

Daggers and Spears¹: Lu Xun and Nietzsche on Cultural Revolution

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O my brothers, not long will it be until new peoples will arise and new fountains rush down into new depths.

For the earthquake—it chokes up many wells, it causes much languishing: but it brings also to light inner powers and secrets.

The earthquake discloses new fountains. In the earthquake of old peoples, new fountains burst forth.

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, ‘On the Old and New Law Tablets’, 25.

LU XUN – ON ‘CHINA’S NIETZSCHE’

Lu Xun was nineteen when Nietzsche died in 1900. He had already begun to write poetry, in classical Chinese style, and came into contact with Western literature in Nanking, where he attended a mining school. It was not until the following year however that he, with a government stipend to study mining in Japan, intensified his relationship with the available threads of world literature, European, British, Russian – and Nietzsche. The work of which he had the most access was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and Japanese renditions of his thought, including the *Untimely Meditations*. Lu Xun travelled to Japan at the right time – amid the chaos of the post-war years and the reformation toward modernity, Japan sought to become an industrial and military power with the aid of Western, i.e. ‘Modern,’ science, including Western medicine and literature. Lu Xun immediately recognized the political and cultural significance of literature, especially that of the English Romantics, Byron and Shelley (to the exclusion of the more introspective poets Wordsworth and Keats) in their individuality and defiance of a corrupt and oppressive cultural and political order. He found a similar though

¹ Pusey, James Reeve. *Lu Xun and Evolution*, p. 182.

deeper message in Nietzsche, one simultaneously of a poetic and philosophical order. Yet, it is the meaning of this influence, and of Nietzsche's message, that has remained controversial. This current writing will be an attempt to dissolve this controversy through the exposure of the intellectual and artistic affinities of Lu Xun and Nietzsche upon their own respective and overlapping *topoi*. It could be argued that Nietzsche had his most immediate impact in Japan, which already by 1903 (at a time which Lu Xun was already in Japan) had a 'Nietzsche Dispute', and had experienced 'Nietzsche fever.' Such an intellectual event could hardly have been missed by Lu Xun, and his first essays of 1907 and 1908 mention Nietzsche, echo Nietzsche, yet, from the perspective of a Chinese radical democratic 'Mara' poet. Lu Xun is not served well by the name of 'China's Nietzsche' – unless, that is, it is clear what we mean by 'Nietzsche'. Such clarity seems to have been lacking in many of the early receptions of Nietzsche, especially in regards to the notion of the *Übermensch*, which in the context of the early Japanese reception resembles more closely Zarathustra's ape, a caricature of Zarathustra, of which Nietzsche had already anticipated, and which he warned would be due to poor reading, in his own prophesy of widespread mis-understanding of his philosophy. In this light, I will cast into the light the caricature of Nietzsche in order to exorcise it from our subsequent discussions.

ZARATHUSTRA'S APE: THE NIETZSCHE CARICATURE

Amid the cultural vacuum of the scientific and positivistic turn of the mid-19th century in Europe, there was widespread popular cultural and political resistance, a struggle which erupted with the widespread establishment of industrial capitalism, of the *proletarianization* of large proportions of the population as they were stripped of their customary rights to the land, either killed outright or huddled into small rooms in the city, destined to work in factories. In the midst of this radical transformation of the social *topos*, there emerged

differing contradictions, and responses, novel forms of social relationships and struggle – the emergence of the entrepreneurial class with the commodification of the subject and of nature, eroding not only customary land rights, but also cultural memory, traditions in disarray, myriad dying cultures shattered in the wake of the Kronian power of fire and steel.

It was in the midst of such a context that Nietzsche emerged, and he was quite honest as to his political filiations and disaffiliations, non-affiliations. Nietzsche sought a ‘grand politics’, one of cultural creativity, revolution and transfiguration, not of the state, which he calls the new idol, nor of the invisible hand, the market. He was averse to political parties, mocking the party man who in the end can speak only party. Nietzsche was a young student when he began to write his first poems and became a Professor of Classical Philology at the age of 25. Poetry and poetics remained central to his work and could be regarded as its explicit meaning with respect to the centrality of creativity, of making, *poiesis*. Reflecting upon his first work from 1872, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in a new 1886 Preface, “Attempt at Self-Criticism,” Nietzsche wrote that he wished he had written the latter work as a song. It is significant that his *magnum opus*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is composed in poetry in the form of a symphony, indicating the Dionysian power at the heart of his work. It was Nietzsche’s intention to create, through the Dionysian power of music and poetics, a counter-movement against and within nihilism in order to re-awaken the wellsprings of culture, of creativity, in the creation of ‘new peoples’.

That such an intention was shared between Nietzsche and Lu Xun would be relatively uncontroversial, except for those who, while not reading Nietzsche, spew vitriol upon what they regard as his philosophy.² Yet, I would like to make a stronger argument of kinship

² Lee, Mabel. “On Nietzsche and Modern Chinese Literature: From Lu Xun to Gao Xingjian,” *Literature and Aesthetics*, 12:23-43, 2002. This essay is significant only in that its ignorance of Nietzsche and Lu Xun has no excuses. It exhibits a shocking lack of knowledge of its subject and is little more than propaganda and invective against Nietzsche and the Chinese government.

between the two writers and influence upon Lu Xun by Nietzsche's philosophy. The usual caricature of Nietzsche is of a power-obsessed megalomaniac, who in his abhorrence of the common man, sought to enact an aristocracy based upon violence and cruelty. It is the *übermensch*, or the "superman," who, in this caricature, symbolizes this tyrant – and comparisons with various twentieth century dictators, in such a context, becomes sufficient to reject Nietzsche's philosophy. The caricature in many ways is a creature of political diatribe and journalistic distortions, misunderstandings, built up over decades. To be fair to the early Japanese reception, under the guiding hand of scholars such as Zhang Binglin—who became the inspiration for Lu Xun's infection of China with 'Nietzsche fever'—materials were sparse, with Lu Xun reading "The Prologue" of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, accounts of *Untimely Mediations* and accounts of Nietzsche and others in surveys of European thought and history. Yet, one is less forgiving to more recent commentators who have maintained the caricature of Nietzsche and maintaining the controversy, or even embarrassment, over the relationship between Lu Xun and Nietzsche. Indeed, it is significant that Lu Xun not only read Nietzsche in the context of diverse world literature, especially the romantics, but also that he himself *translated* the Prologue of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* into Chinese.

One will recall that the Prologue is no mere opening, but a lengthy overture, which includes Zarathustra's initial salute to the sun, his first announcement of the Death of God as an aside to the hermit, the Overman and the Last Man to the people in the market, the tightrope walker and his death, the warning of the grave diggers, the supplication to the lone cabin for food and drink, and the burial of the body after the coming of the first truth. With this latter truth, Zarathustra declares that in respect of the Good and the Just, of those who hypocritically rule the cities, he will become a lawbreaker and will seek companions to take away from the good and the just others who also seek to freedom, to create that which is beyond the *human-all-too-human*. In the Prologue, Nietzsche has built a world, and has

named many of the characters, myriad juxtapositions within the world, the rulers and the ruled, the culture of stagnation and servitude, of conformity in the herd, the dissolution of individuality amid a regime of fear. In this way, Lu Xun would have had before him the basic situation that was *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He moreover was familiar with the section, “On the Old and New Law Tablets,” in Part Three, another very long text. While the Prologue sets up a situation and alludes to that which is to come – the seeking of companions, fellow free spirits – it does not allow one to simply extrapolate and assume one knows the rest of the story, as if one had heard it an eternal number of times. The heroic tales of Carlyle, who Lu Xun also read, would not be fulfilled by Zarathustra, as, in his flight, he faces the gravest battle. Indeed, the section immediately following the Prologue, beginning Part 1, “On the Metamorphoses of the Spirit” throws a wrench into such a heroic tale with its procession from the Camel, to the Lion, and finally, to the Child. It is likely that Lu Xun would have also read “On the Metamorphoses of the Spirit,” as it can be documented that he was familiar with other sections of Part 1, such as the speeches, “On the New Idol” and “The Flies in the Marketplace.” The inexorable transformations on the part of the *übermensch* (and hence its meaning and domain) serve to undermine the caricature from the outset. The Camel is simple enough to understand, as the slave, the bearer of all burdens, which in the case of Nietzsche was European nihilism, and for Lu Xun, the rot of a dynastic corpse. Nietzsche, as Lu Xun himself would emulate when he quit his medical studies, saw himself as the physician of culture, presiding over a dying culture. For Lu Xun, the bearer of the burdens is the Chinese nation, in its humiliation, suffering, fragmentation, a sterile official culture in submission to imperialist exploiters, far removed from the voices of contemporary humanity, and from the enduring mythological wisdom of the common people. The Lion comes as the one who destroys the old law tablets, who rebels, resists, roars on the eve of revolution, who incites the uprising of the people. For both Nietzsche and Lu Xun, the

official culture of their respective *topoi* must undergo a cultural revolution, one that would involve the destruction of nihilistic forms which not only no longer serve life, but actively threaten it. Yet, in respect of the metamorphoses, although an act of destruction is also a creation, it is the Child who, growing up amidst the new world that he or she finds, bestows new values, and immerses himself in the creativity of a self-propelling wheel. The Child is far from the dictator envisaged by opponents of Nietzsche. In this way, one could seek to understand Nietzsche through the lens of the *active* political romantics such as Byron and Shelley, both of whom Nietzsche held in high regard. For Nietzsche and Lu Xun, cultural vitality must be provoked, the dominant forms must be subverted and displaced by new or suppressed forms and values – this is the destruction that is necessary as a prelude to cultural transfiguration.

Up to this point, Lu continues to walk with Zarathustra as he, five years in Japan, was already well on the revolutionary path when he published his first essays in *Henan* in 1907 and 1908. These works were written in response to the urgent situation in China (caused by Japanese and European imperialism and internal fragmentation) and the necessity of laying the ground for the Anti-Manchu revolutionary movement. Under the influence of his vast reading and in his relationship with the aforementioned radical intellectual Zhang Bingli, Lu Xun sought, as had Zarathustra, to find companions, and through his work, to influence the intellectual struggle through the introduction of diverse perspectives upon the Chinese and global situation. Indeed, if we consider two other sections of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which Lu Xun knew, “On the New Idol” and “The Flies in the Marketplace” (not to mention “The Pale Criminal”, etc.) it is clear that Nietzsche has something else in mind for Zarathustra than political tyranny, in that the latter’s metamorphoses, from the Camel, to the Lion and the Child have the same trajectory as Lu Xun – that of cultural renaissance transcending the state and the market. Through his speeches to the people – as a preacher of radical transfiguration

– Zarathustra seeks to steal sheep away from the herd, as a bird of prey of thought and wit, to seduce those with ears to hear to leave the herd and its hypocrisy and join with Zarathustra in *attempting* a path of one's own. For this is Zarathustra's *going under* and *going over*, his trajectory as a self-hangman³ – he does not seek power, but to create, he flees the market place, the state and political parties – he seeks solitude so as to confront his heaviest weight, the eternal recurrence of the same – the eschatological Trojan horse. With this confrontation, one that intimates the radical singularity of human existence, Nietzsche has disclosed the sovereignty of the artist, and of mortal freedom beyond any temporary political construction. Zarathustra survives his confrontation with his tragic and comic singularity, convalescing with the food brought to him by his animals. He addresses the goddesses, soul, life and eternity – these handmaidens of the truth. He declares his love for eternity and the symphony ends, as Graham Parkes, would have it.⁴ Yet, in Part Four, Nietzsche gives us a new ending of the story, and one that concurs with the subtitle: “A Book For All and None”. The first three parts can be enjoyed as a symphony of a being who came to terms with his own mortality – this is a book for all. But, as he leaves again to go into his solitude, Zarathustra is not merely contemplating death, but travels to face his own death without evasion.

As with Empedocles, Zarathustra is approaching his death, not as a sacrifice but as a completion of his life as a gift from fate. He does not aver from his path, despite the evasive temptations of the higher men, all of whom are marks of himself, of his drives, each of whom seek to evade death – Zarathustra will accept the gift with gratitude. The *übermensch* is that one who can stand and say, “Thus I willed it!”, looking back upon the fragmented chaos of history, places and times. This personal death, this ending of the story, is, as it is Zarathustra's death, for none – it is Zarathustra's death and the meaning that he divines for

³ Nietzsche, Friedrich. “Dionysos Dithyramps,” *The Peacock and the Buffalo: The Poetry of Nietzsche*, p. 277.

⁴ Parkes, Graham. “The Symphonic Structure of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*,” *Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra: Before Sunrise*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008.

the world is his alone. Each will seek his or her own meaning – “This is my way, what is yours?” Zarathustra, in the end, does not seek followers, does not try to dominate or destroy lives or life. Instead, in the wake of his destruction of the falsifications of life in nihilistic religious and political eschatologies, he juxtaposes the culmination of his own life in its openness to fate with the nihilistic flights, seeking escape from the terrible truth. Zarathustra embraces fate without resentment, giving birth to himself, inseminated by the lightning bolt of eternity. Nietzsche, in his master work, demonstrates a life that is lived as a gift, one that conquers innocence, displacing the nihilistic cobwebs which suffocate our ability to create ourselves. Indeed, with his pseudo-eschatology, an ironic construct, he implodes all eschatologies. Yet, this is not merely a voluntaristic or arbitrary project, but one attuned to the condition of the age, of its exhaustion, and of its possible re-birth through a creative and critical deconstruction, over perhaps centuries, of the nihilistic hegemonic fantasm and its institutional lifeworld.

Lu Xun is well attuned to such a ‘Nietzsche,’ one who cultivates the freedom of the self in order to create, incite, and cultivate the conditions for new peoples, a world a creativity by means of creativity, an indefinite becoming of creativity, the self-propelling wheel of the child, the well springs. Lu Xun took heed of Nietzsche’s teaching, seeking a cultural transfiguration through his own writing, a writing of biting satire, comic absurdism, surrealism, including, as with Alberto Savinio and George Bataille, among others, strange anachronistic juxtapositions, epochal discordance and tragic and comic irony. Emulating the example of Byron and Shelley, as well as with Nietzsche, Lu Xun, well-armed and highly original, immersed himself in the East Asian pre-revolutionary intellectual struggle. Lu Xun confined himself to essays and short stories, poetry, but perhaps came close to *Thus spoke Zarathustra* with his own beggarly “The True Story of Ah Q”, a tale of the comic hero of the Chinese Republican revolution of 1911, led by Sun-Yat-Sen. Lu Xun came to be a stern

critic of the so-called republican revolution – and the Nationalists as such - and joined sides with the Communists in the civil war which began in 1927 – and which coincided with his crucial essay, “Literature of a Revolutionary Period.”

In the following sections, I will consider, in light of our previous discussion of the context of emergence of Lu Xun, two of Lu Xun’s early essays from 1908, “Refutation of Malevolent Voices” and “The Power of Mara Poetry,” two of his stories, “A Diary of a Madman” (1918) and “The True Story of Ah Q” (1921), and his 1927 essay, just noted, “Literature in a Revolutionary Period.” We will find that Lu Xun, as with many other writers, such as the European surrealists, followed closely the perspectives, strategies, and Nietzsche’s philosophy, often with a Marxian supplement. Lu Xun participated, on China’s behalf, on the world stage of modern literature, upon a global *topos* of cultural and political activity and agitation. Lu Xun’s engagement was contemporaneous and inter-connected with those of an imperialist and monarchical Europe, which, as we have indicated, also suffered its own type of stagnation and suppression of creativity. Indeed, this is the *topos* which is truly illuminating in this context, the global relations of power between the imperialist powers of Japan and Europe in juxtaposition to an imperialized China, India, and the rest, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe - the so-called ‘primitive’ or ‘fallen nations’. It is clear, moreover, that these imperial assaults were prepared ideologically by the deprecation of China by the likes of Hegel. In this context, we can see what is at stake in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, both of whom had already delved deeply into Asian philosophy, with the latter resonating with the early Greek philosophers who were akin to the philosophies of Asia. In this way, there was and is a global circulation of literature as there is that of any commodity or object of trade. Yet, there is also communication, diffusion, person-to-person exchange, and the creation of relationships on a global level. It is in this way that Lu Xun was the founder of modern Chinese literature as he set forth a pathway in his own

practice which cleared a space for the eruption of the energies of the people of China, in their own self-expression and continuous re-invention. Lu Xun confronted the singularity of the gaping vacuum that stood in the face of himself and his and others of his generation.

PROLOGUE TO REVOLUTION

Lu Xun's essays "Refutation of Malevolent Voices" (1908) and "The Power of Mara Poetry" (1908), among others of this phase, provide a rough sketch of his political and cultural perspective, in which he distinctly casts his lot in favour of the republican revolution. His contribution in his essays is not only a meditation upon what sort of revolution it should be, its complexity and character, its scope, national and international, but also a provocation of those dissatisfied with the imperial culture to create something new. In 'Refutation', he criticises those who would seek to graft the results of modern Western science onto the existing power structure, together with the social Darwinist notion that the powerful are the most fit, and that the poor and their superstitions should be eliminated (such as the figure of dragons). Lu Xun defends the popular mythologies of the common people as an exercise of the heart, of bountiful imagination, and as an example of hope in meaning *per se*. Nietzsche shared Lu Xun's disdain for crass and uncreative Darwinism, especially that applied to the socio-economic and political realms. Zarathustra warns the young creator to flee from the marketplace and declares that the state is the great idol and the death of peoples. Both Nietzsche and Lu Xun wanted to conjure and cultivate new peoples. For Lu Xun, the self-governance of the common people is the meaning of the republican revolution, the liberation of those who had suffered for centuries under dynastic rule, whose voices were silenced. Yet, the revolution was also about the further liberation of China as a nation in the face of the imperialist powers. For Lu Xun, the dynastic system had revealed itself to be completely out of touch with the reality of the contemporary world, that its bureaucratic system populated by

those who passed the official examinations in ancient classics, had suffocated the potential of the people. Lu Xun criticized the ‘Men of Aspiration’ and later those who were pretend revolutionaries, as traitors who merely sought novel, modern methods of extracting wealth from the people, and who worked in collaboration with the imperialist powers. That which was required was not merely or even modernization, as was happening in Japan, but a cultural and social revolution which would liberate the people to build a new culture, one which would stand and resist as a new power in the face of internal and external aggressors.

The character of such a cultural revolution is intimated in his work, “The Power of Mara Poetry,” in which he set forth the results of nearly a decade of intense study. His focus is upon ‘Mara’, the demonic, in respect to poetry, the power of the spirit and feeling and the transformational potential of such an awakening in China. He sketches the power of poet-revolutionaries such as Byron, Shelley, and Nietzsche – an intimation of the latter’s own celebration of great poets and figures who may place their stamp upon an age – these would be the Lions who roar on the eve of revolutionary transfiguration. For Lu Xun, Byron was simultaneously a forceful social critic, cultural rebel and revolutionary internationalist in his resistance at home and in his active and self-sacrificial support of Greek Independence. Shelley was the conscience of his age, especially in poems such as “The Mask of Anarchy” (1819), in which he dissects the monarchy and its power structure, exposed in its violent massacre and suppression of the people at Peterloo. Nietzsche himself, as well as his double Zarathustra, enacted his poetic work upon the philosophical and theological terrains – these are his targets, his daggers and spears, in a manner similar to Lu Xun’s post-1927 work, as we will see. Nietzsche has set forth something *new under the sun*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a displacement of the theoretical man of Socrates and the mono-theological axiomatics and politically constructed literatures - these which are to be regarded as a *fact* of revelation from the divine. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in its own scope and in its specific dramatic trajectory

exhibits a parody of the crucifixion of Jesus with the death of Zarathustra; Nietzsche, returning to the prophet who first made the distinction between good and evil, Zarathustra of Persia, has this figure give innocence back to the earth, and to life. This is an ultimate pathway and experiment in freedom and affirmation, one which sought to grasp hold of the vast chaotic history of mortals and to cry, “Thus I willed it.” Zarathustra performs his task to return innocence to the world, to overcome *ressentiment* in the face of death, to put punishment to sleep, and to celebrate the Dionysian self. Nietzsche, in his existential encounter with his own mortal freedom, and his enactment of *amor fati*, beyond the jurisdictions of the state or the market, places affirmation as the *sine qua non* of human existence. Such affirmation is an allusion to the remainder of resistance which will always elude the attempt to totalize the myriad fields of power, of command and control. Human existence is freedom, death assures us, the singularity of existence will deconstruct from within the attempts to assert, as Schumann wrote, a hegemonic fantasm. In light of such freedom, one is prodded by Nietzsche, the one who had established the freedom of the modern poet, and encouraged others, those to come in the future, philosophers, poets, artists to find their own pathways in the en-action of the cultural revolution.

Lu Xun did chose his own pathway, one which resonated with Nietzsche’s world and his injunction to kill with laughter, the revolt of the imagination of the English romantics, the absurdity of Gogol of Russia, George Washington, as an example of a founder of a republic, mixed together with his own social and cultural perspectives, and his knowledge of the Classic cultural topography of China and the popular mythology of the common people. These threads are tied together to articulate a singular voice during the revolutionary transformation of China, a project from which he never wavered, but remained vigilant, standing guard over the course of the revolution – not a party man, but a philosophical poet, engaged in the cultural and political revolutions. He sought to encourage others to think

differently, to engage a novel topography in which the spectators are at once the actors, in the procession of a new culture.

THE LITERATURE OF LU XUN

It is ironic that Lu Xun could not afford to take the examination to become an official bureaucrat in the Qing dynasty. Instead, as we have alluded, he ostensibly studied mining, and then medicine, while for the most part, was engulfed in reading, Western history, literature, writing poetry, pre-revolution (1911) essays, as we have seen, and in 1918, his first short story “The Diary of a Madman” in the magazine *New Youth*. It should be noted that soon after the republican revolution, precipitated by dozens of local uprisings and led by Sun Yat-Sen, Lu Xun began to work for the Ministry of Education, copying books and teaching. His first story emerged only during the *May Fourth Movement* of students, in the late teens, who were dissatisfied with the course of the revolution. The provisional government was a fractious regime which presided over a country torn to pieces from the inside and out, as warlords rivalled each other for control of land, resources and trade, and global imperialists continued to carve up China as the ‘concessions’ of a ‘fallen nation’. People starved in the streets and even, in a reported case at the time, resorted to cannibalism, as members of the provisional government, still dominated by Qing dynasty operatives, attempted to restore the old order.

The works of Lu Xun in the May Fourth period are literary, short novellas and stories, in a satirical and comedic vein. The first, “The Diary of a Madman” has resonances with Gogol, who wrote a story of the same name, and Nietzsche, whose madman runs the streets announcing that we ourselves have killed God. There are also resonances with surrealism, in the bizarre juxtaposition of the ancient and the incipient modern aesthetics, supernatural occurrences, with biting caricature and absurdist humour. The madman, in Lu Xun’s story,

sees the inscription, 'Eat People' amidst the juxtaposition of the Confucian ethical order, the order of the dynastic epoch and of the contemporary destruction of the nation. It was the same Confucians who presided over the centuries of exploitation of the people, who, in an economic sense (also resonating with Marx) of eating people, extracting their energy and life, labour, prohibiting their free cultural and political economic expression – the people remain a resource to be exploited or eliminated as the situation may ordain. In its dissociation with everyday reality, as it is lost in the fog of hollow and hypocritical official culture, Confucianism, in its emphasis upon harmony, order and peace, merely served to legitimize an authoritarian culture-political economic dynastic order. Peace meant the continuation of exploitation, as only rebellion and uprising can challenge a cultural and political order of extractive, exploitative relationships. In this way, the madman is also an allusion to the schizophrenia of the Confucian order, members of which were earnestly seeking to undermine the republican revolution, to restore an order dangerously out of touch with the needs of the people, the solidity of the nation, and the standing of China upon the topography of an interconnected, though asymmetrical world order. The madman throws the charge of cannibalism to the Confucian conservatives, of collaborating with exploitation, in contradiction to their own teachings, participating in the extraction of a social order which was in perpetual war with its own people. Lu Xun targeted the traditionalist elements, the Qing restorationists, with the daggers and arrows of his stories, as he, as Nietzsche recommended, killed with laughter, though sometimes with tragic terror, a feature that recurs throughout all of his 1920's writings. Indeed, it would seem that these stories, if not directly effectual in their casting light, in a specific way, upon the corruption of the new order, seemed to have been moving in the anti-traditionalist direction, when in 1927, the two remaining viable forces in China, the Nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek and the Communists of Mao Tse-Tung entered into a civil war. In many of his writings of the 1920's, Lu Xun

prepared the meta-narrative ground for this civil war and directly involved himself in the war on the side of the Communists.

In “The True Story of Ah Q” (1921) Lu Xun already had begun his drift toward the communists in a scathing satire of the 1911 Xinhai revolution and the subsequent capitulations of the republic government, which had been ceding land for peace. After the death of Sun Yat-Sen in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek, in 1926, undertook the Northern March, seeking to establish hegemony over the Chinese mainland. His attempt at hegemony was met with a communist insurrection and a prolonged civil war. Lu Xun would not live to see the end of the civil war, the Second World War in which the Chinese lost 20 million people in its theatre of the war with Imperial Japan (The Great Patriotic War Against Japanese Aggression), the renewed civil war after the Japanese defeat and the triumph of the Communists who declared the People’s Republic of China in 1949. In his “The True Story of Ah Q,” Lu Xun exposes the Xinhai revolution to ridicule, as a false and drastically incomplete affair, a farce of self-delusion. Indeed, as early as ‘Refutation of Malevolent Voices,’ in 1908, he wrote of the shift toward modernity and pseudo-revolution amongst members of the gentry and the order of official bureaucrats. In Ah Q, this is exactly the flaw of the Xinhai revolution. Despite being made possible by countless bloody uprisings of the people, the transition of power was itself tightly controlled. There was a displacement of most emblems of the traditional feudal order, yet the structure of power itself was not altered. In this way, none of the three central goals of Lu Xun had been fulfilled by the republican national government: the country has not been unified, political economic equality has not been obtained by the people, and the standing of China on the world stage continued to be that of humiliation. Lu Xun describes Ah Q, the leader of the revolution, in an absurd light, a Don Quixote who fights with windmills, or in this case, who is repeatedly humiliated, defeated, though interpreting each of these defeats as a victory, so that he may better sleep.

Despite the destruction of the prominent elements of the traditional order in the anti-Manchu riots, the revolution remained incomplete, in danger not only of the restoration of the dynastic order, but also the destruction of China itself. A revolution only in name maintains the politico-economic and cultural order of obedience and suppresses the imaginative energies of the people, while leaving unscathed the extractive and exploitive relationships within and without China. Lu Xun continued to throw his daggers and arrows until 1927, when he shockingly announced, in an address, the peculiar character of “Literature of a Revolutionary Period.”

LITERATURE AND REVOLUTION

One of the perspectives shared by Lu Xun and Nietzsche was their suspicion regarding a false peace, of the Platonic or Confucian mask of anarchy, one of rest and repose, covering over the truth of a system of political, economic and cultural violence, cannibalism. For Nietzsche, a disciple of the early Greek thinkers, such as Heraclitus and Empedocles, and of Hölderlin, the world, the cosmos, was a unity of opposites, life is this tension, and without the tension, there would only be death, or its epochal instantiations as moribund cultures, suffocating new life and new possibilities. The tension of the bow is harnessed and falsified amid a vampiric relationship between the aristocracy, the powerful, and the common people. As for war, Lu Xun and Nietzsche both fought with their pens for the liberation of the creative spirit, of this tension. Zarathustra, far from seeking a mere street-fight, seeks a cultural revolution, one which gives to mortals their innocence and their sovereignty over their own creative practice. Nietzsche until the day he collapsed the street, composed poetry and music, travelling extensively, while keeping extensive notes. In a cultural war, one must use cultural weapons – although those weapons may announce the ‘not yet’ of literature, such as in one of Lu Xun’s last pre-civil war absurdities, “Forging the Swords,” (1926) in which a

litany of supernatural farce unfolds in a surrealist (heads singing in dancing in a boiling cauldron) assassination of the Emperor, symbolizing in this case, Chiang Kai-Shek.

In his April 8, 1927 address to the Hangpu Military academy, “Literature of a Revolutionary Period”, Lu Xun makes a grave announcement that he is no longer going to write literature. He has been asked to give an address on revolutionary literature and simply responds that no such literature can yet exist. Literature transforms the cultural situation, transfigures the way each regards country, world, the meaning of life itself, yet, it cannot fight and win a war. It could be suggested that herein lies a difference between Nietzsche and Lu Xun. The latter silenced his art to engage in a real war, not as a metaphor for the blood of a pen, but with the blood of corpses. Lu Xun, due to his inclination for social revolution – and not merely cultural – sought to transfigure the order of power within China and its relationships upon the global topography. Nietzsche was not involved in a revolutionary war outside the bounds of his writings in the cultural revolution. Lu Xu said bluntly in his address that there is no place for revolutionary literature during a revolution. During a revolution, he contended, there is a need for revolutionaries. Literature may, with its roars and howls against its enemy, beckon the oncoming struggle, but it has no place in battle. If there is to be revolutionary literature, then there must be revolutionaries. But, revolutionaries are those who are fighting a revolution and not writing. Lu Xun suggests that perhaps after the fighting is over there will be time to write for the revolutionary. But, once the war has begun, the time for literature is over – as it is writing which prepared the ground for the onset of critical action. Literature not only revealed the enemy, but it also disclosed the fact that the alleged revolutionaries who were merely rebranded bureaucrats, were unwilling to give up power regardless of the destruction of China and its people. In such a state of urgency, literature must become silent - one’s energy must engage in warfare. He states at the end of his address, directly to his audience of cadets, who will soon go to war:

You gentlemen are actual fighters, fighters for the revolution, I think you had better not admire literature just yet. Studying literature will not help in the war — at most you may write a battle son which, if well written, may make pleasant reading when you rest after fighting. To put it more poetically, it is like planting a willow: when the willow grows and gives shade, peasants knocking off work at noon can eat and rest beneath it. The present situation in China is such that only the actual revolutionary war counts. A poem could not have frightened away Sun Chuanfang, but a cannon-shell scared him away. I know some people think literature has a great influence on revolution, but personally I doubt this, literature is after all a product of leisure which does, it is true, reflect a nation's culture.

Men are seldom satisfied with their own occupation. I have never been able to do anything but write a few essays, and I am tired of that; yet you who carry rifles want to hear about literature. I myself would naturally rather hear the roar of guns, for it seems to me that the roar of guns is much sweeter to listen to than literature. This is all I have to say. Thank you for hearing me out.

In his humble and beggarly way, Lu Xun, a “writer of a few essays” stands before men who will fight and die in imminent revolutionary civil war. He addresses them, modestly stating that while these men die, he will write no more literature. The civil war resonated in this

address. Yet, Lu Xun did not remain silent, but worked in a network of writers, the *League of Leftwing Writers*, and began to write critical communications against various tendencies of thought, such as Trotskyism. This phase of polemical and political writing, deploying his skills as a writer in the context of revolutionary struggle, lasted eight years, when he returned with a new short story, “Curbing the Flood.” (1935). That he had returned to literature was symbolic of his declaration of a pause in the revolutionary civil war in the wake of the rise of Hitler and the immanent menace of Imperial Japan which continuously sought to capitalize on the disunity within China. Lu Xun’s position was for there to be a break in the civil war so that the Nationalists and the Communists could unite to fight against the Japanese. This fight against the Japanese lasted until 1945. In this story, the absurd and ridiculous status of the rulers is cast into clear view. Headed by Yu, the second to be entrusted to solve the problem of the flood, the rulers are blind to the flood, unknowing of a solution, and in hedonistic disregard for the suffering of the people, of the nation, seeks ways to further gratify themselves. The officialdom of the bureaucracy goes into full force, enacting an intricate ritual of postponements, misdirection, and theatrical non-action, evident of schizophrenic dissociation. All the while, the officialdom wallows in the vortex of the usual self-satisfaction – multiple investigations, each with dinners, provision by the people of their needs while they evade the crisis (which they themselves have created and allow to fester) – while, pathetically maintaining the much needed optimism that at least the people have lots of water – and fish. Lu Xun wrote several more short stories before his death in 1936, increasingly satirical and comedic, gaining the increasing scorn of the nationalists. Nevertheless, the pause ensued and the project of national sovereignty was placed upon the flames. Though Lu Xun had only intimations of the events that would unfold after his death, and as the result of his work, was posthumously named as the “commander of China’s

cultural revolution” by Mao Tse-Tung in posthumous recognition of his role as the founder of modern Chinese literature.

EPILOGUE

Given the controversy and even embarrassment in some quarters regarding the relationship between Lu Xun and Friedrich Nietzsche, it is ironic that it was only Lu Xun who was actively engaged in revolutionary warfare and who had advocated actual war. Nietzsche stayed clear of the political parties, the state (except for his pension), and the marketplace – especially in regards to his sales. Yet, another irony presents itself that Nietzsche is perhaps only famous due to the appropriations and misappropriations of his work by political parties and revolutionary art movements. He attempted to flee from them, but thinking that he must be their leader, they followed him. Lu Xun maintained his literary and philosophical integrity and independence, yet, he did take sides, and it was a choice that was taken from the heart, as he would write in his early essays. In this way, while Nietzsche ultimately remained a visionary and revolutionist in the literary, philosophical and religious domains, especially after his ill-fated attempts to join with Wagner in the resuscitation of German culture, Lu Xun remained a practitioner of revolution in its various guises until the end. There remains a core agreement between Lu Xun and Nietzsche as to principles, a shared understanding as to the inherent strife and tension of human existence, and of their strategic and perspectival approach to cultural revolution. Yet, their respective positions in society and the specific events of their own respective eras encouraged differing responses, as complementary as they turned out to be. Lu Xun favoured the common people as he was one of them, while Nietzsche’s family feigned aristocracy, a trait that Nietzsche would endorse. As he was seeking philosophers of the future and the birth of new peoples from the earthquake, he was also seeking a new aristocracy, one of artists, a non-political cultural aristocracy which would

bring the state and the market to heal through the disclosure of a different world. Nietzsche regarded himself both as a ‘good European’, a pied piper of the best European national writers, and as untimely – he joked that he would be born posthumously, and indeed he was, in Japan, China, in Germany and the rest of Europe and America in the decade and a half after his death – and in most cases, his impact was directly political.

Lu Xun, on the other, was born at the right time, as the founder of modern Chinese literature and as a cultural and political revolutionist, though he, tragically, did not live to see his work come to fruition in either a China which gave its blood in the defeat of Japan (his advocacy of an alliance between the Nationalists and the Communists), nor in the final victory of the Communists with the creation of the People’s Republic of China, which, given his radical criticism of the ineffectuality of the first nationalist revolution, could have been coined by himself. Lu Xun exalted the common people in his writings as the heart of the Chinese nation and language, and for whom he fought in his writings and political activities. It was precisely the lack of decisive cultural and socio-economic transformation in the Nationalist programme which drew him away from their camp in the first place. For, in the end, a “republic” without radical political economic and cultural equality is not a public thing, but, as in the case of China, more of the same tyranny in a different mask. And, while such an order may have been exposed through literature, the order itself had to be displaced by a novel configuration of culture and power, one which seeks the emancipation of contemporary possibilities, energies and voices.

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