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Lu Hsun and revolution in modern China

Lu Hsun's "Diary of a Madman" is news that stays news, which is the kind of revolutionary literature that matters. It was the first story written in modern vernacular Chinese, and its appearance in May 1918 in *New Youth*, the leading journal of China's modernizing intelligentsia, opened a new era in Chinese literature. It also announced the emergence from scholarly seclusion of Chou Shu-jen (1881-1936), using a new pen name, Lu Hsun, formed by adding his mother's family name Lu to Hsun, taken from a name he signed to an essay of 1907.

Lu Hsun, like the madman in his famous story, insisted on penetrating the surfaces of pious words to find out what was really happening. His report of what he discovered presented symbolically in this first story raises questions at the outset about the organizing structures of his imaginative world and about the relation of that world to his life and to the course of revolutionary change in China. Why, for example, do images of enclosure and cannibalism introduced in this story recur throughout his best writing? What connections exist between his personal history and the shifting conditions of Chinese culture? What kinds of changes were taking place at the time?

In China connections between perspective and action have been made clear by the vast scale of revolutionary change. It has been evident from the beginning that problems of creating a new written language and new forms of expression could not be separated from problems of reshaping social structures and reordering China's relation to world life. In this respect the continuing Chinese revolution is peculiarly modern, widely relevant despite its extreme contrasts between tradition and innovation and its compression of cultural changes into a comparatively short span of time. This modern kind of revolu-

tion is not so much a matter of dramatic events clustered around a central political stage but rather a question of underlying processes, in this case what Harold Lasswell calls "the permanent revolution of modernizing intellectuals," a revolution which assumes a permanently changing world and which casts in leading roles men who work with symbols that fuel change and that render change intelligible. One of the aims of writers and artists of all sorts during this permanent worldwide revolution has been to create new shapes, to structure new kinds of social space, and to chart journeys of the inner mind.

Yet China's triple revolution in conceptual, social, and international relationships allows no easy historical analogy. Models for analyzing change when derived from Western experience tend to overlook the unique trajectories of Chinese events and to scant the authority and resources of China's traditional culture. In the case of literary revolutionaries, Chinese situations are apt to be too readily assimilated into those of Western intellectuals, but the scope and pace of Chinese intellectuals' readjustments in outlook since 1900 are enough to set them apart. They have had to survive and think in a whirlwind, all of them — Lu Hsun's generation, the older men who led the way, and the younger men who came after. As they fought against the habits of the old order, they were forced at the same time to consider how world developments might lead toward a new order at once Chinese and modern.

What this involved can be suggested in brief summary. They had to come to terms somehow with the entire tradition of Western thought largely unmediated by any Chinese predecessors, and this novel conceptual framework was itself continuously expanding throughout the period at a rate which left Western intellectuals themselves lagging far behind. For Chinese thinkers this meant assimilating Western theory and technology while at the same time creating media for communication with a public hopefully literate and participant — all in an atmosphere of mounting anti-Western nationalism and in a social setting continuously wracked by civil wars, foreign invasion, and fratricidal ideological struggles. This whole enterprise, it is worth emphasizing, remained embedded in a culture rich in its models of

continuity and opposition, a culture conveyed in a written language powerfully conservative by virtue of its restricted access. Chairman Mao's recent Great Cultural Revolution, like all China's modern revolutions, has been cultural in the thoroughgoing sense of transforming basic human outlooks — a process begun in earnest fifty years ago.

Lu Hsun, as it turns out, was involved in nearly every phase of cultural revolution, often close to the center of action. The turns of his life match the turns of China's history, and his writings derive much of their power from the web of connections he spins between private and public conditions and events. In fact all his writing is historical in its focus on Chinese conditions and autobiographical in its repeated efforts to rethink connections between individual life and a changing China. Problems of historical interpretation are enormous, and in the case of Lu Hsun appraisal is complicated by his posthumous rebirth as a legendary figure, Revolutionary Hero as Writer: "Fierce-browed, I coolly defy a thousand pointing fingers;/ Head-bowed, like a willing ox I serve the children."¹

Fortunately the man back of both the Hero and the ghost remains available through his writings and in the fully documented record of his life. The figure is properly complex, and historical controversy should increase. Lu Hsun might well have lived to admire Mao in many ways, but the Nietzschean spirit of his youth would as likely have persisted. If Lu Hsun resembles, as he does, Mao's fierce yet willing ox, a beast of burden serving the children, he is also a troubler of the herd like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, urging man on to metamorphosis from beast of burden into lion and, finally, into child — creator of new values.

Lu Hsun's education in connecting private and public events and in distinguishing illusions from facts began in late childhood. Born in Shaohsing city in the coastal province of Chekiang in 1881 he grew up in a gentry family of modest wealth, the eldest of three sons of a gentleman-scholar and a self-taught literate countrywoman. His

¹Lines are from Lu Hsun's poem, "Tzu-ch'ao" ("Self-mockery"), in *Chi Wai Chi* (*Collection Outside the Collection*), in *Lu Hsun Ch'uan Chi* (*Lu Hsun's Complete Works*) (20 vols. Shanghai, 1938), 7, 510. Translation is from the official English version in Mao Tse-tung, *Talks At the Yenai Forum on Literature and Art* (3d ed., rev. trans., Peking, 1962), p. 41.

traditional Confucian training was sharply and permanently interrupted by a series of family disasters. In 1893 his grandfather, an honored official in Peking, was disgraced; and the family fortunes were exhausted in negotiations for clemency. Meanwhile, Lu Hsun's father had fallen ill. Despite herbalist treatments which led Lu Hsun back and forth from doctor to pawnshop to pharmacy for three years or more, his father died. The mother now widowed – a serious plight -- became a "poor relation" along with her young sons. "I believe those who sink from prosperity to poverty," Lu Hsun later declared, "will probably learn what the world is really like."

These personal family troubles became identified in Lu Hsun's mind with more general national problems as he managed to continue his education by government scholarship in Nanking at the new schools for Western learning – first at the Naval Academy and then at the School of Railways and Mines where he learned some German. Events of that time, notably the reform failures of 1898 and Western suppression of the Boxers, made Lu Hsun and many of his fellow students keenly aware of the weakness of China and the impotence of the Manchu court. In Nanking Lu Hsun discovered Western medical books and was impressed by Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* in Yen Fu's translation. The way toward understanding Western power seemed to lie through Japan, whose rising position was due, Lu Hsun surmised, to an intellectual reformation begun with the introduction of Western medicine. Again government scholarships opened the way for study in Japan, where for eight years (1902-09) Lu Hsun explored the intellectual world outside the great wall of Chinese culture.

At first China's reformation seemed a matter of physical health. "I dreamed a beautiful dream," he recalled, "that on my return to China I would cure patients like my father, who had been mistakenly treated, while if war broke out I would serve as an army doctor, at the same time strengthening my countrymen's belief in reform."²² The dream of curing China's ills by making the Chinese

²²"Preface" (1922) to *Na Han, Ch'uan Chi, I*, 271. This and subsequent translations rely on versions by Wang Chi-chen and by Gladys and Hsien-yi Yang (see Bibliographic note).

physically healthy was shattered by Japan's quick victory over Russia and the all too evident passivity of the Chinese constrained to be spectators at their own dismemberment. The limitations of reform through medicine were brought home to Lu Hsun while studying at Sendai Medical School. As the only Chinese student there, he seems to have been treated with a special condescension, alternately protective, envious, and dominating, maintained by the Japanese toward the representative of a culture once eminent but now weak and subordinate. The ironies of Lu Hsun's personal situation and the plight of his countrymen were connected dramatically one day when he was watching lantern slides of the Russo-Japanese War shown at the end of a medical lecture.

I suddenly encountered Chinese faces on the screen. One of them was bound, surrounded by others, all of strong build but with stupid and vacant expressions. According to the caption, the one who was bound was a spy for the Russians and was about to be beheaded by the Japanese military as a warning to the populace; the crowd around him were there to enjoy the show.³

Lu Hsun left for Tokyo without finishing the school year, now determined to work for a reformation of Chinese spirit through the power of literature.

This new dream of a literary vanguard of change sustained Lu Hsun up to the Revolution of 1911 and revived his ambitions later on, but in its first phase, as a dream of anti-Manchu revolt leading to the reform of China, it proved to be another illusion. Yet the philosophical views which Lu Hsun formulated in these early years — especially his speculations about the writer's role in social change — established a measure for later assessments of self and society. As a hopeful revolutionary (Lu Hsun joined an anti-Manchu society in 1908), he turned enthusiastically to such Promethean literary rebels as Byron, Mickiewicz, and Petofi — men in love with freedom and, he declared, not tame like the common herd but wild “like zebras.” Among philosophers Lu Hsun singled out Nietzsche's outcries against

³Ibid., p. 271.

hypocrisy and habit and cited Stirner's libertarian insistence on each man's unique and continual self-reconstruction. These particular principles had the added advantage, important psychologically, of revealing the shortcomings of Western society as well as providing intellectual instruments for the reform of China.

Like other reflective and hopeful men all over the world, Lu Hsun, from his vantage in Tokyo, felt the intellectual attraction of the idea of evolutionary progress; it seemed to offer a set of concepts which could give order and meaning to world life. For a while he believed in this organizing vision of human development, and something of this faith may have survived the repeated shocks in the years which followed. To young literary rebels looking out from Japan it seemed that the past in China would have to give way to a future which might well be better. With high hopes Lu Hsun and some friends planned to launch a new journal to be called *New Life*, and with his brother he planned to publish a series of translations from Western literature to add to the range of models available to Chinese writers. But *New Life* perished for lack of funds before it was born, and the first cosmopolitanizing volume of short stories (most of them by Slavic writers and translated from Japanese versions into classical Chinese) sold only twenty-one copies in the first six months, and the second volume twenty. It was evident that the eldest son's responsibilities to his family could no longer be put off. Unsuccessful in medicine and literature Lu Hsun returned to Shaohsing in 1909 and a conventional job teaching school.

Although his personal hopes for a literary career seemed to have died with *New Life*, his hopes for revolutionary change in China were stirred anew by the Wuchang uprising of October 10, 1911, and the subsequent collapse of the Manchus, the end, as it turned out, of two millennia of imperial rule. The Revolution brought new faces and new hopes to Shaohsing, but it soon became apparent that in Shaohsing, as elsewhere, very little had really changed, that results would be a long time coming. Lu Hsun recalled how after the Wuchang success a "revolutionary" government organized by the old-style gentry emerged in Shaohsing, to be replaced shortly by a new Military

Governor who came from Hangchow with his troops and "in less than ten days most of his men in the yamen [administrative building], who had arrived in cotton clothes, were wearing fur-lined gowns though it was not yet cold." Lu Hsun was appointed principal of the Normal School, but before long he left town just ahead of soldiers' bayonets because the Governor had been criticized too bluntly in the name of a newly free press by some ardent young innocents who had prevailed on Lu Hsun to act as their sponsor.

Lu Hsun returned to Shaohsing again only on rare visits. He obtained a minor post in Peking in the Education Ministry of the new Republic and withdrew as much as possible from public participation, indulging his scholarly interest in early Chinese literature. Once again, personal disappointments, this time as a writer-reformer, were felt to be closely related to the more general frustrations of the Chinese scene. As Lu Hsun watched from his quiet study in Peking, Yuan Shih-k'ai's imperial pretensions focused and dissolved; warlord factions vied violently for the center of the stage; the disillusiones of Shaohsing were repeated again and again on a larger scale. Under the circumstances Lu Hsun's scholarly retreat can be considered a conventional public act as well as a sign of private disappointment: his withdrawal echoes traditional Chinese forms of protest against deteriorating standards of public life. Even Mao Tse-tung after brief service with a revolutionary army in 1911 seems to have hung back, his schooling in Changsha somewhat prolonged. Not until 1917 did the forces of intellectual revolution begin to gather in Peking.

In retrospect Lu Hsun's emergence in 1918 from his antique reveries seems only natural, part of the intellectual ferment of the May 4th period, whose span coincided closely with his most creative period. His new reform activities as writer, teacher, and editor were made possible by cultural changes catalyzed by student protests in May 1919 against Japan's humiliating new gains won at Versailles. A new Chinese intelligentsia was emerging, a broad group of literate people (estimated at ten million by 1918) whose education included some modern learning. The cultural revolution stemmed specifically

from the reorganization of Peking's National University under Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei in 1917 and from the proliferation of literary and intellectual journals of all sorts led by Ch'en Tu-hsiu's militant *New Youth*. Geographically, Peking was the center, its population nearly doubling from 1919 to 1923, its parade of warlord factions a reminder of political fragmentation and social disorder. Ironically, warlord disruptions seem to have encouraged intellectual adventuring by blocking centralization of authority and by loosening the bonds of consensus.

Very little was stirring, however, early in 1918 when Lu Hsun took up a new career as a vernacular (*pai-hua*) writer. It was at the special urging of an old friend who was discouraged at the heavy silence which greeted the calls for revolution crying out from the pages of *New Youth*. (This was Ch'ien Hsuan-t'ung, advocate of swift and total latinization of Chinese script, already driven to concocting angry letters to *New Youth* attacking his own views in hopes of controversy.) The campaign to create a modern literature written in the language of common speech (*pai-hua*) had been launched officially the year before by Hu Shih and others, and *New Youth* had just begun in January to publish all its articles in the vernacular style. Lu Hsun was reluctant to emerge, remembering past failures — and he was approaching forty — but the new spirit at Peking University and the prospect of a literature at once Chinese and modern stirred his hopes. His first story, "*K'uang-jen Jih Chi*" ("Diary of a Madman"), as noted earlier, opened a new chapter in China's literary history.

In the famous preface to *Na Han (Cries in Battle)*, Lu Hsun's first volume of stories, he recalled how he resolved his doubts in a query to his friend:

"Suppose there is an iron room with absolutely no window or door and impossible to break down. Suppose there are many people fast asleep in the room slowly suffocating to death. But they will pass directly from sleep to death with none of the fears and sorrows of approaching death. Now you start shouting and you wake up the few people who are not so fast asleep and make them suffer the agonies of inescapable death. Do you think

you are doing them a kindness?" "Even if only a few should wake up," came the reply, "you cannot say there is absolutely no hope of breaking down the iron room."⁴

The metaphor establishes a balance weighted toward death which persists in many of his stories, and the imagery of illusions as forms of stifling enclosure points to a darkened skepticism.

Lu Hsun's skepticism is fundamental. The only certainty which he offers is the certainty of change. Many of his finest stories describe how "you can't go home again," how new experience makes the old accustomed ways no longer comforting, in fact no longer possible. His most complex characters are men uprooted and made wanderers not only by the forces of change but by their own honesty and sensibility. There is little nostalgia for the past in Lu Hsun's fictive world. Nor does he sentimentalize the common people. At best they live by habit, evading unpleasant facts by dreams; at worst they are cruel and credulous, their illusions murderous. Although they are bound together by custom and circumstances, their gestures of human solidarity consist often of abusing those who are weak and ridiculing whatever is new.

Lu Hsun's sensitive and often scholarly wanderers, by contrast, feel at home nowhere but keep going, surviving somehow for a while, their imaginations alive to contrasts: flowers in the snow, light and darkness, the peppery and the bland, stasis and motion. Even despair becomes a kind of vanity: in the end it is survival that matters and the only hope, if it can be called that, the road itself. To the voyager reflecting back on childhood as he floats down the river, hope is not something absolute which either exists or does not; it is "like the roads that travelers make across the face of the earth where there were none before." Although the past revisited by the voyager in "*Ku Hsiang*" ("My Old Home") cannot be recaptured, it survives as an image connecting the past with the future.

If it was not clear to Lu Hsun where the roads of change were leading, some kind of common language was clearly needed to name the routes and identify the landscape of change — which is what his

⁴Ibid., p. 274.

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best writing achieved. One man alone would not likely survive the journey, and lives without felt connections with one another were as good as dead. The need to name new kinds of human relationships and new forms of consciousness was perhaps more urgent in China than elsewhere because the persisting force of outmoded names caused much confusion. All Lu Hsun's writing is about China and directed at China – even his translations aim to enlarge Chinese consciousness – his mission, to help create forms of written expression through which he and his countrymen might understand their situations, might name their personal and common plights and joys, so that they would no longer be cut off from one another by walls of silence and indifference.

This concern animates his writing as a recurrent theme and also defines the achievements of his style. Through his best work he released the newly literate into a world complexly imagined yet disciplined so as to heighten perception, neither blurring the mind's newly opened eyes with sentimental plots nor dazzling with eccentric impressions. His chosen instrument was a supple vernacular, clear and economical, a style strong enough to assimilate both classical phrases and foreign ideas, using them to particular effect, embedding the old and the new in the flow of orderly modern consciousness. His short stories introduced the form to Chinese writing and set standards for all who followed; his prose poems combined classical with vernacular in new forms; and in his regular social commentary he developed an influential new style of *tsa wen*, terse pithy essays aimed at specific targets and adaptable across a wide range from satire and polemics to personal impressions and random reflections of all sorts.

The inner world which sustained Lu Hsun's best imaginative work collapsed after 1926 for reasons which may never be fully understood. The mounting violence of revolution and the sufferings of his personal friends and students shocked him deeply. And the killings and quarrels among the young may well have destroyed his waning hopes for the future. The first heavy blow came on March 18, 1926, when a group of student petitioners were savagely attacked by

the soldiers of warlord "President" Tuan Chi-jui; among the forty-seven killed were two young girl students of Lu Hsun's at the Women's Normal College. When he first heard the news, he could not believe his own countrymen could commit such horrors: although habitually ready to think the worst, he had "never dreamed of such a thing."

His life endangered by his continued protests, he fled Peking, heading south and east toward the centers of political radicalism, his travels symbolizing his countrymen's continuing searches and the opening of a new revolutionary phase. As the Kuomintang's Northern Expedition swept toward victory in the summer of 1926, Lu Hsun moved to Amoy and then to Canton, observing the rising fury of factions among students, noting how slander was replacing argument, how impatience flared toward violence. He finally left in September 1927, arriving in Shanghai soon after mass executions there, and hearing a few weeks later from friends in Canton about massacres on all sides. "The revolutionaries are killed by the counter-revolutionaries. The counter-revolutionaries are killed by the revolutionaries," he wrote at the time.

The non-revolutionaries are sometimes taken for revolutionaries and killed by counter-revolutionaries, sometimes taken for counter-revolutionaries and killed by revolutionaries, and sometimes killed by either revolutionaries or counter-revolutionaries for no apparent reason at all. . . . Revolution, r-e-v-o-l-u-t-i-o-n, REVOLUTION."⁵

Sickened by fratricidal killings and increasing government suppression of criticism and dissent, Lu Hsun moved more completely into the opposition, drawn further toward the left politically by every oppressive act of the right. Although taking a leading public role in the League of Chinese Left-Wing Writers, he did not join the Communist party and remained scornful of "writing under other people's orders." The idea of "revolutionary literature" seemed something of a contradiction in terms to Lu Hsun. During real revolution there is no leisure for literature, he surmised, and when leisure exists, literature cannot be made by blueprint out of such abstractions as "the masses."

⁵*Erh I Chi (That's All)*, *Ch'uan Chi*, 3, 511.

The idea of “revolutionary love” struck him as equally unreal. “I think there is only non-revolutionary love,” he wrote in a letter. “With sex as with food, there can be temporary selection but not permanent involvement.”⁶ Rather than bowing to a new set of abstract pieties literary men might better range freely over the world’s literature in the cosmopolitan spirit of the great days of T’ang. In the end, the flowering of literature in China would depend on writers who had broad education and independent spirit. At the moment, however, China needed men willing to struggle against enemies pressing in from all sides.

What makes Lu Hsun important, finally, is the quality of his mind. At issue is not so much his explicit social commentary, or his literary and political arguments, or his scholarly work in Chinese literary history or in voluminous translations. At issue are the clues that Lu Hsun may offer as to what is involved in an individual’s sequential attempts at reintegrating a set of changing cultural situations and, more specifically, how that experience can be organized into symbolic structures, structures capable of identifying particular human lives as trajectories across scenes whose elements change at variable rates and capable, at the same time, of organizing the web of mutual implications among people within cultural frameworks variably shared. This is a somewhat abstract way of describing one of the crucial achievements of writers during the permanent revolutions of worldwide modernization.

For the moment, consider only the particular revolution that Lu Hsun reimaged in his stories and reminiscences – the Revolution of 1911. This was the crucial cultural event in his own public and private life, and the progressive versions of the event in his writings help identify the process of his imagination, especially the versions in “*Ah Q Cheng Chuan*” (“The Real Story of Ah Q” – 1921) and “*Fan Ai-nung*” (1926).

Ah Q, Lu Hsun’s most famous character, was almost immediately taken into the Chinese language as a symbol of “Ah Q-ism,” a set of

⁶Quoted and translated in Harriet C. Mills, “Lu Hsun and the Communist Party,” *China Quarterly*, 1 (Oct.-Dec. 1960), 23, from Hsu Kuang-p’ing, ed., *Lu Hsun Shu Chien* (*Lu Hsun’s Letters*).

typical Chinese deficiencies: self-deceptions which turn defeats into victories, shallow opportunism responsive to the appearances of power, a pervasive vagueness helpful in evading facts. Ah Q's special gift, it seems, is the ability to forget almost immediately any experience which might damage his latest pleasing illusion — so goes a standard analysis. But Ah Q has other qualities which complicate interpretations of his progress toward death by execution for revolutionary crimes he did not commit during a revolution which did not happen. For example, he is alert to power but not obsequious; he is active rather than passive; and his honesty gets him into as much trouble as his fantasy — in fact, his honesty is what finally kills him. Ah Q totally lacks any past, even a name, and as the story unfolds it becomes evident that he is continually reinvented by others, that he is largely comprised of other people's shifting images of him. Equally striking is the fact that he never learns from experience because he has no continuous interior life of his own. Words fuddle him, especially fragments of old Confucian homilies, and leave him dependent for connection with the world on scattered cues imprinted by threats and ridicule and by animal pain and pleasure. Only when he recognizes that he is on his way to death does he comprehend his feelings and ignore the expectations of the crowd. This nameless man is killed by forces from the past in the name of changes which are unreal partly because left unnamed. But it is also because Ah Q has no past that he dies; in a sense, he has no future because he has no connection to any past, and some kind of continuity remains necessary even in the most extreme situations. Whatever resources one brings to life must somehow survive from the past into the future.

Lu Hsun's own reminiscences, most of them written in 1926 after he was uprooted from Peking, suggest the importance of such survivals out of the past. In naming his connections with people and places that had mattered to him, he was engaged in the kind of reconstruction of inner life more familiar in the modern West where autobiography is now seen as a promising prelude to further cognitive and creative growth. In Lu Hsun's case these autobiographical sketches signaled the close of his public imaginings, and he did not return to

writing reminiscence again until near the end of his life. The bridge that he sought to build from the past into the future may have been barred by the discontinuities of the present in 1927 and 1928.

Among the reminiscences written in 1926 is the story of his friendship with Fan Ai-nung. The story pivots on the Revolution of 1911, and in this last reimagined version of the event, Lu Hsun faces the implications most directly. He recalls how he first met Fan Ai-nung in Japan when they both were young students plotting against the Manchu court; how they quarreled at the time; how they met unexpectedly later in Shaohsing and became friends; how with the coming of the Revolution their hopes for China rose, especially Fan Ai-nung's; how their spirits fell swiftly when the old order continued; how Lu Hsun moved on to Peking and how Fan Ai-nung could find no place to go; how Lu Hsun finally heard the news of his friend's suicide. As the story develops, Lu Hsun's emotional relationship to Fan Ai-nung and their hopes for China become fused with the plight of China and the problem of locating responsibility, generally and personally, for the failure of these hopes.

The reminiscence opens with the assassination of a Manchu governor and the execution of two Chinese revolutionaries, a man and a woman; it closes with Fan Ai-nung's death and the unnamed future of his only daughter. As Lu Hsun looks back, his initial rudeness to Fan Ai-nung in Tokyo and his misconstruals of his friend's behavior are revealed as due to Lu Hsun's own pride and condescension, to his own selfish preoccupations which later insulate him from his friend's despairing situation and which contribute directly to Fan's death. Lu Hsun is finally revealed as an assassin connected irrevocably to his victim, to other assassins — Chinese, Manchu, Japanese — to China, and to the very hopes, his own and Fan's, which he, Lu Hsun, has helped to kill. But the effect of this work of high art, achieved by directing the full force of irony onto himself, is to communicate a sense of the potentially integrating power of the imagination when disciplined into full awareness. The reader, drawn into this process of progressive self-awareness by a style of understatement, comes to fully feel and imagine what he had only suspected at first: that Fan

Ai-nung is China and Lu Hsun is also China, that the web of mutual implication between them really was and now is, and that Lu Hsun hoped that the same kind of failures would not recur and at the same time felt that they would, inevitably so.

Lu Hsun's sense of the extremity of China's situation and the terrors latent in hopelessness found imaginative integration in recurring images of cannibalism. His first vernacular story hinged on traditional cannibal acts: the central delusion-which-is-truth is the madman's discovery in a book of China's history that although words like "benevolence" and "righteousness" were scrawled over every page, hidden between the lines everywhere were the words "*Ch'ih jen*" ("Eat men"). The theme recurs in Lu Hsun's recollections of Fan Ai-nung: the Chinese patriot from Shaohsing who assassinates the Manchu governor has his heart torn out by his captors, then fried and eaten. In Lu Hsun's symbolic world cannibal acts represent ultimate violent human paradoxes.

Other kinds of death imagery cluster around cannibalism. Images of enclosure — rooms and boxes which hem in, walls which bar the way, ice which is freezing fire, circles which constrict — contribute to a sense of expectancies blocked, of breath stifled, of forces pressing inward toward crises of contained violence, powerfully implosive and apocalyptic in the aggregate. This enclosure imagery intensifies the symbolic implosiveness of cannibal acts imagined as breaking into the core enclosures of the human body.

Several paradoxes converge. Although cannibal acts break through walls which isolate man from man, such acts simultaneously separate man from man: cannibalism simultaneously connects and sunders, nurtures and destroys. In the imagery of group relationships, human nurture, when imagined as a cannibalistic sequence, provides a symbolic model of "partial modernization" applicable to a China "Westernized" in the nineteenth century and, in the process, sliced up like a melon, with the added cut that the slicing was said to be for China's own good — benevolent cannibalism.

Cannibalism can also be considered as symbolizing the terrors of cultural change and suggesting the proper limits of rates of change.

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New forms which replace old ones too rapidly, which destroy the old completely in the name of the new, are cannibalistic. When the new devours the old, the future is destroying parts of itself which require a nurturing relation to the past in order to survive. This is one of the paradoxes of Ah Q, who was killed by the past because he had no past; it is part of the plight of Lu Hsun's fictional wanderers whose connections with both past and future have been ruptured by rapid change. The paradox is present in creating new forms of written language: as vernacular style displaces and destroys Chinese classical forms, it destroys some of the qualities of conception it needs — latinization breaks even more completely.

Lu Hsun's responses to a series of extreme situations in China's history led his imagination toward comparable symbolic forms, in this case, paradoxes appropriately violent. Toward the end of his life he was driven to fight with a fierceness often thought of as "revolutionary." What made him a revolutionary writer whose news stays news was a symbolic imagination which nurtured continuity as it recognized overwhelming changes and which held on to individual life while sensing universal destruction.

Bibliographic note

All stories discussed above may be read in English translations in *Selected Works of Lu Hsun*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (4 vols. Peking, 1956-60), which includes a biographical sketch of Lu Hsun by Feng Hsueh-feng. See also *Ah Q And Others: Selected Stories of Lusin*, trans. Wang Chi-chen (New York, 1941), and Wang Chi-chen, "Lusin: A Chronological Record 1881-1936," *China Institute Bulletin*, 3 (January 1939), 99-125. C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction 1917-1957* (New Haven and London, 1961) offers a summary account with bibliographies.