapse, revealing him as a writer navigating trauma, memory, and self-fracture rather than a "national conscience".

Sebastian Veg's analysis of Lu Xun's critical thought highlights his role as both a critic of modernity and a re-inventor of heterodoxy. Veg argues that works like *Diary of a Madman* and *Wild Grass* critique traditional Chinese culture while addressing broader issues of modernity, revolution, and nationalism in early 20th-century China. Lu Xun's writings reflect skepticism toward both Western modernity and Chinese revolutionary movements, positioning him as an intellectual transcending ideological boundaries. In *Ah Q*, he critiques social passivity and psychological submission, hindering progress. Veg views *Wild Grass* as an expression of Lu Xun's disillusionment with modernity, exploring personal freedom, collective responsibility, and alienation amid the clash of traditional values and revolutionary ideals (Veg, 2014, pp. 49-56). Veg suggests that Lu Xun's critique of modernity is a nuanced exploration of China's complexities, not a simple rejection of Western ideas or nostalgia for the past, portraying him as an intellectual searching for a more authentic path forward (Veg, 2014, pp. 49-56).

The Western reception of Lu Xun, showcases how his literary and ideological legacy was scrutinized through various intellectual, ideological and political frameworks. In the next chapter, we turn to the role of translation, which acted as both a bridge and a barrier in shaping Lu Xun's image abroad. The politics of translation and the varying perspectives across different intellectual traditions not only redefined his work but also illuminated broader cultural and political dynamics, illustrating how the global circulation of literature operates within complex power structures.

Translation, Politics, and Perspective: Unpacking the West's Lu Xun

Lu Xun's image in China has shifted from a revolutionary hero to a more complex intellectual figure. Initially seen as a key "enlightener" and "revolutionary intellectual" supporting national liberation, his works were crucial for intellectual awakening and aligned with the Communist Party's goals. However, as political dynamics changed, scholars reassessed his image. His later works revealed contradictions, showing skepticism toward both revolution and modernity. Lu Xun's writings, marked by emotional intensity and ideological rigor, depicted him not just as a revolutionary icon but as a conflicted intellectual. His "revolutionary" spirit allowed him to critique both the past and present, positioning him as a symbol of intellectual self-transformation (Tian & Liu, 2021, p. 116). In the 1930s, his role in the Leftist League reflected his complex situation—engaged in politics yet aware of literature's "powerlessness". Lu Xun's image became both a symbol of revolutionary progress and a critique of its co-optation.

In the West, critiques of Lu Xun focus on the ideological, cultural, and epistemological roles his image has served, framed through the lenses of Cold War politics, postcolonialism, feminism, and modernist aesthetics. These critiques have redefined his significance in global modernity, showing how his image has been constructed, translated, and contested.

Translation and Ideological Negotiation: The Western Rendering of Lu Xun

Translation is not a neutral act of linguistic equivalence but a site of ideological negotiation. Lydia H. Liu, in *Translingual Practice*, argues that translation is embedded in asymmetrical power structures and is always a form of cultural refraction: "the act of translation is also an act of negotiation with the ideological boundaries of the target culture" (Liu, 1995, pp. 26-30). When Lu Xun's works are rendered into polished, idiomatic English prose, much of the irony, ambiguity, and linguistic fracture that characterize his original style are lost. The complexity of his voice—its refusal to resolve moral contradiction—is often flattened into an easily consumable liberal humanism.

Gloria Davies shares this concern, suggesting that English translations of Lu Xun "tend to repackage his dissonant voice into a digestible, universal humanism" (Davies, 2013, p. 21). The critical point here is not a matter of translation quality but of cultural expectation. Western translators and readers often seek coherence, clarity, and moral affirmation—traits that Lu Xun consciously disrupted in his original works. His refusal to offer ethical closure or idealized heroes becomes, in translation, a misread absence. Thus, the critique of translation is not a linguistic objection but a broader political question: how does the global circulation of non-Western texts rely on the domestication of radical voices? In making Lu Xun intelligible to Western audiences, his subversive potential is often neutralized, and the revolutionary dissonance is displaced by a falsely coherent morality.

Cold War Politics and Diasporic Readings of Lu Xun

The second mode of critique derives from the ideological battleground of the Cold War and its aftershocks. As Olga Medvedeva shows, Lu Xun was instrumentalized in different ways during the Sino-Soviet split. While Chinese state discourse lionized him as the forerunner of Maoist revolution, Soviet critics reframed him as a morally reflective humanist more aligned with Russian realism than socialist orthodoxy (Medvedeva, 2010, pp. 485-488).

C.T. Hsia, writing from a diasporic and anti-Communist perspective, challenged the ideological appropriation of Lu Xun in his landmark study *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. Hsia dismissed the Maoist image of Lu Xun as mythological, declaring: "The Lu Hsün enshrined by Communist hagiographers is a myth…… He was never a Marxist, much less a party member". Instead, Hsia emphasized Lu Xun's "private torment and deep disillusionment" as emblematic of an era searching in vain for moral clarity (Hsia, 1971, pp. 344-345). In Hsia's framing, Lu Xun becomes not a prophetic figure but a literary casualty of modern China's spiritual crisis. This form of critique is both literary and ideological. It reflects the diaspora's attempt to reclaim cultural figures from the grasp of authoritarian regimes. Lu Xun's reimagining by Hsia is part of a broader Cold War project to valorize intellectual autonomy, personal doubt, and ethical fragmentation over collective ideological commitment. In essence, it was an assertion of the moral independence of literature against political orthodoxy.

Theoretical Lenses on Lu Xun: Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Beyond

From the 1990s onward, Lu Xun's work began to be reevaluated through the lens of postcolonial, feminist, and poststructuralist theories. Rey Chow, for example, critiques Lu Xun for instrumentalizing narrative detail to establish a nationalist, masculinist discourse. In her influential reading, Chow argues that "detail in Lu Xun is not realism, but a means of evacuating bodily difference and reinserting nationalist authority" (Chow, 1991, pp. 110-112). By focusing on how the suffering of subaltern subjects such as Ah Q is narrated, she reveals how power is reproduced even in ostensibly critical literature. Similarly, David Der-wei Wang's Foucauldian reading of Lu Xun's "Preface to Call to Arms" interprets the famous magic lantern episode as a meditation on spectatorship and violence. Wang notes that Lu Xun "watches the people watching executions" without attempting to intervene—a literary gesture that eschews redemption and underscores the paralyzing effects of modernity (Wang, 2004, p. 119). These critiques reveal a new dimension of Lu Xun as neither a liberator nor a prophet, but as a figure deeply embedded in the machinery of modern power and representation. He becomes a vehicle through which contemporary scholars interrogate the limits of intellectual responsibility, the complicity of critique, and the ambivalence of cultural authority.

Aesthetic Modernism and Lu Xun: Exploring Literary Form and Subjectivity

The fourth strand of Anglophone critique focuses on literary form and aesthetic experimentation. Rather than evaluating Lu Xun in political or ethical terms, scholars like Nicholas Kaldis and Eva Shan Chou explore how his writing enacts modernist alienation and subjectivity in crisis. Kaldis interprets Lu Xun's *Wild Grass* (*Yecao*) as a "Nietzschean and Freudian text of self-dissection," in which the narrator confronts symbolic dissolution and existential fragmentation (Kaldis, 2014, pp. 77-79).

Eva Shan Chou similarly explores recurring motifs in Lu Xun's work—such as queues, blood, and silence—not as national allegories but as symbols of historical trauma and psychic repetition. In *Memory, Violence, Queues*, she writes that "the braid becomes not just a historical remnant but a cipher for recurring trauma" (Chou, 2012, pp. 45-47). These images resist narrative closure and instead gesture toward an unresolved modernity that disorients both character and reader. Such aesthetic critiques see Lu Xun not as a moral guide but as a literary innovator haunted by the impossibility of stable subjectivity. His texts embody rupture, not resolution; crisis, not clarity. These readings align Lu Xun with global modernist movements concerned with alienation, death, and the untranslatability of experience.

To summarize, the Western critique of Lu Xun reflects not a rejection of his significance but an intense and evolving engagement with what he represents. From translation theory to Cold War politics, from feminist deconstruction to aesthetic introspection, Lu Xun's work has been subjected to a variety of critical frames that re-situate his legacy within the global discourses of modernity, identity, and representation. Lydia Liu insightfully observes, "Lu Xun has become a medium through which the West stages its encounter with China's modernity" (Liu, 1995, pp. 35-39).

Critiquing Lu Xun, therefore, is not simply about disputing his contributions. It is about using his work as a prism to reflect Western anxieties about translation, ideology, intellectual authority, and the crisis of modern representation. The multiplicity of Lu Xun in the West—icon, victim, witness, theorist—speaks not only to his textual richness but to the unresolved tensions within global literary and political discourse.

Conclusion

By comparing the shifting image of Lu Xun in China and the Anglophone world, this paper demonstrates how he remains a multifaceted figure. From a revolutionary hero in China to a complex intellectual in the West, Lu Xun's image evolves with broader cultural and political changes. These shifting interpretations reflect not only his literary contributions but also the global tensions surrounding modernity, revolution, and ideological struggle.

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