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## “The Becoming Self-Conscious of *Zawen*”: Literary Modernity and Politics of Language in Lu Xun’s Essay Production during His Transitional Period

**Abstract** While Lu Xun’s early works of fiction have long established his literary reputation, this article focuses on the form and content of his *zawen* essays written several years later, from 1925 to 1927. Examining the *zawen* from *Huagai ji*, *Huagai ji xubian* (sequel), and *Eryi ji* (Nothing more), the author views these as “transitional” essays which demonstrate an emergent self-consciousness in Lu Xun’s writing. Through close reading of a selection of these essays, the author considers the ways in which they point toward a state of crisis for Lu Xun, as well as a means of tackling his sense of passivity and “petty matters.” This crisis-state ultimately yields a new literary form unique to the era, a form which represents a crucial source of Chinese modernity. From sheer impossibility and a “negating spirit” emerges a new and life-affirming possibility of literary experience.

**Keywords** Lu Xun, *zawen*, crisis, consciousness, revolution, education, writing

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### Introduction

We might say the basic contours of the figure of Lu Xun can ultimately be determined through his *zawen* writings. A great deal of preparatory work must be done in order to address these *zawen* in their entirety. Today I will speak of what I deem to be the “transitional phase” of two or three collected *zawen* works, in order to determine whether several characteristics of Lu Xun’s *zawen* writings can be summed up therein. More specifically, I will analyze the writings collected in *Huagai ji*, *Huagai ji xubian* (sequel), and part of *Eryi ji* (Nothing more). My assumptions are as follows: That 1925 to 1927 is the transitional

period in which Lu Xun's writing of *zawen* approached "self-consciousness," and that is it also the time in which the particular texture of his *zawen* gradually came into its own.

This period will be taken as the point of departure for inquiry into Lu Xun's writing of *zawen*, as I gather most everyone is familiar with his early treatises, essays, and short stories. From a literary-critical perspective, *zawen* still belong mainly to the relatively standard categories of "thought" and "literature"; yet, a writing style emerges with *Huagai ji* that is unique and difficult to standardize. We can merely investigate from beneath the frame of "*zawen*," which in turn composes the solid inner core of Lu Xun's writing thereof. Although his early works, inclusive of all the literary styles rich with formal creativity (such as the writing style of the "*suigan lu*" [literally: record of sense] in *Hot Wind*, in which the future is carried forward), had already established Lu Xun's place in literary history, they had not yet—as far as the particular circumstances of his writing of *zawen* are concerned—attained a level of "[self-]consciousness." Saying this is of course not to belittle the importance of Lu Xun's early works. It is precisely owing to the immense achievement of his early writings that Lu Xun at this phase would appear as a writer of nearly infinite possibility: He could take the path of "art for art's sake," for instance; or he could devote himself to a masterwork, vying for the status of a Chinese Goethe or Tolstoy; he might become a scholar, a great thinker, a leader of public opinion, an idol for youth, a social persona, and so forth. Thus we will see, first, that from today's perspective, the "consciousness of *zawen*" is no doubt representative of a writerly higher level; yet, at a glance, we can see that it is also a stage of crisis for Lu Xun as an individual, since the consciousness of one's own life accompanies the "consciousness of *zawen*." It is the consciousness of the self, which is no different from that of the antagonistic relations of the era. Of course, it is also the consciousness of one's own limitations, the ever-increasing knowledge of what the self cannot or will not do. Simply put, as Lu Xun chooses the course of *zawen*, so *zawen* choose the course of Lu Xun. This is a process of pain and strife that carries a taste of predestination; yet it is also the increasingly unequivocal grasp and "acceptance" of consciousness toward this "predestination," this process of pain and struggle. It is precisely through this process, through this continuous and unending confrontation and conflict, wherein Lu Xun's writing truly merges with his era; wherein the *zawen* becomes the era's newly established literary form. This bears qualitative differences from the exploration of enlightenment, criticism, and literary form in Lu Xun's era of *New Youth*. Hence I dub this "transitional period" the fountainhead of the self-consciousness of Lu Xun's *zawen*. The essays of *Huagai ji* and other collections thus compose the phenomenological material of this self-consciousness. From a stylistic perspective as well, from *Huagai ji* onward several obvious changes arise in Lu

Xun's language and writing style. Even within the scope of this moment, the *zawen* in all its written militancy and aimed at matters and individuals that pose an immediate concern is of course not necessarily the only, overwhelmingly dominant, writing style. The prose poems of *Wild Grass*, for instance, were written from 1924 to 1926; the pieces composing *Wandering* were written in 1925; later, his correspondence with Xu Guangping in *Liangdi shu* had, by the first half of 1925, reached its peak; and the prose works of remembrance comprising *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk* were written in 1926. Of course, these are all relatively strong works in a literary sense; they differ markedly in temperament and spirit from the severe and urgent essays that engage in hand-to-hand combat. Further, the distinctive literary forms and themes found in the *zawen* of Lu Xun's mature and late periods had made their appearance early on in *Hot Wind* (particularly in the form we find in *Suigan lu*); in some sense, we might say the style of the *zawen* is implicit in the starting point of Lu Xun's vernacular writing. Yet, even though the treatises and discussions of *Grave* and *Hot Wind* are at a level already commensurate with the characteristics of the *zawen* of Lu Xun's middle and late periods, they derive even more from the consistency and coherence that inhere within Lu Xun's writing and thought. This does not suffice to explain how Lu Xun's *zawen* went on to become such a particular formulation, however, in terms of a so-called final distinction.

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### The Becoming Self-Conscious of *Zawen* and the “Clutter” of the Outside World

This “final distinction” is perhaps at first glance rather extreme and biased to the point of appearing random; but this is precisely the hidden core—the muscle, bone, and marrow, so to speak—of Lu Xun's *zawen*. To dispense with this essentiality, or to deem it a weakness amid the general features of his writing, or to dilute its aesthetic, “literary” quality, would be to overlook this hidden core. In this sense, then, we can say that what *Huagai ji* and other collected works represent is a particular instance, an abnormality, which is nonetheless a testament to the abnormality of the genuine spiritual foundation of normality. German political philosopher Carl Schmitt has said with regard to the political realm that abnormal and exceptional states can inform us of the nature and basis of the normal. War, for instance, through the extremism of conflicts in the spheres of class, nation, religion, culture, and economics, renders explicit the hidden political intensity of these categories in the ordinary day-to-day. From a Chinese historical perspective, troubled times are, similarly, more illustrative of the intrinsic quality of Chinese politics and society than are times of peace and prosperity. In a metonymical sense, we might say that the extreme or transitional

state of Lu Xun's *zawen* writing will be more illustrative of the "political logic" inhering in his literature than the "normalcy" of his early and late periods.

It is commonly known that his early prose writings benefitted from the journal *New Youth*, which served as the vanguard of the vernacular revolution and the New Culture movement. Hence these writings are rather strongly shaded by the enlightenment of thought that accompanied the emotions and ideals [driving this movement]; and, as a result, they carry also a hint of poetry. A certain humane, existentialist tendency further colored the "human awakening" which they bore along. All of this is of course why so many people appreciate *Grave*, *Hot Wind*, *Wild Grass*, and *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk* (not to mention Lu Xun's creative fiction) to this day. But from *Huagai ji* onward there emerge a highly divergent writing style and authorial figure. Lu Xun himself offers an explanation in his *Huagai ji*/ "Tiji" ("Inscription to *Huagai ji*"), which we will analyze below. Compared with the early prose pieces that possess an enlightened sense of mission and a certain romantic sensibility, as well as the technically virtuosic *zawen* of the later period, one might say the essays of *Huagai ji* and *Huagai ji xubian* (sequel) are not terribly good and even a bit dull. They appear to lack literariness, to overemphasize personal feeling, to be immersed in the particular contradictions of human affairs. Textbook explanations would indicate that such are hallmarks of the uncompromising battle against evil, but to the eyes of ordinary readers of literature today, this is merely a battle waged with pen and ink: you punch, I kick. Thus we squabble to and fro until one cannot tell whose arm is whose amid the entanglement. Where [in such a scenario] could one possibly locate any remaining spiritual meaning or aesthetic transcendence? But if we regard Lu Xun's *zawen* writing as a totality, the significance of this juncture then lies in how to stress without overstating. In short, even though we will continue to cross-reference one backdrop with another, we can nevertheless sense that from *Huagai ji* onward an exceptional consciousness of *zawen* has emerged; or to be even more precise, there has clearly emerged a recognition and undertaking of *zawen* as an inevitability.

The circumstances of the three collections are as follows: *Huagai ji* contains thirty-one *zawen* from 1925; *Huagai ji xubian* contains thirty-two *zawen* from 1926 and one from 1927. *Eryi ji* consists of one piece from 1926 and twenty-nine pieces from 1927, including items pre- and post-dating the White Terror of April 12 ("4/12") and the ensuing split between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Nationalist Party (KMT). We can observe how this phase is also a transitional period within Lu Xun's individual history: The overflowing conceptual and stylistic vitality surrounding the era of May Fourth enlightenment in thought and vernacular revolution, the daring and vigor to smash the old world and establish the new on a cultural scale; such idealism had in all aspects broken in the face of reality. In 1923, Lu Xun became estranged from his brother Zhou

Zuoren. Being forced to move from their home in Badaowan was an unexpected blow, so much so that around one year later Lu Xun's writing career had, professionally speaking, more or less come to a halt. Towards the end of 1924 his creative vitality began to reassert itself. The great revolution, furthermore, of which the collaboration between the Nationalist and Communist Parties as well as the Northern Expedition served as representative, had not yet unfolded. Beijing, dominated by northern warlords, was still a conservative, reactionary, and oppressive environment.

Lu Xun himself dubbed the essays of *Huagai ji*, *Huagai ji xubian*, and *Erji ji* as “scattered thoughts” (literally, *gan* designates senses, feelings, etc.),<sup>1</sup> and at this time he had not yet formed a unified theory of the essay. Scattered thoughts are of course personal feelings: The “feeling” or “sense” implied here externalizes the internal consciousness, while “scattered” (*za*: miscellaneous, cluttered, jumbled) hints at this external assignation which is heedless of the internal order. In addition, it suggests suddenness, a general sense of being caught unawares, and of weariness with coping. The self-consciousness of Lu Xun's *zawen* arises from this constant immersion, this state of awareness of “hitting a wall wherever one turns”; it comes from the consciousness of one's life being consumed and sucked away by meaningless struggles; and from awareness of the merciless pressures of the external world and one's own resistance to these pressures. All these lives and “literatures” that have departed from the ideal become more and more remote, but there is one kind of writing that emerges directly from life. The consciousness of Lu Xun's *zawen* responds to the consciousness of this predestination. And one might say that the maturing of his *zawen* lies in the gradual arrangement of the traumatic “clutter” of the outer world that shocks and pains into a process that lies between a structure of consciousness and a writing style. This process does not seek to simply “overcome” the miscellany of the outer world—for instance, to “sublimate” it for the beautiful, or to immortalize it, or [treat it as] a variety of clever and shiny “trinkets.” It is rather precisely the transformation of the crude, repulsive immediacy of the “clutter” of the outer world into the ordered, meaningful “clutter” that lies within the structure of consciousness; a critical capacity for knowledge and penetrative power. At the same time, this process also transforms into the “miscellany” within the world of writing that approaches *zawen*. The ultimate literariness of Lu Xun's *zawen* stems from the tremendous ability and tenacity of this form of writing to support, endure, resist, and transform epochal and historical factors; and here, poetic meaning is inseparable from ethical meaning. It is akin to the two faces of the state of being and the state of existence.

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<sup>1</sup> Previously translated as “Random Thoughts” by Gladys and Yang Xianyi in *Lu Xun: Selected Works*, vol. II, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1957.

Hence at one end of the polarized world of Lu Xun's *zawen* is the war of attrition and head-to-head battle to withstand "shock" on the level of experience; and at the other is a consciousness of "poetic history" that is a testament to the era in the highest sense, a "commemoration of the forgotten"<sup>2</sup> for the life that remains.

The clutter of "sense" in the period of *Huagai ji* consists of the following concrete matters: One is the so-called unrest at Women's Normal University. As an adjunct professor, Lu Xun had supported the students in their efforts to drive out the reactionary chancellor Yang Yinyu, who proceeded to expel them. Thus Lu Xun also proceeded to take a stand behind the scenes in opposition to Yang Yinyu and the Ministry of Education. Ultimately, Lu Xun was expelled from his public office in the Ministry of Education by the Minister himself, Zhang Shizhao. Lu Xun took Zhang to court so that he might be reinstated, but by then he had already sensed that Beijing was not a place in which to remain for long. *Huagai ji* is the true account of Lu Xun's own perspective toward this "unrest"; regardless of whether it is a lawsuit or an ideological struggle, it is a matter of extreme involvement and vigor, which, once started, must be seen through. The second matter is the reference made in *Huagai ji xubian* to the massacre of March 18, 1926 ("3/18"), in which two of his own students were shot dead by an armed squad before the government seat. Forty-seven students were killed altogether, which sparked protest from all walks of life—including from several of those who, ordinarily disregarding of government and deeming themselves aloof from politics and material life, penned extremely fierce writings. To this end did Lu Xun "Commemorate the Esteemed Liu Hezhen." The matters in *Eryi ji* are even greater [in scope], with the so-called "April 12" purge ("4/12") constituting an historical emergency. Lu Xun did not immediately start writing about this incident because it would have been too dangerous to do so, and not taking such precautions would mean meeting with fatal disaster. This event convinced him there was no life [left] among human beings, inciting him to link scattered thoughts in an involuntary depository so that there could only be the "nothing more" of *Eryi ji* ("nothing more"). Each of these three matters followed on the heels of the other: The unrest at Women's Normal University led him to feel that he had hit a dead end, stonewalled from all sides, and "3/18" led him to feel that the blood of the young people was suffocating him; but with "4/12" he discovered that he had been mistaken in originally believing the dark had reached an end, for far ahead lay the ever darker. Although the Beiyang government [of the provinces to the north including Liaoning, Hebei, and Shandong] was extremely dark, decrepit, and reactionary, at the very least it gave the literati a bit of freedom to wrangle with each other on a cultural level. Some Chinese scholarship today reverses the historical verdict, claiming the era of the Northern

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<sup>2</sup> Reference to Lu Xun's 1933 *zawen* of the same title.

Warlords to be quite beneficial to culture, thought, and education—very broad-minded, relaxed, free, and so forth. This is perhaps not completely untrue, but it is emphatically not to say that warlords took an enlightened stance toward cultural policy. They merely waged war and did not truly seize the realms of “superstructure” or “ideology.” If there was any freedom or breathing room to be admired, it arose from the unadulterated confusion and chaos [of the time]. But after 1927, with the arrival of the White Terror of the KMT, even that space disappeared. As Lu Xun said, for a time murder was everywhere, and everywhere one could see blood. *Eryi ji* cut across 1927, [a year] which brought in great change from the perspective of Chinese society and politics. After the repeated failing of the Republic of China in the years following the Xinhai Revolution, Lu Xun’s profound hidden anguish became a fierce antagonism open to the public. Henceforth Lu Xun’s cultural and social criticism would parallel the class antagonism of the Communist Party, and while the two lacked any direct point of intersection they echoed one another nonetheless. They possessed in common a direction for the future. But in the era of *Huagai ji* this directional, antagonistic and future-oriented utopianism had no clarity as of yet; so that we might say the period of transition and consciousness of *zawen* occupied the ideological and political uncertainty of a period brought to its completion.

Following the Xinhai Revolution, although Lu Xun did not spend very long in [relative seclusion] transcribing the inscriptions of ancient stone tablets, we can deem 1925–26 to be another period of depression for him. *Huagai ji*, *Huagai ji xubian* and *Eryi ji* constitute the records of an isolated fight with neither the support nor sustenance of a clear concept, conviction, movement or organization. The “lone soldier, wandering about with his spear”<sup>3</sup> is the portrait of a state of mind: A lonely crusader in combat without clearly drawn lines of battle. He knows only his own entrapment, equal to the “ghosts pounding the wall,” with no room for advancement and with even less space for retreat. But these two years were also an extremely productive phase for Lu Xun, the phase in which he exerted himself in the midst of his depression and hopelessness without regard for his own life. In terms of Lu Xun’s personal life, the result of such willingness toward self-sacrifice was his taking leave of the confinement of marriage in order to live openly with his own student, Xu Guangping. And in terms of his writing, I consider *Huagai ji* to be symbolic of the ascending consciousness of the *zawen* path. From that point onward, Lu Xun’s *zawen* relied on their own reason for being, accorded with their own ontology, and defended their own poetics and politics. They would no longer need to try on or rely on some [other] notion, concept, or artistic effect for their existence; nor would they require a routine

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<sup>3</sup> Reference to Lu Xun’s inscription to *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, derived from a strategy of *xiangqi*, or “Chinese chess.”

literary form or standard (prose poetry, literary sketch, reminiscence, political commentary, other commentary, narrative, notes, or letters, to name several instances). They began to define themselves according to their own rules; they opened up their own path and ultimately became the principal literary form of modern Chinese literature. In this sense, even though *Huagai ji* and the other works are not so dazzling compared with *Wild Grass*, *Hesitation*, or *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk* in a conventional “literary” sense, they are the hidden birthplace of the self-consciousness of Lu Xun's *zawen*.

All of this is discussed sometimes directly and sometimes obscurely in *Huagai tiji*, which was composed on the last day of 1925. One might say this piece of writing stores within it the cipher to the self-consciousness of Lu Xun's *zawen*. We will make a careful examination below:

At the end of one very late night, I was putting in order the scattered thoughts of the past year, which amounted to even more than the four years' worth depicted in *Hot Wind*. The majority of my ideas had not changed, yet my attitude was not so straightforward. My diction often meandered, while my commentary often fixated on several petty matters. It was quite enough to elicit the ridicule of [literary] individuals of good taste. But what method lay therein? Over the past year I had been inclined to encounter these petty matters, inclined to fixate on their petty temper.

Even though the beginning—“At the end of one very late night, I was putting in order the scattered thoughts of the past year”—still carries the very familiar sense of style of a literati's self-portrait, this first section already furnishes us with new information concerning *zawen*: First, their quantity is considerable, more so than the four years' worth of writing in *Hot Wind*, which is also to say that this literary form has already become Lu Xun's most proficient writing style as well as his primary means of expression. Secondly, and even more importantly, is why it should be this way, why this way and no other. Lu Xun's explanation is as follows: “This year I had been inclined to encounter these petty matters, inclined to fixate on their petty temperament.” Nearly every character is a key word. First, we have “petty matters.” The consciousness of *zawen* must have a sober understanding of its own thematic content. Lu Xun was aware that the matters he would confront in 1925, or the matters that would befall him, would not give way to a great masterpiece of pure art; he would not find something therein to embody the dignity and value of life. The “petty” of “petty matters” points not merely to their vulgar, fragmentary, trivial, and annoying qualities, but also to the necessity and authenticity which they contain. All sorts of ideals and dreams and things appearing to be “matters of grave importance” arise. They invariably run up against a wall in the face of these “petty matters” because the

latter does not stand with “history” as the former does, possessed of the intensity of reality itself even though it is more often than not a dark intensity. The necessity and logic of the real “incline” toward finding Lu Xun, and Lu Xun’s “temper” is “inclined” [in turn] not to relinquish this lightly, nor to adopt an “easy and natural” attitude of escapism. These two “inclinations” in fact reveal the fate of the *zawen*—that is to say, the fate of their nature. On the other hand, within the fate of *zawen* their nature and mission are foretold, and this is something that other literary forms do not possess. This is the second matter.

Finally, once the themes and mission of *zawen* have been clearly delineated, their temperament and peculiarities also become clear: This latter can be summed up as “fixating.” As this pertains to the “very serious,” the willful, and the conscientious in a moral and ethical sense, it is also a kind of inevitability on an individual level—having no choice, all the while sinking into the mire of having no choice. Frequently one has no other choice but to go to war; but once war is begun, one must stick with it to the [bitter] end. Such is a state of combat in the realm of writing; it is the encounter of hand-to-hand combat that becomes the protracted war of attrition. It is the see-saw battle of haggling, an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, blood for blood. The minimal condition for this battle is its most elevated state of affairs: War for war’s sake, battle for the sake of yielding the ultimate foundation of moral legitimacy. There is no “higher” aim herein, nor need there be. Here we see the evolution of the internal logic of *zawen*. At first it is the “utilitarian resolution” of *zawen*, a formidable conflict (the original meaning of so-called petty matters). This is the safeguarding of the rights of the individual to subsist; but at the same time it does [tend to] inspire one’s disgust at the unending tussles and pen-and-ink battles of human life. The predominant state of mind here is the sense of being fed up, of loathing and nihilism, which immediately gives way to a conflict of “good and evil” in the moral realm; which, in turn, attains the intensity within the political realm of “life and death,” of “friend versus enemy.” Fear, anxiety, a sense of indignation and callousness thus predominate; and therein lie the single-mindedness and pleasure with which one issues death warrants to his enemies. Ultimately, fighting becomes useless—battle for the sake of battle alone. Yet that very uselessness, in turn, attains a purpose; in which its very uselessness and meaninglessness become a site of play and aesthetic autonomy; and in this way do life and writing themselves become battles.

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### Consciousness, Petty Matters, and the Politics of Existence

Of all the varieties of Lu Xun’s “temperament,” the most impressive we find is that which “fixates on petty matters”; one might call it the location of the style of

his *zawen*. How shall we understand the “petty matters” that have been “fixated” upon by Lu Xun’s *zawen*? First, such petty matters serve to shift human consciousness away from high-sounding “matters of great importance”; they divert and open up the falseness and decadence of all sorts of “historical,” “cultural,” “moral,” and “immortal” things. Thus “immediacy” and “presence” arise all of a sudden, momentarily condensed together with the new possibilities of language. Without these “petty matters” that render one unable to extricate oneself, human consciousness would have no way of penetrating the surface of things or immersing itself in the stoppage of time. It would then be unable to attain a uniqueness that transcends temporality and conceptual systems. Similarly, it lacks the “fixity” of bad temper; and these “petty matters” have no way of obtaining a poetics with political meaning without the trivial, the senseless, and the repugnant. Lu Xun, as we know, clearly recognizes being born into an era that “can bring life just as easily as death” (*Eryi ji*, “Chenyong,” 3/571).<sup>4</sup> Within the times of this state of struggle that are, as the occasion demands, new and bygone, living and dead, light and dark, civilized and barbaric, there is no other choice for life in this era; it will not “erupt in the silence and then die there.” But the relation between Lu Xun and this great era is precisely what is established in this “fixating on petty matters.”

Lu Xun had already clearly written in *Huagai ji*/“Tiji”:

I know that great personages can see across time and space. They illuminate all they see, experience great sufferings, taste great bliss, issue great benevolences. Yet I also know this entails pilgrimage into the mountains and forests to sit beneath the ancient trees, encapsulated in silent meditation to attain the transcendent sight of heaven. The further you depart from the human world for remote corners, the more you understand its depths and vastness; thus it is said to be high and great; thus you become the master of heaven and earth. Although in my youth I once dreamt of flying, I’ve remained on land to this very day. There is not time enough to salve even minor wounds. Yet ample time is required to open my mind thus, to set forth my views fairly and harmoniously, to facilitate equal understanding just like “a man of honor.” Like a soaked wasp, I crawl to and fro over the soil, not daring to compare with the western apartment-dwelling *tongren* (“men of wide knowledge”); yet myself possessed of bitter excitement, as I feel that which the learned ones cannot know.

The root of this ailment lies in my life in the world. As an ordinary person I am thus capable of meeting with *huagai yun* (“bad luck,” “the luck of

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<sup>4</sup> Lu Xu, *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 3, 571. Henceforth only volume/page numbers are given in the main text.

fate”). (3/3)

The second section of “Tiji” thus closely follows: “This year I was inclined to run into these small matters, inclined to fixate on their petty temper,” and goes a step further to illustrate the self-consciousness of the *zawen*. That “profound,” “vast,” “high” and “great” thing does not belong to the world of the *zawen* because the intermediary linking them with life is neither “encapsulated in silent meditation,” nor is it “open-minded”; it is not distant or lost in thought; it is not the “universal understanding” of a “man of honor.” Rather, it is being “rebuffed” and “knocked against a wall”; it is “miserable wrath,” “wound” and “sickness”; it is the “bad luck” (*huagai yun*) of “ordinary folks” in the “world of human beings.” That is to say, for Lu Xun and for the consciousness of his *zawen*, “bad luck” is precisely the normality of life and of existence. This self-consciousness contains the abhorrence toward as well as the break from all sorts of “dignities” and secure lifestyles; as well as with regard to all the hangers-on of power and influence posing as axiomatic mouthpieces—scholars, literary composers, figures of justice and men of honor.

In a more individual sense, this serves also as a farewell to the vain hopes of one’s own youth. Even more importantly, it stands at the intersection of literature and writing to make the ultimate choice. For Lu Xun the professional writer, this is also a choice to be made with regard to an individual style of existence. It is the ultimate choice in the sense of a “politics of existence”:

There are also those who advise me not to make these short commentaries. For their kind intentions, I am very grateful, and I’m not unaware of the value of creative writing. Yet when I am compelled to write the sorts of things I’ve been writing, I fear that I will still write them; for I deem that so long as there are such troublesome prohibitions within the temple of art, it is not worth entering. Nevertheless, I take a stand in the desert and gaze at the dust and stone whipping about. When I find happiness I will erupt with laughter; my sorrow shall be expressed through cries, my indignation through curses. Even if my body should be struck everywhere by coarse sand, even as the blood flowed from my head, I would stroke its congealed pattern as though it were a badge of courage. Yet this is not necessarily of less interest than following China’s literary scholars, who eat buttered bread in the company of Shakespeare. (3/4)

One might say that the first work of a self-conscious writer of *zawen* shows him “standing in the desert, gazing at the dust and stone whipping about,” expressing happiness through laughter, sorrow through cries, indignation through curses; “even if his body is everywhere struck by coarse grit, with blood flowing from his head, he would stroke the congealed blood as though it were a

decorative pattern”—one might also say that this is the writer's most vivid self-portrait. On the level of language, since this expression itself constitutes the extremism of the intensity of writing, it is at the same time the extremism of the intensity of the politics of existence. The extreme state of both, lacking moderation, is precisely that which composes the most fundamental characteristic of the medium or intermediary of the *zawen* writing form. As any reader familiar with the early writings of Lu Xun will say, this kind of vindication is doubtless a resolution internal to literature, and must first be understood from within the world of language; for this bears upon the ultimate definition of Lu Xun as a writer. But to consider what Lu Xun himself has said, this sort of resolution is above the level of literature; it is a resolution that surpasses aesthetics, because the premise of this resolution is precisely the casting off of literariness and the mulling over of aesthetic categories: Ultimately, it makes a moral decision on the level of the politics of existence. This also determines the literature and art of the era, which “often causes people discomfiture and lacks method” (3/571). A choice is thus presented to the literati: “Either escape from literature and art yourself, or release life from their clutches” (3/571). This undoubtedly stems from the perspective of *zawen* consciousness in its general view of the forms of modern Chinese literature and art. The paradox and dialectics of this real judgment and moral determination lay in the fact that this decision arises in the name of “life”; but it can only be conveyed through the language praxis entailed by the writing of *zawen*. In the history of modern Chinese literature, there is no singular literary form akin to that which realizes the most extreme integration of form and content as does *zawen*.

Although the “consciousness of *zawen*” emerging together with this decision is a “negating spirit”—a critical, sneering, and antagonistic posture—it is an affirmation of life in the final analysis; for, “if there are truly people in this world who wish to go on living, they ought first to dare to speak, to laugh, to cry, to rage, to curse, to strike. In this cursed place we shall beat back this cursed era!” (3/45) Here, “those who stubbornly hold to the present and to the ground [beneath their feet]” are regarded as the emergence of life and its vital signs; it is their “true indignation.” (3/5–53) This attitude is doubtless a thoroughly modernist one as it supplants history with a tension-filled present. It employs an existential state and the creative juncture implicated within it to negate tradition. It uses the intensity of learning through experience to annul the integrity of all sorts of experiences, memories, and narratives. It wields a momentary eternity to negate the various “self-evident” and “immortal” mythologies of historicism. Lu Xun even goes so far as to borrow Schopenhauer's allegory, which likens the sounds of those “deeming themselves immortal” to the *ying ying* of flies fluttering over the bodies of murdered soldiers (3/40). In one piece, titled “Xia san chong” (“Three Summer Pests”), he uses the mosquito which, prior to

stinging and blood-sucking, invariably “issues a great commentary through its humming” as a metaphor for those opinionated literati and learned scholars. Meanwhile, he admires “the eagles and hawks, as well as tigers and wolves,” since, “when they are hungry, they bite without trying to justify themselves or indulging in any tricks” (3/42) [Yangs’ translation, 134–35]. Furthermore, in “Geming shidai de wenxue” (“Literature of a revolutionary period”),<sup>5</sup> Lu Xun points to another aspect of literary form, that is, “literary literature, of which only the most useless and least powerful people speak. Those who are strong do not talk; they kill. The oppressed have only to say or write a few words to be killed.” (3/436) [Yangs, 2/334–35] He ridicules the “persons of learning” and “quick-wittedness,” who hide timidly behind the “golden mean,” “unruffled in all their slavish self-abasement; remaining nonetheless unsuited to the path of sagehood” (3/27). He esteems the “defeated heroes,” the military men of “tenacious resistance,” who “dare to go it alone,” as well as the “mourners who travel to weep for the renegades” (3/153). He appeals to the young people of China who seldom or never read Chinese books, but who read great numbers of foreign books, because “reading few Chinese books results in the ability to compose [creatively].” But the most essential matter for the youth of today is “action,” not “speech.” So long as they are living, the worst case scenario is that what they write counts for nothing” (3/12). He rejects all the “antiques and trash” that allow human beings “to fail to realize that progress and regression is all around them; [so that] naturally they cannot distinguish the men from the ghosts” (3/101). In his opposition to all affected, “hoity-toity” reading practices, and in his advocacy for a history of reading in the manner of “checking accounts,” Lu Xun’s aim lies in obtaining the awareness that “Chinese reform cannot be postponed” (3/148–49). All of this is identical to Nietzsche’s proposal with regard to the creativity of forgetting in [his essay,] “The Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life.” And as Paul de Man has noted, the essential process of modernism lies in “modernity” abolishing the domination of history over human beings, thereby opening up space for a new value system, a space opposed to temporality. We can see that a more anti-metaphysical and thorough-going “suspension of tradition” advances along with the emerging consciousness of *zawen*:

If you admire the ancients, go back! If you wish to renounce the world, do it quick! If you want to ascend to the heavens, ascend now! Should your soul wish to depart from your body, let it take its leave! Right here and now we should hold to the present, to the ground where people dwell. (3/52)

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<sup>5</sup> Translated by Gladys and Yang Xianyi.

From this perspective, Lu Xun's *zawen*, like the writings imbued with formal significance (novels, prose poems, *meiwen* [stylized essay], etc) since *Kuangren riji* (The madman's diary), still bear formal relations. These relations, however, can only be clarified on an even more abstract plane from the perspective of modernist value, history, and the philosophy of language. At the same time, the modernist spirit and temperament of Lu Xun's writing cannot avoid being condensed together with the world of language, as the former are manifested alongside his written language. Only in the world of language and writing, furthermore, can that which Lu Xun himself called the *zawen* of "the stuff of one moment's scattered thoughts" or "these boring things" obtain an aesthetic determination; and this aesthetic and stylistic determination is moreover akin to the integrated political whole arising from the existence of the moral foundation furnished by Lu Xun's *zawen*. Taken together these compose Lu Xun's literary self-image as a writer/*zawen*-ist. All this receives an incisive and vivid display in the coda to *Huagai ji*/ "Tiji":

Presently it is very late at night at the year's end, late in the extreme. My life, or at least a portion of it, has been consumed already in writing these boring things, while all I have to show for it is the desolation and crudeness of my own soul. But I am not at all afraid of these things and do not wish to conceal them; I love them, in fact. For such are the scars left by life tossed about like sand by the wind. Once you, too, sense that life is a struggle in the windblown sand, you will understand what I mean. (3/5)

Like an echo of the image at the beginning, "one very late night at the year's end," this passage does not merely point to the writing technique and formal considerations of "scattered thoughts," but goes a step further to reveal the contradictions of the writer's innermost being: "My life, at least part of it, has been consumed already in writing these boring things, while all I have to show for it is the desolation and crudeness of my own soul." The desolate and despairing sense of the meaningless expenditure of life runs throughout Lu Xun's writings; in "Hope" (*Wild Grass*) the exhaustion of youth is even more a prelude to the duet of despair and hope. But only in *zawen* is Lu Xun's individual self-consciousness (including the perspective of his early period based upon evolutionism, Nietzschean philosophy, and the genius of the "Mara" poets, as well as the ideologies of the "individual" related to May Fourth enlightenment idealism) distilled to an even higher political and aesthetic determination: "But I am not at all afraid of these things and do not wish to conceal them; I love them, in fact. For such are the scars left by life tossed about like sand by the wind." The course of *zawen*'s self-consciousness opens up the dread of facing life head-on, as well as the overcoming of this dread, in the course of the world of language.

This consciousness is that of one's own destiny; it is directed toward the love of one's own existence; it is the "scars left by life tossed about like sand by the wind" which are regarded as a testament to life as well as the choice and resolution of writing itself. One might say that, within the consciousness of *zawen*, the autonomy of existence—in the final analysis, it is an autonomy of political logic—prevails over the autonomy of aesthetics. Yet the meaning of "life-and-death struggle" which is intrinsic to political logic causes this consciousness to devote its attention to the immediate and present; thus the conflict of "now" versus "history," of "language" versus "time," resumes writing its own moral discourse and literary discursive meaning.

The consciousness of Lu Xun's *zawen* contains the consciousness of "the desolation and crudeness of my own soul," but the latter is not merely the fond reminiscence of "youth that once dreamt of flying through space." The end of the aforementioned passage—"Once you, too, sense that life is a struggle in the windblown sand, you will understand what I mean"—ought not to be taken lightly, because it indicates that even if Lu Xun regards loneliness and desolation as "intrinsic" to the self-consciousness of *zawen*, this does not stem from a pallid individual narcissism, nor is it directed toward a yearning for "pure form." It is rather directed toward the communicability and exchangeability of a latent collectivist experience, identical to the scenario of one rebel in the darkness who, upon spying the trembling gleam of another man's dagger, issues a laugh of solidarity as he realizes they are "in cahoots." Precisely because it is determined by the era, the consciousness of *zawen* is directed against the era; so that, ultimately, it is not an introverted self-consciousness, but aims rather toward the surface of language, toward the renewed meaning of allegorical truth. In a pure aesthetic sense, we can see that regardless of whether modernism attempts ruthlessly to surmount history, to build an eternal, ever-new, future-oriented "present," history will nevertheless continuously and just as ruthlessly "gobble" this heroic, creative "present" in its own chain of cause-and-effect. All of this unfolds in the historical circumstances of "desolation and crudeness"; and from each respective direction this sense of "desolation and crudeness" strengthens further. This is also to say, the kind of "sublime" which is represented by "desolation and crudeness" (the meaning of sublime assumed here is "the beauty which inspires fear") comes closer to the authentic conditions of existence, as well as to the value of life, than do all the exquisite, elegant, and glossy man-made things. And the form of *zawen* is precisely this richly endowed form of the "sublime;" its short, broken, flexible, coarse, direct, intense, and vicious actuality is invariably intrinsic to the era, as well as to its antagonistic consciousness; or better to say that it is precisely the exteriority of the language of this reality and of consciousness itself.

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## The Paradoxical Nature of the Becoming Self-Conscious of *Zawen*

We can see that the “becoming self-conscious of *zawen*” contains two seeming contradictions. The first is the paradox of writing itself: If writing seeks to attain a state of consciousness, it must “negate” the immediacy and direct nature of reality through distance and “autonomy.” In some senses, this requirement of writing focuses upon its own intrinsic demands, wherein its own perspective is even “higher” than that of reality, even more “enduring.” Next, the act of writing consciously possesses an imperative which is akin to the struggle over the “consciousness of writing,” in the striving to break apart tendencies toward the myth and alienation of writing itself; to release writing from its greatest limitations; to direct it toward an unfamiliar, unknowable assault on the boundaries of existence; to scatter and dispel the forms, organization, systems, and autonomy of writing into the exterior world which is antithetical to the “inherency” of writing; and thus to regard this “exteriority” as the content of writing which is established upon the interior of language. Such paradoxes reside within every modernist writing style, but they are displayed with particular acuteness and extremity in the *zawen* form. As far as *zawen* writing goes, the self-negation of writing is not the highest requirement of its self-consciousness, but is rather its starting point; it is not a stylistic apex but rather makes writing into a possible premise. Without this self-negation, there is no *zawen*, because only by renouncing the freedom and safety of the titular literary system, and only by renouncing the protective umbrella of “beauty,” can the movement and practice of *zawen* exist. We can say that *zawen* reside in what is regarded as the most exterior boundary of the literary writing of “significant form”; herein, language and “self-consciousness” traverse and sink into the same crude and desolate struggle, which is unending in the exterior world. By way of “minimal literature” or “minor literature” they lay bare the ultimate will and greatest intensity of the literary state.

Second, the “becoming self-conscious of *zawen*” reflects with extreme concentration the conflicting relationship of mutual negation between “modernity” and “history.” And as this relation is now the core of the modern spirit, it is also the core of historical consciousness. Paul De Man in “Literary History and Literary Modernity,” by way of looking back upon Nietzsche’s historical philosophy, points out the immanent historical/ahistorical paradox of the concept of “modernity”: Through negation of the legitimacy of the earlier historical process, modernity establishes itself for history’s ultimate field of vision; yet this field negates the unrestrained gamble of history that, ultimately, cannot but obtain meaning through an historical process. This is also to say that,

even if the action of negating history is carried on in the name of the “eternal now” or “ever new” of modernity, ultimately it can only obtain (historical) value and (historical) meaning of the self from its negation of the continuity of the historical process. Thus the modern spirit ultimately cannot help but become possessed of an historical consciousness with an intensely self-critical, self-negating tendency; or that is to say, history obtains anew some self-knowledge by way of the intervention of modernity.<sup>6</sup> In the conflict between modernist literature’s pursuit of the “true present” of modernity and this ahistorical, transhistorical momentary self which is reclaimed anew by history, *zawen* represent a particular means of resolution—that is, through renouncing or “suspending” literariness and entering into historical events and the historical process unconditionally. But in the course of “fixating on petty matters,” *zawen* suddenly and continuously elevate historical consciousness to an allegorical height and intensity; thereby renewing what is regarded as the historical process of Chinese society, tradition, and culture and channeling it into modernity’s ultimate field of vision. The sense of atemporality that arises from experience of the lapse of concrete time does not stem from some “higher” philosophical insight or blind faith in the “renewal” of things. It comes rather from the incisive, uncompromising antagonism to the historical process; from the continuous pressures and metamorphoses undergone by life experience and language worlds. In Nietzsche’s and De Man’s sense, because modernist literature, or rather modernity itself, confronts the successes of the historical process and at once faces the self-negation of its “true present,” the triumph of form ultimately declares its defeat by historicity as a result. In Lu Xun’s sense, however, owing to *zawen* form’s self-negation of literariness at its starting point, that is, its opposition to the defeat of the consciousness of the historical process while achieving the negation of history (inclusive of tradition and the “now”) on the level of language, it thereby ultimately realizes an allegorical triumph. This allegorical quality casts off modernism’s infatuation with the symbolic system and literary ontology, as well as the enclosures of the “true present,” conveying the constant establishment of the strained relations of past, present, and future through modern spirit as well as language.

This is why Lu Xun could brazenly declare in “Qingnian bi dushu” (“Young people must study”) whether it matters if one is able to write essays or not, in comparison to the issue of whether or not one can go on living (“provided there are those among the living, I cannot write of the worst case scenario” [3/12]). Here, the casting off of history’s strength of will in terms of “cultural tradition” and “cultural system” (wherein “Chinese books” supply a concrete conceptual

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<sup>6</sup> See Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 150–51.

figure) not only comes from the “true present” of life which is represented by “life”; it also comes from the actuality and concreteness for which “to go on living” stands (“engage in life, try to do a little something”); it stems from the temporal process that life continues to contain, and thus the tendency to “rehistoricize.” But with regard to the negation of “Chinese books” and “composition,” ultimately we are still on the level of cultural politics, wherein the selection between “Chinese books” versus “foreign books,” between “calming down” versus rousing with promises, between “the dead” versus “the living” and “speech” versus “action,” is obtained. Just as the “eternal now” ultimately seeks to be “rehistoricized” with regard to the negation of history, the negation of “speech” by “action” ultimately can only be established via the structure of radicalism inherent to “speech.” Here, in terms of action and practice, the *zawen* becomes the form of speech. This vestige of literary self-negation itself is the location of the essence of modernist literariness. Lu Xun might reject “composition” for the sake of “the living,” but “the living” merely want to live, and so their voices will issue forth: they will cry, laugh, rage, and curse; they will struggle and battle; and so “the writing of the living” will arise. This is consistent with the various self-conscious ponderings, statements, and practices of Lu Xun's *zawen*.

Naturally, the connotations associated with the concept of Lu Xun's *zawen* do not merely compose a formal issue, but also possess their own specific historical contents. Compared with the modern schools of Europe and America, or Japan's modernist movement, the modern spirit or modernism in Chinese vernacular literature from start to finish is united with a collectivist social struggle and cultural destiny, suffering the stimuli and nourishment of all manner of radical transformative forces. 1925 was not merely the year of Lu Xun's individual bad luck and struggle amidst depression; it was also a year of Chinese anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism as well as the domestic struggle against warlord rule. As Sun Yat-sen left Guangdong province to head north in November of 1924, he issued a declaration advocating for the overthrow of warlords and imperialism, the abolition of unequal treaties, and the convening of a National Assembly in quest of the establishment of a unified China. In January of 1925, the youth of the Chinese Communist Party convened in Shanghai for its Fourth Congress to discuss the increasing rise in revolutionary circumstances, in the face of which, the question of how to strengthen the organization and leadership of mass movements arose. In February of the same year, railway workers nationwide assembled to go on strike, and soon afterwards the “February 7 Massacre” (“2/7”) marked a new phase of China's labor movement. In that month, Guangzhou's revolutionary government carried out the first journey eastward (“eastward crusade”) against Chen Jiongming. It was claimed that more than three thousand teachers and students of the Whampoa (Huangpu) Military

Academy defeated eighty- or ninety-thousand warlord forces. They stormed and captured Shantou (Chen's home base), an action revealed as the prelude to the Northern Expedition. On March 12, Sun Yat-sen succumbed to illness, addressing his final words to the Soviet Union: "Dear Comrades: While bidding you farewell, I wish to express my ardent hopes. I hope that before long as the dawn breaks, the Soviet Union will be allied with its fine friend and welcome the powerful and prosperous independent China. The two countries contend in the great war for the freedom of the oppressed nations of the world. They shall advance hand-in-hand and obtain victory."<sup>7</sup> One might say that the general trend of "transformation" and "revolution" of the twentieth century in China served to determine the ultimately moral perspective and vigorous attitude of Lu Xun's *zawen* writing, but the formidable and obstinate resistance met by transformation and revolution determined, in turn, the stylistic features of severity and impatience, profundity, toughness, and dispute over every detail. The divergences between Lu Xun's modernism and that of the West or Japan are determined by the distinction of such national historical circumstances. *Huagai ji*, *Huagai ji xubian*, and *Eryi ji* not only make a record of Lu Xun's path from "bad luck" and "fixating on petty matters" to consciousness, but they also pertain to the relation between literature and revolution. Formerly in the research on Lu Xun, any of his writing that touched upon revolution as well as the relation of revolution with literature would be placed in the investigative framework of "politics," "position," or "standpoint." But in fact, the relationship between revolution and literature as far as Lu Xun's *zawen* goes is equally an issue of the intrinsic quality of language practice at a critical moment in time, as it relates to the efficacy and radicalism of literature itself. It bears upon the relation of the self-consciousness of modernity to the historical process, as well as it bears upon the relation of that "true present" and the expression of language to a structure of time.

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## Zawen and the Literature of Revolution

On April 8, 1927, just four days before the "4/12" incident, Lu Xun composed his lecture, "The Literature of a Revolutionary Period" (*Eryi ji*), at the Whampoa Military Academy in Guangzhou. In every respect, this lecture expressed a direct complement and correspondence to the ideas of his *zawen* writing in his transitional period; this is also to say, under all manner of adversity, the "passive," "negative," or "negating" demarcations in Lu Xun's *zawen* all found positive, direct, and affirmative correspondences in the optimistic slant of the revolutionary era.

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<sup>7</sup> *Lu Xun nianpu* (Revised edition), vol. 2, 179.

A common misreading of the manuscript of this lecture is that Lu Xun discusses revolutionary literature. In fact, Lu Xun discusses the relation between the “revolutionary era” and literature, or even more precisely, why in China of that time an organic relationship had not yet arisen between “revolution” and “literature,” with the result that it had not yet produced the conditions for “revolutionary literature.” Regarding the pros and cons of literature and revolution, Lu Xun in “Young People Must Study” was equally unequivocal: Whether or not there is revolutionary literature is not at all important (“revolutionary literature can wait” [3/437]). In the call for revolution, literature more often than not is “most useless” (3/436). What is important is the need for revolution, as only in a revolutionary place can there be revolutionary literature. Even more important are the revolutionary people, for they are unwilling to write on command; “instead, [their writings] flow naturally from the heart with no regard for the possible consequences.” (3/437) [Yangs, 2/335] Only then can there be literature and, hence, revolutionary literature; one is otherwise left to compose on a set subject, “like writing an eight-legged essay once again.”<sup>8</sup> (3/437) [Yangs, 2/335]

Lu Xun's contemplation of the relationship of revolution and literature bears hidden echoes of his unfolding of the consciousness of (*zawen*) writing in *Huagai ji*/ “Tiji.” But what is noteworthy is the fact that, although Lu Xun's lecture treats of the relationship of revolution and literature, the core and substance of the question lies in revolution. Revolution is the great event that initiates, creates, and transforms the structure of the foundation of human life; yet literature is a specific means to transmit the historical experience that has been determined and molded by revolution. Formerly, literary history and literary theory regarded the issue of literature and revolution, whether consciously or not, as a political problem to be disposed of; but in the vein of *zawen*'s self-consciousness we can clearly see the relationship between literature and the “revolutionary era.” It is a particular form of the core problem of literary modernity, which is how literature in style and form allows the “true present” to leave its mark, how it allows the momentum and assault of historical process to become, in terms of language and form, a force endowed with form, thereby transforming the inherent antagonism of aesthetics (distant, autonomous, non-utilitarian, traditional) and modernity (immediate, changeful, newly emerging, fashionable, of the moment) into a literary productivity.

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<sup>8</sup> “To write on some set subject is like writing a bagu essay, which is worthless as literature and quite incapable of moving the reader.” The Yangs append a note to their translation to explain the “bagu” or “eight-legged” essay as, “A form of essay set in the imperial examinations of the Ming and Qing dynasties. These essays, divided into eight sections, were stereotyped and devoid of real content.” (Vol. 2, p. 335)

From this angle we can go a step further in understanding why Lu Xun, in accordance with the developmental stages of the revolution, divides the discussion of the relationship between the great revolution and literature into three parts—prior to, during, and after the great revolution—while placing literature in a relatively static, apparently passive, position. Below we can see each section as follows:

(1) Before a great revolution, nearly all literature expresses dissatisfaction and distress over social conditions, voicing suffering and indignation. There are many works of this kind in the world. But these expressions of suffering and indignation have no influence on the revolution, for mere complaints are powerless. Those who oppress you will ignore them. The mouse may squeak and even produce fine literature, yet the cat will gobble it up without any consideration. So a nation with only a literature of complaint is hopeless, because it stops short at that. Just as in a lawsuit, when the defeated party starts distributing accounts of his grievances his opponent knows that he cannot afford to go on and the case is as good as wound up, so the literature of complaints, like proclaiming one's grievances, gives the oppressors a sense of security. Some nations stop complaining when it proves useless and become silent nations, growing more and more decadent. Witness Egypt, Arabia, Persia and India all of which have no voice. But nations with inner strength which dare rebel when complaints prove useless wake up to the facts and their lamentations change into roars of anger. When such literature appears it heralds revolt, and because people are enraged the works written just before the outbreak of revolution often voice their fury—their determination to resist, to take vengeance. (3/438) [Yang, 2/337]

To some extent, this is also a portrayal of the social conditions emerging from Lu Xun's *zawen*. Yet, although the consciousness of *zawen* is directed toward the consciousness of this state of "suffering and indignation," it rejects the "powerlessness" and sense of defeat, devoting itself unsparingly to pursuing the "lawsuit." What the *zawen* writer writes is not an "account of grievances"; he most assuredly does not yield his opponent the opportunity to know "that he cannot afford to go on and the case is as good as wound up." Lu Xun draws from the metaphor of "voice" oft-used in the age of youth to emphasize how, prior to great revolutions, the revolutionariness of literature lay in its resistance to silence and weakness, in its adherence to resistance. This, in turn, bred the strength and awareness so as to one day turn the "sound of grief" into a "roar," to transform the "voicing of suffering and indignation" into "vengeance."

(2) During a great revolution, literature disappears and there is silence for,

swept up in the tide of revolution, all turn from shouting to action and are so busy making revolution that there is no time to talk of literature. Again, that is a period of poverty when men are so hard put to it to find bread that they are in no mood to talk of literature. And conservatives, staggered by the high tide of revolution, are too enraged and stunned to sing what passes with them for "literature." Some say, "Literature is born of poverty and suffering," but this is a fallacy. Poor men do not write. Whenever I was short of money in Beijing, I made the rounds to borrow some and wrote not a single word. Only when our salary was paid did I sit down to write. In busy times there is no literature either. The man with a heavy load and the rickshaw man with a rickshaw both have to put them down before they can write. Great revolutions are very busy and very impoverished times, when one group is contending with another, and the first essential is to change the existing social system. No one has the time or inclination to write. So during a great revolution the world of letters is bound to lapse into a temporary silence. (3/438–39) [Yangs, 2/337–38]

This section best illustrates Lu Xun's point of view towards the relationship between the revolutionary era and literature. While "so busy making revolution," there is "no time to talk of literature." Lu Xun does not sympathize with the notion that "during a great revolution the world of letters is bound to lapse into a temporary silence," though he views it as only natural. For essayists are like everyone else; they are all compelled to throw themselves into the struggle to "transform the conditions of modern society." To suspend essay writing temporarily for the sake of such struggle will likely count for nothing. What is noteworthy is that Lu Xun here not only emphasizes the primacy and decisiveness that revolution bestows upon literature, but also leaves space for the fundamental conditions and relative self-discipline of literary writing itself. Thus: "Whenever I was short of money, I made the rounds to borrow some and wrote not a single word. Only when our salary was paid did I sit down to write." And: "The man with a heavy load must put it down before he can write." Taken together with his other and later writings, this emphasizes the consistency of literary writing's need for *yuyu* ("ampleness") and *yuyu xin* ("ampleness of mind and heart"). But precisely because of this, Lu Xun classifies literature as the historical realm of common culture, while revolution counts as the contingency that breaks historical continuity; it is part of the collapse and "vigorous forgetting" of the cultural and historical establishment of a new starting point and new value. Hence, the silence of the literature of the great revolutionary era more often than not accompanies an affirmation of life, the breeding of new human beings and the creation of historical movement. Compared with the focus, strain, and severity of this movement, the long-windedness or chirruping of literature is

merely a form of decadence.

(3) When the revolution has triumphed, there is less social tension and everyone has enough and something to spare, then literature is written again. There are two types of literature in this period. One extols the revolution and sings its praise, because progressive writers are impressed by the changes and advances in society, the destruction of the old and the construction of the new. Rejoicing in the downfall of old institutions, they sing the praises of the new construction. The second type of writing to appear after a great revolution—the dirge—laments the destruction of the old. (3/439) [2/338; Yangs' translation modified]

Since Lu Xun classifies literature in the historical realm alongside common culture, regarding it as that which composes one part of normality, then society after the great revolution, despite being revolutionary, will still historicize, normalize, and systemize afresh; thereby producing its own universalist culture inclusive of literature. But Lu Xun immediately turns the question around to the China of the great revolutionary wave, issuing the following critical observation:

Only China today has neither type of literature—neither dirges for the old nor praise for the new; for the Chinese revolution is not yet accomplished. This is still the transitional period, a busy time for revolutionaries. There is still a good deal of the old literature left, though, with practically everything in the papers being written in the old style. I think this means that the Chinese revolution has brought about very few changes in our society, scarcely affecting the conservatives at all, and therefore the old school can still hold aloof. The fact that all—or nearly all—the writing in the Guangzhou papers is old proves that society here is equally untouched by the revolution; hence there are no paeans for the new, no dirges for the old, and the province of Guangdong remains as it was ten years ago. Not only so, there are no complaints or protests either. We see trade unions taking part in demonstrations, but with government sanction—not revolting against oppression. This is merely revolution by government order. Because China has not changed, we have no songs of mournful yearning for the past and no new marching songs. (3/440) [2/338–39]

Obviously, this section is what Lu Xun was truly aiming to say; it is the main point of his lecture at the Whampoa Military Academy. From the literary angle, Lu Xun saw the uninterrupted continuity and organicity of the historical process—the absence of radical collapse, the absence of modernity. And the absence of modernity determined in turn the belated arrival and difficult labor of

modern Chinese literature; or rather, we might say that Lu Xun's so-called literature in itself is one form of modernity, in so far as it is relative to historical process and historical organicity. Literature essentially speaks of that which is eternally "modern" because it stands together with the existence, experience, and creativity of living human beings, thereby setting itself against all that is "traditional." Under the conditions of modernity, the elegy devoted to the systems of old is no different from the paean to the new. All are "modern" because they constitute the premise and political content of the era's cataclysm. But in Guangdong and throughout all of China the literature of old still holds sway; old personages remain "above worldly considerations." To Lu Xun, "the Chinese revolution has brought about very few changes in our society, scarcely affecting the conservatives at all." Under the circumstances of modernity's absence, the boundary between literature and "outdated literature" cannot be clearly distinguished, while the "true present" is indistinguishable from the reappearance of historical nightmares. As a result, "new literature" or "modern literature" must fiercely cast off all the fetters of built-in systems and intrinsic forms. For only through unceasing and persistent creation of literary form and criticism of literary systems can writing subvert all sorts of outdated literary systems, condensing the inner radicalism of language together with the "true present." It is precisely in this sense that Lu Xun's *zawen* lacks yet the form of radical literary practice that marks a great era of "revolutionary literature." Its most extreme antithesis is "poetic rhythmic prose," and all the other quintessential orthodoxies of Chinese culture [see *Eryi ji*/ "Tan 'Jilie,'" 3/500]. Compared with this ossified cultural formula, *zawen* form is the reemergence of the literary experience of the world; it is the literary allegory of the era without "literature"; it is possibility owing to impossibility; it is a record of all the astonishment, abominations, despair and sufferings that remain in the "true present" of the world of language—individualized, stylized memorials. Yet Lu Xun's linguistic style does not transform the experience of modernity into "immortal" aesthetic form, but rather points to the source of its astonishment, that is, the historical self-negation of the meaning of modernity. Without this self-negation, true "human history" and the process of society ceaselessly historicizing itself have no place to begin. In this way, the self-consciousness of those who would serve as the bearers of modernity has no means through which to undergo either self-negation or the process of rehistoricizing the modern "moment." Since the course of this self-negation has been suffocated, the self-consciousness of modernity has no way of being "reconciled" with the past or future. It can only forever exist at the heart of shock and nothingness, stranded in the eternal "now" and struggling to no end. For this reason, the anxiety Lu Xun bears toward literature, modernity, and (Chinese) civilization is constitutive of a trinity of concern. If we understand revolution as the highest form of

modernity, and Chinese “new literature” as a means of the expression of modernity, we can then understand the literary theory and practice of the great revolutionary era of Lu Xun, and we can then see in *zawen*’s transcending of traditional writing forms and their related mythologies and taboos a modernist radicalism. This radicalism is intrinsic to modernity itself, as well as to literature in itself. This is also why, outside of Lu Xun’s short stories and prose poems, the “consciousness of *zawen*” represents yet another source of Chinese modernity.

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### The Creation of *Zawen* and “Milking”

Beyond the intimate relation between the “becoming self-conscious of *zawen*” and *zawen* writing with the era in which they arise, I wish to move further into the “intentionality” of the transitional period of Lu Xun’s *zawen* writing, or rather to discuss my observations of the problematic of *zawen*’s “genesis” and “dynamics.” In *Huagai ji*/ “Bingfei xianhua” (“Not really a digression”) (3), we see the following thread:

I have never experienced an “urge to create” which clamps me to my desk and impels me to write even when threatened on all sides by fire and sword. I know quite well that such an urge is pure, noble and utterly admirable: the trouble is I have never had it. One morning a few days ago when a friend glared at me, I flushed up and felt a pang like an urge to something; but later, refreshed by the cold, late autumn wind, the temperature of my face returned to normal—I did no writing. As for those writings of mine already printed, they were milked out of me. When I say milked, I refer to the method of extraction: I am not claiming that my works are like milk in the hope that they will be sealed in glass bottles and sent to some “palace of art.” (3/158) [Yangs, 2/205–6]

Already a writer of high achievement and a seasoned scholar, Lu Xun couldn’t have been unaware that writing essays requires “ampleness” and “ample heart.” In *Huagai ji*/ “Huran xiangdao” (“Sudden thoughts”), he once pointed out that “deficient” “feelings of oppression and privation” are not beneficial to the pleasure of reading or to the vitality of artistic creation. Critical of the “frivolous carelessness of modern implements (which the world mistakenly deems convenient),” the “shoddy construction work, the perfunctory nature of business, the rejection of all that is “visually pleasing” or “enduring,”” Lu Xun even resorts to exaggeration: “When people lose the ampleness of circumstances which allow them to write, or when they carry the feeling of insufficiency in their unconsciousness, I fear for the future of this nation” (3/16). Yet Lu Xun happens

to use a certain character—"milking"—to illustrate the motivations and conditions of his own writing, declaring its "impurity" and "impropriety" thus. The verb "to milk" indeed vividly and directly expresses the exterior pressure of Lu Xun's *zawen* writing, the interior structure and texture of the *zawen* formed under this pressure, as well as the particular correspondence in which exterior and interior fit together. This phylogenetic structure is the hinge to our understanding of the *zawen*'s allegorical particularity.

Lu Xun says his essays are all "milked" out of him: "[I] only do what is called writing when I am 'milked'" (3/160) [Yangs, 2/208]. The first layer of meaning of "milking" [in this context] refers to the external world and the people milking it. One party is milked, as they have no place to hide and nowhere to withdraw. If there is "resistance," it is that which stems from the relationship of action and reaction, for the circumstances of this resistance are limited and shaped by the power of "milking." Conversely, without such external pressure, nothing is created. Without the force of "milking" in the real world, there is no formal transformation, anxiety, severity, or solidity in the world of language. Along with the previous discussion of the "consciousness of *zawen*," that is, the accepting of *zawen*'s fate, the attitude that turns "necessity" into "freedom" is consistent with that which turns negative things into positive strength. Hence, this "but for being milked, I would not write," or that is to say, this helplessness, is a conscious choice; for it is not writing that comes from being squeezed, lacking a certain quality. It is unworthy of being counted upon, even dispensable. Lu Xun brings the following into play as a result: "In my own case, provided my belly is filled and I have not too many callers, I stay placidly behind closed doors and do no writing at all. Or if I write, it will be some mild, ambiguous remarks—what is known as balanced and impartial talk—equivalent, in fact, to not writing at all" (3/161) [Yangs, 2/208]. Conversely, the things worthy of writing are indeed the things which are "milked": The era then resembles a ruthless machine press, wherein *zawen* occupy the mould of continuous transformation like coins cast one by one within the era's enormous force-field. In this consciousness, as with the process of molding and being molded by history, there is no place for the myth of artistic genius related to "inspiration," "creative passion," and so on. Some merely subsist at what is regarded as the lowest rung of moral substance and the substance of language, and, through "milking," find their own distinctive form—for instance, the *zawen* form.

Since those "petty matters" which lead Lu Xun to sense "the twist of fate" constitute the circumstances for this "milking," they comprise also such later occurrences as "3/18," "4/12," and even the secret assassination [in 1931] of the "Five Martyrs of the League of Left-wing Writers." These were among the matters which caused Lu Xun to feel that he was not living among human beings; that he would suffocate in the dark night if he did not write. Here I would stress

Lu Xun's personal experience of "knocking against a wall." In *Huagai ji*/"Pengbi' zhihou" ("After 'knocking against a wall'"), Lu Xun carefully narrates his own various displeasures and conflicts while serving as an instructor under Yang Yinyu's control throughout the turmoil at Women's Normal University. He then writes, with the strokes of an epiphany:

I had knocked against a brick wall! I had knocked against the Yang family's wall. I looked at the students, and they seemed like a group of child-brides... As usual, this meeting achieved nothing; for after some who thought themselves brave had made some polite criticisms of their mother-in-law, we dispersed. When I reached home and sat down by my window it was nearly dusk, and yet the depressing gloom seemed to be receding. The thought of my theory about knocking against the wall could even make me smile.

In China there are walls everywhere but they are invisible, like "ghost walls,"<sup>9</sup> so that you knock into them all the time. And the victors are those who build the walls and can knock into them without feeling any pain—but by now, I supposed, the feast at Pacific Lake Restaurant must be drawing to an end. They must be starting on their ices, and "cooling down"....

I seemed to see the snowy table-cloth already stained with soya-bean sauce, and the men and women sitting round the table eating ices, decreeing the same dark fate for many daughters-in-law as most daughters-in-law have suffered since ancient times under widowed mothers-in-law.

I smoked two cigarettes, and my vision grew clearer. I saw educationalists murdering students between cups of wine under the bright candelabra in the restaurant, assassins killing honest people with a smile, corpses dancing on refuse heaps, filth strewn over Aeolian harps. I wanted to draw this, but not a line could I draw. Why had I become a teacher, to disgrace even myself? (3/176) [Yangs, 2/176–77]

This feeling of being surrounded, squeezed, and frustrated in "knocking against" such a wall as that of the Yang family not only determines the substance of a particular, antagonistic experience (the substance of the experience of "the defeated"); even more, it produces an allegorical mirage. In the wake of "I seemed to see," reality is "mystified" and "caricatured," yet a great many seemingly necessary steps of expression or logic are omitted thus, in the direct attainment of a nearly arbitrary satirical and allegorical truth bearing overtones of triumph and revenge ("The thought of my theory about knocking against the wall

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<sup>9</sup> The Yangs appended this note to their translation: "It was thought that men were made to lose their way at night by being blocked by invisible walls put up by ghosts."

could even make me smile"). The core of *zawen* writing lies precisely in the direct or "fancied" ability (for instance, the series of "I saw... I saw... I saw..." in the quoted section above) of the allegorist to access the real. Since this allegorical truth of *zawen* carries conceptual purity and universality ("murdering," "killing," "corpses," "filth"), it is also perceptual, immediate, particular ("between cups of wine," "with a smile," "refuse heaps," "Aeolian harps"). Since the allegorical logic of this *zawen* writing "fixates on petty matters," contented with the spoils of thought and language seized in the midst of Walter Benjamin's so-called "fallen concreteness," it is also capable of temporarily and unexpectedly shaking off worry at any time. From the self-made symbolic world the general appearance of reality and history unfolds—for instance, "In China there are walls everywhere but they are invisible, like "ghost walls," so that you knock into them all the time"; or like the even more astonishing mirage below:

China likely is not truly hell on earth. Yet "one's surroundings are determined by state of mind." Sinister clouds invariably overlap, filling the space before my eyes. Among them are the ghosts of old, new ghosts, roving souls, Ah Pang [the servant of the Buddhist hell], beasts, metamorphosis, great cries, utter silence, so that I cannot bear sight nor sound. (3/72)

One might say the notion that "surroundings are determined by state of mind" is a unique freedom obtained by the allegorist from the symbiotic relation of the experience of "milking," together with the shape that is assumed by the external world. This presses even closer to the intrinsic mechanism of *zawen* writing than does the above-mentioned "dare to speak, to laugh, to cry, to rage, to curse, to strike. In this cursed place we shall beat back this cursed era!" At the same time, a single "milking" character expresses vividly and thoroughly the antagonistic relation between interior and exterior. This manner of confrontation, pressure, anxiety, abhorrence and indignation conveys not only the function of language that is intrinsically held, but also determines beforehand the acceptance of works of art and literature. Precisely because *zawen* have been "milked" out of him can Lu Xun disdain to glance at the variety of complaints surrounding his *zawen* writing. "Milking" removes *zawen* writing far from gentlemanly demeanor, fair play, "art for art's sake," "self-evident truth," "men of honor" and other sorts of affected, empty styles and postures declaring themselves transcendent. This guaranteeing the earnestness and devotion of the literary form of *zawen*, which is necessitated by the bodily engagement and battles of the era. The experience of learning "head-on," of clashing, colliding, pushing and struggling for a routine

meal and even for writing, allows *zawen*—this apparently most willful, most individualized writing style—to be removed from everything that is merely the element and will of the individual; far from the playfulness of all traditional forms; and far from all frivolity, cowardliness, boredom, preening, parroting and claptrap. Thus on the level of the fundamental ethics of writing are the life-worlds and literary habitats of “old literature” and “old literati” cast out, and the solemnity, functionality, and modernity of the starting point of the political ontology of “new literature” are obtained. For without some kind of writing style akin to *zawen*, you might as well combine the formidable and living experience of the individual with the “true present” that has been generalized and universalized. Together they constitute the allegorical and critical certainty borne toward some “dangerous juncture” of history.

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### “Three Spirits in the Teaching Profession” and “A Few Parables”

Finally, I would like to use two essays from *Huagai ji xubian* in conclusion: “Three Spirits in the Teaching Profession” [2/241–45], and “A Few Parables” [2/249–51]. Both essays, albeit from diverging angles, lay bare vividly and precisely the productive machinery and preparatory process that is intrinsic to Lu Xun’s *zawen*. In “Three Spirits,” Lu Xun begins with the [old Daoist formulation of] *san hun liu po* (“that a human being has “three spiritual and six animal essences”—some say seven animal essences” [2/241, Yangs’ translation modified]) to say that, if the national spirit of China is composed of three spirits, the first is the spirit of officialdom, the second the spirit of the bandit, and the third the spirit of the people. The reason for this “differentiation of spirits” continues to reside in being “milked” and “fixating upon petty matters”:

Since Zhang Shizhao hung out his sign “Regenerate the Schools” last year and took the important post of Minister of Education, the teaching world has been exuding an atmosphere of officialdom. Those for him are “in the know” (*tong*), those against him are “bandits” (*fei*). We have not yet heard the last of the ample airs of official jargon. Still, thanks to this we can clearly distinguish the colors of the realm of learning. Zhang Shizhao is not the true representative of the official spirit, for above him there is the president “losing his appetite,” and Zhang himself is at most an official animal essence. Now he is in Tianjin “resting his men, while waiting for another chance.” Since I do not read his journal *Jiayin*, I do not know what he has been saying. Is it the language of officials, bandits, the people, or that of yamen runners and thugs? (p. 222) [2/245; Yangs’ translation modified]

Upon initial publication of *Yusi* magazine's sixty-fourth issue, an endnote included the writer's "Addendum" as follows:

Today, as I went to teach in Dongcheng district, I caught sight of Professor Chen Yuan's letter posted in the New Tide Society. At the entrance to Peking University I saw *Xiandai pinglun* (Modern commentary). The discussion in "Xianhua" (Digressions) touched upon Zhang Shizhao's journal *Jiayin*, saying: "It is gradually gaining in life." Evidently, those who write essays on current affairs should not become officials... Naturally there are a few "bandits" who might as well be bureaucrats... In this manner, those "bandits" I mentioned previously who oppose Zhang, and "the ample airs of official jargon" of which I have been speaking, might be suspected of "toting a sniper's shot." Now I will specially announce: I had been speaking merely in a general sense; if Professor Chen felt pain, he has been nicked by a stray bullet. Yet it might well do if I were asked to add the phrase, "such as Chen Yuan and those like him" after "the last of which we've not yet heard." As far as the *tong* of "those for him are *tong* (in the know)" goes, it has been changed as of this moment—its source being Zhang Shizhao, who once referred to Chen Yuan as *tongpin* ("a man of wide knowledge").

The praising of others ought not to be used to ridicule one; yet Chen Yuan uses the terms of the "bandit." One section of "Xianhua" (*Xiandai pinglun* 50) proceeds as follows: "We Chinese critics are truly too grand and plentiful... seeking the thieves of the land, we consequently turn a blind eye toward the vast majority of plagiarism. Shall I give an example? All the same, I'd better not say. I really do not dare to commit another crime against 'the authorities of the realm of thought'." In light of his vehemence at this time, should he wish to dispense with "baseness" and maintain a "half-humanly air," it should be mentioned early on who the bandit, what the pending case, who the plagiarist, and what the evidence may be. Should one happen to recall those parenthetical six characters of "authority of the realm of thought," and if one had seen my name advertised in the *Minbao fukan* (People's newspaper supplement), he would then have known the extent of Professor Chen Yuan's "humanly air."

Henceforth, I will impose upon Chen Yuan such terms as "Dong jixiang pai" ("Eastern auspicious school"), "men of honor," "men of wide knowledge," and so on; thus I will have used the term *tong*. I want "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," or half a tooth, or two teeth for one tooth; for I am a human being, measuring up to the justice of God with difficulty. If I do not do so, it will be owing to my powerlessness; for it really isn't magnanimity with which I forgive the enemies who have harmed me. Furthermore, there are some mean folk, who, with regard to the

abominations often cast upon others, consider that people ought to disdain to fight back; as engaging in any such dispute results in the loss of your own human dignity. Yet I would cast back, were he to cast them upon me. With regard to those who take no such action, however, I am unwilling to strike out. Furthermore, within the limits of writing, I am confident that up till now I have not deigned to wield such treacherous skills as “trumping up facts” and “spreading gossip.” Although I am a “bandit” in the eyes of thugs, yet “thieves, too, have their way.” I recall another matter. Several days ago, when nine schools “demanded salary,” I also served as a representative and, for this reason, met with several intermediaries of the former “Association to Preserve Self-Evident Truths,” i.e., “Association of the Back-up Forces of Women’s Normal University.” Fortunately they did not tie me up, or send me to the San-beizi Gardens; neither did they exile me into the mountains, “throwing me to the jackals and tigers”; nor did they carry out “cutting me off from the banquet table” by sawing the bench. In the end, the “academic officials” and “academic bandits” all became “academic beggars,” assembled together in one hall as a punitive expedition against outstanding accounts—in vain, naturally. I recall a foreign devil once saying that China is first a bureaucratic state, later a bandit state, and in the future it will be a beggar state. It seems the teaching profession has entered this trajectory. (p.223)

This section appears to deal with the background of literary writing, the true rudiments of the method of *zawen* writing. “Fixating on petty matters” and “milking” determine the force-field that is wrought by *zawen*. Yet to arrange all these internal and external forces within a pattern of writing and the essay, we still require a means with which to weave them; i.e., to mount all sorts of “petty matters”—in accordance with the origins of “milking” as well as with the passage quoted above and the forms illustrated therein—in the vein of “fixating.” This overlapping and repetitive section, strewn with quotation marks, is illustrative of the intimate relationship between *zawen* writing and its concrete environment. Since this environment is determined by the “head-on” confrontation with all variety of “petty matters,” as well as by the outcome of the free choice and determination of the *zawen* writer on the basis of allegorical logic; it is capable of allowing, through the play, quotations, and “codes” taking place at the level of linguistic form, *zawen*’s language of freedom to come and go amid differing contexts with agility and variation: The context of individual emotions (“Yet I would cast back, were he to cast them upon me”), the context of debate (“should he wish to dispense with “baseness” and maintain a “half-humanly air,” it should be mentioned early on who the bandit, what the pending case, who the plagiarist, and what the evidence may be”), the context of morality (“Henceforth,

I will impose upon Chen Yuan such terms as “Dong jixiang pai” [“Eastern auspicious school”], “men of honor,” “men of wide knowledge,” and so on”), the context of history (“There is really a mania for officialdom in China. In the Han Dynasty, when men were appointed officials for their filial piety and probity, Guo Ju buried his son and Ding Lan carved a wooden image of his mother. In the Song Dynasty, when philosophers were given official posts, many scholars wore tall hats and shabby boots. In the Qing Dynasty, when stereotyped examination essays led to officialdom, such terms as “moreover” and “notwithstanding” became all the fashion” [p. 220; Yangs, 2/241–42]), and even the context of economy (“academic beggars” and “demanded salary”).

This method of weaving allows the *zawen* writer to throw himself into the time and place of pitched battle, preserving the freedom of the allegorist to “observe and preserve,” “to allude,” “to derive the great from the small,” to have “sudden notions.” This manner of “fixating” is not only aimed at the current political situation, at all that cannot withstand the test of history, and at superficial and specious outward appearances (including “men of honor,” “men of wide knowledge,” “authority of thought,” and other terms of bluster); it is also aimed at the tendencies toward alienation and objectification of writing and language itself, in order to penetrate the organism of “old literature” and the soul of men “assuming official airs, behaving like officials, speaking official language” (p. 220). Here, official jargon naturally possesses concrete historical reference, yet aversion toward and vigilance against all “jargon” runs throughout Lu Xun’s *zawen* writing. Thus in later years, he criticizes the literary-artistic jargon of Shanghai’s literary and artistic youth as well as the Marx-Leninist jargon of several theoreticians “draping themselves in the flag of revolution for show.” From Lu Xun’s opposition to “official jargon” and “cultural jargon,” to Mao’s opposition during the Yan’an period to the “stereotyped writing of the Party,” we might say the entirety of the history of new literature was also set in some sense against the objectification of language and the systemization of history. From this, we can also see that this intrinsic substantiveness and radicalism of the language of “new literature” is once again faced with crisis in the China of today. Our scholarly scope in the present day is bound to be congested with jargon in every kind of learning, set to the tune of national studies, “overseas sinology,” “western theory,” “Chinese medicine,” the educated and the dilettantish. Controversies in thought and ideology more often than not have yet to fully unfold, and very quickly fall into the pattern of every kind of “jargon” and “tune”; they are simplified for the sake of a position or posture, for the arrangement of some poetic embellishment—the jargon of “passive freedom,” of “left-wing angry youth,” of “universal world culture,” of “cultural conservatism,” and so forth. On the basic level of language practice, amid the influence of all the elements of systemization, one might gather from the “new literature,” which is laying the

foundation for the state of contemporary Chinese writing, that it is abominable in the extreme; that it resides in layer upon layer of every kind of official jargon, advertising jingle, mass-media claptrap, academic clique, inferior and half-cooked translation, the “private language” of the urban petty bourgeoisie, and so on and so forth.

On the fundamental level of the ethics of language, *zawen* form inherits and carries on the opposition of “new literature” to all formulaic writing of the revolutionary tradition that is outmoded, artificial, hollow, overly complicated, stuck in a rut, far removed from the masses and reality, with the result that it is the conscious practice of “everyman writing,” “national writing,” and “individual writing.” It comprises the high degree of self-confidence with which rebels regard the legitimacy and rationality of the modern significance of the “new,” just as it comprises the discarding by the “wild” or “savage” of all “ceremony” or “Confucian ethical codes.” Issuing the position of the “wild” from his stance amid the “ceremony” of the new, Lu Xun distinguishes between the “so-called bandits of officialdom” and the “so-called bandits of the people,” ridiculing the bad habits of the official learning of old literature and old literati, who regard themselves as “official” and all the challengers to battle as “bandits.” Thus he preserves on his own side the moral ground of the criticism of culture, nationalism, and civilization; this becomes, in turn, a non-axiomatic intrinsic force of his *zawen*. Lu Xun writes:

Since the teaching profession is a relatively new class, it should be possible to purify the old spirit a little there. But judging by the official language I hear from the “academic officials” and the new name “academic bandits” we still seem to be taking the old path. So of course this must be overcome as well. It will be overcome by the “people’s spirit,” the third of the spiritual essences. This was not very well developed in the past, hence after making a commotion the people would not seize political power, but “let a few enthusiasts overthrow the emperor and set themselves up in his place.” Only the people’s spirit deserves to be valued. Only when this spirit develops can there be real progress in China.

But now that even educationists are retrogressing along the old path it is not easy for it to raise its head. In this foul atmosphere, there are what the officials consider as bandits, and what the people consider as bandits; what the officials consider as citizens, and what the people consider as citizens. There are those whom the officials count as bandits, who are really good citizens; there are those whom the officials count as citizens, who are really *yamen* runners and thugs. So what seems to be the people’s spirit may be the official spirit after all. All who appraise spirits must be on their guard against this. (p. 222) [Yangs’ translation modified, 2/244]

The second instance is the essay titled, "A Few Parables." As Beijing is located near the area north of the Great Wall, there are often bevvies of sheep walking over the ruins as they are being herded into the city. On the Beijing streets, Lu Xun sees the flock of sheep "shoving, jostling and crowding together; with an all too docile expression, they trot briskly after the goat which leads them to whatever awaits." He is unable to keep from "voicing a foolish query that would not reach them—"Where are you going?!" (p. 232) [2/249; Yangs' translation modified].

The "foolish query that would not reach them" owes to the goat with a small bell hanging about its neck—"the badge of the intellectual"—which generally takes charge of the flock. Consequently the response of the intellectual follows:

Some gentlemen may say, "Sheep will be sheep. What else can they do but follow obediently in a long file? Have you ever watched pigs? They hold back, make off, squeal, and dash madly about; but still in the end they are taken to where they have to go. All their revolts are simply a waste of energy."

That is to say: If you must die, die like sheep, so that peace may be preserved and both sides will be saved trouble.

This is certainly an excellent, admirable plan. But have you never seen wild boars? With their two tusks they can make even experienced hunters keep out of their way. If pigs escape from the sties their swineherds have made them, and go into the mountains, before long they will grow such tusks. (p. 233) [Yangs, 2/250]

Although this imaginary dialogue is somewhat removed from the celebrated dialogue of the "iron room," qualitatively speaking, its meaning is very close to that of the latter. From sheep to pig, from fleshy swine to the long-toothed wild boar of the mountains, thence to the porcupines with spikes that grow upon their backs (of which we will speak just below), the "routes of flight" (Deleuze) have no use for the language of poetry, the novel, or prose poem in order to seize and describe. Yet employing the *zawen* "pattern" is entirely appropriate in this case, for not only is it argumentative, inquisitive, and conceptually engaging, but it furthermore possesses the drama and tension of writing, even assuming a lifelike form. Although this is not the form of "pure literature," it is that of allegory.

Moreover, with regard to the allegorical figure of the wild boar, Lu Xun brings the following into play, which might be deemed a step closer toward an annotation of the term "milking":

In England those who ignore these niceties are warned, "Keep your distance!" But even such warnings are probably only effective among

porcupines, for they keep each other at a distance in order not to get hurt, not because of the warning. If an animal without spikes joined the porcupines, then, no matter how it shouted, they would squeeze up against it. Confucius said, “Ceremony is not extended to the common people.” But judging by the situation today, it is not the common people who are forbidden to approach the porcupines, but the porcupines who do not care how they prick the common people in order to keep warm. Of course, people get hurt, but that is their fault for not having any spikes to make others keep a suitable distance. Confucius also said, “Punishment does not extend to nobles.” So no wonder people want to be gentlemen. Of course, you can resist these porcupines with teeth or horns, clubs or sticks, but you must be ready to accept the verdict of porcupine society which will brand you as “low-class” or “impertinent.” (p. 234) [2/251, Yangs’ translation modified]

Better to say “spikes” and “teeth” are a guarantee of distance rather than a medium of engagement. Such confrontation, resistance, rampant “milking,” tit-for-tat, and tooth-for-a-tooth yield the most direct portrayal of the relation of *zawen* to its era, for they are the basic premise of “milking’s” efficacy. Otherwise, “no matter how it shouted, they would squeeze up against it.” Admittedly *zawen* is the “spikes” and “teeth” of the allegorist, the so-called dagger and spear of Lu Xun; yet beyond the scope of language, the artillery of a machine gun is similar to the “spikes” and “teeth” of a class or nation. This is consistent with Lu Xun’s lowest expectation of Chinese people, who, “upon seeing a wolf, wish to resemble it,” “upon seeing a sheep, seek to emulate it” (and it is not otherwise: seeing a wolf and turning into a sheep, seeing a sheep and becoming a wolf). This attitude of the *zawen* writer, of withstanding the era with the might of his larynx, is at the same time imbued with an epistemological purposiveness and even authenticity. In the final analysis, the music of the *zawen* writer comes not at all from “mutual confrontation that cannot help crowding and rubbing, bumping and knocking”; but stems rather from

supposing all was but the ruthless and savage energy of life, it should nonetheless emerge to the greatest extent possible... I also know that, regardless, all temperament resides within. There might well be “a show of grace” upon one’s face and beneath one’s pen that is exceedingly good-looking; but such good looks must not be dug at. With just the slightest dig, who knows what airs might emerge? Yet these are the true colors, in fact. (p. 239)

(Translated from Chinese by Jennifer Dorothy Lee)

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