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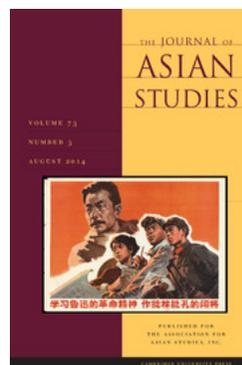
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## Lu Xun on Our Minds: The Post-Socialist Reappraisal; Chou, *Memory, Violence, Queues: Lu Xun Interprets China*; Davies, *Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence*; Cheng, *Literary Remains: Death, Trauma, and Lu Xun's Refusal to Mourn*

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## Trends

### CHINA

#### *Lu Xun on Our Minds: The Post-Socialist Reappraisal*

*Memory, Violence, Queues: Lu Xun Interprets China.* By EVA SHAN CHOU. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Association for Asian Studies, 2012. viii, 333 pp. \$25.00 (paper).

*Lu Xun's Revolution: Writing in a Time of Violence.* By GLORIA DAVIES. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013. xxvi, 408 pp. \$35.00 (cloth).

*Literary Remains: Death, Trauma, and Lu Xun's Refusal to Mourn.* By EILEEN J. CHENG. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013. xi, 313 pp. \$54.00 (cloth).  
doi:10.1017/S0021911814000515

That American academic publishers within a short time have put out three monographs this substantial on Lu Xun (1881–1936), often referred to as the founder of modern Chinese literature, is indicative of a new enthusiasm for Lu Xun in the United States and elsewhere in the West. In Japan, South Korea, and of course the People's Republic of China, the study of Lu Xun has been an academic enterprise of considerable standing for some time already.<sup>1</sup> Not that American scholars have failed to make substantial contributions to Lu Xun studies in the past, but such contributions have been

<sup>1</sup>Notable recent monographs in Chinese are: Gao Yuandong, *Xiandai ruhe "nalai": Lu Xun de sixiang yu wenxue lunji* [How he "brought over" modernity: Essays on Lu Xun's thought and literature] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009); Gao Yuanbao, *Lu Xun liu jiang* [Six lectures on Lu Xun] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2007); Huang Qiaosheng, *Lu Xun xiang zhuan* [Lu Xun: An illustrated biography] (Nanning: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2013); Sun Yu, *Lu Xun yousi* [Lu Xun's contemplations] (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2012); Wang Dehou, *Lu Xun yu Kongzi* [Lu Xun and Confucius] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2010); Wang Hui, *A Q shengming zhong de liu ge shunjian* [Six moments in Ah Q's life] (Shanghai: Donghua shifan daxue chubanshe, 2014); Zhang Jieyu, *Duxingzhe yu ta de deng: Lu Xun "Yecao" xidu yu yanjiu* [The lone awakened one and his lamp: A close reading and study of Lu Xun's "Wild Grass"] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2013). In Japanese: Kitaoka Masako, *Rojin Kyuuboo no yume no yukue: "Akumaha Shijiron" kara "Kyoojin Nikki" made* [Surrounding Lu Xun's dream of [national] salvation: From "On the Power of Satanic Verse" to "The Diary of a Madman"] (Suita-shi: Kansai Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2006); Nagahori Yuuzoo, *Rojin to Torotsukii – Chugoku ni okeru Bungaku to Kakumei* [Lu Xun and Trotsky – Literature and Revolution in China] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2011). In addition, the Beijing Lu Xun Museum, which houses an extensive archive of his papers and personal library, publishes a scholarly journal, *Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan* [Lu Xun research monthly], which is highly ranked domestically, and the unprecedented publication in China by an independent organization of an international journal, *Lu Xun Studies*, in English has just been announced.

relatively far between. Fortunately, there is little overlap between these three exciting new studies.

The first, by Eva Shan Chou, Professor at Baruch College and author of *Reconsidering Tu Fu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), is a meticulously researched, factually rich literary biography, focused on four discrete periods in Lu Xun's life. It devotes special attention to Lu Xun's classical-style poetry and to visual materials, notably the woodcut movement he fostered and his reaction to its representation of him and his works. The second, by the Malaysian-Chinese Australian academic Gloria Davies of Monash University, is an engaging intellectual history, primarily concerned with the last and most politically charged decade of Lu Xun's life in Shanghai. The third, by Eileen Cheng of Pomona College, is a treasure trove of sensitive and erudite close readings of short stories from Lu Xun's collections *Nahan* (Call to arms) and *Pan-guang* (Hesitation), the autobiographical fiction in *Zhaohua xishi* (Dawn blossoms plucked at dusk), and his satiric reworkings of ancient legends in *Gushi xinbian* (Old tales retold). Whereas Davies concentrates on Lu Xun's *zawen*—short, timely essays of social, political, and cultural criticism of the 1930s—Cheng's focus is on *belles lettres*.

All of the works under review grapple with issues larger than Lu Xun: China's transition from tradition to modernity; China and the West; and the violent cycle of repression, revolution, counter-revolution, and repression that characterize the Chinese revolution and Lu Xun's response to that violence and trauma. Eileen Cheng emphasizes his struggle to come to terms with loss and asserts that it was his "radical hope" (p. 220) for the future that kept him going. Gloria Davies credits his "humanism" (p. 19) and "empathy" (p. 333), his sympathy for the suffering (which one might also trace back to Buddhist influence—certainly there is evidence of it in some of his essays and stories). Eva Shan Chou's book "does not present an overarching hypothesis" about the many transformations Lu Xun's life encompassed; rather, it "examines some consistent themes in them" (p. 222), and these again take us back to violence and painful memories—the latter she sees as "accumulated experience" that he was unwilling to forget, which led him further into pessimism (p. 230).

Why call this as a "post-socialist" reappraisal of Lu Xun in America and the West in general? In the past we often looked at Lu Xun through the lens of the Cold War, perceiving him as a once-brilliant writer of fiction turned into a crotchety curmudgeon tarnished by his association with Communist front organizations in the 1930s, by his embittering entanglement with student demonstrators and academic politics in Beijing during the warlord government of the 1920s, and by the idea (first broached by Su Xuelin and others) that he was somehow posthumously responsible for the Communist victory in the Chinese civil war (and all subsequent excesses) by having thoroughly discredited the Guomindang (Nationalist) government through his short "dagger essays" of the 1930s. If we are now—thank goodness—free to admit the historical context of Lu Xun's era and the injustices he witnessed into our understanding of his writing, perhaps this is because we no longer feel threatened by Chinese Communist ideology, since socialism, the only thing communism ever had going for it, is, for all intents and purposes, dead in China, save for periodic genuflection to some graven images.

Eva Shan Chou's is an innovative approach, focusing on four "moments" in Lu Xun's life, each approximately two years in length. The first is titled "Cutting His Queue: Nationalism, Identity and Other Unknowns" (chapter 2), in which we see Lu Xun as one of some 8,000 Chinese students in Japan circa 1902–1903. Here we "catch him in a moment when he is both a developing person and a person of his times, in other words, someone who is not exceptional. The resulting picture is not amazing, although it is fuller, but perhaps it is a contribution to Lu Xun studies to make him less singular"

(pp. 97–98). In other words, Chou challenges the myth that Lu Xun's patriotic sentiments—which some readers discern in a classical-style poem from this period, often referred to as “Ziti xiaoxiang” (Personally inscribed on a small picture)—were unique among students. Although Chou is right to challenge this myth, I do not think many scholars have tried to argue that Lu Xun was unique in arriving at such a degree of political consciousness at the time he wrote the poem (circa 1903). They just use it to try to pinpoint and date the stirring of that consciousness in him. But Chou comes back deftly to the same poem in her treatment of the early 1930s, in chapter 4 (see below).

In chapter 3, “The Literary Afterlife of the Queue: A Closer Look at the Years 1920–1922,” Chou treats Lu Xun's years as a writer in Beijing, discussing his stories “Fengbo” (Storm in a teacup), “Toufa de gushi” (The story of hair), and “A Q zheng zhuan” (The true story of Ah Q), and two essays: “Sheng xiang si bu xiang” (Surrendering in life but not in death) and “Mingzi” (Names). She tells us that Lu Xun was only a political observer; he never took part directly in the 1911 revolution, the May Fourth movement, or the anti-Japanese demonstrations of the 1920s, nor did he take an active role in the movement led by the League of Left-Wing Writers in the 1930s. But Lu Xun never lost faith in the power of writing. He intended his fiction and essays to reflect the violent realities of China, to use literature to move his compatriots and thereby change their thinking. She concludes:

The common thread in his work was not an updated version of the political commitment of his youth but rather an abhorrence of violence, an abhorrence that was deep, consistent, and lifelong. He felt deeply the destruction of life, the erasure of the fact of life by means of orchestrated violence. He had no interest in politics in the sense attributed to him by the Communists and Marxists. His low opinion of human nature, of politics' participants, made him follow it with an unbearable fascination. He never ceased to have the capacity to be sickened by the casual casualties of politics. He never became the thorough cynic that the protagonist in the later story “The Loner” gradually developed into. (p. 144)

This is an important point to underscore: Lu Xun was a skeptic, but not a cynic. Feng Xuefeng (1903–76) recollected that Lu Xun once told him the story “Guduzhe” (The loner) was autobiographical. If that is the case, one point to keep in mind is that the protagonist Wei Lianshu, whom I see as a kind of doppelgänger for the author, is not really a cynic. In my reading at least, he dies of a broken heart after betraying his ideals in order to survive. Fortunately, Lu Xun never had to do that (at least not the survival part), but I wonder if the protagonist does not in some uncanny way foreshadow the unfortunate fate of Lu Xun's middle brother, Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967).

Chapter 4, “The Life of a Poem, 1903–1936,” examines the period around 1931. Here Chou probes for the reasons the 1903 poem of Lu Xun's youth keeps coming back, first when “the photograph [taken after he cut off his queue] that was likely the original companion to the poem was made public for [the first time] in 1926 through Lu Xun's agency but without an indication of its short-hair significance” (p. 174) in the first volume dedicated entirely to Lu Xun criticism, *Guanyu Lu Xun ji qi zhuzuo* (On Lu Xun and his works), compiled by Tai Jingnong with Lu Xun's participation and published in Beijing by the Weiming She (Unnamed Society). Although the 1903 poem was not reproduced in that volume (its text remained unpublished at that time), Chou thinks it is alluded to by the presence of the photograph. In 1931, Lu Xun copied out the poem with a

writing brush, producing a specimen of his own work of a much earlier period in his own unique calligraphy, dated the sixteenth day of the second month in the year *xinwei* (1931). But he did not publish it or even give it away then, he simply kept it (p. 148). Chou argues that Lu Xun was drawing a private connection between the ideals of his youth and the blood sacrifice of five left-wing writers, later known collectively as the Five Martyrs, executed in secret by the Guomindang regime at Longhua Garrison Headquarters: “His long ago ideals are transferred to these young people with a grimly different outcome. The poem is changed from a young man’s manifesto to a tribute by an old man to the new, young men” (p. 154). In fact, the executed writers also included a young woman writer, Feng Keng, who was pregnant.<sup>2</sup> After their execution, according to PRC scholar Zhang Ziqiang, whom Chou cites (pp. 159–61), Lu Xun may have shown a copy of the poem (with one character *shi* [arrow] slightly revised to *zu* [barbed arrow-head]) to Qu Qiubai, the then defrocked former General Secretary of the Communist Party, after which they talked for some time. Although Chou teases our interest, she refuses to speculate about the subject matter of their discussion (p. 160), but I think it must have been the betrayal of the writers (who were suspected to be Li-Lisanists<sup>3</sup>) to the authorities by another faction, implicating the underground Communist leadership in Shanghai (who were Stalinists). Obviously, Lu Xun’s and Qu’s sympathies would have been with the martyred writers, giving another layer of meaning to Lu Xun’s bout of “grief and anger” reported in *Wenji xinwen* (Literature and art news), in the issue of August 10, 1931, that contained three of his other poems alluding to their deaths.<sup>4</sup>

Chou’s fifth chapter, “In the Hands of Others, 1934–1936: The Visual Materials,” discusses how Lu Xun, by promoting a modern woodcut movement, sought to use a visual medium “to make incisive criticisms of China through works of the imagination” (p. 220). She adds that, “biographically speaking, he gave up on creative writing in some way but was still looking forward, this time proposing a serious visual culture for everyone versus, previously, creating a serious literature of the new elite” (pp. 220–21). The first half of the sentence perpetuates a common view (proceeding from C. T. Hsia’s position) that Lu Xun turned away from creativity. Yet we cannot really say he gave up on creative writing entirely, because he continued to compose classical-style verse and to write the majority of the satirical stories collected in *Old Tales Retold*.

In her own words, Chou’s book

probes for what the works of the imagination chosen in each chapter can reveal about the author, especially what they can reveal that is not otherwise knowable, to bring out features of his thought and psychology that are not otherwise accessible. The approach is akin to taking a core sample in order to obtain a cross section of information that penetrates to some depth. It is from this complex of imponderables that his interpretations of China emerge. Their bases in a particular time and place are traced here. (p. 40)

In many ways, this is similar to what I intended to do in *The Lyrical Lu Xun*. Chou recreates, as I did, a historical context in which she reexamines some of Lu Xun’s writings, dated around certain major incidents or accomplishments in his life. This approach,

<sup>2</sup>See Kowallis, *The Lyrical Lu Xun: A Study of His Classical-Style Verse* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1996), 142–67.

<sup>3</sup>See *ibid.*, 151.

<sup>4</sup>See *ibid.*, 142.

while innovative, at times can feel a bit “hit or miss.” I would disagree, for example, with the conclusions Chou leads the reader to draw on Lu Xun in the Japan period simply because her focus on 1903 forces her to gloss over the intellectually more fecund period of 1906 to 1908, when Lu Xun does become rather unique as the author of five lengthy treatises in classical Chinese. But the book is factually rich, and the author has successfully integrated Western and Chinese scholarship on Lu Xun. Its innovative approach is attractive, and Chou’s scholarship insightful. The book contains an extensive bibliography, as well as two appendices (one on the dating and meaning of *shenshi* in the 1903 poem, the other on illustrations of Lu Xun’s fiction and his person), and an index.

Gloria Davies takes a tripartite approach, assessing Lu Xun from a literary, linguistic, and intellectual angle, and does so with elegant precision. Although David Pollard made a start in this direction,<sup>5</sup> no one writing in English has treated Lu Xun as an essayist as completely, particularly in the last ten years of his life. Davies recreates an intellectual context for the polemics in which he was engaged and offers new insights on the controversy over “revolutionary literature” in which he became embroiled in 1928–30; on the factionalism within the League of Left-Wing Writers, of which he was the titular head; and on his role in the “Battle of the Slogans,” sometimes called the debate over “National Defense Literature,” which took place during the last two years of his life. She cuts through the rhetoric to the core of the issue, which was essentially about intellectual freedom and the role of literature versus propaganda. Davies shows how Lu Xun, although he was a leading spokesman for the Left, stood up against Communist apparatchiks at the cost of his own health and at the risk of his reputation. (By his opposition to “National Defense Literature” at a time when Japan was threatening China, his critics could easily imply to those who did not fully understand his position and the complexities of the day that he was a “traitor.”) Davies’s conclusion that Lu Xun was a humanist who advocated empathy, not a radical revolutionist who advocated violence, is well argued. Nevertheless, it will be contested.<sup>6</sup>

Davies is on the right track in saying that Lu Xun argued in favor of writing in *baihua wen* (vernacular Chinese) and did so even at conscious personal cost, since he had been a great stylist in *wenyan wen* (classical Chinese). But she does not examine his classical-style poetry or his early (1907–8) essays in any detail. What she does offer is a detailed and nuanced reading of works from his brilliant and challenging modern prose poetry collection *Yecao* (Wild grass), written between 1924 and 1926, with five prototype pieces composed in 1919. Davies’s readings of this collection supplement what Leo Ou-fan Lee has written in his well-known monograph on Lu Xun, *Voices from the Iron House* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).<sup>7</sup> Davies sees Lu Xun as a cosmopolitan writer and critic who stimulated his Chinese readers with his familiarity with the

<sup>5</sup>See David Pollard, “Lu Xun’s Zawen,” in *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, ed. Leo Ou-fan Lee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 54–89.

<sup>6</sup>See my chapter “Lu Xun and Terrorism: A Reading of Revenge and Violence in *Mara* and Beyond,” in *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900–1940*, ed. Peter Zarrow (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 83–97, where I examine, among other things, Lu Xun’s support for internationalist intervention in wars of national liberation and his sympathy with the cries for vengeance in the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Slowacki.

<sup>7</sup>One new monograph on *Wild Grass* is Nicholas A. Kaldis, *The Chinese Prose Poem: A Study of Lu Xun’s Wild Grass (Yecao)* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2014). There is also a special issue of the *Journal of Modern Literature in Chinese* 11.2 (Spring 2014) edited by Nick Admussen under the title “Layers of the Real: Lu Xun’s *Wild Grass*.”

outside world and with his translations without pretense or guile. He never patronized his readers or talked down to them.

In fact, she concludes, in light of Walter Benjamin's notion of *Einfühlung*, that Lu Xun's literary craft made him a "virtuoso of empathy" (p. 333) by emptying his own ego. She sees this in the essays of his last period, "In Praise of Darkness" (1933) and "This Too Is Life" (1936). On reading his last two essays on Zhang Taiyan (1868–1936), Davies concludes that Lu Xun, who was also a notable scholar of classical Chinese literature, "wanted to be remembered for his passions rather than his scholarship" (p. 334). He wanted to be "connected with a countless multitude of people" (p. 334)—a phrase reminiscent of a line from his untitled May 30, 1934, classical-style poem: "Troubles boundless in my heart expand, ranging the vastness of our land" (*Xinshi haomang lian guangyu*).<sup>8</sup> Although the Maoist-mandated mass study of Lu Xun in Chinese schools from the 1940s on disposed a number of students against his writings, it also served to spread his works, his quotations, and his language around on a wide scale and, Davies tells us, when all was said and done in the post-1978 reappraisal of Lu Xun, this assured his spiritual permanence in academic, literary, official, and everyday Chinese.

Eileen Cheng's exquisitely presented volume (Lu Xun treasured the aesthetic effect of a book's design) sets out systematically to interpret Lu Xun's creative writings and to arrive at new answers to unanswered questions about Lu Xun and his works. She challenges the familiar generalization that he was a "radical iconoclast" bent on discrediting Chinese tradition. This approach, Cheng tells us, overlooks the transformative nature of Lu Xun's engagement with native literary forms and conventions, be it through allusions, imitation, adaptation, or parody. She sees strong imprints of the classical literary tradition not only in his classical-style poetry but also in the bulk of writing that Lu Xun himself designated as "creative": the short stories in *Call to Arms* and *Hesitation*, the satiric reworkings of ancient legends in *Old Tales Retold*, the autobiographical fiction in *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk*, and the plays, prose poems, and anecdotes in *Wild Grass*.

Lu Xun stepped out of the tradition to renarrate the past, speaking on behalf of the victims of "progress," and so challenged the metanarrative constructed by a faction within the New Culture movement (chapter 1). Cheng sees Lu Xun's preface to *Call to Arms* as an allegory of "the failure of literature to deal ethically with the suffering and death of others" (p. 11). He used facetious prefaces and played on traditional notions, such as filial piety, to underscore his anxiety at being unable to live up to core traditional values and the pressures of being the heir to a daunting literary heritage; he also suffered from an anxiety over literary obsolescence, that is, the idea that his own works would not be understood or transmitted accurately in the new evolving literary field (chapter 2). With his biographical and fictional character studies, Lu Xun continued in the vein of Sima Qian's biographies to ensure that the unrecognized worthies of his own day, such as Qiu Jin, Fan Ainong, Liu Hezhen, Rou Shi, and Zhang Taiyan, would be remembered through the narratives he created (chapter 3). He attached importance to the representation of women, avoiding the exploitative images of women in the popular media, but his own sympathetic portrayals began to border on traditional eulogies, which valorized

<sup>8</sup>The poem is perhaps better remembered today for its next (and concluding) line: *Yu wu sheng chu ting jing lei* (And in this place without a trace of sound, [I] hear tremorous thunder raging 'round), which is often taken to refer to the nascent revolution that lurks beneath the calm surface of a repressive society. See Kowallis, *op. cit.* note 2, pp. 311–15.

feminine suffering and submission (chapter 4). By interpreting Lu Xun's parody of the theme of the abandoned lover in his poetry and fiction, Cheng finds an answer to C. T. Hsia's question of why he "gave up" writing short stories in 1926, suggesting that he may well have done so because he could not stand to see his works co-opted by the emerging "culture industry" (chapter 5). Cheng engages with the question of the returned intellectual and the theme of the journey home in Lu Xun's fiction, categorizing these themes as his depiction of the plight of his intellectual travelers—wanderers with neither a home nor a clear mission (chapter 6). She demonstrates how his mocking of the ancient sages in "Cai wei" (Gathering vetch, 1935) and "Li shui" (Curbing the flood, 1935) in *Old Tales Retold* indicts the cultural apparatus that continued to nurture elite privilege (chapter 7). In chapter 8, she analyzes "Bu tian" (Mending heaven, 1922) and "Qi si" (Resurrecting the dead, 1936), also in *Old Tales Retold*, suggesting that Lu Xun's continued attachment to certain aspects of traditional culture is reflected in these challenging satirical stories, brimming with classical allusions and abstruse references. With these "tales," Lu Xun hints that if remnants of the past are revived simply to entertain, rather than as a source of illumination or to inquire into religious beliefs in a world beyond, then perhaps these "skeletons are best left" undisturbed (p. 209).

Cheng concludes by analyzing how *Wild Grass* highlights the paradox and potential violence involved in representing the dead, but also emphasizes the importance he placed on commemoration. Lu Xun hoped that the "frozen flames" (to use a metaphor from *Wild Grass*) in his writings might be "reignited in the hands of a discerning reader to illuminate the past, present, and a future yet to unfold" (p. 233). Cheng's critical masterpiece does precisely that, leaving the reader with a feeling of hope, both for the survival and proliferation of Lu Xun's understanding and for the future of a new China built thereon.

Taken as a whole, the rich insights these three works provide indicate how much can be achieved through a combination of close reading, hermeneutics, and the new historicism. But I would guess that in the future we are likely to see more of an attempt to contextualize Lu Xun within the international intellectual world of his contemporaries. Nanjing in 1898–1901, Tokyo in 1902–9, Beijing in 1912–26, and Shanghai in 1927–36 were all hubs of the international trade in ideas. Dare I suggest "globalizing" Lu Xun?

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