

# 7. Reformist Discourses: Classical Literary Language Versus Modern Written Vernacular in Lu Xun's Short Story "A Madman's Diary"

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## Introduction

In the wake of the Opium Wars in the nineteenth century, the semi-colonisation of China by western imperialist forces and China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war (1894–95), many students, scholars and intellectuals called for economic and political reforms to strengthen China. Thousands of Chinese students went to study abroad, in Japan, Europe and United States. Some returned convinced that China needed profound reform, not only adopting western science and technology, but also breaking off ties with traditional culture and Confucian ethics. Anti-traditionalists advocated modernisation of education through "western learning", stressing science and democracy,<sup>1</sup> and reform of language and literature. David Wang states: "Language reform was the first stage of literary revolution, which in turn was key

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<sup>1</sup> Tse-tsung Chow, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [1960] 1967), 1.

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to a broader project of cultural renovation”.<sup>2</sup> Reformists within the New Culture Movement, such as Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun, promoted “modern” Chinese literature written in the vernacular. This entailed re-evaluations of language, content, genres, forms, narrative strategies and aesthetic ideals, often inspired by western literature, philosophy, science etc.

Although some ideas promoted by anti-traditionalists within the New Culture Movement had roots in domestic literary culture, what may be called a “reformist discourse on literary revolution”, with regard to the development of modern Chinese literature in the era of the May Fourth Movement,<sup>3</sup> dominated in literary histories

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<sup>2</sup> David Der-Wei Wang, “Chinese Literature from 1841–1937”, in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature: Volume II: From 1375*, ed. Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 469.

<sup>3</sup> In its most narrow sense, the term referred to the May Fourth Incident, i.e. the student demonstrations that broke out in Peking on May Fourth, 1919, against Japanese imperialism and the Versailles Peace Treaty after World War I, which ceded the German concessions in Shandong to Japan. In its broader sense, the May Fourth Movement now refers to the demonstrations on May Fourth, together with the intellectual currents, protests and debates leading up to them, and also to the continued debates, protests and demands for cultural, social and political reforms that spread across China and gained in impact after the demonstrations (Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 1–2). Chow sums up the main goals of the movement: “[...] the students and new intellectual leaders promoted an anti-Japanese campaign and a vast modernization movement to build a new China through intellectual and social reforms” (Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 1). The May Fourth Movement in this broader sense was a sociopolitical, intellectual and cultural reform movement. They rejected traditional (Confucian) ethics, philosophy etc., demanded reforms of language and literature, as well as political institutions and were strongly inspired by western ideas, while at the same time the participants held several political orientations, such as socialism, anarchism and liberalism (Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 1). The major events related to the movement took place in 1917–1921 (Chow, *The May Fourth Movement*, 6). See also Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee, eds., *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and others. The cultural legacy of this movement is still a matter of great controversy among scholars within the field of Chinese literature.

in the People's Republic of China after 1949.<sup>4</sup> This “mainstream narrative” was modified several times due to changing socio-political circumstances in China, entailing political re-evaluations of authors and their works.<sup>5</sup> After 1978, the influence of Late Qing fiction on the development of modern Chinese literature was recognised, and manifestos/literary experiments by reformists prior to the May Fourth era (i.e. not sharing the political views of later leftist reformists), such as Liang Qichao, were included into the reformist discourses on literature and language leading up to the New Culture Movement.<sup>6</sup>

It is of course impossible to exhaust the subject of language reform and the development of modern literature in China in this chapter.<sup>7</sup> My aim is to trace a few influential voices of reformists/writers in the early twentieth century to show how their calls for reform of language and literature were embodied in a single liter-

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<sup>4</sup> The views of the Communist Party of China on traditional Chinese culture conflicted with those of the Nationalist party, which retreated to Taiwan after 1949, where the preservation of traditional Chinese culture and language became of essence; thus the May Fourth reformists/writers were regarded less favourably. In recent times, the concept of “sinophone” literature is creating heated debates. Jing Tsu, on the issue of “national” versus “sinophone” literature claims that: “Diaspora, rather than pointing at an unspecific desire that can easily be mapped anywhere onto the idea of China, generates tensions not only between nations but also between dispersed Sinophone communities vying to protect their hard-won capital of distinction”, Jing Tsu, “Epilogue”, in *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature: Volume II: From 1375*, ed. Kang-i Sun Chang and Stephen Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 714. For more on the debates on the concept of sinophone literature, see Arny Schweiger's chapter in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> For more on politics involved when writing histories of modern Chinese literature and postcolonial critique of mainstream narratives, see Arny Schweiger's chapter in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> Li Guiqi 李桂起 and Jiang Qi 姜启, “Xiaoshuo tishi juan” 小说体式卷 [Section on Forms of Fiction], in *Zhongguo jinbainian wenxue tishi liubianshi* 中国近百年文学体式流变史 [History of the Evolution of Literary Forms in China in the Past Century], edited by Feng Guanglian 冯光廉 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1999), 87–88.

<sup>7</sup> For an overview of the development of modern Chinese literature in China, see for instance David Wang, “Chinese Literature from 1841–1937”, 413–529.

ary work. I begin by brief accounts of manifestos calling for fiction written in the vernacular by Liang Qichao, Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu. Then I show how their reformist discourse on language and literature confronts literary tradition *within a work of fiction*, through the conflict between the juxtaposed classical, literary language narrative and the modern, written vernacular narrative in Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary". A short introduction to the "classical, literary language" and "written vernacular" is required before discussing the manifestos and Lu Xun's short story.

## The Classical, Literary Language and the Written Vernacular

In China since ancient times, oral and the written traditions have interacted in a multitude of ways and contributed to the development of both high and popular literary forms.<sup>8</sup> The written language designated for education, administration and high literature, such as poetry and non-fictional prose, was the classical, literary language *wenyan* (文言). The First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221–207 BCE) mandated the unification of the writing system. This became a milestone in the development of a standardised, written, literary language used in the imperial administration,<sup>9</sup> to bridge the difficulties in communication with officials in different parts of the empire speaking in different dialects and strengthen the Emperor's control. For centuries, the educated elite

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<sup>8</sup> As Børdahl and Wan have pointed out: "How oral and written traditions interact in Chinese popular literature is a question of almost incredible breadth and complexity, [...] the topic could easily include studies of the earliest Chinese folk songs as found in *The Book of Odes*, Shi Jing (1000–600BC)[...]", Vibeke Børdahl and Margaret B. Wan, eds., *The Interplay of the Oral and the Written in Chinese Popular Literature* (Copenhagen: NIAS press, 2010), 1. Børdahl and Wan also cite Ruth Finnegan's claim in *Literacy and Orality* (1988) that rather than distinguishing "orality" and "literacy" as two separate modes, they may be regarded as "a continuum", in which they "mutually interact and affect each other", *The Interplay*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ping Chen, *Modern Chinese: History and Sociolinguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67.

taught their sons to read and write in this literary language, as they memorised the Confucian classics, the histories and the philosophers' works, and imitated the most esteemed writers' poetry and prose, in order to pass the imperial civil service examination to obtain office (an examination system abolished in 1905).

The written vernacular, later referred to as *baihua* (白话), “vernacular literary language”, had roots in folk songs and ballads, early translations of Buddhist narratives, oral story-telling in the Tang and Song dynasties etc. The written vernacular became the major medium for fiction writing and matured with famous novels published in the sixteenth century, such as *The Water Margin*, *Journey to the West* and others.<sup>10</sup> The written vernacular was closer to contemporary spoken languages and had low status. Ping Chen writes:

Due to the conservatism prevalent among the ruling class and the literati, *wenyan* was considered refined and elegant, thus ideal for high-culture functions, while *baihua* was despised as coarse and vulgar, suitable only for low-culture functions.<sup>11</sup>

Popular genres written in the vernacular, such as fiction, had low status. During the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), when Confucianism became state ideology, the term today translated into English as “fiction”, namely *xiaoshuo* (小说), which literally means “small talk”, was explicated by Han dynasty historian Ban Gu (32–92):

The school of small talk originates from officials of low ranking. It is created out of the talk of the streets and the gossip of the alleys, and what has been overheard on roadsides and spoken on pathways.

小说家者流，盖出于稗官。街谈巷语，道听涂说者之所造也。<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For an overview of the development of the written vernacular in China, see for instance Liangyan Ge, *Out of the Margins: The Rise of Chinese Vernacular Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001) and others.

<sup>11</sup> Chen, *Modern Chinese*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Ban Gu 班固, *Hanshu* 汉书 [History of the Han Dynasty], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中华书局, [1962] 1975), vol. 5, 1745.

Although the literati enjoyed collecting, reading and writing *xiaoshuo* themselves, they officially did not recognise fiction written in the vernacular as part of high literature up to the early twentieth century. By then, the *wenyan* was more removed from the spoken languages, intelligible only for the educated elite. For many reformists, the classical, literary language was a “dead language” not spoken by people<sup>13</sup> and unsuited for conveying “enlightened” discourse: this required a living, spoken language in literature. Liang Qichao, Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu published manifestos calling for the reform of literature and literature in contemporary written vernacular.

### Liang Qichao’s Call for the Reform of Fiction

Liang Qichao (1873–1929), a young reformist exiled in Japan for a decade (after the failed “Hundred days of reform” in 1898), studied western and Japanese ideas, traveled to several countries and launched journals advocating political reforms. Since ancient times in the mainstream Confucian tradition, literature was supposed to fulfill a didactic purpose, summed up in the famous slogan “Literature is a vehicle of the Way” (文以載道),<sup>14</sup> the “way” implying “the Confucian way”. For Liang, literature could be a “vehicle” for something more than Confucian ethics, spread new ideas on politics, society and culture. However, the main part the population had limited reading skills. Poetry and non-fictional prose, high-literary “vehicles” for moral education, were written in *wenyan* for the educated elite. On the contrary, fiction written in the vernacular flourished, easier to read and popular among the general reading public. Liang, also impressed by the political novels in Europe and Japan, believed that fiction could be an effective vehicle for reformist discourses in China, but fiction had low status among intellectuals, thus a re-evaluation both of fiction and of the written language was required.

<sup>13</sup> Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 271.

<sup>14</sup> A slogan originating in statements by neo-Confucian Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017–1073), cited and translated by James J. Y. Liu, *Chinese Theories of Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 114.

In 1902, Liang started the magazine *The New Novel* (*Xin xiaoshuo* 新小说) and published his manifesto “On the Relationship between Fiction and the Government of the People” starting with the famous words: “If one wants to renew the people of a nation, one must first renew the fiction of that nation” (欲新一国之民, 不可不先新一国之小说).<sup>15</sup> He goes on to claim that changes in morality, religion, politics, social customs etc. all require the reform of fiction: fiction can “change people’s minds” (新人心) and “remold people’s characters” (新人格), “because fiction has unimaginable powers to govern the way of mankind” (小说有不可思议之力支配人道故).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, fiction is easy to understand and fun to read, can deeply move us and provide insight into our own emotions as well as those of others; it leads us to “the world beyond oneself and one’s world” (身外之身, 世界外之世界).<sup>17</sup> Liang also claimed that: “In writing, the vulgar language [vernacular] is more effective than the literary [classical] language” (在文字中, 则文言不如其俗语).<sup>18</sup>

Liang’s manifesto was timely, in the midst of rapidly growing urban culture and increasing demands for popular literature it contributed to the elevation of fiction among the educated

<sup>15</sup> Liang Qichao 梁启超, “Lun xiaoshuo yu qunzhi zhi guanxi” 论小说与群治之关系 [On the Relationship Between Fiction and the Government of the People], in *Liang Qichao wenji* 梁启超文集 [The Collected Works by Liang Qichao], (Beijing: Beijing Yanshan chubanshe 北京燕山出版社, 1997), 282. For an English translation of Liang’s manifesto, see Gek Nai Cheng’s translation in Kirk A. Denton, ed., *Modern Chinese Literary Thought: Writings on Literature, 1893–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 73–81.

<sup>16</sup> Liang, “Lun xiaoshuo”, 282. According to Liang, fiction has “four powers” (四种力), that can change the individual reader, and by extension the norms and values of an entire culture and society. These are: gradual and subconscious “intoxication” (熏) and complete “immersion” (浸) of readers’ minds; “provocation” (刺) of strong emotional response; and “transcendence” (提) of one’s own body and mind, thereby making readers completely forget themselves “as if transforming themselves – entering into the book and becoming the main character” (若自化其身焉 —入于书中, 而为其书之主人翁), Liang, 283–285.

<sup>17</sup> Liang, “Lun xiaoshuo”, 282–3.

<sup>18</sup> Liang, “Lun xiaoshuo”, 284.

elite.<sup>19</sup> No longer seen as simple entertainment, fiction could fulfill a traditional, didactic purpose of literature. David Wang stated that: “the conviction that fiction could and should serve as the foremost medium of enlightened discourse has apparently been endorsed by elite and mainstream literary historians ever since”.<sup>20</sup> Further calls for language reform came with Hu Shi’s and Chen Duxiu’s manifestos and the New Culture Movement.

### Hu Shi’s and Chen Duxiu’s Calls for a “Revolution” in Literature and Language

In 1915 in Shanghai, Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), later one of the founders of the Communist Party of China (CPC), started a journal which became pivotal for the New Culture Movement, advocating science, democracy and “literary revolution” (文学革命). In *New Youth* (新青年), Chen introduced western literature and published translations of western novels. In January 1917, Hu Shi (1891–1962), at the time a student in the US, published “Humble Suggestions for the Reform of Chinese Literature” in *New Youth*. In the article, Hu urged writers to stop imitating ancient masters and avoid using allusions, parallelism and old clichés, while on the contrary, “not avoid using vulgar [vernacular] words and expressions” (不避俗字俗语).<sup>21</sup> His article has been regarded as

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<sup>19</sup> Liang and his predecessors (Yan Fu, Xia Zengyou and others) shared in what Wang calls “the story of the boom in late Qing literature”, including several factors pivotal for the rise of “a new popular reading culture”, such as the growth of urban culture, print industry, public media, popular literature etc. David Wang stated, “Without these material factors by which the cultural and social environment had been conditioned, Liang’s advocacy of a new form of literature would not have had such an overwhelming effect” (Wang, “Chinese Literature”, 441).

<sup>20</sup> Wang, “Chinese Literature”, 441.

<sup>21</sup> These are five of the eight famous suggestions in Hu Shi胡适, “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文学改良刍议 [Humble Suggestions for the Reform of Chinese Literature], *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [New Youth ], vol. 2, no. 5 (1917), (Dongjing: Jigu shuyuan 汲古书院, 1970–1971), vol. 2, 467. For an English translation of Hu’s article, see Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 123–139.

the “first trumpet call of the literary revolution”,<sup>22</sup> although Liang Qichao and others had earlier advocated literary reform.<sup>23</sup> In the subsequent issue of *New Youth*, Chen Duxiu published “On the Literary Revolution”, writing:

1. To overthrow the painted, powdered, and obsequious literature of the aristocratic few, and to create the plain, simple, and expressive literature of the people;
2. To overthrow the stereotyped and over-ornamental literature of classicism, and to create the fresh and sincere literature of realism;
3. To overthrow the pedantic, unintelligible, and obscurantist literature of the hermit and the recluse, and to create the plain speaking and popular literature of society in general.<sup>24</sup>

曰，推倒雕琢的、阿谀的贵族文学，建设平易的、抒情的国民文学；曰，推倒陈腐的、铺张的古典文学，建设新鲜的、立诚的写实文学；曰，推倒迂晦的、艰涩的山林文学，建设明了的、通俗的社会文学。<sup>25</sup>

Hu’s and Chen’s ideas met with opposition from the conservative camp, but the May Fourth Movement put additional pressure on the authorities to make the vernacular become the standard written language.<sup>26</sup> In his article, Chen also dared Chinese writers to

<sup>22</sup> Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 275.

<sup>23</sup> David Wang states: “What distinguishes Hu Shi lies in his vision of the relation of the vernacular to a total literary and cultural renewal. While his Qing predecessors considered vernacular language an efficient tool to enlighten the public, they did not do away with the classical language as a sign system of cultural continuity and intellectual fecundity” (Wang, “Chinese Literature”, 468).

<sup>24</sup> Chen Duxiu “Wenxue geminglun” [On the Literary Revolution] in English translation by Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 276. For an English translation of Chen Duxiu’s article, see Timothy Wong’s in Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 140–145.

<sup>25</sup> Chen Duxiu 陈独秀, “Wenxue geminglun” 文学革命论 [On the Literary Revolution], *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [New Youth], vol. 2, no. 6 (1917), (Dongjing: Jigu shuyuan 汲古书院, 1970–1971), vol. 2, 563.

<sup>26</sup> Ping Chen, *Modern Chinese*, 74. Hu Shi’s and Chen Duxiu’s articles had certain impact on debates, but several factors contributed to the

become “a Chinese Hugo, Zola, Goethe, Hauptman, Dickens, or Wilde.”<sup>27</sup> Many writers at the time drew inspiration from western literature, such as Lu Xun, whose short stories published in *New Youth* reinforced Hu’s and Chen’s calls for “literary revolution”.

## The Language of Tradition versus the Language of Reform in “A Madman’s Diary”

In May 1918, Lu Xun (1881–1936) published “A Madman’s Diary”, which “is considered the first ‘modern’ Chinese short story ever published”, in *New Youth*.<sup>28</sup> Lu Xun, being critical of some superstitious medical practices in China (his own father being the treated with ineffective methods before dying), went to study western medicine in Japan.<sup>29</sup> Thinking that the teaching of

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replacement of the classical, literary language: the abolishment of the civil service examination in 1905; the fall of the Qing Dynasty and establishment of the Republic of China in 1912; rising nationalism; the May Fourth Movement etc., see Ping Chen, 70–75.

<sup>27</sup> Chen Duxiu, “Wenxue geminglun”, 566. In 1918, Hu Shi published an article in *New Youth* advocating “A literature written in the national language [written vernacular], a national language for literature” (国语的文学, 文学的国语), Hu Shi胡适, “Jianshe de wenxue geminglun” 建设的文学革命论 [Construction of Literary revolution], *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [*New Youth*], vol. 4, no. 4 (1918), (Dongjing: Jigu shuyuan 汲古书院, 1970–1971), vol. 4, 345.

<sup>28</sup> Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 85. Shih states: “Not that China did not have its own forms of short vernacular fiction (*xiaoshuo*), but the modern short story form, as it has been used since the May Fourth period, was modeled explicitly after its western counterpart, where more emphasis is given to the economy of plot and character conflict, and where supposedly ‘modern’ issues are dealt with” (Shih, 85, f. 43). According to David Wang, the first “modern” Chinese short story written in the vernacular could be Chen Hengzhe’s “One Day” (一日), written by a Chinese student in the US about the daily lives of female college students, published in 1917 in *US Student Quarterly*, David Wang, “Chinese Literature”, 479.

<sup>29</sup> Lu Xun 鲁迅, “Zixu” [Author’s Preface] 自序 to *Nahan* 呐喊 [Call to Arms], in *Lu Xun quanji* 鲁迅全集 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe 人民文学出版社, 1973), vol. 1, 270. For an English translation of this

western medical science in Japan had had an effect on the Japanese Reformation, he believed that as a doctor, he could provide effective cures to illnesses in China for patients like his father, while at the same time “promote a belief in reformation among my fellow countrymen” (促进了国人对于维新的信仰).<sup>30</sup> Lu Xun claimed to have changed his mind after seeing newsreel slides in Japan about the Russo-Japanese war, showing a Chinese “spy” being executed by the Japanese, while his countrymen stood passively by.<sup>31</sup> He decided to study literature, since medical science cured people’s bodies, not their attitudes:

The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit; and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement.<sup>32</sup>

第一要著，是在改变他们的精神，而善于改变精神的是，我那时以为当然要推文艺，于是想提倡文艺运动了。<sup>33</sup>

Lu Xun, just as Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and Liang Qichao, for all their anti-traditionalist views, adhered to a traditional, didactic view of the function of literature.<sup>34</sup> Lu Xun rejected traditional Chinese culture and promoted learning from the west.<sup>35</sup> With the

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preface, see the Yangs’ in Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 238–42.

<sup>30</sup> Lu Xun, “Zixu”, 271.

<sup>31</sup> Lu Xun, “Zixu”, 271.

<sup>32</sup> Lu Xun, “Preface to Call to Arms”, a translation of Lu Xun’s preface to the collection of stories in *Call to Arms* by the Yangs in Denton, *Modern Chinese Literary Thought*, 240.

<sup>33</sup> Lu Xun, “Zixu”, 271.

<sup>34</sup> Reformists within the May Fourth Movement embraced different ideas, several writers advocated literature for literature’s sake and other ideas; see for instance David Wang, “Chinese Literature” and others.

<sup>35</sup> Lu Xun translated many literary works and expressed views on cosmopolitanism and the idea of “World Citizens” (a concept introduced to China by Liang Qichao): “Some people say: ‘We intend to grow within the boundaries of our traditional culture; otherwise how can we be Chinese?’ Thus, I fear for the exclusion of China from the global society of World Citizens”, Lu Xun, “Suigan lu 36” [Collection of Random Thoughts 36] published in *New Youth* in 1918, cited and translated by Fugui Zhang and Ren Chuangong, “The Spread of Cosmopolitanism in China and Lu Xun’s Understanding of the ‘World Citizen’”, *Frontiers of*

publication of “A Madman’s Diary”, he became a leading voice within the New Culture Movement. This short story was inspired by Gogol’s “The Diary of a Madman” (1835) and likewise tells the story of a madman in the form of his diary.<sup>36</sup> The young man in question is tormented by what he thinks are mortal threats from everyone surrounding him – people on the street, neighbours, his doctor and even his brother. His deranged mind takes a bleak view of Chinese history:

Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology and scrawled all over each page are the words “Confucian Virtue and Morality”. Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night until I began to see words between the lines. The whole book was filled with the two words – “Eat people!”<sup>37</sup>

凡事总须研究，才会明白。古来时常吃人，我也还会记得，可是不甚清楚。我翻开历史一查，这历史没有年代，歪歪斜斜的每叶上都写着“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”!<sup>38</sup>

Lu Xun intended an allegorical reading of the story as a critique of society and Confucian ethics.<sup>39</sup> The diary is written in a first-

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*Literary Studies in China* 6, no. 4 (2012): 564. However, Lu Xun’s ideas about cosmopolitanism changed during his lifetime, also discussed by Zhang and Ren.

<sup>36</sup> There are numerous studies of the influence of foreign literature on Lu Xun’s works; in English, see for instance Patrick Hanan, “The Technique of Lu Hsün’s Fiction”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 34 (1974): 53–96.

<sup>37</sup> Lu Xun, “A Madman’s Diary”, translated by the Yangs in Joseph S. M. Lau and Howard Goldblatt (eds.), *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature: Second edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>38</sup> Lu Xun 鲁迅, “Kuangren riji” 狂人日记 [A Madman’s Diary], *Xin qingnian* 新青年 [New Youth ], 4, no. 5 (1918), (Dongjing: Jigu shuyuan 汲古书院, 1970–1971), vol. 4, 485–486.

<sup>39</sup> Lu Xun, “Lu Xun lun wenxue yu yishu” [Lu Xun on Literature and Arts], cited by Ming Dong Gu, “Lu Xun, Jameson and Multiple Polysemia”,

person voice and we get to see the world through the narrator's, the madman's, eyes. While the madman's thoughts are absurd to the point of being hilarious, the reader gradually comes to think that perhaps he is a kind of "poet-prophet" type of literary character. He is the only sane person in what in his mind is a seriously dysfunctional Chinese traditional society. He is a rebel against society and conventions.

The diary is written in contemporary vernacular and ends in the madman's utter despair and call to "save the children" (救救孩子) from becoming "man eaters".<sup>40</sup> However, the diary has a preface written in *wenyan* that has already let the reader know how the story ends. The narrator of this preface claims to have decided to publish the diary, written by a friend during a period of mental illness, since it might be of value for medical research. The young man in question has by then recovered and been appointed to an office in the government administration. However, having

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*Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* December (2001): 450. Gu says: "Scholars generally agree on the basic theme of the story. Through a madman's mouth, the author voices his opinion of Chinese history and society", i.e. his fierce critique of Confucian virtue and morality (Gu, 446). However, Gu applies a semiotic/psychological model to uncover deeper layers of possible interpretations of conscious or unconscious messages in the story. Gu adds: "Since 'A Madman's Diary' marks the birth of modern Chinese fiction, I suggest that the modernity of this story lies in the author's conscious use of the unconscious not only as the thematic concern but also as its mode of narration" (Gu, 446).

<sup>40</sup> Lu Xun, "Kuangren riji", 493. Lu Xun's criticism of traditional society in his fictional works profited greatly from the shocking effect of using the metaphor of "man eating". Among his main targets were superstitious medical cures. He also wrote a short story called "Medicine" (药), in which a father buys a bun soaked in blood from an executed revolutionary to cure his son's tuberculosis. This of course has no effect; the son is dead, just as the revolutionary who possibly could have changed society and superstitious customs. Mo Yan, Nobel laureate in literature 2012, wrote "The Elixir" (灵药) in 2000, a short story staged in China after the revolution had taken place. On the advice of a local doctor, a man procures human bile to cure his mother's blindness. He cuts up the gallbladder of an executed landowner/class enemy and obtains the "elixir", but his mother dies from the shock of learning what the medicine consisted of. The story *may* be read as a response to "Medicine": the revolution did not wipe out superstitious practices or political persecutions.

read the diary, the reader realises that the recovery described in the preface rather indicates that the rebel has given in to societal pressures. The madman has regained his “sanity” only in the sense of accepting the Confucian virtue and morality, done his filial duty and become a government official in this traditional socio-political system, contributing to its legitimatisation and persistence, and if so, that is the tragedy, or irony, of his “recovery”.

The preface written in the classical, literary language and the diary written in the modern vernacular interact and undermine each other, thus the story embodies the contemporary struggle between literary tradition and traditional morals, and the reformists’ “modern”, anti-traditionalist ideas within the realm of language in a work of fiction. The “madman”, the person questioning “man-eating” – that is, the metaphor for “Confucian Virtue and Morality” – uses the vernacular as his medium. The friend in the preface speaking on behalf of the “sanity” or rationality of traditional society and Confucian ethics uses the normative classical, literary language. It is a battle between thoughts, world-views, morals and values expressed in “different” mediums.<sup>41</sup> The classical, literary language expresses and safeguards traditional society and Confucian morals, while the vernacular language breaks off from tradition both in content and expression, and becomes the language of rebels/reformists, the written language for demands for change, reform and revolution. This shows the different functions and alliances of *wenyan* and *baihua* at the time from the viewpoint of these reformists. In that sense, “A Madman’s Diary” embodies *within* a single literary work of fiction the power struggle between the “traditional” classical, literary language and the “modern” written vernacular in China in the early twentieth century. Lu Xun subsequently published several stories written in the vernacular. The written vernacular in time became the main written language of fiction in China. The substitution of the classical, literary language by the contemporary, written vernacular in

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<sup>41</sup> On the affinities between *wenyan* and *baihua*, see Patrick Hanan, *The Chinese Vernacular Story* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1981).

China in education and administration in the 1920s in China is in many ways connected with the New Culture Movement.<sup>42</sup>

Lu Xun's rejection of Confucianism and traditional Chinese culture, his promotion of western ideas, and his criticism of the Chinese national spirit were controversial in his lifetime, China at the time being semi-colonised by western and Japanese imperialists. The evaluations of Lu Xun and his literary works have changed over time, in response to socio-political and cultural changes in China, oscillating between the two extremes of seeing Lu Xun as a patriot trying to save his country through western learning versus a destroyer of the indigenous Chinese culture and civilisation.<sup>43</sup> The Cultural Revolution (1966–76) entailed a complete rejection of Confucianism and traditional culture and entailed a deification of Lu Xun by the leadership of the CPC. However, the present CPC leadership's promotion of Chinese cultural identity entails a revival of traditional Chinese culture and Confucianism, thus Lu Xun's works have become a burden.<sup>44</sup> In western and

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<sup>42</sup> Ping Chen, *Modern Chinese*, 70–82. Establishing a standardised, modern vernacular entailed a complicated, political process; see Ping Chen and others. Many May Fourth writers were educated abroad and their “heavily Europeanized and Japanized (i.e. translated) vernacular might in effect be as alien to the ordinary reader as *wenyan*”, according to Shih, *The Lure of the Modern*, 71. For a list of loan words, transliterations etc. at the time, see Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900–1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). May Fourth writers calling for vernacular literature for the people instead of the “aristocratic few”, themselves came under attack by leftists for being Europeanised elitists.

<sup>43</sup> For changing evaluations of Lu Xun's work in China and political implications, see for instance Fugui Zhang, “Three Paradigms in Lu Xun Research and Contemporary Value Options”, *Social Sciences in China* (English edition) vol. 35, no. 3 (2014): 100–118 and others. As Zhang points out, evaluations rely on the “richness and complexity of Lu Xun's spiritual world”, but also on “the value criteria of the evaluator”, “Three Paradigms”, 114. See also for instance Kang Liu, “Politics, Critical Paradigms: Reflections on Modern Chinese Literature Studies”, *Modern China* vol. 19, no. 1 (1993): 13–40.

<sup>44</sup> In 2006, huge commemorations of Lu Xun's death 70 years earlier by the government did not take place as many had expected. The 100-year anniversary of the May Fourth Movement falls on 4 May 2019, and official

Taiwanese academia, the critique against Lu Xun and his works have gained strength from postcolonial criticism,<sup>45</sup> while in the Chinese Mainland some scholars regard him as a patron of critical thinking.<sup>46</sup> A hundred years after the publication of “A Madman’s Diary”, Lu Xun’s fiction is part of the literary canon in China and of world literature, but the ideas expressed in his fiction remain provocative and are still subject to controversy among researchers across the globe. His fiction still has relevance in present-day debates among researchers, critics and readers.<sup>47</sup>

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celebrations (or the lack of them) will reflect the present leadership’s view of its legacy.

<sup>45</sup> Shu-mei Shih states, “Lu Xun’s Occidentalism is complete”, *The Lure of the Modern*, 84.

<sup>46</sup> See for instance Liqun Qian, “The Historical Fate of Lu Xun in Today’s China”, in *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2013): 529–40, a polemical article in which Qian hails Lu Xun’s critical thinking and then uses this as a pretext for overt criticism of Taiwanese society, politics, education etc.

<sup>47</sup> According Zhang, in 2000–12, there were 9,988 articles on Lu Xun published just in the Chinese Mainland, “Three paradigms”, 105.

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