

Guohui Chen

Book

The Principles of Incorporating the Concept and Practice of Lu Xun's Introduction of Foreign Art



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and Practice of Lu Xun's Introduction of Foreign Art**

Monograph

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The principles of incorporating The concept and practice of Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art

This monograph explores Lu Xun's concept of the "principles of incorporating," examining his approach to integrating foreign art into Chinese culture. It highlights how his advocacy for foreign art was not just theoretical but actively practiced during the New Culture Movement, shaping modern Chinese art. The study delves into the motivations behind Lu Xun's efforts, the methods he employed, and the specific foreign art forms he introduced. It also explores his art criticism, focusing on how it reflected his "incorporating" philosophy. The paper examines key themes such as the development of Lu Xun's doctrine of incorporation, his advocacy for the youth woodcut movement, and the cultural impact of his work. It investigates the ideological shifts and changes in Chinese art as a result of foreign influence, shedding light on the complexities of modern Chinese art formation. By analyzing Lu Xun's correspondence, prefaces, and writings on art theory, this study provides valuable insights into the historical process of foreign art integration into China's cultural framework. It aims to offer a deeper understanding of the transformative role Lu Xun played in shaping the trajectory of Chinese modern art, contributing significantly to cultural enlightenment and artistic development.

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Foreword

Lu Xun's concept of the "principles of incorporating" reflects his attitude toward both Chinese and foreign cultural heritage, and this idea plays a pivotal role throughout his literary and artistic activities. What is most significant about his "incorporating" philosophy is that it was not merely a theoretical stance. Lu Xun's advocacy for integrating foreign art into Chinese culture manifested not just in words but in practice, as he became a pioneer in the introduction of foreign art during the New Culture Movement. His ideas on "incorporating" were strongly supported by his objective actions.

This monograph aims to examine Lu Xun's approach to the introduction of foreign art by exploring five key themes: the academic history of "Lu Xun and foreign art," the development of his thoughts on the doctrine of incorporation and its appeal to enlightenment, his ideas and practices surrounding the communication of "fine art," the concept of foreign art that he introduced, and how Lu Xun's art criticism reflected the "incorporating" philosophy. The paper delves into the motivations behind Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art, the ideological foundation of his efforts, the specific methods he employed, and the content and style of the foreign art he introduced. Furthermore, it discusses the efforts he made in the process and what particular artistic concepts he sought to promote.

Through the analysis of Lu Xun's correspondence, prefaces, art theory writings, and his advocacy for the youth woodcut movement, this paper explores the nature of the art criticism practices he developed. It aims to answer critical questions regarding his methods of incorporating foreign art: why he chose to incorporate it, how he went about doing so, what specific art forms he introduced, and how these art forms were utilized after their incorporation.

This study also investigates the valuable lessons and experiences that Lu Xun's historical efforts in introducing foreign art offer, particularly in the context of modern Chinese art. By tracing the process of incorporating foreign art into China's cultural framework, we gain insight into the changing dynamics of Chinese modern art. On one hand, this helps us better understand the spread and adaptation of foreign art in modern times, along with the ideological shifts in Chinese and foreign art exchanges over the last century. On the other hand, it broadens our understanding of the complexity and diversity that shaped the formation of Chinese modern art.

This monograph presents a comprehensive exploration of Lu Xun's foreign art activities from multiple angles – his motivations, methods, and the cultural significance of his work. It aims to restore a clear understanding of Lu Xun's principles of incorporation and his role in the cultural enlightenment and development of modern Chinese art.

Introduction

1. Rationale for the topic selection

The late Qing dynasty to the Republican era was a period of political upheaval and cultural transition, during which the beliefs, ethical values, and behavioural patterns of ordinary people underwent constant transformation. Lu Xun once vividly described the shifts in social thought during the early years of the Republic: “While professing freedom of belief, they nevertheless held Confucius in special reverence; while styling themselves “relics of the former dynasty (胜朝遗老)” · they nevertheless accepted money from the Republic; while asserting that reform was necessary, they nevertheless advocated a return to antiquity: on all sides, matters were layered two or three-fold, even multiple times over, each layer contradicting the next. Thus all people lived amidst these contradictions, On all sides, matters were layered two or threefold, even multiple times over, each layer contradicting the next. Thus all people lived amidst these contradictions, mutually complaining as they went about their lives.” (Xun, 1919) According to Taiwanese scholar Mr Zhang Hao, the prevailing social thought and culture of that era was characterised by: ‘Whether in the mediums through which ideas and knowledge were disseminated, or in the content of those ideas themselves, there occurred revolutionary transformations’ Regarding the former, the primary changes were twofold: firstly, the proliferation of institutionalised media such as newspapers, magazines, modern schools, and learned societies; secondly, the emergence of a new intelligentsia. As for shifts in intellectual content, these too manifest in two dimensions: a crisis of cultural orientation and the emergence of new intellectual discourses (Hao, 2003). Against the backdrop of a national political crisis, the advanced intellectuals contemplated and sought to resolve issues such as how to treat tradition, how to introduce Western influences, and how to construct a new Chinese culture—primarily through approaches like radicalism, liberalism, or conservatism (Fang, 1991; 1990).

Since the early 20th century, foreign art has been strategically introduced as a new intellectual resource and a vital component of new culture. Its impact and influence on China’s art world, and indeed its cultural and intellectual spheres, have been profound.¹ Within the historical context of internal strife and external threats, the revolutionary transformation of Chinese art stemmed directly from the introduction of foreign artistic concepts and ideas. Simultaneously, it was inextricably linked to the tide of epochal change, particularly to the approaches, attitudes, and methods contemporary thinkers employed in contemplating and engaging with China’s indigenous cultural traditions. This was intrinsically connected to the reflection and practice surrounding the quest for a modern cultural path for China. For instance, the debate concerning the ‘scientific’ approach began with a critique of literati painting, prompting a re-examination of traditional artistic resources against the backdrop of Western concepts of ‘realism’.² On the other hand, tracing the cultural

¹ Since modern times, the introduction of foreign art into China occurred through several pathways: foreign artists and missionaries, like Lang Shining and Wang Zhicheng, brought Western art through cultural exchange; Chinese envoys studying abroad documented Western art developments, influencing domestic discourse; Westerners teaching art in China and the growth of export paintings spread foreign styles; technical schools incorporated Western art for practical skills; and artists educated abroad, such as Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong, introduced and fused Western styles with Chinese traditions.

² Kang Youwei advocated for a “return to antiquity to achieve renewal” and supported the realistic painting traditions of the Tang and Song dynasties. In contrast, Chen Duxiu, who opposed Confucianism and promoted Western learning, criticized the Qing dynasty’s literati painting tradition and championed realism, specifically the European style that emerged after the Renaissance.

threads of foreign art entering China and examining certain characteristics continually revealed by the “importation” process itself is undoubtedly crucial to understanding the experience of modern Chinese art’s transformation and development. In the early 20th century, China’s cultural and intellectual circles engaged in diverse debates and explorations concerning the modern critique of traditional culture and the path forward for modern Chinese culture. As a novel cultural form, the introduction of foreign art stimulated transformations in Chinese artistic styles, alongside the renewal of knowledge systems and shifts in modes of thinking. This reveals certain experiences and insights at the level of intellectual history, offering a window into how modern intellectuals navigated the political, cultural, and psychological upheavals of a rapidly changing era. For instance, The theory of ‘East-West synthesis’ in art is generally considered to have originated with Kang Youwei (1908)³. In reality, it was an inevitable outcome of the political, historical and cultural context of the time, representing the protracted extension of the debate over the essence and application of Chinese and Western cultures within the art world.⁴ However, these issues were not merely the subject of debate within the art world; they constituted a broader intellectual contest among scholars in the early 20th century, spanning political, academic, and social dimensions. This contest permeated the entire intellectual history of China throughout the 20th century and warrants further reflection (Hui, 1989)⁵.

The topic of “Lu Xun introducing foreign art” undoubtedly constitutes a significant case study within the history of modern Chinese and foreign art reception. The era in which Lu Xun lived marked a pivotal period of cultural transformation in modern China, characterised by radical Westernisation, gradualist cultural reform, and traditionalist preservationism that sought to “learn from the past to understand the present”. The art world was no exception. By the early 20th century, China’s art scene witnessed a proliferation of reform proposals and divergent views on artistic transformation. This shift was catalysed by the emergence of modern schools, the return of overseas-educated scholars, the founding of art periodicals, and the establishment of modern exhibitions. Examples include Chen Duxiu’s ‘Art Revolution’, Lin Fengmian’s theory of harmonising Eastern and Western approaches, Xu Beihong’s ‘Realism’, and Chen Shizeng’s theory of literati painting. Lu Xun, standing at the vanguard of his era and attuned to its pulse, championed the “‘incorporating’”, advocating the ‘cross-contextual’ introduction of foreign art. This “‘incorporating’” reflected Lu Xun’s stance and principles regarding the cultural heritage of both China and the West. Positioned precisely at the historical juncture of modern China’s cultural transition between old and new, the question of how to engage with ancient and contemporary, Chinese and foreign cultures became a central theme throughout his literary and artistic endeavours. More significantly, Lu Xun’s advocated “incorporating” foreign art transcended mere theory. As a pioneer consciously

³ In 1917, Kang Youwei proposed synthesizing Eastern and Western approaches to usher in a new era in painting studies. While the 1908 article ‘The Biography of Lady He Bi’ briefly mentioned ‘eclectic painting techniques,’ it lacked a detailed exposition. Kang’s theory, however, is seen as the first formal formulation. His doctrine of “synthesis” further develops his philosophy of ‘Chinese essence with Western utility,’ providing a solid theoretical foundation.

⁴ During the debate on the modern development of Chinese art, the controversy over the theory of ‘integration of Chinese and Western elements’ was primarily between the ‘national essence’ faction and the ‘integration’ faction. The central issue was determining the foundation for China’s modern cultural development.

⁵ Wang Hui argues that China’s “modernity” was shaped not only by cultural transplantation from abroad but also through the interaction of distinct cultural and linguistic communities. Thus, research into China’s modernity involves an “intercultural act of cultural interaction.” This concept recognizes both the passive nature of China’s modernization and the cultural autonomy in its development.

engaged in the New Culture Movement's practical endeavours, his activities introducing foreign art served as a powerful illustration and objective embodiment of his intellectual stance.

In the process of introducing foreign art, Lu Xun's rich intellectual and cultural resources warrant fresh interpretation. Since the early 20th century, foreign art was strategically introduced into China. As one of the pioneers in introducing foreign art and the "mentor" of the New Woodcut Movement, Lu Xun functioned as a "gatekeeper"⁶ – a role articulated by communication studies founder Luhmann. In the process of gathering and disseminating information about foreign art, Lu Xun's role as a "gatekeeper" served to scrutinise and "filter" such content (Guoliang, 1995). What, then, were the conceptual motivations behind Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art as this gatekeeper? What were his intellectual foundations? What efforts did he undertake in introducing foreign art, and which artistic concepts did he prioritise? On the practical level, what methods did Lu Xun employ to introduce foreign art? What specific artistic forms did he introduce? How do the extensive art correspondence he exchanged with young woodcut artists, along with his various prefaces and art critiques, reveal his art criticism practices, and how should these be interpreted? What valuable lessons can be drawn from Lu Xun's historical experience and cultural aspirations in introducing foreign art? And so forth. Selecting the topic 'Lu Xun's Concepts and Practices in Introducing Foreign Art' aims to explore and address these questions. Through this inquiry, we seek to re-examine and understand Lu Xun's "incorporating" and his cultural enlightenment-driven explorations in establishing his identity and pursuing development, and ultimately to reflect on the century-spanning experience of art reception in both China and the West.

2. A review of research on 'Lu Xun and Foreign Art'

Studies on Lu Xun and Foreign Art broadly encompass reminiscences, critiques, research articles, and monographs addressing the subject of Lu Xun's engagement with foreign art. Conducting a relatively systematic review of the current state of research on this topic constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for exploring the specialised field of study concerning Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art.

As the research topic 'Lu Xun and Foreign Art' falls within the broader field of 'Lu Xun and Art', numerous articles examining Lu Xun's relationship with art often address his connections to foreign art as well. To comprehensively review the current state of research, this paper will first provide an overall description of the research landscape concerning 'Lu Xun and Art', before specifically detailing the status of studies on 'Lu Xun and Foreign Art'.

2.1. Research on 'Lu Xun and the Fine Arts'

The research on the relationship between Lu Xun and fine arts spans a rich scholarly history, with over twenty monographs, more than one hundred and twenty articles, and fifteen illustrated catalogues published to date. Despite the extensive volume of literature, much of it remains repetitive, offering little more than factual recollections or surface-level descriptions. Genuinely

⁶ One of the founding figures of modern communication studies, the German-American scholar Kurt Lewin (1890-1947), proposed the renowned 'gatekeeper' theory. He observed that 'Information always moves along channels containing "gateways", where decisions regarding whether information or commodities are permitted to enter the channel or continue flowing through it are made either according to impartial rules or based on the personal judgement of the gatekeeper.' Consequently, 'information dissemination networks are permeated with gatekeepers.'

scholarly works are relatively few, and most of the existing research on Lu Xun's connection with fine arts, especially his engagement with foreign art, lacks depth. The goal of this paper is to offer a concise commentary on the existing literature, while also deriving its own research theme through a retrospective examination.

The study of Lu Xun's involvement with fine arts began in earnest after he supported the emerging woodcut movement with an advertisement in Shanghai's *Wenyi Xinwen* on March 23, 1931. This field of research can be divided into three major phases: the 1930s and 1940s, the period from the founding of New China to the Cultural Revolution, and the post-Cultural Revolution era. While memoirs and reflective pieces dominate the early literature, several works stand out for their scholarly merit.

The first valuable contributions include studies on Lu Xun's support for the woodcut movement. Notably, the 1940 paper *A Comprehensive Review of China's Woodcut Movement Over the Past Decade* (Hua et al., 1940) by several woodcut artists including Liu Jian'an and Li Hua, outlined the historical trajectory of the movement and Lu Xun's influence. In the same year, Xu Guangping's *Lu Xun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement* (Guangping, 1999) examined Lu Xun's contributions from three perspectives: his collection of prints, his role in organizing print exhibitions and teaching, and his views on woodcut research. This work provides both recollections and objective analyses of Lu Xun's artistic activities.

The 1940s saw further developments with works such as Chen Yanqiao's *Lu Xun and Woodcut Art* (1943) and Tang Yingwei's *A History of Modern Chinese Woodcut Art* (1946), both of which expanded upon Xu Wen's work. These monographs not only described Lu Xun's artistic activities but also explored his artistic philosophy. By the 1980s, research on Lu Xun's relationship with woodcut art reached a new level of sophistication. The publication of *Lu Xun and Woodcut Art* (1981) by Yoshikichi Uchiyama and Kazuo Nara (1985) was the first overseas monograph on Lu Xun's art. This comprehensive study offered a systematic presentation of Lu Xun's role in the woodcut movement, enriched by Japanese art historical materials. It also advanced innovative perspectives on his printmaking philosophy. Among the most influential works on the subject within China was *Lu Xun and the Emerging Woodcut Movement* (1985), edited by Ma Tiji and Li Yunjing. This book, which comprises six sections, integrates both textual and pictorial materials, providing a thorough study of Lu Xun's contributions to the woodcut movement.

In addition to his involvement with woodcut art, Lu Xun's artistic endeavors also encompassed his extensive art collection. Wang Guanquan's *Lu Xun and Fine Arts* (1979b) was a definitive introduction to his artistic activities, though it was colored by subjective political interpretations due to the period of its publication. Subsequent works on Lu Xun's art collection, such as Li Yunjing's *Appreciation of Lu Xun's Art Collection* (1999) and Sun Yu's *Catalogue of Lu Xun's Art Collection* (2008), continued to explore the historical and emotional significance of his collection. Li's work, while brief and descriptive, provided foundational insights into the collection's content, while Sun's work took a more subjective approach, blending personal expression with scholarly analysis. The *Complete Collection of Foreign Prints Collected by Lu Xun* (Yunjing, 2014), a five-volume work, offers a detailed catalog of over 2,000 foreign prints in Lu Xun's possession, including European, American, Soviet, and Japanese prints. This collection offers a rich source of material for studying Lu Xun's relationship with foreign art.

Beyond woodcuts and his art collection, Lu Xun's engagement with other art forms, such as book design, genre painting, New Year prints, comic strips, seal carving, and calligraphy, has also

been a subject of study. Key works in this area include Li Yunjing's *Lu Xun and Comic Strips* (1987a), *Lu Xun and Cartoons* (1987b), Jin Xuezhong's *Lu Xun on the Aesthetics of Seal Carving* (1987), and Zhu Guorong's *Lu Xun and the Art of the Human Figure* (1986). These studies offer various perspectives on Lu Xun's involvement with sequential illustrations, cartoons, and other visual art forms, as well as his writings on foreign art.

Recent efforts to review the research on Lu Xun and fine arts have been provided by Wang Ying in *Lu Xun in the Fine Arts Perspective* (1993) and Cui Yunwei in *Review of Research on 'Lu Xun and Fine Arts' in the New Era* (2004). Wang Ying's work catalogues the scholarship on Lu Xun from the 1930s to the 1990s, providing the first academic-historical retrospective of this field. Cui Yunwei's work updates this history, identifying key trends such as the deepening study of Lu Xun and printmaking, the broadening of perspectives to address gaps, and the growing comparative studies between Lu Xun and foreign art.

In summary, the field of research on Lu Xun and fine arts has evolved significantly over the past half-century. Despite the redundancy in many of the works, the scholarship has provided invaluable insights into Lu Xun's contributions to the fine arts, particularly the woodcut movement, his art collection, and his engagement with various other art forms. This paper aims to build on this rich scholarly foundation and offer a fresh perspective on Lu Xun's lasting impact on Chinese art.

2.2. Research on the special topic 'Lu Xun and Foreign Art'

Since the 1940s and 1950s, numerous articles have occasionally touched upon Lu Xun's artistic activities, including his relationship with foreign art. However, these discussions were often fragmentary and superficial. Key examples include works such as Kuli's *Lu Xun's Artistic Activities* (1999), Cao Bai's *Written in Eternal Remembrance* (1999), Zheng Zhenduo's *Everlasting Warmth: In Memory of Mr. Lu Xun* (1999), Xu Guangping's *Lu Xun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement* (1999)⁷, Bai Wei's *Recollections of Two or Three Incidents Concerning Mr. Lu Xun* (1999), and Xu Shouchang's *Impressions of My Late Friend Lu Xun* (1961). These works, while significant, often remained limited to memoirs or compilations of historical facts. It was only in the 1970s and 1980s, after the *Cultural Revolution*, that academic research into Lu Xun's engagement with foreign art deepened. This period marked the beginning of more substantial scholarly efforts, with works like *Recollections of Lu Xun's Artistic Activities* (1977), published by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House, providing comprehensive reviews of Lu Xun's contributions to promoting China's emerging woodcut art, introducing foreign art, and preserving China's ancient artistic heritage. Despite this, much of the research still remained focused on factual recollection rather than critical analysis.

In the 1980s, the academic landscape began to shift. Scholars started to explore Lu Xun's relationship with foreign art from a variety of perspectives, producing valuable new insights. Notably, Li Yunjing, Zhang Wang, and Wang Guanquan contributed to the study of Lu Xun's artistic activities, providing thorough analyses of historical materials related to Lu Xun's engagement with foreign art. Among these scholars, Li Yunjing stands out for his thorough and systematic approach.

⁷ Li Yunjing has made significant contributions to the field of 'Lu Xun and the Fine Arts.' His works include *Lu Xun and the Emerging Woodcut Movement* (co-authored with Ma Tiji), *The Complete Collection of Foreign Prints Collected by Lu Xun*, and *A History of Modern Chinese Printmaking*. The latter organizes modern Chinese printmaking into five stages: embryonic, formative, developmental, adversarial, and prosperous, exploring printmaking movements, artists, Sino-foreign exchanges, and printmaking theory throughout these phases.

His monograph, *Lu Xun and Chinese and Foreign Art* (2005), remains a cornerstone in the field. This work compiles over forty articles selected from more than one hundred pieces written by Li since the 1980s, all focused on the theme of “Lu Xun and Chinese and Foreign Art.” The monograph is divided into two sections: “Lu Xun and Chinese and Foreign Art” and “Lu Xun and Chinese and Foreign Artists,” which examine specific aspects of Lu Xun’s engagement with art from both China and abroad. While this volume provides a significant contribution to understanding Lu Xun’s relationship with foreign art, it remains a documentary-style work that largely compiles historical materials without in-depth critical analysis.

A review of the scholarly research on Lu Xun’s relationship with foreign art over the years highlights several recurring themes. First, the analysis of Lu Xun’s purpose in introducing foreign art has been a prominent topic of study. In 1956, Wang Qi’s *How Lu Xun Introduced Foreign Art* provided an early overview of Lu Xun’s efforts to present foreign art, focusing on his objectives and selection criteria. Although the work was limited to a retrospective account, it laid the groundwork for later studies. In the early 1980s, Zhang Wang’s *The Significance of Lu Xun’s Introduction of Foreign Art* (1980) posited that Lu Xun’s motivations for introducing foreign artworks mirrored his approach to translating foreign literature, grounded in both political and artistic considerations. Zhang emphasized Lu Xun’s focus on European realism in both literature and art, suggesting that his promotion of foreign art was aligned with his literary goals. Other works, such as Wu Bunei and Wang Guanquan’s *The Great Fire-Bearer: A Discussion on Lu Xun and the Introduction of Foreign Art* (1981), further explored Lu Xun’s role in promoting foreign art, though these remained descriptive and lacked deeper critical engagement with the broader implications of his work.

Second, the collection and organization of historical materials related to foreign art and the individual artists Lu Xun engaged with has been a focal point of research. Early studies, such as Zhang Wang’s *Lu Xun on Beardsley’s Decorative Art* (1956), provided insights into Lu Xun’s views on specific foreign art phenomena. However, many of these works were limited by their scope and lacked critical depth. By the 1980s, scholars began to move beyond simple introductions to foreign art, seeking to understand the deeper connections between Lu Xun and foreign artistic movements. For instance, Koizumi Kazuko’s *Lu Xun and Fukuya Kōji* (1988) explored the reasons behind Lu Xun’s admiration for Fukuya Kōji’s work, critically analyzing the artist’s depiction of adolescent romance. Similarly, Zhang Wang’s *Lu Xun and Fukuya Kōji’s Paintings* (1985) responded to Koizumi’s critique, arguing that Lu Xun’s selection of Fukuya’s work was purposeful and not merely imitative. These studies represent a shift toward analyzing Lu Xun’s aesthetic sensibilities and the reasons behind his introduction of foreign art, although they are not without their limitations.

Third, research on Lu Xun’s introduction of foreign art has also focused on his aesthetic theories and the broader implications of his artistic philosophy. Lang Shaojun’s *The Heartfelt Call for ‘Goodness, Beauty, and Vigour’* (1988) was one of the earliest studies to examine Lu Xun’s artistic philosophy, particularly his emphasis on the “beauty of strength” in his approach to foreign art. Liu Zaifu’s *Draft Discourse on Lu Xun’s Aesthetic Thought* (1981) and Jin Hongda’s *Explorations into Lu Xun’s Cultural Thought* (1986) explored the aesthetic principles underlying Lu Xun’s artistic thinking. These studies were crucial in highlighting Lu Xun’s contributions to both the political and artistic dimensions of Chinese modernity. More recent work, such as Cui Yunwei’s *Lu Xun’s Understanding and Reception of Western Modern Expressionist Art* (2006), has continued to explore the intersections of literature and fine art, particularly in relation to Western Expressionism. Cui’s

analysis provides valuable insights into how Lu Xun's engagement with Western modernist art influenced his literary works.

Finally, there has been substantial research on the chronology of Lu Xun's artistic activities, particularly his engagement with foreign art. However, much of this research remains descriptive and lacks critical analysis. For example, works like *Chronology of Lu Xun's Artistic Work* (1955) by Zhang Wang and *Chronology of Lu Xun's Art Department* (1979a) by Wang Guanquan provide detailed accounts of Lu Xun's art collection, translations, and publications, but they are primarily concerned with compiling historical sources rather than providing critical commentary. While these works are valuable for understanding the timeline of Lu Xun's artistic endeavors, they do not constitute fully developed academic research.

In conclusion, while numerous studies on *Lu Xun and Foreign Art* have laid a solid foundation, the existing research still lacks comprehensive and systematic scholarly works that delve deeply into the critical analysis of Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art. There remains insufficient exploration of the intellectual resources and cultural experiences that underpinned his engagement with foreign art, which is of contemporary relevance for the reception of both Chinese and international art. This paper aims to address these gaps by adopting the perspective of "incorporation" to examine the theme of *Lu Xun's Concepts and Practices in Introducing Foreign Art*, with the goal of offering fresh insights and advancing the field.

3. Thesis Framework and Explanation

This monograph is structured to explore Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art across five chapters, each examining a different facet of his approach and contributions.

Chapter One focuses on the ideological core of Lu Xun's concept of "incorporating." It begins by tracing the formulation of this concept, analyzing its essence, stance, and attitude. The chapter demonstrates how Lu Xun's development of this concept was deeply intertwined with the social currents of the late Qing and early Republican eras, his personal formative experiences, and the evolution of his scholarly thought. It also identifies the ideological foundation of his "incorporating" as a means of enlightening the masses, awakening the 'slumbering nation,' and aspiring to forge a 'new humanity.' This was achieved through the 'borrowing' of cultural, literary, and artistic forms, which served as vehicles for intellectual enlightenment.

Chapter Two examines Lu Xun's introduction of the term "fine art" and his efforts to promote it within the domestic context. As a cultural official in the Ministry of Education, Lu Xun propagated a vision for "fine art" that incorporated Western concepts of art morphology, classification systems, and functional positioning. His initiatives ranged from advocating for the establishment of art galleries to organizing art exhibitions, creating incentive schemes, and founding literary research institutions. He also focused on preserving traditional art forms while promoting imported foreign artworks, as well as cultural relics conservation and newspaper editing. Lu Xun's commitment to art advocacy and education centered on 'aesthetic cultivation,' which he pursued through a combination of theoretical and practical measures. These included collecting and researching Chinese and foreign artworks, writing art criticism, and publishing articles on art theory.

Chapter Three delves into the practical methods Lu Xun used to introduce foreign art. Not only did he collect and organize numerous foreign artworks, but he also published these works in magazines, edited collections of foreign art, translated foreign art theory, and organized exhibitions.

Additionally, Lu Xun invited Japanese instructors to conduct woodcut workshops, emphasizing the promotion of artistic forms like ‘creative woodcuts’ and ‘book illustrations.’ Through these efforts, he played a pivotal role in “nurturing” and fostering young woodcut printmakers.

Chapter Four explores the artistic concepts Lu Xun introduced through his work with foreign art. The key concepts include: 1) An artistic philosophy centered on ‘illuminating the human heart,’ advocating for the ‘exaltation of individual spirit’ and the ‘beauty of strength.’ Lu Xun believed that art possessed qualities capable of directly influencing thoughts, soul, and disposition. 2) The ‘art for life’ perspective, where Lu Xun drew from the works of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Kant, and Shirakawa Hakuson, offering two contrasting views: the ‘usefulness of uselessness’ (aesthetic autonomy) and the ‘unexpected usefulness’ (aesthetic utilitarianism). Lu Xun’s aim was to balance artistic autonomy with practical functionality, forging a new perspective on artistic creation that both “engaged with life and approached art.” 3) The Materialist Historical View of Art. By the late 1920s, Lu Xun began to incorporate Marxist perspectives on literature and art, developing his own materialist historical view through revolutionary practice. This perspective examined the relationship between art and politics, realism and modern artistic methods, and art’s connection to the masses, alongside Lu Xun’s distinct perspectives.

Chapter Five analyzes Lu Xun’s practice of art criticism within the framework of his “incorporating.” While promoting foreign artworks, Lu Xun also engaged in critical examination, addressing not only the subject matter and artistic language of the works but also the spiritual character of artistic creation. His criticism extended to issues concerning artists, audiences, and modes of dissemination. For clarity, this chapter examines Lu Xun’s art criticism through three distinct lenses: his woodcut creations, book illustrations, and cartoons, each offering insight into his views on the art world.

This structure allows for a thorough exploration of Lu Xun’s multifaceted engagement with foreign art, offering both a historical overview and a critical examination of his lasting influence on the development of Chinese art and its integration with global artistic movements.

Chapter 1

“Incorporating”: Its idea generation and the appeal of thought enlightenment

The doctrine of “borrowing,” a renowned concept introduced by Lu Xun, originated in his essay *The Doctrine of Borrowing*, published on June 7, 1934, in *China Daily · Trends*. Signed under the pseudonym Huo Chong, this essay, though brief at around 1,300 words, provides a concise encapsulation of Lu Xun’s stance, attitude, and methodology regarding the treatment of both Chinese and foreign cultural heritage. Although it is not an exhaustive theoretical treatise, the essay holds significant scholarly value by offering insights into Lu Xun’s cultural philosophy.

It is important to note that the concept of “incorporating” was not entirely novel to Lu Xun. As pointed out by Sun Yu, similar ideas were previously addressed by Japanese scholar Fukuza-wa Yukichi in his discussion of modern Japanese culture. Furthermore, the concept resonates with remarks made by Nikolai Gogol in 1856 (Gogol, 2009), indicating that scholarly discourse on “incorporating” has been a long-standing topic. The principal theoretical contributions on this subject can be categorized into several key areas:

1. **Sino-foreign Cultural Exchange:** One of the main contributions to the discussion of “incorporating” is the analysis of the perspectives and attitudes surrounding it, especially in the context of Sino-foreign cultural exchange. Scholars have emphasized the need to distinguish the concept of “incorporating” from opposing positions such as ‘isolationism,’ ‘passive acceptance,’ and ‘complete Westernisation.’ In this regard, it is crucial to clarify the objectives and methodologies of “incorporating” (Shencheng, 2001).

2. **Literary and Artistic Philosophy:** Another significant theoretical contribution is the application of the “borrowing approach” as a literary and artistic philosophy. This approach has been used to conduct a thorough analysis of Lu Xun’s literary works, particularly examining the connections between his literary output and foreign literature.

3. **Practical Application of Incorporating:** From a historical perspective, scholars have analyzed Lu Xun’s process and achievements in introducing and translating foreign literature, stressing that the practice of “incorporating” is not a mere slogan but a reflection of practical experience (Huang, 1991). This perspective underlines the tangible outcomes of Lu Xun’s intellectual and artistic endeavors.

4. **Cultural and Intellectual History:** Finally, the value and significance of “incorporating” within the context of modern Chinese cultural history have been explored. This analysis highlights how Lu Xun’s “incorporating” approach fits into broader intellectual currents and contributed to the cultural development of modern China (Guanglian et al., 2002).

Building on these prior scholarly contributions, this chapter will explore the origins and intellectual genesis of the “incorporating” discourse, particularly examining its connotations and underlying attitudes. The chapter will also investigate how Lu Xun’s approach, grounded in Enlightenment ideals, aimed to awaken the ‘slumbering nation.’ His methodology of using culture, literature, and fine arts as tools for intellectual enlightenment reveals a deliberate effort to use foreign and domestic cultural forms for the broader goal of national awakening. This approach reflects Lu Xun’s belief in the transformative power of art and literature, which he saw as essential for the intellectual and cultural reformation of China.

1.1. The advocacy, attitude and intellectual origins of the ‘Incorporating’ approach

1.1.1. The proposal of the ‘Incorporating’ approach

Lu Xun’s essay ‘Incorporating’ was written on 4 June 1934 and included in the collection *Miscellaneous Essays from the Qiejie Pavilion* (《且介亭杂文》). This piece was penned in response to the prevailing ‘Exportism (送去主义)’ of the time, the imperialist ‘Doctrine of Receiving’ and China’s former policy of ‘Isolationism (闭关主义)’. In 1933, Lu Xun successively authored essays such as *Retention, A Further Discussion on Reservation, The Empty Name Rebuttal* (《“有名无实”的反驳》) and *Superficial Understanding* (《不求甚解》). He argued that the ‘Doctrine of Surrender’ constituted a servile foreign-flattering practice that sacrificed national and ethnic interests. Lu Xun (1981)⁸ asserted that beyond ‘surrendering’ in accordance with the principle of reciprocity, ‘one must also “Incorporate” – this is the “Incorporating”’. Lu Xun contended that ‘China has long adhered to what might be termed “isolationism” – refusing to engage with the outside world while barring others from entering. Since the gates were forced open by gunpowder, it has encountered a series of setbacks, and now finds itself embracing a policy of “Exportism”’. Lu Xun (1981)⁹ observed that ‘China has long adhered to what might be termed “isolationism” – refusing to engage outwardly while barring others from entering. Since the gates were forced open by gunpowder, it has encountered a series of setbacks, culminating in the present state of “Exportism”’. Evidently, “Exportism” emerged as the consequence of “Isolationism” having failed.

In his essay *Incorporating*, Lu Xun incisively pointed out that the Nationalist Government’s unreserved ‘generosity’ in practising the ‘Exportism’ was not merely cultural – advocating the “export” of ‘national treasures’ boasting of foreign acclaim, and extolling the ‘glory of the nation’ – but essentially a self-deceptive charade. The material Exportism, taking coal as an example, meant that if China’s “abundant” coal was “generously” ‘given away’ as a form of self-sacrifice, “several centuries hence,” it would be entirely depleted, leaving “our descendants” to suffer the consequences. The consequences are unthinkable: the Chinese nation’s ‘abundant’ material “foundation” would vanish into thin air. Our descendants would be reduced to kowtowing to imperial powers, begging for ‘leftovers and scraps’ and waiting for others’ charity. Such ‘Exportism’ is, in essence, an act of treason.

Bestowing (送来主义) is a pejorative term coined by Lu Xun. “Bestowing” essentially means “tossing away”. While ostensibly motivated by friendship, as a gift or act of assistance, this policy carries overtones of aggression and a certain degree of deceit. Lu Xun (1981)¹⁰ pointed out that the Western powers successively “delivered” items such as British opium, German scrap firearms, French perfumes, American films, and various Japanese trinkets bearing the label “entirely national goods”. “But we were terrified by these ‘delivered’ items” · “so even the clear-headed youth developed a dread of foreign goods”. Why? Because what the Western powers ‘bestowed’ upon us were obsolete, toxic and harmful goods – imposed through the strong bullying the weak, and often with malicious intent. These were things people did not need, yet were forced to accept. In essence, the “gift” was merely a pretext for plunder, a ‘cover’ for military aggression and economic exploitation.

⁸ Lu Xun, “Incorporating”

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

From “Isolationism” to “Exportism”, and the “Bestowing” of Western powers, in response to various aberrations and profound historical lessons, Lu Xun decisively proposed “incorporating”, advocating that we “exercise our intellect, open our eyes, and take what we need ourselves” (Xun, 1981). In short, “we shall take it ourselves!” Lu Xun’s ‘Incorporating’ articulates his personal stance and perspective, clarifying how to approach the literary and artistic heritage of both China and the West. He maintained that ‘without taking, people cannot become new individuals; without taking, literature and art cannot become new literature and art’ (Xun, 1981). Lu Xun’s “taking” was aimed at forging ‘new individuals’ and creating ‘new literature and art’.

1.1.2. The attitude of ‘Incorporating’

In his essay ‘Incorporating,’ Lu Xun (1981)¹¹ contends that ‘according to the etiquette of reciprocity, alongside “giving,” one must also “take” – and do so with neither arrogance nor servility’. Foremost, one must dare to ‘take.’ In Lu Xun’s view, ‘isolationism,’ ‘self-enclosure,’ and ‘the arrogance of the Night King’ all stem from a lack of self-confidence. Lu Xun extolled the ‘Han-Tang spirit,’ believing that the Han and Tang peoples’ tradition of embracing foreign cultures without inhibition or rejection demonstrated a ‘broad-minded confidence.’ ‘When adopting foreign elements, they treated them as if they had been captured, freely utilising them without reservation’. The rationale behind ‘isolationism’ is ‘fear of the foreign’ and ‘rejection of the foreign.’ Lu Xun likened it to a ‘deaf and dumb’ policy, incisively pointing out that ‘the aged nation burrows deep within rigid traditions, refusing to reform, decaying to the point of utter exhaustion, ready to tear itself apart – thus allowing fresh forces from outside to enter with ease’. Therefore, on the issue of national cultural heritage, Lu Xun opposed ‘self-imposed confinement’ and advocated ‘facing the world’, urging the courage to “adopt”. He believed: ‘First and foremost, adopt without hesitation!’. First and foremost, one must possess the spirit to “borrow”. In the process of “borrowing”, we must avoid falling into three erroneous attitudes: the first being “hesitating to step through the door”. Lu Xun (1981)¹² pointed out that ‘hesitating to step through the door’ is a sign of “weakness”. ‘If one opposes the former owner of this house yet fears being tainted by his possessions, hesitating to step through the door is weakness’.

This sort of “coward” dares not enter the door because of “timidity” and “fear”, thus choosing evasion and refusing to confront the issue, thereby exposing their own feeble character. The second erroneous attitude is to “set fire to it all”. Lu Xun believed that such people, though “preserving their own integrity”, are “fools”. This ‘foolish’ act of ‘setting fire to everything’ is fundamentally an expression of ‘total negation’ and ‘closed-door policy’. The third erroneous attitude is ‘accepting everything’. Lu Xun (1981)¹³ states: ‘Because they originally admired the former owner of the house, and now accept everything, happily squeezing into the bedroom to inhale the remaining opium, they are naturally even more worthless’. This sort of “waste” willingly accepts everything, its actions clearly manifesting a “capitulationist” and “uncritical acceptance” stance. Through his portrayal of these three archetypes embodying extreme errors, Lu Xun starkly delineates his own position: First, the “coward”. A representative of blind phobia, these “living beings” are terrified by

¹¹ Lu Xun, “Incorporating”

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

“foreign goods” and feel “panic” towards anything external. They are utterly incapable of ‘exercising their brains’ or ‘casting their eyes wide’; lacking courage, they dare not ‘take matters into their own hands’. Second, the ‘foolish blockhead’. Contrasting with the weakling, this is the archetype of ‘blanket rejection’ and ‘exclusionism’. Third, the ‘useless waste’. Standing in stark opposition to the foolish blockhead, this represents the ‘surrenderism’ of ‘blanket acceptance’. None of these three types possess the qualities required of the ‘new man’ who practises “appropriationism”; none can correctly achieve ‘taking things for themselves’.

Secondly, one must be adept at ‘taking’. ‘Incorporating’ must not be understood literally as unaltered replication, as if everything could be ‘taken’ wholesale. In truth, “taking” is merely the first step. That is to say, we must neither dismiss foreign cultures without cause nor reject them blindly. Lu Xun likened the cultural heritage of China and the West to an old house, arguing that it should not be ‘cremated’ simply because it is aged; an old jacket should not be discarded merely because it is worn out, nor should one continue to live in the house or wear the jacket simply to ‘preserve national treasures.’ The correct approach is to first take it in, understand its nature, and then either refurbish it, inhabit it, or wear it – the aim being to make it serve our purpose. This process inevitably involves elements of inheritance and critique, utilisation and innovation. Hence, Lu Xun (1981) employed terms such as ‘appropriate,’ ‘inherit,’ “select,” ‘delete,’ ‘destroy,’ ‘store,’ ‘absorb,’ and ‘utilise.’ Undoubtedly, the goal was to masterfully ‘put them to my own use.’ To achieve this, Lu Xun repeatedly emphasised the need to ‘exercise one’s intellect and broaden one’s vision,’ to be ‘calm, courageous, discerning, and unselfish’¹⁴. Not only must one be adept at distinguishing the essence from the dross, the honey from the arsenic, but one must also recognise that the dross and arsenic are not entirely worthless, devoid of merit. Nor is there any need to become arrogant and self-important merely because something is a “national treasure”, or to become overly sensitive and insecure simply because it is “imported”.

Lu Xun pointedly observed that we were terrified by the goods “bestowed” on us by imperialist powers: be it British opium, German scrap firearms, French perfumes, American films, or Japanese trinkets bearing the label “Made in Japan”. These “bestow” foreign goods were either toxic like opium or useless like scrap firearms; or, like perfumes with overpowering scents or films with fantastical plots, they terrified people. ‘Even the clear-headed youth developed a dread of foreign goods’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁵. ‘Being sent’ is not ‘taking’; it is something ‘thrown’ at us, not what we need, but rather deliberately imposed by imperialist powers. ‘Taking’ requires ‘exercising one’s brain’ and ‘opening one’s eyes’ to “select” according to one’s own needs; it demands fully exercising one’s own initiative to ‘select’ what is needed.

‘Selective Incorporating’ must be undertaken with a spirit of careful discernment. How should one ‘select’? Lu Xun (1981)¹⁶ maintained that “selection” must be guided by standards and criteria: ‘Upon encountering opium, one ought not to smash it publicly in the privy to demonstrate thoroughgoing revolution, but rather consign it to the dispensary for medicinal purposes... Only the opium pipes and lamps... save for a few specimens destined for the museum, the rest may well be destroyed’. Here, Lu Xun advocates three approaches to ‘selective appropriation’: first, ‘putting to

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

use'; second, 'preserving for storage'; and third, 'destroying'. The essence of 'selection' lies in emphasising the need for critical absorption of foreign cultures, opposing unprincipled 'unconditional acceptance' or 'unconditional rejection'. It advocates absorbing the essence while discarding the dross; the criteria and standards for 'selection' require a dialectical grasp of proportion.

Lu Xun maintained that the purpose and principle of 'selection' is 'to serve my needs'. Therefore, in the process of 'selection', one must differentiate based on whether it can 'serve my needs' and the extent of its usefulness. He vividly illustrated four aspects of how to "select" and 'serve my needs': First, shark's fin. As something beneficial to health without harm, it can be 'consumed like radishes and cabbages, absorbing its "nutrients"'. Opium. Though toxic, it possesses medicinal value. Such substances with both grave harm and significant benefit require careful 'selection'; they must never be 'flung into the privy' and wasted, but rather delivered to the dispensary 'for the treatment of illness' (Xun, 1981)¹⁷. 3. Smoking pipes and oil lamps. These items, being neither toxic nor useful, should not be regarded as 'national treasures.' However, donating a few to a "museum" would be acceptable. The remainder serve no purpose and 'may well be destroyed.' Fourth, concubines. They are appendages of the masters of 'old mansions,' aberrations forced into existence by the old social system. Though they may have some utility, they carry 'more significant, lingering harm.' As 'new people,' we must practise humanitarianism and 'allow them to disperse as they will.'

Regarding the aforementioned 'shark's fin,' 'opium,' 'smoking pipes and lampstands,' and 'concubines,' we must exercise caution in 'possession' and avoid "blind" abandonment. With a cool head and a pragmatic spirit, we should 'appropriate' from our cultural heritage only what serves our needs. Provided they are 'put to use,' items like shark's fin may be consumed without hesitation if they can be assimilated to 'nourish oneself' and 'strengthen the body.' 'While importing as much as possible, we must simultaneously digest and absorb; what is useful is passed on, while the dregs are left to linger in the past.' There is no need to harbour alarmist fears about 'poisoning' when accepting and adopting foreign cultures; such apprehension is, in fact, a manifestation of incompetence and backwardness. We must recognise that absorbing foreign cultures inevitably involves 'influence,' but this "influence" is not necessarily detrimental. As Lu Xun (1981)¹⁸ observed: 'Even if it is Western civilisation, when we can absorb it, it becomes our own. It is as if by eating beef, we ourselves become beef.' We possess the capacity to 'discern' and 'assimilate,' so there is no need to fear foreign 'influence.' In short, we must 'calmly, courageously, discerningly, and unselfishly "take what we need," drawing upon the past and present, East and West, to 'make use of it' according to our requirements.

Adopting an eclectic stance and attitude towards the question of how to introduce foreign art, Lu Xun (1981)¹⁹ offered a vivid and succinct expression in his essay 'A Few Words on Tao Yuanqing's Painting Exhibition': "A certain segment of China's populace today is indeed in a state of considerable distress. ...The world's contemporary currents have long swept in from all sides, yet they remain imprisoned within three millennia of antiquated shackles. Thus they awaken, struggle, rebel – yearning to emerge and participate in the world's endeavours. Let me narrow the scope: the endeavours of literature and art." In the face of the onslaught of foreign literature and art,

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Lu Xun, "A Few Words on the Occasion of Tao Yuanqing's Art Exhibition"

shall we “awaken”, “struggle”, or “rebel”? How shall we “appropriate” foreign literature and art? Lu Xun (1981)²⁰ then pointed out that, on the one hand, “those within the literary and artistic historical sphere should abandon the old yardstick they have long used and mistakenly deemed ‘permanent’, and instead measure the art of each era and each nation with the yardstick inherent to that era and nation”.

On the other hand, ‘the fierce rebellion of new artists startles our senses, yet often commands our respect... forming a new, external shackle worthy of reverence’. In the process of “borrowing” foreign arts, should we abandon our own nation’s inherent artistic value standards and adopt the artistic value traditions of other countries, developing entirely upon others’ foundations? Or should we adopt a “bold rebellion”, completely discarding both Chinese and Western artistic traditions and value concepts, directly absorbing the new artistic trends then emerging in the West? Lu Xun (1981)²¹ deemed both perspectives anachronistic, constituting ‘twofold shackles.’ He advocated that “borrowing” should be ‘free from these twofold shackles,’ insisting that while upholding ‘national character,’ one must grasp both ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign artistic traditions, alongside the global currents of artistic development. ‘Precisely because it converges with the world’s contemporary intellectual currents on both internal and external fronts, yet does not shackle China’s national character; it is ‘neither “zhī hū yě zhě” [classical Chinese formal speech] (之乎者也) nor “Yes” “No” ; it cannot be measured ‘by the Mida ruler’ nor by ‘the Han dynasty’s Li Xian ruler or the Qing dynasty’s construction ruler (汉朝的虑僂尺或清朝的营造尺) ’ ; it is not ‘European script’ but ‘Europeanised prose’ · ‘and must be measured by the psychological yardstick of contemporary Chinese who aspire to participate in world affairs’ (Xun, 1981)²². Evidently, confronting foreign arts and literature entails neither rigid adherence to domestic traditions – the ‘zhī hū yě zhě’ – nor a ‘policy of avoidance’ that shuns absorbing foreign cultures; nor is it the ‘Yes’ and “No” of ‘accepting everything’ or ‘complete Westernisation’ ; In the process of ‘selection’ it is neither measured by the ‘ruler of deliberation’ nor the ‘ruler of construction’ based on domestic artistic standards, nor is it entirely ‘European literature’ adhering to foreign artistic standards. Rather, it is the ‘Europeanised style’ selected with a realistic perspective.

1.1.3. The emergence of the ‘Incorporating’ ideology

The origins of Lu Xun’s appropriative approach to thought stem from multiple factors, encompassing both external societal influences and personal developmental experiences; they involve both his individual perception and understanding of reality, as well as insights gained through the assimilation of others’ ideas, among other elements. Yet at least two aspects cannot be overlooked: on the one hand, the impact of social ideologies prevalent during the late Qing and early Republican periods; on the other, the connection to his personal growth trajectory and the evolution of his academic thought.

Since the Opium War, modern China has faced intense external shocks and influences stemming from the combined forces of Western expansion into the East and the eastward diffusion of Western learning. On an intellectual level, the Chinese people gradually abandoned the notion of

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

their nation as the “Celestial Empire”, instead embracing the principle of “borrowing” – advocating the introduction of foreign artefacts, knowledge, and institutions. This evolved into social trends such as Westernisation and Europhilia during the late Qing dynasty and early Republican era. From Wei Yuan’s pioneering call to ‘learn the barbarian’s advanced techniques to subdue the barbarians’ – advocating the adoption of Western technology to address the Qing government’s industrial backwardness – to the extensive practical application of ‘learning the barbarian’s advanced techniques’ by the Self-Strengthening Movement, represented by figures such as Yixin, Wen Tianxiang, Zeng Guofan, Zuo Zongtang, Li Hongzhang, and others, the Yangwu Movement extensively practised ‘learning from the barbarians’ advanced techniques.’

Its achievements in acquiring ‘techniques’ initiated the process of integrating traditional China with the modern Western world. Subsequently, figures such as Feng Guifen, Guo Songtao, Wang Tao, Xue Fucheng, Zheng Guanying, and Yung Wing recognised the limitations of the Westernisation Movement’s ‘Chinese essence with Western utility’ approach. They advocated prioritising ‘Western affairs’ alongside learning advanced production techniques, proposing to adopt Western learning and transform China through Western civilisation. For instance, Yung Wing asserted: ‘By harnessing Western civilisation’s scholarship to reform Eastern culture, we shall surely transform this aged empire into a youthful new China’ (Hong, 1985). On the question of how to reform, after completing his Western education, Yung Wing set forth his grand ambition: ‘Having received this civilised education in my lifetime, I shall endeavour to ensure that those who come after me may also enjoy the same benefits. I shall impart Western learning to China, enabling the nation to progress steadily towards a state of civilisation and prosperity’ (Hong, 1985).

This signified his commitment to overseas education, cultivating Westernised talents to nurture pillars for the nation’s revival. Despite many thinkers like Yung Wing proposing insightful concepts at the time, within the prevailing ideology of ‘Chinese essence with Western utility,’ the Chinese people remained entangled in the arrogant mindset of ‘Western learning originating from China’ and ‘seeking the lost rites in the countryside’ when confronted with Western and Chinese learning. Following the devastating defeat of the Qing government in the First Sino-Japanese War, the nation was plunged into shock. Through profound reflection, the reformists gained deeper insights into Western culture and began to contemplate self-reform in governance, education, and institutional frameworks. Reformist thinker Yan Fu contended that Western learning was not merely the material culture of ‘robust ships and powerful cannons’ – the ‘lower realm of traces’ – but encompassed not only ‘tools’ and ‘uses’ but also “principles” and ‘substance’. This extended to Western social sciences and even political systems. Prominent Hunan reformers Fan Zui and Yi Nai advocated ‘emulating only the West,’ proposing radical Westernisation as the sole path to avert China’s peril. The emergence of such Westernising thought stemmed primarily from the heightened sense of urgency to strengthen the nation and avert disaster brought about by the deepening national crisis. Secondly, large numbers of young students studying abroad, having undergone the intellectual cleansing of European and American influences, ‘gained insight into the universal principles of world evolution, wrote books and established theories to awaken their compatriots’, becoming the main proponents of Westernisation (Lin, 2005).

Since the May Fourth Movement, a new generation of intellectuals represented by Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Lu Xun, and Zhou Zuoren possessed conditions unavailable to their predecessors such as Yan Fu, Zhang Taiyan, and Liang Qichao. Having studied abroad, they had firsthand experience

of foreign cultures and a relatively direct understanding of the state of modern civilisation in Japan and the West. This held significant implications for the cultural vision and choices of these pioneering enlightenment thinkers during their formative period. ‘Europeanisation’ was a term frequently employed by the May Fourth generation of intellectuals. In his essay ‘National Essence and Europeanisation,’ Zhou Zuo (1996) articulated his stance on the matter: ‘We welcome Europeanisation because we delight in the arrival of a fresh air that we may enjoy, generating new vitality. It is not something to be injected into our veins to replace our very blood’. Moreover, take Chen Duxiu as an example. He was proficient in Japanese, English, and French, and had studied political science, literary studies, the history of science, and law. He particularly enjoyed introducing foreign ideas, translating numerous articles that often addressed contemporary issues, frequently using foreign civilisations as a reference point for Chinese problems.

For instance, his translation of French scholar Seignobos’s *History of Modern Civilisation* introduced modern European literary history and promoted the ideas of European scientists, encompassing reflections on how European civilisation might inform solutions to China’s contemporary problems. Chen asserted: “Whether in politics, scholarship, ethics, or literature, Western methods and Chinese methods are fundamentally distinct and absolutely irreconcilable. ...If one resolves to reform, all should adopt the new Western methods, without resorting to the nonsense of “national essence” or “national conditions”... For the old and new methods are like water and fire, ice and charcoal – utterly incompatible. To attempt their coexistence would inevitably produce something neither ox nor horse, failing in both respects.” *The New Youth* magazine, under the stewardship of Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi and others, exhibited two particularly distinctive characteristics in its editorial approach that profoundly influenced the intellectual trajectory of modern China: firstly, its introduction of cultural trends from beyond the borders; secondly, its clear problem-consciousness, recognising the pressing challenges demanding resolution within the nation.

Furthermore, the accompanying trend of Westernisation gradually spread, fundamentally altering the Chinese people’s perception of the West. In his work *Metabolism in Modern Chinese Society*, Mr Chen Xulu (1992) observed that at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, ‘the replacement of the national psychological defences, sustained by traditional consciousness, amidst the upheavals became one of the notable transformations in early 20th-century Chinese society.’ Douglas R. Reynolds, an American scholar, also noted in his work *The New Policy Revolution and Japan* the abrupt transformation in Chinese thought and political systems at that time: “On the eve of the Hundred Days’ Reform in 1898, Chinese thought and institutions rigidly adhered to principles unique to China, rooted in its ancient heritage. A mere twelve years later, by 1910, foreign influences had wrought fundamental transformations in Chinese thought and governmental structures. In their most essential sense, these changes were revolutionary. ... If one compares the thought and institutions of China in 1910 with those of 1925, or indeed with those of China today, one finds a fundamental continuity; they belong to the same sequence of reality.

On the other hand, if one compares 1910 with the beginning of 1898, one finds a marked and widening divergence in both the realms of thought and institutions” (Da and Zhongxian, 1998). In truth, from the late Qing to the early Republican era, the Chinese people’s adoption of Western ideas underwent a transformation far more complex and profound than Mr Ren Da describes – shifting from “form” to “function” · and from “method” to “substance”. On the one hand, the ‘borrowing’ practised by enlightened thinkers during this period often involved new ideas, concepts, and

knowledge transferred via Japan. Although modelled on and benchmarked against the 'West' these were cognitive systems filtered, adjusted, and reframed through Japanese cultural lenses to accommodate Eastern modes of thought. The original intellectual lineage was frequently obscured by the complexities that emerged. To Yan Fu, with his European academic background, such an approach seemed utterly misguided. On the other hand, the further advancement of the 'borrowing' trend from the late Qing to the early Republican era was a product of the fusion of modern Sino-Western cultural clashes.

To some extent, it represented the national revitalisation strategy of certain modern intellectuals amid deepening national crises – an endeavour to introduce Western 'civilisation' to the homeland and thereby transform China's fundamental character. The process of 'introduction' was in fact one of confrontation between Chinese and Western, ancient and modern cultural thought. China's inherent cultural concepts did not collapse overnight; traditionalism often persisted with tenacious vitality through 复古 and conservative intellectual and cultural currents, re-emerging periodically when political opportunities arose. Simultaneously, the relationship between anti-traditionalism and traditionalism itself was intricate and complex. For instance, Zhang Taiyan, a renowned revolutionary figure, was simultaneously a staunch conservative and revivalist; Nor were traditionalists solely fixated on the past. Even advocates of national essence could not ignore the prevailing Westernisation trend in society. They promoted the use of European and American civilisation to reform Chinese social customs, declaring that 'national essence does not obstruct Westernisation' but rather 'assists Westernisation to become more pronounced, not opposing Westernisation to defend itself' (Shouwei, 2005).

Moreover, certain enlightened figures who vehemently opposed tradition during the May Fourth New Culture Movement – despite wishing for tradition to be severed, they were most acutely aware of its enduring presence and power. This ambivalent sentiment found expression in a certain sophisticated intellectual discourse after the New Culture Movement. Take Fu Sini-an, for instance: this Peking University student who had fiercely opposed tradition during the movement adopted a more temperate stance in his later years, defending the 'efficacy of tradition': "Tradition is immortal. It endures, particularly when ways of life remain unchanged. Foreign conquest proves futile. Yet should modes of production transform, ways of life must follow suit; and with such transformation, tradition itself suffers profound strain... Thus we must acknowledge tradition's enduring efficacy while simultaneously devising adaptations to mitigate its impact" (Sinian, 2000). In such a complex intellectual environment, Mr Luo Zhitian (2003) describes it as 'a prominent characteristic of modern China being the multifaceted interpenetration of various temporal and spatial factors from ancient and modern times, both domestic and foreign.' Thus, it can be observed that the "borrowing" trend in modern China manifested distinct aspirations and characteristics across different historical periods. These shifts precisely reflect the close interplay between Sino-Western cultural clashes and the social transformations of modern China.

Lu Xun's 'incorporating' philosophy essentially represents the continuation and development of the modern Chinese 'incorporating' trend that emerged from the late Qing dynasty to the early Republican era. In 1920, Lu Xun wrote to Song Chongyi: "The so-called new intellectual currents, though commonplace abroad, strike terror in China upon arrival. Their proponents, with half-hearted convictions and inconsistent conduct, invariably give rise to abuses – yet the new

currents themselves bear no blame for these evils. Lu Xun (1981)²³ believed that adopting Western innovations would prove beneficial for China's social reform and transformation. From his days studying in Japan, Lu Xun, alongside figures such as Zhou Zuoren, introduced the new European literary and artistic trends of the time. They published magazines, translated novels, and introduced Western doctrines.

The voice of consciousness, once raised, invariably struck a chord in the hearts of the people, clear and illuminating, unlike any ordinary sound. Thereafter, as Xu Shouchang (2015) observed, Lu Xun 'shouted and charged for thirty years', championing "incorporating" Western new trends to 'shout' for cultural enlightenment. Following Yan Fu, Lu Xun undoubtedly became another pivotal figure in comparative Sino-Western cultural studies, with many of his stances and perspectives rooted in Western cultural references and shaped through comparative analysis. The genesis of Lu Xun's 'incorporating' thought was also closely intertwined with his formative experiences and the evolution of his scholarly thought. Within Lu Xun's intellectual development, his exposure to modern 'new learning' and his engagement with 'Western learning' during his studies in Japan proved particularly pivotal. These two influences not only constituted the logical starting point for his cultural and intellectual outlook, but also exerted a direct impact on the subsequent evolution of his scholarly ideas.

At the close of the 19th century, the Qing government implemented the 'New Policies' · aiming to reform the educational system. This initiative introduced Western natural sciences as its foundation, while retaining the Four Books and Five Classics (四书五经) as the core of moral instruction, thereby forming the 'New Learning' (Mengxi, 2008)²⁴. This approach was widely adopted within the teaching systems of various schools. In May 1898, the eighteen-year-old Lu Xun arrived in Nanjing and initially enrolled at the Jiangnan Naval Academy. Dissatisfied with its curriculum, he subsequently transferred to the Mining and Railway School attached to the Jiangnan Military Academy. This institution integrated traditional Confucian studies with Western learning within its new educational framework, constituting the core content of the new learning. Hence Lu Xun remarked (1981)²⁵: It was only at this academy that I learned of subjects such as natural philosophy, mathematics, geography, history, drawing, and physical education. Physiology was not taught, yet we encountered woodblock editions of works like *The New Theory of the Human Body* and *Treatise on Chemical Hygiene*". In his work *Lu Xun's Youth*, Zhou Zuoren (2002a) described Lu Xun as exceptionally diligent and eager for new knowledge. Not only did he copy numerous lecture notes by hand, but he also illustrated and transcribed *Mechanical Drawing*, achieving outstanding results.

Ultimately, he was selected to study in Japan, ranking third in the first class. 'What proved particularly beneficial to him was the subject of geology... The textbook employed was a Chinese translation of *Lyell's Outline of Geology*, titled *A Brief Introduction to Geology*... This imparted knowledge of palaeontology, which proved highly significant in aiding his comprehension of evolutionary

²³ Lu Xun, "Letter to Song Chongyi"

²⁴ Modern 'New Learning' emerged from the convergence of Chinese and Western scholarship since the late Qing dynasty. It was not a natural evolution of traditional Chinese learning but a response to Western influence. As Chinese learning underwent fundamental changes, it incorporated Western ideas, blending both traditions. The term 'Western learning' gained prominence by the late Ming and early Qing periods, while 'new learning' became widely recognized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the Self-Strengthening Movement, 'new learning' was defined by the integration of Western natural sciences with Chinese practical studies.

²⁵ Lu Xun, "Preface to *The Cry*"

theory.'Of particular significance was Lu Xun's transition from studying modern natural sciences to engaging with Western social sciences. During this period, he encountered Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, translated by Yan Fu²⁶, to such an extent that he could almost recite it verbatim. 'Whenever he had a spare moment, he would habitually snack on sesame cakes (倭饼) · peanuts, and chillies while reading Evolution and Ethics' Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, originally titled Evolution and Ethics (《天演论》原名《演化论与伦理学》) · elaborated upon the theory of biological evolution presented in Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. The work was published in Tianjin in December 1897 within the journal *National News Digest* (《国闻汇编》)²⁷.

Yan Fu's translation and commentary on *Evolution and Ethics* was not a straightforward literal rendering but incorporated his own commentary and elaborations. From translation to formal publication, the work took three years to complete. During this period, China suffered the devastating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, plunging the nation into an unprecedented crisis. As a progressive intellectual of the modern era, Yan Fu, while translating and expounding on the theory of evolution, closely linked it to China's realities. He pointed out the laws governing human evolution, warning that failure to revitalise and strengthen the nation would lead to the peril of national extinction and the demise of the race. Following the publication of *On the Evolution and Ethics*, novel concepts and theories such as 'natural evolution' 'struggle for existence' 'natural selection' and 'survival of the fittest' swiftly provoked profound intellectual upheaval. For instance, upon reading the translation, Kang Youwei, leader of the reformist faction, declared Yan Fu 'the foremost translator of Western learning in China'²⁸, extolling him with the praise: 'I have never seen his like' During his studies in Nanjing, Lu Xun immersed himself in *Evolution and Ethics*, experiencing profound inspiration and intellectual upheaval. Evolutionary theory soon became a cornerstone of Lu Xun's early philosophical framework.

In addition to *On the Origin of Species*, Lu Xun managed to acquire and read cover to cover Yan Fu's translations of Spencer's *Principles of Sociology* (《群学肄言》) · Zhen Kexi's *Social Interpretation* (《社会通论》) · Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, and Mill's *System of Logic, Part I*. (《法意》以及《穆勒名学部甲》) Yan Fu, motivated by the imperative to save the nation and its people from peril, introduced Western doctrines and vigorously advocated for reform and strengthening. He highlighted the dangers of isolationism and blind self-confidence, expressed scepticism towards the Westernisation faction's 'new policies' questioned the 'Chinese essence

²⁶ Yan Fu (1853-1921), from Hougou, Fujian, entered the Fuzhou Naval Academy at fourteen and later studied at the Royal Naval College in Britain in 1876. Upon returning, he became Chief Instructor at the Tianjin Naval Academy. From 1896 to 1908, he translated influential works, including Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*, Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, John Stuart Mill's *A System of Logic* and *On Liberty*, Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws*, and others, leaving a lasting impact in China.

²⁷ In his essay "Miscellaneous Notes" from *Morning Flowers Plucked at Dusk*, Lu Xun recalled how reading *The Theory of Evolution* influenced his thinking. He described how, caught up in the trend of reading new books, he bought the Chinese translation of the work, a thick volume priced at five hundred cash. The text, beautifully written, began with Huxley reflecting on the landscape of southern England two thousand years ago, before the Roman general Cato arrived. Lu Xun was struck by Huxley's thoughtfulness and continued reading, encountering ideas like "survival of the fittest," "natural selection," and references to Socrates, Plato, and the Stoics.

²⁸ The publication of *On the Origin of Species* sparked an immense social response. Wu Rulun, a Jinshi from the Tongzhi era, was so impressed by the manuscript that he meticulously copied it and hid it in his pillow. Liang Qichao, after reading it, championed the work and wrote essays inspired by its ideas. Kang Youwei called it "the foremost work on Western learning in China." Within a decade of 1898, over thirty editions of *The Theory of Evolution* were published, reflecting its profound influence.

with Western utilities' approach, and particularly critiqued 'traditional learning' from the perspective of comparative Sino-Western thought and culture²⁹. His ideas profoundly influenced the young Lu Xun. Moreover, Lu Xun read the Reformists' *Shiwubao* and the *Yishuhui Bian*, published by students studying in Japan. *Shiwubao* featured a broad perspective, primarily publishing introductions to European and American legal and political content, while *Yishuhui Bian* aimed to publish renowned European and American legal and political works and introduce Western cultural thought. Lu Xun also read European and American novels compiled and translated by Lin Shu, amongst other works. Influenced by these new ideas and cultural information, his thinking henceforth entered a realm entirely distinct from traditional Chinese culture.

In February 1902, Lu Xun was selected by the Jiangnan Provincial Military Training Office to study in Japan, initially enrolling at Tokyo's Kōbun Gakuin (东京弘文学院). The most notable shift in Lu Xun's intellectual development during his Japanese studies was his mastery of linguistic tools such as Japanese and German. These linguistic proficiencies afforded him more direct and extensive access to foreign cultures, while also granting him the convenience and freedom to comprehend international social currents more swiftly and thoroughly³⁰. It may be said that these linguistic tools opened a window for Lu Xun. Through this window, he not only systematically examined various modern Western political philosophies and social currents, but also gained a panoramic view of the world, connecting the cultural and intellectual landscapes of nations. This enabled him to engage in earnest, profound reflection on his own culture, the human nature of his people, and questions of national character, which he articulated in his essays.

Examining the essays published during Lu Xun's Japanese studies reveals his intellectual synthesis: works like *The History of Man* and *The Teaching of Scientific History* demonstrate his integration of biology, physiology, anthropology, history of science, philosophy, and historiography. Essays such as *On Cultural Bias*, *On the Power of Moroccan Poetry*, and *Refutation of Evil Voices* demonstrate his extensive knowledge of world history, historical philosophy, aesthetics, cultural history, fine arts, literature, folklore, ethics, and religion. Mr Sun Yu once compiled statistics on Lu Xun's translations: "Throughout his life, Lu Xun translated works by over ninety authors from fourteen countries, amounting to more than two hundred titles. Russian works constituted the largest proportion" Lu Xun's collection of Russian materials centred primarily on literary works, encompassing nearly sixty writers and over twenty thinkers. Among these literary works, besides numerous Chinese translations and woodcut illustrations, there were eighty-six Russian-language sources, one hundred and sixty-four Japanese translations, and one hundred and fifty-one German and English translations" (Yu, 2015b).

Evidently, these figures reveal both Lu Xun's intellectual passions and knowledge structure – crucial insights for understanding the origins of his 'incorporating' – while also confirming his close friend Xu Shouchang's assertion that Lu Xun 'truly pioneered the introduction of Europe's

²⁹ Yan Fu launched a scathing critique of the "old learning", pointing out that its three components, the metaphysical principles of Song scholarship, the textual scholarship of Han scholarship, and the literary composition of classical prose, were all "without substance" and "without use", and should be entirely discarded.

³⁰ At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Japan's intellectual sphere witnessed a large-scale introduction and dissemination of diverse Western cultural and political currents. These included Rousseau's concept of natural rights, Spencer's theory of social evolution, Schopenhauer's voluntarism, Nietzsche's philosophy of the Übermensch, Ibsen's individualism, Bakunin's anarchism, and Marx's socialism.

new literary and artistic trends at that time' (Shouchang, 1978). Certain of Lu Xun's ideas emerged from the collision of perspectives during his reading and translation of foreign cultures. He drew immense energy from introducing Western literary works, providing the Chinese people with an intellectual enlightenment that 'converged with the contemporary currents of thought both internally and externally, without stifling China's national character' (Xun, 1981)³¹.

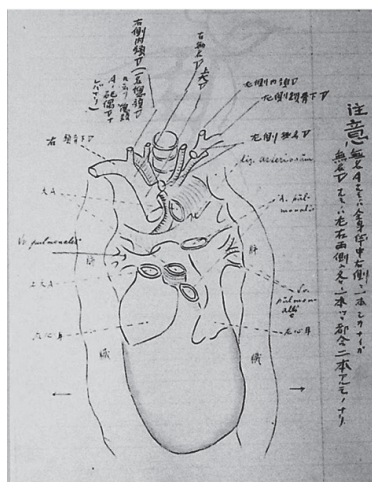


Figure 1. Anatomical diagram.

September 1904 to March 1906 During his studies at Sendai Medical School in Japan, Lu Xun produced these medical notes and cellular diagrams.

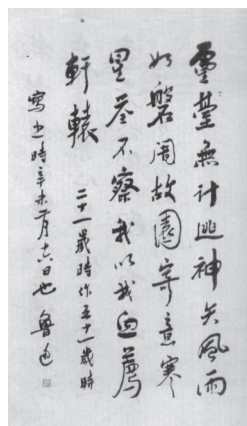


Figure 2. Lu Xun's Poem 'Self-Caption to a Portrait': The spirit's platform cannot evade the divine arrow's flight, Whilst storms rage like iron plates over the darkened homeland. My heart's intent, entrusted to the cold stars, remains unseen; I offer my own blood to the Yellow Emperor's altar.
Written in Japan whilst studying abroad, 1903.

³¹ Lu Xun, "A Few Words on the Occasion of Tao Yuanqing's Art Exhibition"

1.2. From culture and literature to fine arts: the forms of intellectual enlightenment

1.2.1. Critique of national character and intellectual enlightenment

As the most central critique within Lu Xun's thought, his examination of 'national character' has long been a focal point within Lu Xun studies. The overwhelming majority of scholarly work on this subject posits that Lu Xun's critique and analysis of 'national character' aimed to expose its inherent flaws, seeking to transform China's backward state through the reformation of this character. Yet what precisely does 'national character' denote? How did it come into being? Despite relatively intense debates during the 1980s and 1990s, domestic scholars have remained vague on this point, finding it difficult to pinpoint exactly what 'national character' signified in Lu Xun's writings. Some suggest that Lu Xun's 'national character' was both an abstract, overarching concept and possessed the concrete, individual connotations of 'national personality'³². Some have sought to interpret the "national character" in Lu Xun's writings as the collective mental state of the populace, the ruling class's ideology, and the prevailing mindset shaped by this ideology. Yet these two interpretations have coalesced into an all-encompassing concept (Bao, 1982).

American scholar Liu He contends that the concept of 'national character' was first proposed by German Romantic thinkers. Inspired by the notion of 'national spirit,' they emphasised the profound and distinctive traits of the German national character, highlighting its differences from other nations. In contrast, China's concept of 'national character' is foreign in origin, emerging through the combined influence of Western missionaries' introduction of the term and the unique interpretations of the Chinese people (He, 1995). Among China's modern thinkers, Liang Qichao and Yan Fu were the earliest and most influential in addressing the issue of 'national character'. At present, it is difficult for the author to find direct evidence confirming whether Lu Xun was influenced by these two predecessors. In 1902, Liang Qichao published his renowned *New People*, recognising that the corruption plaguing China for millennia persisted into the present primarily due to a servile mentality. He argued that without eradicating this servility, China could not stand among the nations of the world. Thus, he proposed that to 'renew the nation,' one must first 'renew the people,' making the 'renewal of the people' the most urgent task.

His moral revolution theory advocated concepts such as public virtue, rights, and freedom, asserting that the ultimate purpose of morality must be 'benefiting the community.' Without such community-oriented morality, 'there can be no nation.' He promoted public virtue for the collective good, declaring: 'When public virtue is known, new morality emerges, and new citizens emerge.' It must be noted that Liang Qichao, like Yan Fu, was a political reformist. Both Liang's theory of the "new people" and Yan's doctrine of "enlightening the people" served as justifications for opposing the overthrow of the Qing government and advocating instead for a "constitutional monarchy" or "enlightened autocracy". In 1902, when Lu Xun first arrived in Japan, Liang Qichao was vigorously promoting his 'New People' theory.

According to recollections by Lu Xun's close friend Xu Shouchang, Lu Xun frequently contemplated and discussed issues of national character at this time: '(1) What constitutes the

³² Xu Lin observes: 'For Lu Xun, "national character" was naturally an abstract, holistic concept. Yet when treated as an object of Enlightenment, its practical meaning became "national personality" – an individual concept. In Lu Xun's view, the so-called transformation of "national character" entailed altering a blind national collective governed by "national character" into a modern social collective composed of independent individual personalities.'

ideal human nature? (2) What is most lacking in the Chinese nation? (3) Where lies the root of its ailment?’ (Shouchang, 1977). Whether Liang Qichao’s advocacy profoundly influenced Lu Xun’s thinking remains uncertain. Yet Liang Qichao’s influence remained considerable at the time. Zhou Zuoren noted in *Lu Xun’s Youth*: “Lu Xun’s broader exposure to new publications only occurred after his arrival in Japan in February of the Renyin year (1902). ...Although Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were both originally royalists, Liang Ren Gong was ultimately more open-minded in his thinking. His attacks on the Empress Dowager Cixi appeared close to anti-Manchu sentiment, and as he himself stated, “his pen often carried emotion”, which greatly moved the hearts of ordinary young people, thus giving him considerable influence. In March of the Gui Mao year (1903), Lu Xun sent me a parcel of books, which included eight volumes of the *Compilation of Qing Public Opinion*, three volumes each of the *New People’s Journal* and *New Fiction*...” (Zuoren, 2002b).

Liang Qichao successively served as editor-in-chief of publications including the *New People’s Journal*, the *Compilation of Public Opinion*, and the *New Fiction*. These periodicals exerted considerable influence not only among students studying in Japan but also played a significant role in disseminating new cultural ideas within modern China. In 1923, Hu Shi wrote that the *Current Affairs Journal*, the *New People’s Journal*, and the *New Youth* represented three distinct eras, demonstrating the profound influence of the *New People’s Journal* at that time (Shih, 1923). As a modern ‘journalist’ of immense impact, Liang not only exerted a wide-reaching and profound influence in disseminating new ideas through his accessible yet impassioned writing, but also infused modern cultural enlightenment with a wealth of fresh intellectual vitality. In his early years, Lu Xun encountered new ideas and culture precisely through these periodicals, yet he never held much regard for Liang, offering considerable criticism.

In ‘*A Few Matters Concerning Mr. Taiyan*’ from *The Last Collection of Essays from the Qiezhong Pavilion*, Lu Xun (1981)³³ remarked: ‘I enjoy reading *Minbao*, but not because of the author’s archaic and abstruse style, which is difficult to decipher, or his discussions of Buddhist doctrine and “universal evolution”. Rather, it is for his struggle against Liang Qichao, who advocated for the preservation of the monarchy...’ It is evident that Lu Xun aligned himself with his teacher Zhang Taiyan, adopting a cultural stance and set of values diametrically opposed to those of Liang Qichao. Indeed, he later repeatedly launched forceful critiques against Liang Qichao’s advocacy of ‘national essence’ and his reverence for Confucius. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Liang Qichao’s theory of the ‘New People’ exerted a profound influence on the enlightenment of modern Chinese cultural thought.

According to Mr Pan Shisheng’s (2002) research, ‘Japan (primarily modern Japan) is a nation intensely preoccupied with debating questions of national character.’ In particular, from the early Meiji period onwards, concepts such as national character, ethnicity, and national spirit became pivotal terms and prevailing discourses within Japan’s cultural sphere. They constituted a common intellectual framework among enlightenment scholars, forming a significant ideological trend that permeated the entire intellectual and cultural landscape. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, China’s intellectual circles, influenced primarily by Japanese thought, gradually began examining the question of the nation’s character (Shisheng, 2002). For instance, in 1916, the journal *New Youth* featured articles discussing this very topic. Chen Duxiu wrote extensively on the subject, advocating integrity, frugality, purity, sincerity, and trustworthiness as counterweights to various

³³ Lu Xun, “Miscellaneous Essays from Qiezhong Pavilion: On Two or Three Matters Concerning Master Taiyan”

social ills. He championed the national spirit and the inherent value of the individual. In *The True Meaning of Life*, Chen Du-xiu observed: “We must contemplate the purpose of our existence and how we ought to live. ... The Confucian principles of rectifying the heart, cultivating oneself, harmonising the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world merely constitute one aspect of human endeavour and achievement; they cannot encompass the entire true meaning of life. If we were to dedicate ourselves solely to sacrificing our own interests for the benefit of others – to live for others rather than for ourselves – this would certainly not constitute the fundamental reason for individual existence...” (Yu, 2013).

Chen Duxiu’s (1987) concept of ‘national character’ originated from the human life force, establishing a form of ‘individualism’ consistent with personal survival and development. The call during the *New Youth* period to ‘destroy Confucianism, destroy Confucian law, destroy national essence, destroy chastity, destroy old ethics (loyalty, filial piety, chastity), destroy old art (Chinese opera), destroy old religion (ghosts and gods), destroy old literature, destroy old politics (privileged rule)’ was, to a certain extent, directed at criticising the national character within the context of traditional culture. Lu Xun’s reflections on ‘national character’ predated his contributions to *New Youth*. Xu Shouchang noted in ‘Lu Xun as I Knew Him’: “In truth, Lu Xun’s outcry did not begin with the May Fourth Movement. His 1903 work *The Spirit of Sparta*, penned at age 23, invoked the righteous courage of foreign warriors to awaken China’s dying national spirit. In 1907, at the age of 27, his works such as *On the Bias of Culture*, *On the Power of Moroccan Poetry*, and *The Grave* all stemmed from his dismay at the superficiality of prevailing New Party thought, which failed to recognise the importance of individuality and the value of genius.

Thus, he cried out in urgent appeal for reform” (Shouchang, 1961). Mr Qian Liqun (1986) contends that ‘Lu Xun’s early writings in Japan, through the shifting focus of his central themes, fully demonstrate his recognition that the national crisis lay in a cultural crisis, and that this cultural crisis stemmed from a crisis of “human hearts” and a crisis of the national “spirit”. This represents a quest moving from the external to the internal: the nation perishes when its people perish, and the people perish when their hearts perish; to save the nation, one must first save the people, and to save the people, one must first save their hearts’. Therefore, the ‘primary imperative’ lies in ‘transforming’ the ‘spirit’ of both the people and the nation (Xun, 1981)³⁴. Influenced by Nietzsche’s doctrine of the “Übermensch” (superman), Lu Xun proposed the concept of the ‘individual,’ emphasising spiritual freedom for the person. He grounded the ‘founding of the nation’ in the spiritual freedom of the individual, maintaining that the foundation of ‘establishing the person’ lies in human conviction.

This, in turn, highlighted the importance of cultural enlightenment in ‘enlightening the people’. Lu Xun stated: ‘Any ignorant and weak populace, however robust or vigorous their physical constitution, can only serve as meaningless material for public display and as spectators. The death of any number from illness need not be regarded as misfortune. Therefore, our foremost task lies in transforming their spirit. At that time, I naturally believed that literature and art were best suited to effect such transformation, and thus I advocated for a literary and artistic movement’ (Xun, 1981)³⁵. In 1906, Lu Xun abandoned medicine for literature, embarking upon the path of cultural salvation for his nation. In his view, the Chinese nation was weak and its people ignorant; only by

³⁴ Lu Xun, “Preface to The Cry”

³⁵ Lu Xun, “Preface to The Cry”

introducing the 'cries of vengeance and rebellion' from progressive writers could the 'oblivious Yellow Race' be enlightened. For instance, in 1907, his essay '*On the Power of Morosic Poetry*' highlighted revolutionary Romantic poets such as the British Byron, the Polish avenger poet Mickiewicz, and the Hungarian Petőfi Sándor. Subsequently, he collaborated with Zhou Zuoren to compile works like 'Foreign Short Stories'. Upon examining Lu Xun's 'Establishing the Individual' philosophy around 1907, one inevitably discerns an undeniable connection between his 'Establish the Nation by First Establishing the Individual' concept – articulated in works like 'On Cultural Bias' – and Liang Qichao's 'New People' ideology advocating enlightening the populace before implementing democracy.

Yet Lu Xun's philosophy fundamentally diverges from Liang's. Lu Xun's (1981)³⁶ assertion that 'the consciousness of the people, the assertion of individuality, a nation of scattered grains – thus, establishing the people precedes establishing the nation' originates from the natural legitimacy of individual freedom and rights, constituting a critique and negation of 'rule by the masses.' In contrast, Liang Qichao maintained that 'only when a nation's customs have been enlightened, its literature flourishes, and its people's wisdom is cultivated, can a parliament be established. To open a parliament at this juncture is to invite chaos.' This approach follows the path of 'enlightened despotism,' taking the 'nation' rather than the "individual" as its point of departure, and reinforcing the notion of 'rule by the masses.' Liang Qichao's theory of the 'new citizen' is founded upon enlightened despotism; concerns for the individual are merely a by-product of his reflections on the fate of the nation and the people. Indeed, he even harboured fears that the liberation of individual freedoms and rights might lead to social disorder (Xinyu, 2013)³⁷.

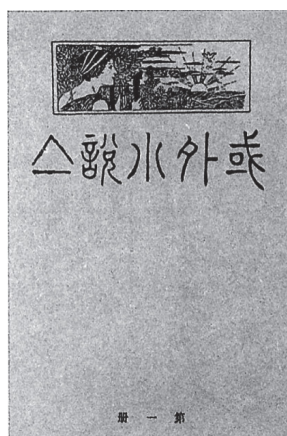


Figure 3. Cover of *Foreign Short Stories*, a two-volume collection translated collaboratively by the brothers Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren. Published at Lu Xun's own expense in Tokyo, Japan, in March and July 1909.

³⁶ Lu Xun, 'On Cultural Bias'

³⁷ On this point, Sun Yat-sen's reservations regarding democratic politics share certain affinities with this perspective; Sun believed that the full emancipation of individual freedoms would render the populace as scattered as loose sand, incapable of forming the cohesive force required for revolution.



Figure 4. The small illustration preceding the volume of *Grave*: After completing the editing of *Grave*, Lu Xun drew a decorative piece to adorn the front of the book.

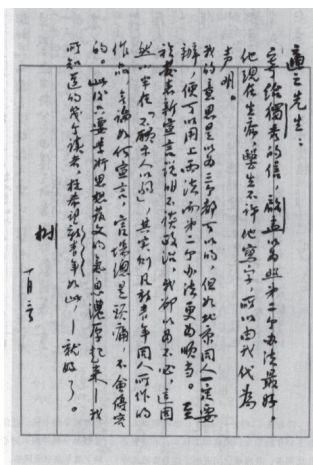


Figure 5. Towards the end of 1920, the *New Youth* group faced a crisis of dissolution. Hu Shi published a declaration in *New Youth* stating that they would ‘refrain from discussing politics’ and sought the opinions of his colleagues. This letter is Lu Xun’s reply.

However, during his period of study in Japan, Lu Xun’s concept of ‘establishing the individual’ – rooted in his critique of ‘national character’ – was neither complete nor fully matured. It was during the New Culture Movement, under the impetus and influence of his colleagues at *New Youth*, that this idea truly reached maturity, becoming enriched and substantiated. Having undergone profound cultural reflection in the wake of the lessons from the Xinhai Revolution, the cultural pioneers of *New Youth* integrated ‘saving the nation’ with ‘establishing the individual.’ They combined the national liberation struggle against imperialist aggression with the task of liberating humanity

from autocratic traditions, uniting individualism with national rejuvenation and social transformation. They vigorously advocated evolutionary theory, humanitarianism, commoner consciousness, and ethical revolution, demanding a 're-evaluation of all values.' Such re-evaluation requires a standard. What should this standard be? Hu Shih's assertion that 'establishing the individual' equates to saving the nation fundamentally aligns with Lu Xun's principle that 'to establish the nation, one must first establish the individual.'

Hu Shih's (1998) works including 'Organising National Heritage and "Exorcising Ghosts"', 'Let Us All Take a Good Look in the Mirror', 'Painful Memories and Reflection', 'Faith and Reflection', 'Further Reflections on Faith and Reflection', 'Immortality – My Religion' Ibsenism, The Question of Chastity, My Views on Funeral Reform, and The Nation's Ruin Lies in Clinging to Pretence of Stability, among numerous other writings, profoundly exposed 'the grave sins of our ancestors and ourselves', advocating for thorough 'ghost-busting' and 'demon-hunting' within China's old civilisation, which was 'riddled with ghostly influences'. Hu Shi's 'The Biography of Mr. Almost' pinpointed the ailments of the Chinese character with remarkable precision. Though not as profound as 'The True Story of Ah Q,' it remains a significant work in the genre of exposing national weaknesses.

Regarding Lu Xun's involvement with New Youth, Zhou Zuoren (2002) observed: Thus his foray into fiction was not to advance the vernacular movement, but primarily to overthrow feudal society and its morality – continuing the literary campaign of New Life, albeit now employing vernacular for convenience. His endorsement of the literary revolution was unquestionable, 34 yet he felt it held little significance unless coupled with an ideological revolution..." Prior to joining New Youth, Lu Xun spent nearly a decade in a 'lonely' and 'iron house' filled with 'groundless sorrow,' passing his days in "silent" and 'numbing' contemplation through the collation of ancient texts and inscriptions, and the study of Buddhist scriptures.

Yet the intense fire of his long-standing reflections on China's ailing society never truly died out. In 1918, Lu Xun published his first work, *Diary of a Madman*, in *New Youth*, delivering the most scathing critique of China's outdated moral codes and traditional civilisation. This marked the beginning of an unstoppable literary force, with works such as *Kong Yiji*, *Medicine*, *Tomorrow*, *Hometown*, and *The True Story of Ah Q* emerged – a series of cries from within the 'iron house.' With profoundly poignant prose, he portrayed pitiable commoners like Kong Yiji, Yuntu, Hua Laozhan, Shan Si's wife, Chen Shicheng, and Ah Q, expressing both sorrow for their misfortune and anger at their passivity. The chronic ailments of the national 'mediocre masses' reflected the latent pain of a nation within a "cannibalistic" society. Regarding Lu Xun's achievements during the May Fourth era, his colleague Qian Xuantong (1999) from *New Youth* remarked: "His historical scrutiny and social observation possess an exceptionally keen insight, capable of exposing the deep-seated ailments of Chinese society. This is evident in his novels such as *The Diary of a Madman*, *The True Story of Ah Q*, and *Medicine*, as well as in his Essays in *New Youth*. Such writings, like a skilled physician's diagnosis, provide the basis for prescribing the right remedy. They are of immense value for reforming society."

Examining the "cannibalistic" perpetrators within Lu Xun's depiction of society, Mr Li Xinyu (2013) contends that they essentially stem from two primary sources: 'one originating from society; the other from the inner self. The former constitutes a social organisational and normative system founded upon despotic politics and ethical principles, built upon an inhuman foundation and underpinned by material factors. The latter constitutes a corresponding conceptual existence – a value system likewise founded upon inhuman principles, an intangible, invisible "cannibalistic

software”. Therefore, ‘Establishing humanity’ necessitates endeavour in both these realms: first, the transformation of the soul – targeting the inner world of the individual; second, the transformation of the social environment – targeting the external world. In Lu Xun’s view, the purpose of criticising ‘national character’ lay in ‘establishing humanity’. The method lies in ‘intellectual enlightenment’. In 1933, in ‘How I Began Writing Fiction’, Lu Xun (1981)³⁸ stated: “I still hold to the “enlightenment ideology” of over a decade ago, believing that literature must be “for life” and must strive to improve life. I deeply detest the former practice of labelling fiction as “leisure reading”, and regarding “art for art’s sake” as merely a new euphemism for “pastime”. Hence, my subject matter is largely drawn from the unfortunate souls of a diseased society, with the intent of exposing suffering and drawing attention to the need for healing.”

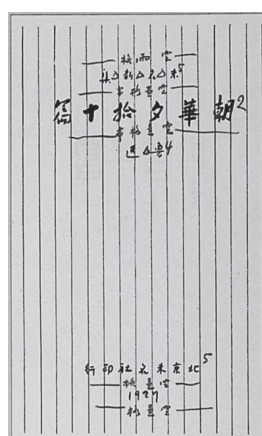


Figure 6. Preface to *Morning Flowers Plucked at Dusk* This volume is a collection of essays by Lu Xun, comprising ten prose pieces. Published by Beijing’s Wuming Press in September 1928.

Enlightenment and national salvation were the two major themes through which domestic scholars in the 1980s summarised the May Fourth New Culture Movement. In his work *Essays on Modern Chinese Intellectual History*, Mr Li Zehou delved deeply into the ‘dual variation’ of enlightenment and national salvation: on the one hand, he revealed the conflict between enlightenment and national salvation, arguing that the latter overpowered the former; on the other hand, he maintained that the very goal of enlightenment was national salvation³⁹. Mr Li Xinyu (2013) raised doubts on this point, arguing: ‘Whilst Mr Li Zehou recognised the relationship between

³⁸ Lu Xun, “How I Began Writing Fiction”

³⁹ Li Zehou noted: “Although the self-consciousness of the New Culture Movement was cultural rather than political, its aim was the transformation of national character and the destruction of old traditions. It placed the foundation of social progress in ideological re-education and democratic enlightenment work. Yet from its inception, it explicitly contained or implicitly harboured political elements and factors. As evidenced by Chen Duxiu’s aforementioned words, this ‘final awakening of consciousness’ remained directed towards the transformation and advancement of the nation, society, and the collective. That is to say, the objectives of enlightenment, cultural reform, and the discarding of tradition were still for the sake of the nation and the people, still aimed at altering China’s political landscape and societal appearance. It remained inseparable both from the Chinese literati tradition of ‘regarding the world as one’s responsibility’ and from the central theme of modern China’s resistance to foreign aggression and pursuit of prosperity and strength.

enlightenment and national salvation in the May Fourth New Culture Movement, it remains perplexing that if the goal of enlightenment was national salvation, where exactly does the notion of “overwhelming” come into play? Regrettably, Mr Li Zehou (1987) did not elaborate further. Mr Wang Hui (1989) has addressed this point, arguing that the inevitable reason for national salvation overshadowing enlightenment lies in the fact that: ‘Fundamentally, Chinese enlightenment thought has always been a “secondary theme” to the main melody of Chinese nationalism. It lacks the capacity to constitute an equal and independent theme within the so-called “double variation”’.

But the question remains: was the goal of enlightenment ultimately the individual or the nation? Was it the emancipation of the people or the salvation of the nation? This is a matter that touches upon whether there has been a misunderstanding of the May Fourth Movement. Taking Lu Xun himself as an example, the starting point and fundamental purpose of his intellectual enlightenment during the May Fourth New Culture Movement was primarily ‘establishing the individual’: his reflections on ethical issues, Confucianism, marriage, chastity, father-son relations, and language reform were grounded in questions of human existence. Even when connected to national salvation, these were not directly linked.

Take the issue of chastity as an example. In 1919, Lu Xun published ‘*My Views on Virtuous Women* (烈女)’ posing a series of questions concerning the misfortunes of Chinese women (Xun, 1919). First, ‘How do women who are not chaste and loyal harm the nation?’; second, ‘Why does the responsibility for saving the world rest entirely upon women?’; third, ‘What effect does honouring them achieve?’ Thus, from these phenomena, he repeatedly probed: ‘Is chastity and loyalty difficult? The answer is, very difficult’; ‘Is chastity and loyalty painful? The answer is, very painful’; ‘Is one free from pain without chastity and loyalty? The answer is, still very painful’; “Do women themselves willingly embrace chastity and loyalty? The answer: “They do not wish to.” From this, it was discerned that traditional morality – which ‘benefits neither self nor others, serves no purpose for society or the nation, and holds no meaning for the future of human life – has now lost its *raison d’être* and value”, warranting vigorous criticism.

Almost simultaneously, Hu Shih (1996) penned ‘*The Question of Chastity*’ asserting that ‘this custom of guarding chastity for one’s betrothed and martyring oneself for it is, first, utterly unreasonable; second, profoundly unequal. The root of the problem lies in the failure of traditional culture, wherein men and women were never accorded the status of human beings. The notion that ‘starvation is a minor matter, but loss of virtue is a grave one’ – this view of chastity and the virtuous woman – is nothing but a lie propagated by the outdated morality of traditional culture. At that time, Hu Shi also wrote on family and marital matters, producing works such as *Ibsenism*, *American Women*, *On Women Defiled by Rape*, and *The Most Important Matter in Life*. If ‘*My Views on Chastity and Loyalty*’ overturned the old notions of chastity and loyalty, then in ‘*How We Should Be Fathers Now*’ Lu Xun overturned the hierarchical order of elders and juniors. The hierarchical subordination mindset forged by China’s traditional authoritarian society centred on ‘ritual propriety’ (li), outwardly manifested as the ‘Three Bonds and Five Constants’ – a system Lu Xun likened to “cannibalism”. It suppressed human freedom and individuality by ‘preserving heavenly principle’ while ‘extinguishing human desires’. It resembles ‘an iron house, utterly windowless and nearly impossible to break down, where many people lie fast asleep. Soon they will all suffocate to death, yet they drift from slumber into oblivion without feeling the sorrow of impending death’.

For Lu Xun (2015), ‘now you cry out loudly, startling a few more lucid souls, only to subject this unfortunate minority to the irredeemable agony of impending death’ – this encapsulates the original intent of intellectual enlightenment: the transition from “slumber” to ‘awakening.’ As depicted in the novel *The Withered* and the essay *What Happens After Nora Leaves*, Lu Xun portrays those newly awakened individuals pursuing individualism. Even if this nascent consciousness remains insufficiently lucid, their resistance incomplete, and ultimately doomed to failure, it undeniably represents the new voice of the ‘unfortunate minority’ transitioning from “slumber” to ‘awakening.’ Fundamentally, therefore, breaking free from the shackles of traditional authoritarian culture hinges primarily on ‘establishing the individual’ and awakening ethical consciousness. As Chen Duxiu (1987) aptly observed, ‘Ethical awakening constitutes the ultimate awakening of our final awakening’, with its focus squarely on ‘the discovery of humanity’.

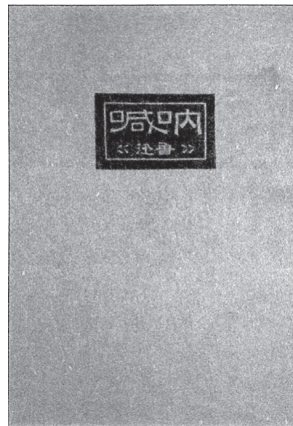


Figure 7. Cover of *The Call Beginning* in 1918, Lu Xun published a series of short stories.

Following Chen Duxiu’s vigorous advocacy, he resolved to compile them into a book. The first edition appeared in August 1923, featuring a cover designed by Lu Xun himself.

Since, for Lu Xun, the purpose of intellectual enlightenment lay in ‘establishing the individual,’ the question arises: how might such enlightenment be achieved? In his ‘On the Bias of Culture,’ Lu Xun (1981) proposed a solution for intellectual enlightenment: first, ‘the awakening of the national consciousness’; second, ‘the transformation of a nation of scattered grains into a nation of individuals.’ The so-called ‘national consciousness’ entails cultivating citizens’ awareness of their rights, involving not merely ‘criticism’ of national character but also its “transformation”; while ‘human nation’ represents an entirely new concept distinct from autocratic societies, one grounded in safeguarding human freedom and rights (Xinyu, 2013). Lu Xun’s early translations – *The Spirit of Sparta*, *On the Power of Morosic Poetry*, and *On the Bias of Culture* – emphasised the value of human strength and the assertion of individuality. He championed Western thinkers like Nietzsche, Byron, Shelley, and Petőfi, praising the romantic spirit of the ‘Morosic school’ that ‘resides in rebellion, finds its purpose in action,’ not for the harmonious sounds of worldly compliance, but to raise their voices in a rallying cry that stirs the hearer to rise up, defying heaven and resisting convention.”

His intent was to provide his compatriots with a reference point for striving towards their own liberation and the nation's rebirth. For even then, Lu Xun recognised that the enlightenment of the people could draw nourishment from foreign arts and literature. 'During our studies in Japan, we harboured a vague hope: that literature and art could transform character and reshape society. This conviction naturally led us to consider introducing new foreign literature' (Xun, 1981). The Enlightenment thought of modern Chinese intellectuals was closely linked to their overseas studies, their "opening their eyes to the world", and their introduction of novel ideas and perspectives from foreign lands. On 5 October 1916, Chen Duxiu wrote to Hu Shi in America: 'I request you to select several publications from American books and periodicals, detailing their authors, places of purchase, and prices for publication in *The Youth*, thereby introducing them to the student community. This constitutes a vital strategy for importing civilisation' (Duxiu, 1916)⁴⁰. Under Chen Duxiu's editorship, *New Youth* published numerous translated works from abroad: Hu Shi's translations of Russian author Taliachev's *The Duel* and French author Maupassant's short story *The Two Fishermen*; Chen Duxiu's translation of *A Discussion on Modern European Literary History*; Zhou Zuoren's translation of British author Campbell's *The Maturity of Love*; and Gao Yihan's *Optimism and Life*. Liu Shuya's *The Philosophy of Bergson* and *The American Spirit of Freedom*, Liu Ban'nong's adaptations of Western poetry, Ma Junwu's introductions to Western thought, and Lu Xun's review of Mushanokōji Saneatsu (武者小路实笃)'s play *A Young Man's Dream*, among others.

These translations, though approaching their subjects from diverse angles, largely conveyed a common message: the liberation of humanity and the transformation of society. During the May Fourth era, Lu Xun translated numerous short stories from Russia, Eastern Europe, and Japan, intending to 'broadcast the suffering and cries of the oppressed, and to stir up the nation's loathing and fury towards the powerful. This was not about reaching out from some "palace of art" to pluck exotic flowers and rare plants from overseas and transplant them into China's artistic garden'. 'Beyond igniting sparks within his own people' he further hoped 'to kindle the flames in the youth, and beyond stirring the masses' righteous indignation, to instil profound courage.' As a 'warrior of the spiritual realm' Lu Xun deeply understood the difficulty of transforming the deeply poisoned minds of the 'common people' Yet the call for and practice of intellectual enlightenment remained a fundamental theme throughout his life. His close friend Xu Shouchang (2015) assessed his critique of 'national character' and his achievements in intellectual enlightenment thus: His dedication to this literary movement – that is, his lifelong, unwavering study, exposure, condemnation, and eradication of the nation's flaws – remained constant for thirty years. Truly, he "devoted himself wholeheartedly until death", which remains one of the reasons for my enduring admiration."

⁴⁰ Chen Duxiu observed: "Since Western civilisation entered our nation, scholarship was initially the force that spurred our awakening; its inadequacy is now evident to all. Next came politics, which recent developments have shown is no longer capable of preserving the old order. Henceforth, the matter that will most profoundly trouble our people's minds will be ethical issues. Should we fail to awaken to this, then the so-called awakening of the past was not thorough; it remains shrouded in confusion and obscurity."

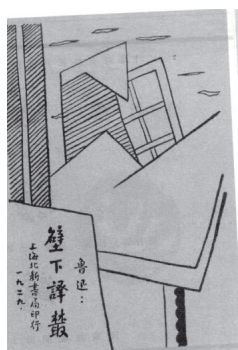


Figure 8. The Wall-Under Translations Collection Cover of Literary Essays, A compilation of 25 literary and artistic essays translated by Lu Xun between 1924 and 1928.

1.2.2. Literature and Art as Forms of Intellectual Enlightenment

In light of his critique of national character, Lu Xun employed literature and art as tools for intellectual enlightenment, recognising their inherent capacity to serve specific objectives. A pivotal reason for the young Lu Xun's abandonment of medicine for literature was his aspiration to heal the nation's spirit through artistic endeavours, hence his advocacy for 'literary and artistic movements'. Lu Xun maintained that literature and art could directly touch the 'human heart', 'stir the soul', and influence one's thoughts, spirit, and disposition, thereby 'cultivating the human intellect'. Lu Xun (1981)⁴¹ advocated 'honouring individuality and championing the spirit, 'establishing the principle of the individual', placing literature and art within the context of human existence, 'believing that literature and art can transform character and reshape society'.

When examining the origins of this literary perspective, several aspects cannot be overlooked. First, prior to Lu Xun, Liang Qichao founded the journal *New Fiction* in Japan, publishing works such as *Preface to Translating Political Fiction from India* and *The Relationship Between Fiction and Social Governance*. He incorporated the social function of fiction into his theory of 'new citizens,' viewing fiction as 'essential to renewing a nation's people, one must renew a nation's fiction' (Qichao, 2006). Liang asserted that fiction wields 'an unfathomable power to influence people' in shaping new ethics, new religion, new customs, new learning and arts, new hearts, and new character. Though Liang may have exaggerated fiction's social impact, his emphasis on its value and promotion through *New Fiction* did exert considerable influence in late Qing China. No evidence currently exists to prove whether Lu Xun was directly influenced by Liang Qichao.

However, during his studies in Japan, Lu Xun was an avid reader of *New Fiction*⁴², suggesting he was undoubtedly intellectually influenced. This is particularly evident in his belief that 'what I then considered most adept at transforming the spirit was literature and art · the novel must "serve life", and indeed improve that life" – this assertion shares common ground and implicit resonance

⁴¹ Lu Xun, 'On Cultural Bias'

⁴² Zhou Zuoren once explained that in 1907, the Zhou brothers conceived the desire to edit a magazine, aiming to promote literature through publication. This was influenced by Liang Qichao's magazine *Xin Xiaoshuo* (New Fiction), which seemed to offer a path for the spiritual self-rescue of the Chinese people. Liang Qichao founded *New Fiction* in 1903, which predominantly featured serialised novels promoting patriotism and national rejuvenation, alongside translated works from abroad. It enjoyed immense popularity, exerting particularly strong appeal among young people.

with Liang Qichao's theory of the social function of fiction (Xun, 1981)⁴³. Secondly, the German aesthetic perspective originating with Kant – which posits literature and art as sources of 'disinterested pleasure' – indirectly influenced Lu Xun via Japanese literary criticism. Thirdly, during the late Qing and early Republican periods, scholars such as Yan Fu and Chen Duxiu championed materialism and science as the primary tools for national salvation and social transformation. However, Lu Xun explicitly opposed this view in his 'On the Teaching of Science History,' arguing that the one-sided, biased veneration of 'knowledge' and "science" since the 19th century inevitably led to material desires obscuring spiritual enlightenment, external substance supplanting inner spirit, and the consequence of 'materialist extremism.'

Thus, Lu Xun (1981)⁴⁴ called for 'upholding the spirit while rejecting materialism, and valuing the individual while rejecting the masses'. He contended: 'The spirit of profound contemplation revives, the inclination towards self-reflection and expression of emotion awakens. Casting off the shackles of material reality and nature, one returns to the realm of one's inherent spirit. Recognising that spiritual phenomena constitute the pinnacle of human existence, their radiance must be illuminated for life to have meaning; and that the exaltation of individual character is the foremost principle of human existence. Yet the character demanded at this time differs significantly from that of the past'(Xun, 1981)⁴⁵. Professor Wang Hui contends: 'Lu Xun's reflection on nineteenth-century European modern civilisation transcended utilitarian social concerns to reach the spiritual plane, where he emphasised the freedom of individual spiritual conviction and existential being. Precisely this reverence for faith and existential liberty led Lu Xun to formulate a more incisive reflective proposition: "Prioritise the individual over the masses" (Hui, 2008).

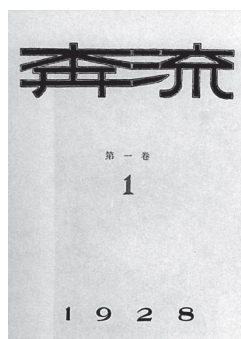


Figure 9. The cover of *The Torrent*, a literary monthly primarily devoted to introducing foreign literature, first published in June 1928. Co-edited by Lu Xun and Yu Dafu.

Zhou Zuoren (1918) stated in *The Literature of Humanity*: 'The new literature we ought to advocate today, to put it simply, is "the literature of humanity". What ought to be rejected is the inhuman literature we oppose.' So where did the theoretical foundations for this new "humanistic

⁴³ Lu Xun, "How I Began Writing Fiction"

⁴⁴ Lu Xun, "On the Bias in Culture"

⁴⁵ Ibid.

literature” originate? Having studied in Japan, the Zhou brothers absorbed progressive Western ideas while engaging in classical Chinese studies, examining history and exploring the human condition. It was through this comparative approach that they sought their conclusions. Arthur Henry Smith’s *The Chinese Character* exerted a significant influence on Lu Xun’s understanding of Chinese society. Even fourteen days before his death, Lu Xun wrote an article appealing for the book to be translated into Chinese, believing it held considerable value for the Chinese people in understanding themselves and the issue of women. Similarly, the theories of British psychologist A.C. Ellis exerted considerable influence upon Zhou Zuoren (Yu, 1997)⁴⁶. The Zhou brothers’ absorption of foreign civilisations was remarkably eclectic.

If one were to sketch a rudimentary thread: Lu Xun progressed from evolutionary theory to Nietzsche, then to Smith and Freud, culminating in Marxist aesthetics; Zhou Zuoren, however, progressed from evolutionary theory to sexual psychology and cultural anthropology, ultimately gravitating towards Greek and ancient Chinese cultures. Lu Xun bore the intellectual imprint of Nietzsche, Smith, and Darwin; Zhou Zuoren, conversely, reflected the temperate humanism of Aries, Friederich, and numerous other Western scholarly traditions. Regarding translations, Lu Xun once remarked, ‘I read little of Anglo-American works and take little liking to them’. Among his extant early library holdings, American literature comprised merely three German-language editions totalling five volumes – including a biography and short story anthology of Edgar Allan Poe – while his inclination leaned more towards Soviet culture. Commencing with *The Collection of Foreign Short Stories*, Lu Xun predominantly selected works depicting ‘the suffering and cries of the oppressed.’ (Ai, 1991).

From Gogol, Gorky, Andreyev, and Alesko to Fadeyev, he translated over two hundred works by more than ninety authors from fourteen nations throughout his life, with Soviet Russian literature constituting the largest proportion. In the realm of fine art, Lu Xun believed that art could express culture, support morality, and rescue the economy. He consistently placed great importance on introducing foreign art, critically “incorporating” it for his own purposes. In summary, these foreign artworks held multifaceted value for Lu Xun: firstly, they revealed the authentic essence of foreign cultures through visual imagery; secondly, they offered opportunities to learn from the aesthetic qualities within the artworks; thirdly, they enabled the effective integration of literature and art, fostering a form of dialogue; and fourthly, they addressed the need to cultivate new artistic styles within China.

⁴⁶ In 1924, Zhou Zuoren stated in his essay ‘Havelock Ellis’s Words’: “Havelock Ellis is the thinker I most admire, though I know little of his life... My first encounter was with his *The New Spirit*, part of the Scots Library series priced at one shilling, later included in America’s Modern Library collection. Next came his *Essays and Assertions*. All three are critiques concerning literary and artistic thought. Additionally, he has specialised works on sexuality, crime, and the study of dreams, each containing his insightful critiques of culture, which are also highly valuable. Yet his greatest work must surely be the six-volume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Such meticulous research might be undertaken by others, but such breadth of vision and depth of thought are truly rare indeed. Though we are laymen in these fields, his writings have yielded considerable benefit. Personally, I can confidently assert they have provided more than any collection of classics combined.”

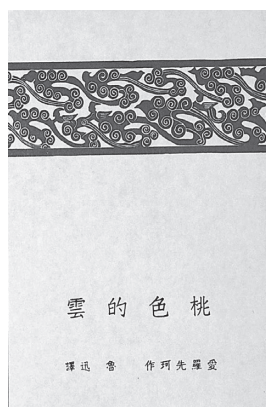


Figure 10. Pink Clouds Cover of a three-act fairy tale written in Japanese by the Russian blind poet Aronov in 1921. Translated by Lu Xun between April and May 1922.

It must be acknowledged that the foreign literary works introduced by Lu Xun were primarily translated via Japanese and German intermediary texts. Consequently, the cultural contexts, translation movements, and prevailing cultural trends in Japan and Germany significantly shaped Lu Xun's intellectual framework and his assessments of foreign cultures. For instance, in the afterword to his translation of Shirakawa Hakuson's *Leaving the Ivory Tower*, Lu Xun (1981)⁴⁷ remarked: My translation of this work is not intended to expose our neighbours' shortcomings for the amusement of my compatriots. China harbours no ambition to "exploit chaos and mock the fallen", nor do I feel charged with the mission of probing other nations' vulnerabilities. Thus, such endeavours are unnecessary. Yet when I witness him lashing out at his own people, the pain seems to pierce me as well...". The courage within Japanese culture to confront and critique itself profoundly inspired Lu Xun, prompting introspection among the Chinese people. Thus, Lu Xun's call to 'seek novel voices not from foreign lands' signified borrowing another nation's fire to cook one's own meat – freeing compatriots from blind confinement within history's cage. Through "incorporating," individuals naturally become 'new people,' and literature and art naturally become 'new literature and art.'

⁴⁷ Lu Xun, "Afterword to "Out of the Ivory Tower"

Chapter 2

The conception and practice of broadcasting ‘Fine Arts’

How was the term “fine art” introduced? What was Lu Xun’s understanding of its essence and connotations? This formed the premise for Lu Xun’s introduction of foreign art. In 1912, Lu Xun served as Chief of the First Section within the Social Education Department of the Ministry of Education, effectively overseeing the nation’s cultural and artistic endeavours. As a cultural official, Lu Xun subsequently published his “Proposed Opinions on the Dissemination of Fine Arts” in 1913. This work disseminated his fundamental understanding of “fine arts” and his vision for its propagation. It stands as one of the earliest systematic studies in China examining the essence, characteristics, and functions of fine arts, possessing significant academic and historical value. On a practical level, Lu Xun actively pursued art promotion and education guided by the principle of “aesthetic education”. He collected and studied Chinese and foreign artworks and art books, wrote art criticism, and published his views on art, demonstrating his refined artistic taste and broad artistic vision.

2.1. The Introduction of the Term “Fine Arts”

As Lu Xun noted, “the term ‘fine arts’ was not used in ancient China.” It does not appear in classical Chinese art theory, where related terms like “arts” (“艺”) and “artistry” (“艺术”) carried meanings quite distinct from our modern conception of “art.” The ancient meaning of “arts” (“艺”) was essentially synonymous with “skills” (“技”), referring to specific technical abilities. The so-called “Six Arts” – ritual, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and mathematics – may be viewed as an expansion of the concept of “arts” (“techniques”). Artists listed in the Twenty-Four Histories were all practitioners of medicine, shamanism, divination, technical arts, or skilled craftsmen, while painters were categorised under the *Biographies of Literary Figures* or *Biographies of Recluses*. “Fine Arts” is a loanword, translated from the English “Art” or “Fine Art”.

The introduction of the term “fine art” was initially closely associated with overseas art exhibitions. In the late Qing dynasty, Wang Tao (1985) travelled to Europe to view art exhibitions, still referring to them as “painting gatherings”: “Beyond their art academies, the English also maintain painting galleries. Throughout the seasons, they host painting gatherings, displaying hundreds of works of varying sizes hundreds of paintings are hung in the gallery for public viewing. Visitors are provided with a catalogue listing each painting’s number, artist, and price, all clearly marked.” The subsequent emergence of the term “fine art” in China stemmed from news of art exhibitions originating in Japan.

On 8 August 1897, the *Shiwubao* published a report entitled “Italy Opens International Art Exhibition” translating an article from the Shinpo newspaper covering the exposition. Inspired by the Universal Art Exhibition, contemporaries viewed “fine art” as a craft capable of reforming and advancing agriculture, commerce, and industry. Painting, previously deemed “useless,” was now seen as a skill with developmental potential., which translated a report on an art exhibition from the Japanese Shinpō newspaper. Inspired by the Universal Art Exhibition, contemporaries in China began to view “fine art” as a craft capable of improving and developing agriculture, commerce, and industry. Painting thus leapt from its former status as “useless” and “self-indulgent” to become a rare treasure for material salvation.

“The study of painting forms the foundation of all learning. The Chinese regard it as useless, yet how can they know that all industrial and commercial products, all instruments of civilisation, depend upon painting for their invention? Industrial and commercial goods are the means of practical utility; instruments of civilisation are the tools of reputation. If painting is not refined, then industrial products will be crude and inferior, difficult to sell, and there will be no way to manage finances. Civilised implements, too, are the very tools nations vie for in this age of mutual competition, and cannot be established by mere substance in this era of mutual contention” (Youwei, 1908).

In 1910, the Nanyang Industrial Exhibition – the first nationwide exposition – established a dedicated art gallery showcasing paintings, carved and inlaid crafts, artistic handicrafts, and decorative arts. This exhibition aimed to “gather the finest products to attract farmers and artisans, using observation as a means of refinement and inspiration as a catalyst for revitalisation” (Report by the Chief..., 1910). It asserted: “Today, all speak of commercial warfare, yet few realise that to prosper in such warfare, one must first master the fine arts. ... Where commerce flourishes, the craftsmanship of its products must be exquisite. Where craftsmanship is exquisite, the foundation of its fine arts must be rich (Record of the Nanyang..., 1993). This explanatory memorandum for constructing an art gallery clearly demonstrates the immense utilitarian value accorded to art in contemporary society. Concurrently, this recognition of art’s practical utility spurred the development of art education. New-style schools of the era progressively introduced drawing and handicraft courses, encompassing not only brush painting, pencil sketching, and watercolour techniques, but also mechanical drawing, pattern design, and practical skills such as woodworking, bamboo crafting, clay modelling, and plaster moulding. New-style schools also advocated holding exhibitions of pupils’ drawing and handicraft work to stimulate refinement in artistic skills. These courses were not established for the cultivation of character or aesthetic education, but rather to train technical personnel for industry. It is thus evident that during the process of Westernisation, the term “fine arts” was not solely associated with spiritual or aesthetic dimensions, but was primarily understood in terms of its practical utility.

When exactly was the term “fine arts” introduced? And from where? In his *Comparative Study of Modern Sino-Japanese Painting Exchange*, Mr Chen Zhenliang notes that “fine arts” was translated via Japanese from German, likely around 1910. Introduced to China in the form of an industrial exhibition (Zhenliang, 2000)⁴⁸. In his essay “Research on ‘Fine Arts’”, Mr Huang Dade (2004) demonstrated through primary historical sources that the term “fine arts” had already appeared in Guangdong newspapers as early as 1904, rapidly gaining recognition and extending its usage within contemporary society. In his essay “A Century of the Eastward Spread of Western ‘Art History’ Studies,” Mr Shao Hong contends that the late Qing and early Republican scholar Wang Guowei (1877–1927), a master of both Chinese and Western learning, was the first to introduce the Japanese-derived term “fine arts” into China (Hong, 2004)⁴⁹. From the research of these three scholars,

⁴⁸ The term “fine arts” was originally a loanword translated from German. In the fourth year of the Meiji era (1871), as Vienna prepared to host the World’s Fair, Prince Rainier of Austria, serving as the exhibition’s governor, issued invitations to governments worldwide. These were accompanied by a German-language appendix detailing the classification and categorisation of exhibits. In November of that year, this note and its appendix were translated into Japanese. The term “fine art” appeared multiple times within it, marking what could be considered its first appearance in Japan. However, it was not until 1910 that the concept was introduced to China through the form of industrial exhibitions, with the term “art gallery” first appearing at the late Qing Dynasty’s Nanyang Industrial Exhibition.

⁴⁹ Shao Hong contends that in 1902, Wang Guowei published his translation *Ethics*, whose glossary appended to the book included the term ‘fine art, 美术’. He further asserts that ‘this marks the first appearance of the Japanese-derived term “美术” in Chinese publications’.

it is certain that the term “fine arts” was introduced to China via Japanese translation.

The early concept of “fine arts” differed from its contemporary understanding. In 1906, Wang Guowei’s (1906) *On Detoxification: Fundamental Treatment for Opium Addiction and Future Educational Considerations* “Fundamental Treatment and Future Educational Considerations” Wang Guowei listed “fine art” alongside “religion” as remedies for “opium addiction.” His conception of “fine art” encompassed not only architecture, painting, and sculpture, but also music and literature, referring should correspond to the Western concept of “Fine Art”. In Lu Xun’s 1913 *Proposed Memorandum on the Dissemination of Fine Arts*, the concept of “fine arts” encompassed not only sculpture and painting, but also music, literature, and theatre. He stated: “It is evident that fine arts refer to the beautification of natural objects through reason and thought. If it conforms to this, then regardless of its external form, it may be termed fine art; thus sculpture, painting, literature, architecture, and music are all examples”.

The term “美术” used by Lu Xun (1913) was the Chinese translation of the English word “fine arts,” which in fact referred to “art.” Around the time of the May Fourth Movement, the English word “Art” (which Lu Xun referred to as “Aite”) was translated both as “art” and as “fine arts”⁵⁰. For instance, in his 1904 commentary on *Dream of the Red Chamber*, Wang Guowei asserted that “poetry, drama, and fiction represent the pinnacle of fine arts,” employing “fine arts” to denote “art” or “artistic expression” while positioning “literature” as subordinate to “fine arts.” In 1917, Jiang Danshu, then teaching at Zhejiang First Normal School, stated in the preface to his *History of Fine Arts*: “Fine arts are matters of artistry, not inherent terms in our nation. Since ancient times, our nation has valued literature over the arts, hence literary matters are recorded while artistic endeavours are not. Arts that approach literature are documented, while arts purely as techniques are not”.

He regarded “fine arts” as a foreign term, preferring not to use “history of painting” or “history of pictures” rather than “History of Painting” was adopted under Japanese influence, presenting “a comprehensive survey of Eastern and Western artistic traditions through both pictorial and historical accounts,” constituting “a distinct national discipline.” Its content chronicled the history of visual arts, categorised into architecture, sculpture, calligraphy and painting, and applied arts. In 1917, Lü Cheng (1917) published “The Revolution in Fine Arts” in Volume 6, Issue 1 of *New Youth*, stating: “All objects that embody beauty constitute art (Art). Among these, painting, sculpture, and architecture must possess a definite form in space, and may be specifically termed Fine Art. This constitutes the conventional distinction.” Here, “Fine Art” is definitively positioned as “visual art,” while literature and music are excluded. On 13 August 1922, in his lecture “Art and Life” delivered at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Liang Qichao (1998) stated: “Three potent tools specialise in stimulating the senses to prevent their dullness: literature, music, and fine art.” Evidently, Liang had already distinguished “fine art” as a distinct discipline from music and literature. After 1920, with the establishment of concepts such as art schools, art periodicals, art galleries, and artworks, the term “fine art” evolved from broad connotations like “the art of beautification,” “aesthetic education,” “aesthetics,” or “artistic expression” towards the precise concept of “figurative art.”

⁵⁰ Chen Zhenliang contends that Lu Xun’s assertion – ‘The term ‘fine art’ was not used in ancient China; its adoption here translates the English ‘art’ or ‘fine art’ – contains an error. This is because the English ‘art’ was not directly rendered as ‘fine art’ in Chinese; rather, the non-English German term “Kunst” was first translated into Japanese as ‘art’.

2.2. Lu Xun's interpretation of "Fine Arts"

In February 1913, Lu Xun published his essay '*Proposed Memorandum on the Dissemination of Fine Arts*' in Volume 1, Issue 1 of the Ministry of Education's Monthly Journal of the Compilation Office. This marked one of the earliest systematic studies in China examining the essence, characteristics, and functions of fine arts, possessing significant academic and historical value. The essay comprises four sections: II. The Categories of Fine Arts; III. The Purpose and Practical Application of Fine Arts; IV. Methods for Disseminating Fine Arts.

When publishing his '*Proposed Memorandum on the Dissemination of Fine Arts*,' Lu Xun was serving as Chief of the First Section of the Social Education Department under the National Government's Ministry of Education, concurrently overseeing the attached Fine Arts Investigation Office. This work was composed within his first six months in office. It constitutes a guiding theoretical outline or overarching operational framework drafted to fulfil the operational requirements of the Social Education Department. Within this text, Lu Xun's exposition of the concept of 'fine arts,' his classification of artistic disciplines, and his articulation of their functions reveal the essence, value systems, and functional positioning derived from Western artistic concepts. This reflects the intellectual form and theoretical level Lu Xun had attained in his early conception of fine arts.

2.2.1. What Constitutes "Fine Art" and Its Classification

Lu Xun (1913) begins this essay by stating: "The term 'fine art' was not used in ancient China. The term employed here is a translation of the English 'art'. Art or fine art. The term 'aite (爱忒)' originates from Greece. Its meaning is 'artistry'." He then explores the fundamental connotations of the concept of fine art from aspects such as artistic creation, conception, and aestheticisation. "Thus, fine art comprises three essential elements: first, the natural world; second, rational thought; third, aestheticisation. Since fine art necessarily possesses these three elements, its boundaries with other domains are strictly defined" (Xun, 1913)

Lu Xun posited that the formation of fine art encompasses three factors: first, the reflection of the objective world; second, the representation of the objective world; and third, the subjective aesthetic creation of art. By synthesising these three elements – natural objects, conceptual reasoning, and aestheticisation – he defined the essence of fine art. He excluded other seemingly related utilitarian crafts from this category, thus his term "fine art" carries the connotation of "beauty," referring specifically to "Fine Art" in the pure sense. In summary, his definition of fine art involves employing "thought and reason" to embellish "natural objects," encompassing sculpture, painting, literature, architecture, and music. The "fine art" discussed by Lu Xun essentially corresponds to what we today refer to as art.

Lu Xun explored the 'classification of fine arts'. The first classification divides fine arts into 'static fine arts', 'dynamic fine arts', 'visual fine arts', 'auditory fine arts', 'mental fine arts', 'formative fine arts', and 'sonic fine arts'. The second classification distinguishes between 'imitative fine arts' and 'original fine arts'. The third classification divides fine art into 'functional art' and 'non-functional art'. This categorisation draws upon morphological perspectives from the history of modern Western art (Jiyao, 2002). The first perspective is that of Plato, who divided the fine arts into static and dynamic arts. The second perspective is that of the French aesthetician Badeau and the German aesthetician Hegel.

Bade (1713–1780) published *The Fine Arts under the Principle of Unity* in 1746. In this work, he defined 'Fine Art' as encompassing painting, sculpture, dance, music, and poetry – essentially

referring to art intended to evoke aesthetic pleasure (Jie, 2008). Bade's classification distinguishes: "the arts of the eye" encompassing painting, sculpture and dance; "the arts of the ear" being music; and "the arts of the heart" being poetry. Hegel, adhering to the aesthetic principle that "beauty is the sensuous manifestation of the idea", delineates the development of fine art into three stages: the symbolic, the classical, and the romantic. Based on differing expressions of artistic consciousness, Hegel identifies varying degrees of material and spiritual expression within fine art.

Lu Xun's views on the classification of fine arts also drew upon the research findings of British aesthetician Colvin concerning the morphology of art. Colvin's article 'The Fine Arts,' published in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, represented the aesthetic perspectives of the psychological, structuralist, and functionalist schools that emerged from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards (Kagan, 1986). Psychological schools categorise art into visual and auditory arts based on the characteristics of perceptual art, yet as this fails to fully encompass the classification function of art, they subsequently propose an alternative taxonomy: 'visual arts', 'auditory arts', and 'imaginative arts'. Structuralist schools classify art into mimetic and non-mimetic art according to the manner in which fine art reflects reality. Structuralists contend that fine art reflects the world through two approaches: representational art and non-representational art. Functional schools categorise art based on its role in social life, distinguishing between applied art and fine art (Guangqian, 2003).



Figure 11. In 1912, the Department of Social Education within the Ministry of Education established a provisional body known as the 'Art Investigation Office' to oversee preparatory matters for the establishment of the National Art Gallery and National Museum. Lu Xun was appointed as its principal officer. This photograph depicts the preparatory office of the Historical Museum.

Almost contemporaneously with Lu Xun, on 15 April 1918, Cai Yuanpei also delineated the classification and scope of fine arts in his Address at the Opening Ceremony of China's First National Academy of Fine Arts: "Fine arts inherently encompass disciplines such as literature, music, architecture, sculpture, and painting. However, literature is typically the preserve of universities of arts, while music is often taught in specialised institutions. Thus, art schools generally focus on the visual arts. Among these visual arts, architecture and sculpture also fall within this scope. Yet

architecture originated from practical needs, and sculpture began as a means of worship; painting alone emerged from the pursuit of pure aesthetic appreciation” (Yuanpei, 1983b). The fine arts as discussed by Cai Yuanpei essentially encompass the scope of today’s art disciplines, whilst he also delineated the functional positioning of different art forms. In 1920, Cai Yuanpei published *The Origin of Fine Arts*, in which he expounded that the concept of fine arts has both a narrow and broad definition. “Fine arts in the narrow sense include architecture, sculpture, painting, and applied arts. The broad sense encompasses not only the aforementioned arts but also literature, music, and dance. Western-authored histories of art employ the narrow sense; aesthetics or art studies employ the broad sense” (Yuanpei, 1920).

2.2.2 The purpose of fine arts and their practical application

In his *‘Opinion on the Proposed Dissemination of Fine Arts,’* Lu Xun (1913) analysed the ‘purpose’ and ‘practical application’ of fine arts. Regarding the “purpose” of fine arts, he contended that while art possesses an aesthetic, non-utilitarian aspect, it also has an aesthetic, utilitarian dimension: “Those who champion beauty maintain that the purpose of fine arts lies solely in the art itself, with no further connection to other matters.” He further noted: “Those who employ it primarily believe that art must benefit the world.” Regarding the “function” of art, Lu Xun (1913) examined it from three perspectives: First, ‘art can manifest culture,’ contending that ‘all art sufficiently reflects the thought of an era and a people.’ Second, ‘art can supplement morality,’ stating that “though the purpose of art does not entirely align with morality... yet it may support morality in governance.

As material civilisation expands, human sentiments increasingly grow superficial; now, by elevating them through beauty and grandeur, noble sentiments endure while base thoughts are suppressed, ensuring national peace without recourse to punishment or exhortation. Thirdly, ‘art can seek aid from economics. Lu Xun recognised relatively early the role of fine art in economic development (though this naturally contradicted his earlier stance of excluding applied arts from the realm of fine art; the categories of fine art he enumerated consistently omitted applied arts). By examining the functions of fine art from cultural, moral, and economic perspectives, Lu Xun elucidated its potential societal impact. These insights retain considerable academic value and theoretical significance to this day.

2.2.3. Methods for disseminating fine arts

The section ‘Methods of Disseminating Fine Arts’ in this article discusses the rationale behind disseminating fine arts and the approaches to doing so. Lu Xun first explains the reason for disseminating fine arts as follows:

The purpose of fine art. Having achieved these three objectives, the fundamental purpose remains to provide enjoyment for the people. The means to realise this purpose must therefore lie in dissemination. By dissemination is meant not keeping it hidden, but transmitting it among the people, bringing it within the reach of the nation’s eyes and ears, thereby revealing the true essence of the arts, awakening the nation’s aesthetic sensibility, and further aiding the emergence of art-ists. The proposed measures are as follows” (Xun, 1913).

Lu Xun employed the term ‘dissemination’, which conveys the modern meaning of ‘propagation’. Lu Xun pointed out that disseminating art prevents works from remaining ‘obscure,’ instead bringing them into the world. This allows the public to gain aesthetic appreciation and cultivate

their spirit through engaging with artistic information. Simultaneously, he hoped to nurture and develop artists with aesthetic sensibilities. Therefore, Lu Xun proposed three approaches to disseminating art: first, ‘building institutions.’ This entails establishing both central and regional art galleries to exhibit ‘artworks owned by the state’; organising diverse art exhibitions to showcase private collections or newly created works by artists; constructing theatres and concert halls to stage new plays and perform contemporary music, enabling audiences to grasp their essence; and founding literary and artistic research societies to organise scholars in studying domestic culture and translating renowned foreign texts. Secondly, the ‘preservation enterprise’. This encompasses safeguarding renowned architecture, steles, murals, sculptures, and picturesque woodlands (natural landscapes), ensuring the protection of historic sites such as the residences of eminent figures, ancestral temples, famous murals, and sculptures, alongside beautiful natural scenery. Thirdly, the ‘Research Initiative’. This involved establishing the Chinese Ancient Music Research Society and the National Literary Arts Research Society. The aim was both to prevent the discontinuation of traditional Chinese music and to collate folk literature, including regional folk songs, proverbs, legends, and fairy tales. In summary, Lu Xun’s multifaceted approach to promoting the arts encompassed advocating for the establishment of art galleries and organising art exhibitions; proposing incentive schemes and founding literary research institutions; championing the preservation of traditional art forms and the dissemination of foreign artistic works; and offering distinctive personal perspectives on cultural relics conservation and newspaper editing.

In his treatise *Proposed Opinions on the Dissemination of Fine Arts*, Lu Xun, whilst influenced by European works on the morphology of art such as those of Plato and Hegel, also formulated his own theoretical framework for fine arts in response to the domestic context. The essay provides detailed exposition on the essence, elements, classification, functions, and dissemination of fine arts, holding considerable theoretical and historical significance within the annals of modern Chinese art history.



Figure 12. In 1912, the Department of Social Education under the Ministry of Education established a provisional division known as the ‘Fine Arts Investigation Office’ to oversee preparatory matters for the National Art Gallery and National Museum. Lu Xun was appointed as its principal officer. This photograph depicts the preparatory office of the Historical Museum.

2.3. Lu Xun's practice of disseminating art as cultural official of the ministry of education

In the first year of the Republic of China (1912), Cai Yuanpei assumed the role of Minister of Education. With numerous tasks awaiting attention, urgent manpower was required. In February of that year, through the introduction of Xu Shouchang, Lu Xun was recommended to Cai Yuanpei and appointed as a staff member of the Provisional Government's Ministry of Education in Nanjing. Two months later, Lu Xun accompanied the Ministry's relocation to Beijing, initially serving as a section officer before becoming head of the first section within the Department of Social Education. The subsequent turbulent political climate led to frequent changes in the Ministry's leadership. Before Lu Xun's departure in 1926, the Ministry had seen 38 changes in the position of Minister of Education and 24 changes in the position of Deputy Minister. In August 1926, Minister of Education Zhang Shizhao unlawfully dissolved Peking Women's Normal University. As a member of the university's maintenance committee, Lu Xun clashed with Zhang over this action and was subsequently dismissed by Zhang in violation of regulations. From 1912 to 1916, Lu Xun served within the Ministry of Education for a total of fourteen years. Lu Xun's primary responsibilities at the Ministry encompassed overseeing social culture and scientific dissemination, specifically: matters pertaining to museums, libraries, art galleries, art exhibitions, literature and art, music, theatre, the investigation and collection of antiquities, and academic affairs concerning botanical gardens (Ying, 1979).



Figure 13. Ministry of Education of the Beiyang Government, 1912

In September 1912, the Ministry of Education established a provisional department, the 'Art Investigation Office', based on the First Section, to prepare for the establishment of the National Art Gallery and National Museum. The 'Outline of the Ministry of Education's Affiliated Fine Arts Office' defined its primary research scope: - The history of domestic fine arts; - The preservation status of ancient artworks; - The locations of extant artworks; - The history of foreign fine arts; - A catalogue of essential Chinese art reproductions; - A catalogue of essential extant works by Chinese artists; - The sequence and methods of collection (Xun, 1912). As head of the first department, Lu Xun participated in the leadership of the "Art Investigation Office".

From his appointment as Minister of Education, Cai Yuanpei integrated aesthetic education into the educational system, elevating its status within pedagogy, urging that "cultural movements

must not neglect aesthetic education”(Yuanpei, 1983b;1984). “Aesthetic education” refers to education in aesthetic sensibility or aesthetic appreciation (Yuanpei, 1983b)⁵¹. The term “aesthetic education” was coined by Cai Yuanpei from the German “Sthetische Erziehung”. Influenced by European art education, Cai accorded aesthetic education equal importance alongside intellectual, moral, and physical education (Yuanpei, 1983a). Lu Xun’s work at the Ministry of Education effectively responded to Cai Yuanpei’s educational policy of ‘aesthetic education’ (Xincheng, 1961)⁵². His suitability for this role stemmed from his lifelong passion for the arts, his profound research into art and aesthetic education, and his extensive artistic vision.



Figure 14. In February 1913, Lu Xun created the illustration Ming Dynasty Funeral Objects Unearthed at Beimang (I) and inscribed it.

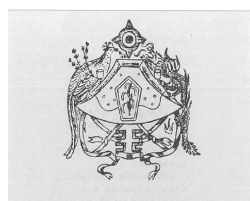


Figure 15. In April 1912, the Provisional Government of the Republic of China relocated to Beijing, commencing preparations for the national emblem’s design in June. The task was specifically entrusted to Zhou Shuren (later known as Lu Xun) and Qian Daosun from the Department of Social Education, alongside Xu Shouchang from the Department of Specialised Education within the Ministry of Education. According to Lu Xun’s records, four design sketches were produced, though only this single illustration has been publicly released to date. Lu Xun additionally preserved a trial-cast specimen of this national emblem.

⁵¹ Aesthetic education, as defined by Cai Yuanpei, is not synonymous with fine art. He emphasized that aesthetic education, unlike fine art, encompasses a broader scope, including architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature, as well as the management of art galleries, theatres, gardens, public spaces, and even social interactions. The beauty of nature also falls within its domain, which cannot be fully captured by the term “fine arts”.

⁵² In September 1912, the Ministry of Education promulgated its educational objectives, which included: ‘Emphasis shall be placed on moral education, supplemented by utilitarian education and military-civic education, with aesthetic education serving to perfect its moral character.

Lu Xun's artistic interests are documented by Zhou Zuoren in his works *The Old Home of Lu Xun*, *Characters in Lu Xun's Fiction*, and *Lu Xun's Youth*. From childhood, Lu Xun loved watching opera and sketching. He was particularly fond of various painting manuals, the "illustrated portraits" found in ancient bound books, folk woodblock New Year prints circulating in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region, Han Dynasty portrait stones, and portrait bricks. During his studies in Japan, he not only developed an appreciation for Japanese ukiyo-e prints but also gained insights into Western oil painting and contemporary international art trends through Japanese translations. In late January 1903, Lu Xun joined 29 fellow Shaoxing students studying in Japan, including Xu Shouchang and Tao Chengzhang, in co-authoring the '*Shaoxing Fellow Countrymen's Letter*.' This document discussed Japanese art education, lamented the backwardness of Chinese art development, and urged compatriots to 'seek wisdom across the world, gather knowledge from the globe,' and 'awaken our nation from its slumber, rouse the spirit of our people' (Zhenming, 2010)⁵³.

In 1907, Lu Xun had selected the oil painting *Hope* by the nineteenth-century British artist Washi as the illustration for the inaugural issue of the magazine *New Life*. However, due to various circumstances, the publication ultimately failed to materialise. Washby was an imaginative painter, and the selection of his work reflects a certain state of world art that preoccupied Lu Xun at the time. In 1908, Lu Xun published '*On the Power of Moroccan Poetry*' and '*On the Teaching of the History of Science*', both of which touched upon the subject of art. In '*On the Power of Barbarian Poetry*,' he posited that the essence of all fine art 'lies in evoking emotion and delight in the viewer or listener.' Quoting the Irish poet John Dowden, he stated that 'the finest works of art and literature emerge into the world to be contemplated and recited,' thereby imparting spiritual pleasure and inducing a state of 'deep contemplation'.

'*On the Teaching of Science History*' explores the relationship between science and art in the Middle Ages, asserting that science holds equal importance to fine art and literature. It highlights the significant contributions made to human civilisation by eminent thinkers, scientists, literary figures, painters, and musicians. Upon his return to China, Lu Xun, drawing upon a modern perspective informed by foreign civilisations, articulated numerous personal views on the development of Chinese art. The '*Proposed Opinions on the Dissemination of Fine Arts*' stands as one of Lu Xun's more significant writings on art during his tenure at the Ministry of Education. Influenced by Cai Yuanpei's concept of 'aesthetic education,' this essay constitutes an important discourse exploring the nature and defining characteristics of fine art. An examination of Lu Xun's artistic endeavours while serving at the Ministry reveals numerous instances of his involvement in promoting aesthetic education and art instruction. For instance, he delivered a lecture titled '*A Brief Discussion on Fine Arts*' at the Ministry's summer lecture series.

On 21st and 28th June, and 5th, 10th, and 17th July 1912, he delivered lectures on five occasions. The session scheduled for 5th July was cancelled due to heavy rain; Lu Xun braved the downpour to attend, only to find no audience present and return. Thus, he actually delivered four lectures. According to attendance figures recorded in Lu Xun's diary, the total audience numbered merely

⁵³ The Shaoxing Fellow Townsman's Circular discusses the state of Japanese art education: "In Japan's various schools of arts and crafts, their lacquer work (髹漆), their carving, their forging. And as for embroidery, for textiles, for dyed goods, all advance daily and monthly, striving for ever greater refinement. Moreover, in papermaking (recently innovated using wood pulp), copperplate engraving, photography, and leatherworking, every craft displays consummate skill and daily advancement. Even porcelain, traditionally China's own, now sees Japan striving to surpass it. Other products are equally abundant and varied".

dozens, revealing the prevailing indifference towards art among the Chinese populace at that time. The manuscripts of Lu Xun's speeches are now lost. According to Xu Shouchang's (2010) recollections, Lu Xun's oratory was 'profound yet accessible, concise without being tedious, and perfectly measured.' Lu Xun's personal commitment to implementing the educational principle of 'aesthetic education' is further evidenced by other entries in his diaries. For instance, on 6 September 1912, He was invited to attend the Ministry of Education's inaugural seminar on university curricula, where he deliberated on the programme for art schools. Between May and November 1913, he successively translated three papers by the Japanese scholar Ueno Yoichi (上野阳一) : *Social Education and Taste*, *Education in Art Appreciation*, and *Children's Curiosity*. He also composed a *Translator's note for Education in Art Appreciation*, originally published in Volume 1, Issue 7 of the *Compilation Office Monthly*, issued by the Ministry of Education of the Beiyang Government. The introduction to this article noted that '*Education in Art Appreciation*' authored by a Japanese psychologist, presented profound and rigorous insights. It was considered 'highly instructive for those in our country who are now endeavouring to advance aesthetic education' (Xun, 1981)⁵⁴.

On 27 February 1914, Zhou Zuoren's translation of Zhang Bailun's Children's Painting was published in the Appendix to the National Children's Art Exhibition Bulletin after revision by Lu Xun. From 21 April to 20 June, he personally organised the National Children's Art Exhibition. The exhibition featured calligraphy and painting works by primary school pupils nationwide, alongside their woven crafts, embroidery, toys, and handicrafts... These documented activities reveal Lu Xun's dedication to aesthetic education as an official within the Ministry of Education's Art Department. Lu Xun also participated in designing the national emblem for the Beiyang Nationalist Government. Collaborating with Qian Daosun and Xu Shouchang, he successfully completed the task and authored the Explanatory Notes on the National Emblem for the State Council. This document detailed the emblem's origins, historical significance, and function, proposing the design philosophy that 'drawing extensively from ancient history while establishing a new emblem with a solid foundation would be most appropriate' (Xun, 1981)⁵⁵. It also provided a detailed introduction to the emblem's graphic design. Lu Xun also travelled to Tianjin to study traditional opera, participated in the establishment of the Imperial Library and the Popular Library, helped found the Historical Museum, co-organised exhibitions of academic achievements from higher education institutions, and designed the emblem for Peking University.

⁵⁴ Lu Xun, "The Education of Art Appreciation"

⁵⁵ Lu Xun, "Explanatory Notes on the Design of the National Emblem for the State Council"

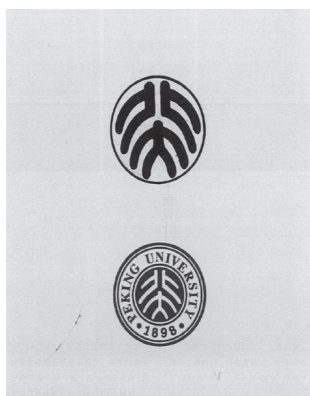


Figure 16. In December 1916, Cai Yuanpei assumed the role of President of Peking University.

The following year, he commissioned Lu Xun to design the university's emblem. Lu Xun submitted the completed emblem design to Cai Yuanpei on 7 August 1917, which was subsequently adopted. Although the emblem was later discontinued for an extended period, the current emblem of Peking University is based on this original design with modifications.



Figure 17. In 1915, Chen Shizeng carved the stone seal 'Zhou Shu', measuring 63 millimetres in height, which he presented to Lu Xun.

Alongside his duties at the Ministry of Education, Lu Xun frequently engaged with colleagues such as Xu Shouchang, Dai Luoshen, Chen Shizeng, Xu Jishang, and Qian Daosun in purchasing books, appreciating paintings, appraising treasures, and collecting artefacts, often exchanging insights. During this period, another pivotal figure in Lu Xun's artistic world was Zhou Zuoren. From 1912 to 1923, the brothers exchanged letters, both devoting themselves to the study of ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign art. They sent each other books, among which were numerous art manuals and treatises on art theory. Through mutual research and exchange, they read extensively on Chinese and foreign art. Taking merely the foreign books they exchanged in 1912 as an example, one can discern Lu Xun's artistic vision and depth of knowledge in the field:

On 11 July, "Received one small parcel containing one copy each of P. Gauguin: *Noa Noa* and W. Wundt: *Einführung in die Psychologie*, dispatched from Shaoxing on 27 June. Read Gauguin's

work by night, finding it most splendid; furthermore, I am eager to peruse other texts concerning the Impressionist school.’⁵⁶

On 7 August: ‘Received a small parcel from my second younger brother this evening, containing one volume of Furtwängler’s *Kunst und Volkserziehung* and one volume of Füssi’s *Kunstlehre*, both in German, posted on the 1st.’⁵⁷

On 11 August, ‘In the evening received a parcel from my second younger brother containing a copy of Sies’s *Modern Plastic Arts* in German, posted on the 5th.’⁵⁸

On 16 August, ‘Received a copy of V. van Gogh: *Briefe* from my second younger brother, posted on the.’⁵⁹

On 20 September: ‘Received one volume of *Suishan: A Pictorial Biography* sent by my second younger brother. Posted on the 14th.’⁶⁰

On 12 October: ‘In the evening received two small parcels sent by my second younger brother, containing... one volume of *A Brief History of Chinese Painting*. Posted on the 7th.’⁶¹

From the above account, the attentive reader may discern that Lu Xun had already encountered considerable information regarding modern Western art in his early years. In 1919, in his essay ‘Random Thoughts, No. 53’ published in the *New Youth* magazine, Lu Xun discussed the Impressionist painters Cézanne and Van Gogh, stating: ‘Post-Impressionist painting is not yet entirely obsolete today; its major figures, such as Cézanne and Van Gogh, were also artists of the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the latest passing away in 1906.’ These remarks reveal Lu Xun’s familiarity with European Impressionist painting. Subsequently, while editing the magazines *Yusi* and *Mangyuan*, he selected numerous works from Western painting and Japanese modern art to serve as illustrations.

The era in which Lu Xun lived coincided precisely with a pivotal period in Chinese art, transitioning from traditional forms towards modernity. Numerous foreign art movements had only recently been introduced domestically through the return of students who had studied abroad. At that time, as a significant theme of the New Culture Movement, the ‘art revolution’ was widely debated. Numerous cultural figures argued that literati painting had reached its ‘twilight years’. Kang Youwei (1996) lamented that ‘Chinese painting in recent times has declined to an extreme’,

⁵⁶ *Noa Noa*, by Paul Gauguin, meaning “fragrance” in French, is a travelogue that Lu Xun purchased in a Japanese edition on April 28, 1932, and later received the original French edition from his friend Masuda Wataru on April 29, 1933. Lu Xun translated it into Chinese in May 1933 under the pseudonym Luo Tu, but the publication was canceled, and the manuscript is now lost. Gauguin, a key figure in Post-Impressionism alongside Cézanne and Van Gogh, wrote the book during his time in Tahiti, where he rejected “civilized society” and depicted the decline of civilization and the impact on innocent islanders. Lu Xun described Gauguin as a formidable figure in French art. The translation included twelve woodcut illustrations and was planned for publication. Lu Xun’s library also contained a 1929 edition of *Noa Noa*, published by Cress Press in Paris, likely gifted by Masuda Wataru, and now preserved in the Lu Xun Museum, along with the Japanese and French editions. Lu Xun also owned a 1923 German edition of *An Outline of Art History* by R. Gaul, with 1,054 illustrations, now held in the Lu Xun Museum.

⁵⁷ *Fu’s Art and National Education* and *Fu’s Treatise on Art* are no longer extant in Lu Xun’s library collection; their editions remain unknown.

⁵⁸ *Modern Plastic Art*, German, popular art discourse, authored by J. Strzygowski of Poland, published by K. Weller & Mayer, Leipzig, 1907. The copy acquired by Lu Xun is now lost.

⁵⁹ *Briefe*, German, translated as *The Letters*. Van Gogh (1853–1890), Dutch, leading painter of the Post-Impressionist movement. The copy acquired by Lu Xun is now lost.

⁶⁰ The contents of *Suishan Huazhuan* (Biographical Sketches of Suishan) remain unknown; the copy purchased by Lu Xun is now lost.

⁶¹ Ōmura Seigai, *A Brief History of Chinese Painting*, published in Tokyo, Meiji 43 (1910). The copy purchased by Lu Xun is now preserved in the Lu Xun Museum.

Chen Duxiu (1996) advocated 'abolishing the dynastic painting tradition', while Xu Beihong (1996) pointedly declared that 'the decadence of Chinese painting studies has now reached its zenith'. and Lü Hai (1996) lamented that 'the ills afflicting our nation's fine arts are nowhere more acute than at present'. As an influential writer within the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun, though not directly involved in this artistic debate, penned several insightful essays on the subject during his tenure at the Ministry of Education. These essays offer deeper insight into Lu Xun's personal views on the modern transformation of Chinese art. On 15 January 1919, almost concurrently with Chen Duxiu and Lü Hai's publication of '*The Art Revolution*,' Lu Xun also penned a reflection:

Progressive artists – this is my demand of the Chinese art world. An artist must certainly possess consummate technical skill, but above all must have progressive ideas and noble character. His creations, though appearing as a painting or a sculpture on the surface, are in truth expressions of his thoughts and character. When we behold them, we are not only delighted to admire and appreciate them, but they also stir our emotions, exerting a profound spiritual influence. The artists we demand are visionaries who lead the way, not the leaders of "citizens" groups'. The artworks we demand are specimens that mark the intellectual and artistic level of the Chinese nation, not the average score of substandard thought (Xun, 1981)⁶².

The artists we demand are visionaries who can lead the way, not the leaders of a "citizens" group'. The artworks we demand are specimens that mark the intellectual and artistic level of the Chinese nation, not the average score of substandard thinking. It is thus evident that the "ideas" and "character" within artistic works have been elevated to positions of significance, rather than the lamentable state where "foreign elements, upon reaching China, seem to fall into a black dye vat, losing all their colour", or where "having learned the unrefined art of nude painting, one produces obscene works; having mastered the indistinct chiaroscuro of still life, one can only paint shop signs. The outward form may be novel, but the underlying mindset remains unchanged"(Xun, 1981)⁶³. It is evident that Lu Xun emphasised the spiritual expression of artistic works.

Lu Xun (1981)⁶⁴ pointed out: 'In *Poke*, he lambasted other artists as "blind in heart and mind", ignorant of true new art. 'Expressing considerable disappointment at the infighting within the art world. Though he acknowledged, 'I am entirely an outsider when it comes to art', he still 'deeply hoped for the emergence of new art in China'. On 29 December of the same year, Lu Xun wrote in the second issue of *Weekly Commentary*: 'Since the early years of the Republic, the fashionable crowd has often bandied about the term "art", but they talk much and do little'. Consequently, 'even finding illustrators for fiction magazines proved exceedingly difficult,' let alone 'masterful creators.' Thus, the only recourse was 'to reprint old paintings, like a prodigal son squandering his inheritance,' to the extent that 'even someone possessing a tattered old contract might be counted among the art world's figures.' Lu Xun (1981)⁶⁵ pointed out the poor standard of artistic creation in the art world at that time, and thus appealed: 'In a country as vast as China, with such a large population, and at this very moment, to see only this nascent bud of art is truly desolate indeed'

⁶² Lu Xun, "Random Thoughts"

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Ibid



Figure 18. In November 1916, Chen Shizeng carved the seal ‘Waiting Hall’ (侯堂), a stone seal measuring 27 millimetres in height, which he presented to Lu Xun. Lu Xun, whose own hall was named ‘Locust Tree Hall’ (槐堂), adopted ‘Waiting Hall’ as his own seal name.

As for “literati painting” · Lu Xun never expressed personal views nor penned any monographs or specialised treatises evaluating Chinese literati painting. However, in his essays and correspondence, he occasionally offered some general observations on the subject. In terms of personal inclination, while Lu Xun expressed reservations about the ‘excessive emphasis on simplicity and refinement’ in literati painting, his diaries from Beijing reveal his extensive collection of ancient artworks, catalogues, and literati paintings. His deep appreciation for poetry-inscribed stationery, stationery albums, and antiquities also suggests that he was not without affection for traditional Chinese painting, exemplified by literati painting.

When Lu Xun first took up residence in Beijing in 1912, he collected over thirty albums of traditional paintings and calligraphy reproduced by phototype printing from publishers such as Zhengshu Press and Shenzhou Guoguang Press. Lu Xun’s acquisitions spanned a broad range, unrestricted by any particular publisher or school. These phototype albums largely reflected prevailing trends within the traditional painting community, predominantly featuring artists from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Among Lu Xun’s extant artworks is the ‘*Landscape in Freehand Brushwork*’ by Lin Shu, acquired on 9 November 1912⁶⁶. Among Lu Xun’s close acquaintances during his residence in Beijing were the accomplished painters Dai Luling and Chen Shizeng⁶⁷. Not only were Lu Xun and Chen Shizeng classmates, they also served as colleagues at the Ministry of Education, sharing a profound friendship.

On 10 December 1914, *Lu Xun’s Diary* records: ‘Chen Shizeng painted four small landscape frames for me, and also promised to paint flowers’ (Zhenming, 2010). On 2 February 1915, he further noted: ‘Chen Shizeng brought four paintings of winter flowers.’ By 10 January 1921, ‘I obtained another painting from Shizeng.’ In total, Lu Xun preserved nine paintings by Chen Shizeng. In the Preface to the *Beijing Stationery Album* (北平笺谱·序), Lu Xun also lavished high praise upon Chen Shizeng’s artistic prowess: ‘...Upon the founding of the Republic of China, Chen Shizeng of Yining entered Beijing... Soon thereafter, he expanded his artistry onto stationery paper. His talent flourished, his brushstrokes concise yet rich in meaning. Moreover, he considered the engravers’

⁶⁶ Lin Shu (1852–1924), originally named Qunyu, courtesy name Qinnan, pseudonyms Weilu and Leng Hongsheng, hailed from Min County, Fujian (present-day Fuzhou). He was a literary figure, translator, and master of calligraphy and painting. Lu Xun included several of his works in his collection *Notes on Beijing Stationery*.

⁶⁷ Chen Shizeng (1852–1923), native of Yining, Jiangxi. He was a classmate of Lu Xun at Nanjing Railway and Mining College and Japan’s Kōbun Gakuin. After the Xinhai Revolution, they both worked at the Ministry of Education and jointly designed China’s first national emblem.

labour, sparing them the hardship of excessive chiselling, thereby opening a new realm for poetic stationery' (Xun, 1981)⁶⁸. On 18 March 1934, he wrote in a letter to his Japanese friend Masuda Wataru: 'Truth be told, since the days of Chen Hengke and Qi Huang (Bai Shi), the art of painting on stationery has been in decline...' (Xun, 1981)⁶⁹. These remarks not only reveal Chen Shizeng's achievements in stationery painting but also, to some extent, reflect Lu Xun's understanding of literati painting.⁷⁰



Figure 19. Lin Qinnan's Landscape Sketch, acquired by Lu Xun on 9 November 1912. The painting bears the inscription 'Weilu Lin Shu's Sketch' and the seal 'Qinnan'.



Figure 20. Chen Shizeng's painting Narcissus, presented to Lu Xun on 2 February 1915.

⁶⁸ Lu Xun, "Preface to the Peking Stationery Collection"

⁶⁹ Lu Xun, "Letter to Masuda Wataru"

⁷⁰ Chen Shizeng (1876–1923), given name Hengke, courtesy name Shizeng, pseudonym Xiu Daoren. Native of Xiushui, Jiangxi. Painter and seal engraver. Studied in Japan alongside Lu Xun. Following Chen Shizeng's passing, the Beijing Liulichang Chunjing Pavilion compiled the ten-volume posthumous collection *Chen Shizeng's Remaining Works* (also known as *Shizeng's Posthumous Ink*). Lu Xun's diary records visits to Liulichang to purchase "Remaining Brushwork of Shizeng". These historical records not only demonstrate Lu Xun's appreciation for Chen Shizeng's ink paintings but also reflect his personal affection for the artist.

Regarding the new Western-style painting emerging in China at that time, Lu Xun also held his own views and stance. In 1926, Lin Fengmian held a solo exhibition at the National Academy of Fine Arts, showcasing over 100 oil paintings including 'Groping', 'The History of Mankind', and 'The Return of the Fisherman'. On 15 March, Lu Xun visited the exhibition on the eve of its closing, though he left no written record of his impressions. No extant materials document Lu Xun's appraisal of Lin Fengmian's artistry, yet he held the work of Tao Yuanqing and Szeto Chiu in particularly high regard. He considered Tao Yuanqing's Western-style paintings to embody not only 'the artist's personal subjectivity and emotion,' reflecting his dedication to brushwork, colour and aesthetic sensibility, but also an Eastern flavour. Lu Xun admired Szeto Chiu's art, noting his ability to express the painter's authentic character and the indomitable spirit of the Chinese people within scenes depicting 'a world shrouded in yellow dust.'

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For a long time, academic circles have focused more on Lu Xun's relationship with the emerging woodcut movement, paying scant attention to his early artistic activities. Indeed, tracing the intrinsic connections between Lu Xun's artistic endeavours during his tenure at the Ministry of Education and the contemporary artistic phenomena of his era not only outlines the developmental trajectory of his early artistic philosophy. Within the cultural context of modern transformation in Chinese art, it further prompts reflection on the emergence of modernity in Chinese art through the lens of value systems. This perspective offers valuable insights for re-examining the critical consciousness surrounding the concept of 'modernity' in Chinese art.

Chapter 3

Take it: Lu Xun's way of introducing foreign art

Lu Xun “borrowed the fire from abroad” with the aim of catalysing the emergence of new literature and art. The question is: how did he “incorporating”? This chapter traces Lu Xun’s methods and pathways for introducing foreign art through his reception, collection, publication, exhibition and evaluation of such works, his introduction of “illustrations”, and his organisation of the “Creative Woodcut Workshop”. This will clarify Lu Xun’s cultural selection of foreign art and his corresponding artistic philosophy.

3.1. Acceptance and acquisition of foreign art

3.1.1. Lu Xun's reception of foreign art

Lu Xun’s exposure to and understanding of foreign art were profoundly shaped by his studies in Japan. In Lu Xun’s *Former Residence: An Illustrated Catalogue*, Zhou Zuoren recounts how, during his residence in Sendai, Lu Xun was inspired and influenced by the Japanese author Natsume Sōseki. It was during this period that he first encountered Japanese ukiyo-e prints, purchasing an illustrated catalogue of works by Katsushika Hokusai (葛飾北斎)⁷¹.

Later, Lu Xun gained further insight into oil painting through literary works and Western art books. During his time in Japan, Japanese art had already embarked on a tortuous path towards modernisation, building upon the introduction of European modern painting. From the Meiji era onwards, the dissemination of Western painting in modern Japan gave rise to two distinct painting traditions: Japanese painting and Western-style painting. On one hand, the new Western-style painting challenged traditional Japanese literati painting and the Kano school; on the other, under the advocacy of figures such as Ernest Fenollosa and Okakura Kakuzō, an art movement centred on the Art Appreciation Society, the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, and the Japan Art Institute emerged, known as the ‘New Japanese Painting’ movement.

Presently, no records exist confirming whether Lu Xun followed developments within the Japanese painting world. However, three aspects warrant attention: firstly, the educational slides used in Japan at the time featured works by Japanese painters, whose mastery of realism was exceptional, employing Western techniques for landscape depiction. During his medical studies in Sendai, the realistic style of these slides must have profoundly impacted Lu Xun. Secondly, he held a particular fondness for ukiyo-e. On 27 January 1934, in a letter to his Japanese friend Yamamoto Hatsue, Lu Xun mentioned his youthful admiration for Hokusai’s work, stating, ‘Now it is Hiroshige, followed by Utamaro,’ and expressing his long-held desire to introduce Hokusai’s works to his homeland through illustrations and commentary.

Among Lu Xun’s book collection were works such as *The Rare Ukiyo-e Print Collection*, *The Great Collection of Ukiyo-e*, *Masterpieces of Ukiyo-e Prints*, *The Great Compendium of Japanese Woodblock Ukiyo-e*, and *The Six Great Ukiyo-e Masters Series*. Thirdly, Lu Xun possessed the 1931 edition of *The Complete Collection of Japanese Nude Art* (published by Tokyo Takami Translation Press

⁷¹ Katsushika Hokusai, a master of Japanese ukiyo-e, incorporated Western painting techniques into his woodblock creations, lending them a more modern sensibility.

in Shōwa 6), acquired from Uchiyama Books. This volume compiles nude artworks from various periods in Japan, encompassing sculpture, oil paintings, large-scale brocade paintings, fan paintings, woodblock prints, copperplate engravings, and charcoal drawings. Lu Xun also introduced or engaged with numerous Japanese literary figures, including Natsume Sōseki, Lafcadio Hearn, Katagami Shin, Mushanokōji Saneatsu, Arishima Takeo, Chūgawa Hakuson, Hayashi Ōgai, Noguchi Yōjirō, Kobayashi Takiji, Shiota Atsushi, Aoki Shōji, Hasegawa Jōjikan, Masuda Wataru, and Inoue Kōbai. Among Lu Xun's personal library, Japanese-language publications numbered 995 titles comprising 1,889 volumes, constituting a significant proportion (Shuhui and Yanli, 1999). Whilst many were Japanese translations or works introducing foreign cultures, the majority focused on Japanese culture and literature. Unlike Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun did not extensively describe the culture of the Japanese island nation. He often gained insights into European cultures, particularly the art of Russia and the smaller nations of Eastern Europe, through reading Japanese and German texts.

He also held a particular interest in the cultural traditions of Germany and the Soviet Union. At present, the author lacks documentation to verify Lu Xun's engagement with foreign art during his time in Japan. However, several details warrant attention: Firstly, in 1906, Lu Xun withdrew from Sendai University to pursue literary activities in Tokyo, during which he extensively read foreign books, translated works, and organised magazines. As an integral facet of culture, art naturally captured the interest of Lu Xun, who possessed a keen appreciation for the visual arts. It was during this period that he first encountered ukiyo-e prints and Western paintings through various publications. Secondly, in 1907, while co-founding the magazine *Xinsheng* (New Life) with friends in Tokyo, Lu Xun selected the oil painting *Hope* by the 19th-century British artist Washi as an illustration. The high standard of this choice indicates his growing awareness of modern European painting. Thirdly, in 1908 he authored and published 'On the Teaching of Science History,' asserting that humanity's spiritual life requires not only Shakespeare but Newton; not merely painters like Raphael, but also Darwin. This essay explicitly referenced Raphael, the outstanding Italian painter of the European Renaissance.

The circumstances of certain scholars and poets mentioned in *The Moroshi Theory of Poetry* likely emerged from literary and artistic movements of the time. As for what art albums or illustrations Lu Xun actually read during that period, we cannot know for certain. However, judging by the state of Japanese book publishing technology at the time, innovations in modern printing techniques were sufficient to reproduce colour artworks, which would have provided the young Lu Xun with considerable visual gratification.

It was not until later that Lu Xun began consciously introducing foreign art, primarily during his 'Shanghai period'. Beyond his personal artistic interests and his instrumental view of art as a tool for 'saving the nation through literature and art', other factors likely played a role. These included the need for illustrations in book editing and publishing, and the recognition that visual imagery could aid in understanding the humanistic context of European society.

3.1.2. Lu Xun's collection and organisation of cultural traces of foreign art

How did Lu Xun acquire information about foreign art? Let us examine this question. Lu Xun's library comprised predominantly literary and artistic works. This rich collection of books and materials broadened Lu Xun's intellectual horizons and provided him with extensive artistic knowledge. Regarding the sources of these books, particularly foreign-language volumes,

most were acquired from Japanese-owned bookshops such as Uchiyama Books, Maruzen Books, Sagamiya, Kyōdo Kenkyūsha, Chūjōdō, Keiseidō, Kyōkadō, Tenshōkan, Jitsugyō no Nihon Sha, Bunkudō, Mikasa Books, and Iwanami Shoten. During the final decade of his life, Lu Xun developed a profound connection with Uchiyama Shoten. Founded around 1907 in Shanghai by the Japanese proprietor Uchiyama Kanzo, the bookshop was situated not far from Lu Xun's residence. It not only displayed and sold new publications from Japan but also promptly offered European books, demonstrating an international perspective in its range, with a particular emphasis on literary and artistic works.

On 3 October 1927, Lu Xun, settled in Shanghai. Within five days, he discovered Uchiyama Books and purchased three or four volumes there. Thereafter, he visited the bookshop multiple times each month to acquire books. Examining Lu Xun's diaries and purchase records reveals not only extensive lists of acquisitions but also numerous artistic gatherings held at Uchiyama Books. For Lu Xun, this bookshop served a dual purpose: it resolved his reading needs, acting as a window to the wider world, while also providing a meeting place for friends, including young artists, writers, and Japanese literati. Some of Lu Xun's correspondence was relayed through the bookshop, and the books and art catalogues he edited were sold there on his behalf. Several art exhibitions organised by Lu Xun were also connected to Uchiyama Books, some even held within the shop itself. The proprietor, Mr Uchiyama, not only actively facilitated these events – arranging contacts, purchasing art catalogues, and organising lectures – but also provided crucial assistance during Lu Xun's periods of flight and medical treatment. During Lu Xun's final decade in Shanghai, he forged a profound friendship with Mr Uchiyama. His last surviving manuscript was a letter addressed to Mr Uchiyama, testifying to the esteemed position the publisher held in his heart.

Lu Xun's collection of foreign artworks was also indebted to the support and assistance provided by Cao Jinghua, Chen Xuezhao, Ji Zhiren, Xu Fancheng, Wei Suyuan, and Xiao San while they were abroad. Cao Jinghua had been an auditor in Lu Xun's lectures at Peking University. Around 1924, he joined the Unnamed Society organised by Lu Xun, publishing *White Tea* and *New Russian Drama Anthology*. He swiftly gained Lu Xun's trust, becoming a literary youth close to the writer. In 1927, Cao Jinghua travelled to the Soviet Union, taking up a teaching post at the Leningrad Institute of Oriental Languages in Moscow. At that time, Lu Xun was diligently searching for Russian-language books in Shanghai, but faced considerable difficulties. Upon learning of Cao Jinghua's precise whereabouts, he wrote to commission him to procure these works. According to the *Correspondence and Chronology* in Volume 11 of *Cao Jinghua's (1989) Collected Translations*, between 20 September 1930 and 17 October 1936, Lu Xun and Cao exchanged 84 letters, which comprehensively document the process and details of Lu Xun's collection of Soviet prints. In 1931, whilst proofreading Cao Jinghua's translation of *Iron Stream*, Lu Xun felt it ought to be accompanied by woodcut illustrations.

He therefore wrote to Cao Jinghua, entrusting him with the task of sourcing original Soviet woodcut prints. Honouring Lu Xun's request, Cao Jinghua spent nearly two years travelling extensively across the Soviet Union. After considerable effort, he located four original woodblock prints of illustrations by the printmaker Biskalev for the novel *Iron Stream*. Though Biskalev's woodcut prints commanded a high price, he maintained that 'nothing surpasses Chinese paper for printing artworks,' and requested only a consignment of Xuan paper as payment in lieu

of monetary compensation (Jinghua, 1989)⁷². From then on, Lu Xun repeatedly purchased paper and sent it to the Soviet Union, while Cao Jinghua continually dispatched original prints of Soviet woodcuts to Lu Xun. In Annotations to Lu Xun's Letters to Cao Jinghua, Cao Jinghua frequently recounted the arduous task of collecting Russian artworks, and how, amidst the Nationalist government's multiple restrictions on Russian publications, the books and works he sent were exceptionally hard to come by (Jinghua, 1989)⁷³.



Figure 21. Iron Stream Cover of the novel Iron Stream by Soviet author S.S. Safarimovich, translated by Cao Jinghua. Published at Lu Xun's own expense in December 1931 under the imprint 'Three Leisure Book House'

Lu Xun's collection of German prints was connected to Xu Shiqian, who was studying in Germany. Xu Guangping (1999) noted in *Lu Xun and the Chinese Woodcut Movement*: Mr Lu Xun had always cherished a passion for fine art, maintaining a particular interest in art publications which he delighted in acquiring and perusing. Whenever funds became available, he would promptly entrust others to send marks and francs to Mr Xu Shiqian, studying in Germany, and Mr Ji Zhiren, conducting research in France, requesting them to seek out woodcuts." Xu Shiqian, pen name Fan Cheng, hailed from Changsha, Hunan. In 1927, he gained admission to Fudan University, departing for Germany two years later to pursue further studies.

⁷² "I searched for the illustrations for two years without success, even reaching out to the author and inquiring through Moscow, but his address couldn't be found. I also consulted the local art academy, which keeps records of Soviet artists' addresses, but no information for Mr. Bi was available. The original annotations for Iron Stream, which provide valuable historical context, will be translated soon. Additionally, I plan to translate the author's essay 'How I Wrote Iron Stream' as an appendix. The new edition includes a map and four photographs, which can be reproduced in the translation if needed".

⁷³ "During my time in the Soviet Union, I collected original hand-printed woodcuts for Mr. Lu Xun and made efforts to acquire valuable art albums and illustrated world classics, such as *The Arabian Nights*. This was during Stalin's Five-Year Plan, which required foreign exchange, so even paintings and calligraphy were sold for this purpose. Special "export editions" of artworks could be bought with foreign currency or gold and were later found in second-hand bookstores for high prices in roubles. I purchased two copies of such works – one for Mr. Lu Xun and another for safekeeping. Due to severed Sino-Soviet relations, I had to rely on intermediaries in Western Europe to send these works, sometimes repurchasing and resending if they fell into the hands of the Kuomintang. After returning to China, during the unstable Kuomintang rule, these items were often kept at Mr. Lu Xun's residence, which explains the duplicates in his later book collection".

Lu Xun's correspondence with Xu Shiquan commenced in May 1928. From August 1929 to August 1932, during his time in Germany, Xu Shiquan dispatched numerous German prints to Lu Xun, procured on his behalf. Xu Guangping noted: "To procure the finest artworks for Lu Xun, Xu Shiquan took art history courses at Heidelberg University and specialised in printmaking at a technical college. The woodcut prints he sent back to Lu Xun were mostly guided by his renowned masters, of exceptional quality, and were hailed as "expertly curated selections".

Consulting *Lu Xun's Diary*, his interactions with Xu Shiquan are vividly recorded (Guangping, 1999; Zhenming, 2010):

Received eleven woodcut prints sourced in Germany from Shi Quan, valued at one hundred and sixty-three marks, equivalent to approximately one hundred and twenty Chinese dollars. Additionally, nine volumes of nine different books, valued at approximately sixty-eight dollars. (30 April 1930)

Received five volumes of Kathe Kollwitz's art collection and one volume of George Grosz's art collection from Shi Quan, collectively valued at thirty-four dollars. (15 July 1930)

'Received a letter from Shi Quan enclosing four woodcut studies.' (4 August 1930)

'Received five prints of Carl Meffert's engraving "Deine Schwester" sent by Shi Quan, totalling seventy-five marks.' (21 August 1930)

'Received letter from Shi Quan with two self-made woodcuts.' (1 September 1930)

'Received ten woodcut illustrations of Carl Meffert's Zement sent by Shi Quan, cost 150 marks, Shanghai customs levied 6 yuan 3 jiao.' (12 September 1930)

'This afternoon received three copies of the Frankfurter Anzeiger from Shi Quan, along with two woodcuts of his own making.' (13 February 1931)

'This evening received a letter from Shi Quan and one woodcut portrait of Gorky.' (26 March 1931)

'In the evening received Shi Quan's dispatch of Edvard Munch's Graphik.' (4 May 1931) 'Received from Shi Quan one portfolio each of Daumier and Kathe Kollwitz selections, sixteen and twelve prints respectively, totalling eleven yuan.' (23 June 1931)

'Received from Shi Quan one volume of Graphik der Neuzeit, two photographs, and one of my own copperplate engravings.' (4 November 1931)

'Received from Shi Quan one copy each of Masere's Selected Woodcuts and The Life of Balushek, dispatched from Berlin. (2 December 1931)

'This afternoon received two parcels of books from Shi Quan, totalling three volumes, all being illustrated books.' (28 December 1931)

'This evening received a letter from Shi Quan along with one copperplate engraving of Sograd Elephant' (12 January 1932).

Xu Fancheng recalled that during his studies in Germany, his duties included collecting woodblock prints for Mr Lu Xun, purchasing art books, and mailing magazines and newspapers, sometimes looking up terms not found in the dictionary⁷⁴. During Xu Fancheng's stay in Germany, Lu

⁷⁴ Xu Fancheng recalled: "My duties included collecting prints for the Master, mainly original woodcuts with the artist's signature, purchasing art books, and forwarding magazines and newspapers. Occasionally, I would look up unfamiliar terms in German. Correspondence mainly dealt with remittances and the receipt of books and paintings, totaling about forty or fifty letters. Unfortunately, during the War of Resistance Against Japan, my entire collection was lost, and the Master's purchases of paintings and calligraphy stopped. This was due to Roushi's sacrifice, leaving no one to go to the bank for money orders. 'I now lack even someone to run to the bank,' the letter stated."

Xun received a steady stream of periodicals and nearly a hundred books and artworks from Germany. These included publications such as *Art and Society*, *The Human Figure in Art History*, *The Nude in Art Through the Ages*, *Art in Peril*, and *The Barbarian and the Classicist Polish Art from 1800 to the Present*, *Nineteenth-Century Painting*, *Expressionist Peasant Paintings*, and *Cubism*. There were also albums of works by Rembrandt, Van Gogh, and Daumier, alongside expressive prints such as those by Käthe Kollwitz. In 1930 alone, Xu Fancheng sent Lu Xun 409 prints (Zhenming, 2010).

Chen Xuezhao was China's first female Doctor of Literature to study in France. Born in 1906, she hailed from Haining, Zhejiang. From a young age, Chen Xuezhao nurtured a passion for literature. At fifteen, she travelled to Shanghai to pursue her studies, and by seventeen, she had embarked upon her literary career. She contributed to numerous publications, including *Yusi* and *New Woman*, and through her writing and submissions, she came to know literary luminaries such as Lu Xun, Zhou Jianren, Mao Dun, Ge Gongzhen, and Qu Qiubai. In 1927, Chen Xuezhao used her writing earnings to study in France, travelling alongside Ji Zhiren and Cai Baoling, son of Cai Yuanpei. During her studies in France, she continued writing and submitting work while also serving as the European correspondent for Tianjin's *Ta Kung Pao* and a contributing writer for *Life*. At this time, Lu Xun also entrusted her with sourcing foreign-language books and print works. In her later years, Chen Xuezhao recalled in her essay '*Thinking of the Far Horizon, Pondering the Distant Shore*' that Lu Xun would wire money from China to France, entrusting her to purchase print books.

Holding a press card from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs entitled her to a twenty per cent discount, and she could sometimes obtain further reductions by purchasing books in the name of the bookshop. Upon acquiring the books, she would send them along with the receipts to Mr Lu Xun by registered post (Shuhui and Yanli, 1999)⁷⁵. At present, the author has no further evidence to confirm that Chen Xuezhao, Ji Zhiren, and Cai Bailing were the recipients of the art books and artworks purchased by Lu Xun. In 1932, Xu Fancheng returned to China after completing his studies, followed by Cao Jinghua the following year. On 11 March of that year, Lu Xun received books sent from France by Ji Zhiren, after which he lost contact with both Ji Zhiren and Chen Xuezhao. Consequently, it appears Lu Xun no longer found it as convenient to purchase artworks and books directly from abroad.

Another individual who collected foreign art publications for Lu Xun was Xiao San. A native of Hunan born in 1896, Xiao San studied at the Moscow Oriental University from 1923 and was skilled in poetry. During his time in the Soviet Union, Xiao San became acquainted with Qu Qiubai, Chen Duxiu, Wang Ruofei, Zhao Shiyan, and Chen Duxiu's two sons, Chen Yannian and Chen Qiaonian. An expert on Soviet affairs, he attended Lenin's funeral and served as the Moscow representative for the Left-Wing Writers' League. In 1931, he took up a post at Moscow Oriental University teaching Chinese, where he befriended numerous Russian literary figures and European writers. It was Qu Qiubai who introduced Xiao San to Lu Xun upon his return to China, and it was Qu who informed Lu of Xiao San's admission to the 'Red Professors' College' (i.e., Moscow Oriental University). Lu Xun remarked: 'At last we have someone truly dedicated to literary research.' (San, 1983). During

⁷⁵ In *Thinking of the Far Horizon*, Chen Zhaoxue recalls: "When Mr. Lu Xun sent remittances, he entrusted me with purchasing books of engravings for him. With a press pass from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I could get a twenty per cent discount on books. Zhiren accompanied me, and sometimes Xiao Cai joined, as we searched Parisian bookshops." "After acquiring the books, I would send them and the receipts to Mr. Lu Xun by registered post." "Purchasing under the bookshop's name also secured the same discount. On occasions when I didn't have my press card, the shopkeepers would offer a discount or accept pre-printed vouchers for exceptionally fine books. Our goal was to save Mr. Lu Xun some money and help him acquire more books".

his time in the Soviet Union, Xiao San sent Lu Xun numerous publications, including *International Literature*, *History of Soviet Drama*, *Pacific Lighthouse*, *Suiji Yiyang Novels*, and postcards of ancient Persian paintings. Many were also books and materials concerning revolution and literature, as well as world revolutionary literature (Tiji and Ding'an, 1984).

Consulting Lu Xun's Diary from 1933 to 1934 reveals details of books sent to Lu Xun by Xiao San:

'Received four literary books.' (19 October 1933)

'Received ten Russian books, evidently sent by Xiao San.' (31 October 1933)

'Received three books on fine arts and one periodical from Xiao Shan.' (29 January 1934)

'Received a letter from An Mi and one book.' (8 February 1934)

'Received a letter from Xiao Shan and five parcels of literary books and periodicals, containing ten German-language books, eight English-language books, and three Russian-language books.' (9 April 1934)

'Received three parcels of books sent by Xiao Shan, containing ten Russian volumes, four German volumes, and one English volume.' (23 April 1934)

'Received nine literary magazines, two volumes of daily newspapers, and four photographs, sent by An Mi.' (30 October 1934)

Moreover, Qu Qiubai (2012) also introduced Lu Xun to foreign art movements. Having visited the Soviet Union, Qu possessed considerable familiarity with its political and cultural landscape. In his work *The Heart of the Red Capital*, he expressed profound admiration for the new Russia: firstly, for its distinctive artistic and literary traditions, which China lacked; secondly, his admiration for its subversion of capitalism and the resulting transformation of its social system; thirdly, his impression of the educational attainment among the working masses in Soviet Russia and the shift in the status of the peasantry and labourers; and fourthly, the charisma of Soviet political leaders, particularly the fervent scenes of Lenin's speeches, which left an indelible impression upon him. Before meeting in person, Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai had already become acquainted through correspondence and their respective writings and translations.

Between late 1932 and 1933, Qu Qiubai and his wife Yang Zhihua took refuge in Lu Xun's home on three occasions. During this period, Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai collaborated on numerous essays and compiled and translated works on Russian literary theory. These manuscripts have become crucial materials for subsequent generations studying China's left-wing literary and artistic movements. On 18 June 1935, Qu Qiubai was tragically murdered, and the books, manuscripts, and furniture he had entrusted to Lu Xun's home became memorial relics. Among Qu Qiubai's books and manuscripts were numerous literary and artistic materials, including works by Lunacharsky, Plekhanov, Gorky, and clippings from Russian newspapers. Though Lu Xun did not understand Russian, he could sense the cultural ethos of the new Russia through the propaganda posters and cartoons in those publications, which deepened his understanding of revolutionary literature and art.

3.1.3 Lu Xun's collection of foreign art

Based on extant materials, Lu Xun's lifelong activities in collecting and organising foreign art can be broadly categorised as follows: Lu Xun possessed a lifelong passion for books, amassing not only Chinese works but also a substantial collection of foreign-language publications. According to Ye Shuhui and Yang Yanli in their book *Understanding Lu Xun Through His Personal Belongings*,

his library contained 86 titles and 96 volumes in Russian, predominantly focused on art and literature, comprising 31 art-related titles and 29 literary works. His Western-language collection totalled 778 titles across 1,182 volumes, encompassing German, French, English and other languages, with German being the most prevalent. By category, art and literature constituted the largest holdings. The art collection comprises 178 titles, including original art treatises alongside exquisite albums featuring works by renowned artists such as Daumier, Van Gogh, Gros, Kroll, and Munch. Additionally, there is the album entitled *The Creators*, edited by Paul and Westheim, containing 160 signed prints by renowned artists, including works by Kross, Meffert, Mayser, and Grosz. The collection of Japanese-language books comprises 995 titles totalling 1,889 volumes, with 164 titles falling under the art category. These include art criticism, art history, and world-renowned art anthologies such as *The Complete Collection of Japanese Nude Art*, *The Complete Collection of World Art*, *The Complete Collection of World Nude Art*, *The Complete Art Encyclopaedia*, and *The Complete Collection of Calligraphy*. Furthermore, there are albums of Japanese ukiyo-e prints, such as *Katsushika Hokusai Hiroshige*, *Kitagawa Utamaro*, *The Great Collection of Ukiyo-e*, and *Masterpieces of Ukiyo-e Prints* (Shuhui Yanli, 1999).

Lu Xun's collection included numerous foreign artworks, such as original woodcuts, copper-plate engravings, and lithographs by artists including Käthe Kollwitz, Edvard Munch, Paul Gauguin, Eugène Grégoire, Max Munch, and Max Munch, alongside extensive collections of French, Soviet, and German prints, modern Japanese prints, and ukiyo-e reproductions. Taking Lu Xun's collection of Soviet prints as an example⁷⁶, between 8 December 1931 and 14 November 1933, over a period of nearly two years, he received a total of one hundred and eighteen original prints from the Soviet Union. On 24 January 1934, Lu Xun published *Yinyu Ji* (*A Collection to Attract Jade*), compiled from sixty original prints selected from his Soviet collection. Following its publication, Lu Xun received a further eighty-eight original Soviet prints between September 1934 and June 1936.

The Diary of Lu Xun and related materials indicate that on 19 September 1934, Lu Xun received 15 original prints of engravings by Klavdiya Kameneva⁷⁷; on 9 October of the same year, he received a further 14 original prints of engravings by Goncharov, created for Ivanov's short stories⁷⁸. On 1 February 1936, he received 49 original prints gifted by Soviet printmakers and forwarded via the Soviet Union's International Cultural Relations Committee; On 2 March, he received three Soviet prints: Fyodorovsky's Portrait of Young Goethe, Suvorov's Advertisement for Antiquities, and Bychkov's frontispiece illustration for Hafiz's Lyric Poems. On 23 February 1936, at the 'Soviet Print Exhibition', Lu Xun further selected seven original prints from the Soviet

⁷⁶ According to Lu Xun's Diary:

On 3 July 1929, "Afternoon: Zhang Muhan came, but did not see him. Left... a sheet of twenty new Russian prints and departed. All were sent by Cao Jinghua from Moscow."

On 4 June 1930, "Received one copy of The Tainy Picture Book sent by Jinghua."

13 June 1930, "Received Jinghua's letter this morning, along with the illustrated collections by C. Yexohnh and A. Kannyh."

10 September 1930: "This afternoon received one copy of October magazine and three volumes of Woodcut Engravings (volumes 2 to 4) sent by Jinghua."

18 October 1930: "Received a letter from Jinghua along with seventeen portraits of ancient and modern Russian literati." Etc.

⁷⁷ On 19 September 1934, received 15 original prints by Klavdiyev, illustrations for Part One of the novel Quiet Flows the Don. Sent as a gift by Klavdiyev.

⁷⁸ 9 October 1934: Received 14 original prints of woodcut illustrations for Ivanov's short stories, sent by Goncharov.

collection. Statistics indicate that Lu Xun's surviving collection of Soviet prints totals 463 pieces, comprising 222 original prints and 241 printed reproductions (Shuhui and Yanli, 1999).

Lu Xun acquired German prints primarily through two channels: one involved commissioning the Commercial Press to procure them from Germany; the other entrusted Xu Shiqian, a friend studying in Germany, to collect them on his behalf. According to records, the Commercial Press procured the following 70 German print publications and original print rubbings for Lu Xun: 1) Collection of Woodcuts⁷⁹; 2) Twelve Intaglio Prints and One Intaglio Cover for Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*⁸⁰; 3) The Creative Printmaking Collection⁸¹; 4) Illustrations of Aphorisms from Schiller's *The Robbers*⁸²; 5) A Collection of New Works by Käthe Kollwitz⁸³.

The German prints procured by Xu Shiqian on behalf of Lu Xun comprised the following: 1) The woodcut collection *The Cathedral*⁸⁴; 2) *America in Woodcuts*⁸⁵; 3) *The Passion of Christ*, an illustrated volume⁸⁶; 4) Four prints titled *The Sun*, *The Battlefield*, *The Prophet of Writing*, and *The Butterfly and the Bird*⁸⁷; 5) *The Cry Rises*, a print⁸⁸; 6) Three sets of illustrations: *The Weavers' Revolt*, *The Peasants' Revolt*, and *War*⁸⁹; 7) *Mother and Child*, a collection of woodcuts⁹⁰; 8) Käthe Kollwitz: *Collected Works*⁹¹; 9) Käthe Kollwitz: *Sketchbook*⁹²; 10) *Your Sisters*⁹³; 11) Ten original

⁷⁹ Collection of Woodcut Prints, comprising 144 reproductions of woodcut works from the 14th to the 20th century. Edited by Westerheim. Published by Kippenheuer Verlag, Potsdam, 1921. Received by Lu Xun on 8 March 1929.

⁸⁰ Twelve Intaglio Prints and One Intaglio Cover for Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata*. Contains thirteen original prints. By Geiger. Published by Drei Masken Verlag, Munich, 1922. Signed copy, letter 81. Received by Lu Xun on 28 October 1930.

⁸¹ The Creative Printmaking series, edited by Westerheim, was first published in 1918 by Berlin's O'Fryon Press and Weimar's Kippenheuer Verlag. It consisted of four volumes per year, each with ten original prints, some autographed. Lu Xun acquired the complete set from the second to the fourth year, totaling 12 albums with 120 prints. The fifth and sixth years each had two volumes with 20 prints, bringing the total to 160 prints. These works, including woodcuts, copperplate engravings, lithographs, and photogravures, were created by over 80 artists from 11 countries, with German artists contributing the most. Lu Xun received the set in two installments on 27 April and December 1930.

⁸² Schiller's Play *The Robbers*: Illustrations of Aphorisms, comprising 9 original lithographic prints. By Grosz. Published by Malik Verlag, Berlin, 1922. Received by Lu Xun on 15 May 1931.

⁸³ Collection of New Works by Käthe Kollwitz, an illustrated volume containing 33 prints. By Käthe Kollwitz. Published by Reissner Verlag, Dresden, 1933. Received by Lu Xun on 14 April 1934.

⁸⁴ *The Cathedral*, a collection of woodcuts containing 10 prints. By Max Tarman. Published by Dietrich Verlag, Jena. Received by Lu Xun on 30 April 1930.

⁸⁵ *America in Woodcuts*, containing 24 prints. By Thalmann. Published by Dietrich Verlag, Jena, 1927. Received by Lu Xun on 30 April 1930.

⁸⁶ *The Passion of Christ*, album containing 8 original woodcut prints. Poems by Tarlho, illustrated by Tarman. Published by Dietrich Verlag, Jena, 1923. Received by Lu Xun on 30 April 1930.

⁸⁷ Four prints titled *The Sun*, *The Battlefield*, *The Prophet Who Writes*, and *Butterflies and Birds*. Received by Lu Xun on 10 July 1930.

⁸⁸ *The Cry Arises*, a collection of 36 woodcuts by Käthe Kollwitz. Published by Fritsch Kunstverlag, Berlin, 1927. Received by Lu Xun on 15 July 1930.

⁸⁹ Three sets of prints comprising 20 woodcuts: *The Weavers' Revolt*, *The Peasants' Revolt*, and *War*. By Käthe Kollwitz. Published by Fursche Kunstverlag, Berlin, 1928. Received by Lu Xun on 15 July 1930.

⁹⁰ *Mother and Child*, a collection of woodcuts comprising 37 prints. By Käthe Kollwitz. Published by Fursche Kunstverlag, Berlin, 1928. Received by Lu Xun on 15 July 1930.

⁹¹ Käthe Kollwitz: *Collected Works*, containing 182 prints. Published by Reissner Verlag, Dresden, 1930. Received by Lu Xun on 15 July 1930.

⁹² Käthe Kollwitz: *Sketchbook*, containing 14 prints. By Käthe Kollwitz. Compiled by Kunstverlag. Published by Kunstwacht Verlag, Munich, 1927. Received by Lu Xun on 15 July 1930.

⁹³ *Your Sisters*, seven original woodcut prints. By Meffert. Received by Lu Xun on 21 July 1930.

woodcut illustrations for Simenon's works⁹⁴; 12) Collection of Woodcuts⁹⁵; 13) Reynard the Fox, Collection of Woodcuts⁹⁶; 14) The Incarnation of God, Collection of Woodcuts⁹⁷; 15) The Foundling, Play. Includes a set of woodcut illustrations⁹⁸.

Moreover, on 17 April 1931, Lu Xun entrusted Shimatelai to remit one hundred marks to Käthe Kollwitz for the purchase of her prints. Between May and July 1931, Lu Xun received a total of twenty-two prints signed by Käthe Kollwitz on two separate occasions.⁹⁹ From the above rough and incomplete statistical list, it is evident that Lu Xun collected a substantial number of foreign prints. His purpose in 'importing foreign prints' was quite clear: as he himself pointed out, it was to 'foster a little robust and unadorned literature and art. Two extant letters constitute invaluable historical records concerning Lu Xun's collection of foreign art. One is Lu Xun's letter to the Soviet woodcut artist, the other is Lu Xun's letter to the Czech sinologist Pštík. Lu Xun's Diary entry dated 9 January 1934 records: "Sent letters to Moscow to Alekseev and others, along with two parcels. Contents: Woodblock editions of Gu Kaizhi's *Biographies of Exemplary Women*, *Plum Blossom Manual*, and *Painted Biographies from the Hall of Late Laughter*; lithographic editions of *Painted Biographies of Eminent Figures Through the Ages*, *Poems on the Pictures of Farming and Weaving*, and *Poems on the Pictures of the Old Summer Palace* – seventeen volumes in total."

Who was this Alekseev mentioned as the recipient in the diary? Nikolai Vasilyevich Alekseev (1894–1934) was a Soviet illustrator. He produced illustrations for Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, Feidin's novella *The Old Man* and novel *The City and the Year*, and *Gogol's Dead Souls*. His final work comprised illustrations for Gorky's novel *Mother*. On 14 November 1933, Lu Xun's Diary records: 'Received a letter from Jinghua No. 72 along with 56 woodcuts by Soviet artists.' Among these 56 woodcuts were 41 by Alekseev: 14 illustrations for *Mother* and 27 for *The Town and the Year*. Lu Xun's connection with Soviet woodcut artists began when he sought original woodblocks for *The Iron Stream*. At that time, Lu Xun asked Cao Jinghua to make contact, and the Soviet woodcut artists promptly gifted their original woodblocks to Lu Xun – the very correspondence he received on 14 November 1933. In return, Lu Xun sent Chinese rice paper and woodblock-printed books to these artists as a gesture of reciprocity. He was particularly impressed by Alekseyev.

In 1934, when compiling and publishing *Yinyu Ji* (The Jade Collection), Lu Xun included Alekseyev's illustrations for *Mother* in the volume. In the Afterword to *Yinyu Ji*, Lu Xun remarked: 'Of Alekseyev's works, I possess the complete *Mother* and *The City and the Year*. The former already has a Chinese translation by the late Shen Duan, hence its inclusion in its entirety; the latter is also a monumental work. Perhaps a translation may appear in future; for now, I retain it, awaiting that

⁹⁴ Cement, ten original woodcut illustrations. Sement is a novel by Soviet author G. K. Gurevich, illustrated by Meffert. Received by Lu Xun on 12 September 1930.

⁹⁵ Woodcut Collection, comprising 20 woodcut works. By Tillmann. Published by Fursche Kunstverlag, Berlin, 1922. Received by Lu Xun on 23 September 1930.

⁹⁶ Reynard the Fox, a collection of woodcut prints, containing forty woodcut animal illustrations. Created by Klemm, with textual commentary by Reitzlob based on Goethe's poetic spirit. Published by Fursche Kunstverlag, Berlin. Received by Lu Xun on 7 October 1930.

⁹⁷ The Incarnation of God, a collection of woodcut prints, containing seven original woodcut prints. By Barach. Published by Cassirer Verlag, Berlin, 1922. Received by Lu Xun on 19 October 1930.

⁹⁸ The Foundling, play. Includes a set of woodcut illustrations. By Barach. Published by Cassirer Verlag, Berlin, 1922. Received by Lu Xun on 11 March 1931.

⁹⁹ Between May and July 1931, Lu Xun received two shipments of 22 woodcuts signed by Käthe Kollwitz. These included six original prints of *The Weavers' Revolt* and four original prints of *The Peasants' War*.

day' (Xun, 1981)¹⁰⁰. When Lu Xun learned of Alekseyev's passing from a German-language newspaper in Czechoslovakia, he was profoundly saddened. Despite his illness, he composed the Preface to the *Illustrated Edition of The City and the Year*, in which he wrote: 'We must mourn the misfortune of those who have shared a bond with our literature and art' and 'We must honour those who have shared a bond with our literature and art' (Xun, 1981)¹⁰¹.

The correspondence between Lu Xun and the Czech sinologist Pšik (普实克) took place in 1936. On 23 June 1936, Pšik wrote an English-language letter to Lu Xun from Tokyo, Japan. Unable to ascertain Lu Xun's address but aware of his association with the Shanghai-based monthly journal *Literature*, he sent the letter to *Literature Monthly* for forwarding. In his letter, Pšik requested permission to translate Lu Xun's collection *The Cry*, particularly *The True Story of Ah Q*, into Czech. Lu Xun received the letter on 13 July and replied promptly on 23 July, enclosing a preface for the Czech translation of *The Cry*, a photograph of himself, and a copy of *New Tales*. In his reply, Lu Xun not only readily consented to the Czech translation but also declined any remuneration. However, he expressed a wish to the Czech literary community: "As compensation, I would appreciate reproductions of portraits of Czech literary figures, past and present, or graphic prints (Graphik). When these are introduced to China, they would allow us to recognise two individuals simultaneously: the literary figure and the artist. Should such prints prove difficult to obtain, then a volume of renowned Czech literature, richly illustrated, would suffice as a memento" (Shuhui and Yanli, 1999).

The two letters mentioned above not only shed light on Lu Xun's active efforts to collect foreign artworks, but also reflect the bonds of friendship forged through his correspondence with foreign literary and artistic figures. In 1929, Lu Xun translated and published the monograph *Modern Art History: A Critical Survey* by the Japanese art historian Sakagaki Takae. This came about because, while sourcing illustrations for Li Xiaofeng's *North New Monthly* in 1928, he felt that piecemeal introductions lacked systematic coherence. Upon encountering *The Modern Art History Tide*, which he found to be 'a novel experiment, straightforward and remarkably insightful, tracing developments from the French Revolution to the present day with "national colour" as its central thread.' Believing China sorely needed such works, he deemed it worthy of introduction.

Consequently, Lu Xun wrote to Li Xiaofeng, volunteering to translate the book, 'translating the historical treatise myself, to serve as commentary on the illustrations.' Furthermore, as the book contained 134 illustrations, if two or three images were selected for each issue alongside the translation, allowing text and pictures to complement each other, and published in the *Northern New Monthly*, it was foreseeable that within less than two years, readers would thereby gain systematic knowledge of art history. Thus, from January 1928 to February 1929, Lu Xun continuously translated this specialised treatise on art history. It was published in instalments in *The Northern New*, and ultimately reprinted as a standalone volume by Beixin Publishing House in 1929. Other art-related works translated by Lu Xun include: Katayama Kokon's *Expressionism*¹⁰², Yamagishi Mitsunobu's *Aspects of Expressionism*, Kuchikawa Hakuson's *Symbol of Torment* and *Out of the Ivory*

¹⁰⁰ Lu Xun, "Postscript to Yinyu Ji"

¹⁰¹ Lu Xun, "Preface to the Illustrated Edition of The City and the Year"

¹⁰² Katayama Kokon's *Expressionism* was translated between 1924 and 1928, later included in The Wall's Translation Collection and Yamagishi Mitsunobu's *The Various Aspects of Expressionism*. The translation appeared in the 21 June 1929 issue of *Morning Flowers Monthly*, Volume 1, Issue 3, and was subsequently included in The Translation Collection Supplement.

*Tower*¹⁰³, Aono Kikichi's *The Revolution in Art and the Art of Revolution*, and Arishima Takeo's *Reflections on Art*.

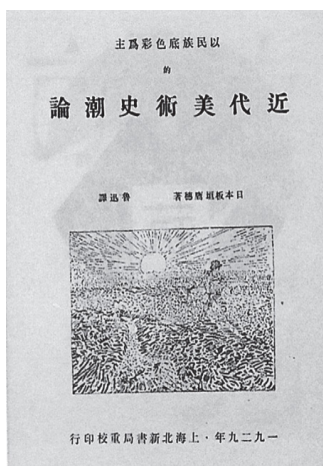


Figure 22. (Japan) Cover of Sakagaki Takahashi's Tide of Modern Art History, translated by Lu Xun, published by Beixin Publishing House, Shanghai, 1929

Lu Xun published numerous and diverse writings on art criticism and art direction, encompassing essays, prefaces and postfaces, diaries, letters, advertisements, and more. According to Mr Zhang Guangfu's classification, collation, and compilation, those concerning Lu Xun's engagement with foreign art topics may be categorised into four principal groups: 1) General art theory¹⁰⁴; 2) Painting critiques¹⁰⁵; 3) Cover art and illustration critiques¹⁰⁶; 4) Foreign printmaking critiques¹⁰⁷.

Among these numerous art criticism pieces, some comprise prefaces and afterwords written by Lu Xun for various illustrated volumes; others consist of correspondence with young artists, occasionally touching upon foreign art; Others were advertisements for art book sales, mostly brief pieces. Yet they offered many insightful and instructive theoretical perspectives on introducing foreign art. Drawing upon his writings on literature, art, and aesthetics, one can systematically construct his theoretical framework and artistic philosophy. This area of research remains ripe for further exploration by scholars.

¹⁰³ Lu Xun completed his translation of Shirakawa Hakuson's *The Symbol of Suffering* in 1924, and finished *The Ivory Tower* in 1925, published on 18 February.

¹⁰⁴ Representative essays on art theory include: 'Proposed Artistic Manifesto' (1913) and 'Random Notes 43' (1919).

¹⁰⁵ Painting critiques include: Preface to *The Beardsley Picture Book* (1929), Preface to *The Picture Book of Fujio* (1929), Preface to *The New Russian Picture Book* (1930), On the 'Adoption of Old Forms' (1934), In Defence of 'Sequential Pictures' (1932), and 'A Casual Discussion of "Cartoon"' (1935).

¹⁰⁶ Cover art and illustration critiques include: 'Preface to Mayfield's Woodcut "The Silt Map"' (1930), 'Postscript to the Proofs of "Brave John"' (1931), and 'Preface to "A Hundred Pictures of Dead Souls"' (1935).

¹⁰⁷ Foreign printmaking critiques include: letters to Cao Jinghua (1932, 1934, 1935), 'Postscript to Yinyu Collection' (1934), 'Records of the Soviet Print Exhibition' (1936), 'Preface to Selected Modern Woodcuts Vol. 1' (1929), 'Postscript to Modern Woodcut Selections No. 1' (1929), 'Preface to Modern Woodcut Selections No. 2' (1929), 'Postscript to Modern Woodcut Selections No. 2' (1929), 'Introduction to the German Writers' Print Exhibition' (1931), Preface to the Catalogue of Käthe Kollwitz's Selected Prints (1936), etc.

3.2. Publication and exhibition of foreign art

While collecting foreign artworks, Lu Xun also felt that many of these foreign artworks in his possession 'seemed like a burden'. From then on, he 'thought daily of reproducing them', declaring that 'they must be introduced'. He thus resolved to 'reproduce them in book form, to pass them on to young art students and print enthusiasts' (Xun, 1981)¹⁰⁸. Consequently, in order to enhance the creative standards of young artists in his country, broaden their intellectual horizons, and invigorate their artistic passion, Lu Xun not only acquired foreign artworks but also continuously compiled and published collections of foreign art, organised multiple exhibitions of foreign woodcuts, and authored articles introducing these published art books and exhibitions.

3.2.1. Publication of an art portfolio

In the 1930s, Lu Xun repeatedly lamented: 'That China still lacks a single decent art journal is truly shameful' (Guangfu, 2010). On 18 December 1934, in a letter to the young woodcut artist Li Hua, he wrote: 'Logically, given China's vastness, there ought to be (at the very least) a proper art journal that both introduces foreign works and showcases domestic artistic developments. Yet we have none. Publications bearing the name "art" mostly feature material of the basest taste – it's beyond words...' To introduce foreign artworks, Lu Xun advocated: 'To promote woodcut art, I believe the best approach would be to publish a quarterly journal; if that proves unfeasible, then a biannual or occasional publication would suffice' (Guangfu, 2010).

Lu Xun publicly introduced foreign artworks, initially publishing them in literary and art journals. Firstly, he utilised publications he edited or supported – such as *The Torrent*, *The Northern New*, *The North Star*, *Literature*, *Sprout*, and *Translation* – to showcase artworks. During his editorship of *The Torrent*, he not only published foreign artworks but also included brief introductions to the featured works and artists in the editorial notes. He even promoted collections of foreign artists' works published abroad, specifying where they could be purchased and their prices, enabling readers to acquire original foreign art collections. In December 1928, to commemorate the centenary of Leo Tolstoy's birth, *The Torrent* published a series of essays by Rogachevsky and Kurano-hara Tadahito. Lu Xun specially selected a set of illustrations from the Japanese translation of *The Complete Works of Tolstoy*, including Repin's oil painting *Tolstoy Ploughing*.

In his editorial notes, he introduced this work and also mentioned Repin's other painting, *Tolstoy, the Literary Giant*. Secondly, Lu Xun organised the establishment of publishing houses and compiled collections of fine art works. In the autumn of 1928, with Lu Xun's assistance, literary youths including Roushi and Cui Zhenwu founded the 'Morning Flower Society'. This organisation aimed to introduce Eastern and Northern European literature, import foreign prints, and advocate vigorous, unadorned artistic expression. It published the art album *Morning Flowers in the Garden of Art* and the literary journal *Morning Flower*. The literary journal *Morning Flowers* ran from 6 December 1928 to 21 September 1929, spanning one year. Initially published weekly, it later transitioned to a fortnightly schedule, issuing 20 weekly and 12 fortnightly editions for a total of 32 issues. It featured 22 works by 13 foreign artists. At that time, most literary publications, even when featuring illustrations, confined these to literary vignettes, portraits of writers, or decorative filler images; rarely did they independently publish fine artworks. As a literary journal, *Morning Flowers*

¹⁰⁸ Lu Xun, "Postscript to Yinyu Ji"

pioneered the independent publication of fine art, setting an exemplary precedent.

In early 1929, the Morning Blossom Publishing House successively released the illustrated collection *Morning Blossoms in the Garden of Art*. Though not strictly a fine arts journal, it may be regarded as a periodical pictorial publication organised and edited by Lu Xun. Its publishing purpose was articulated by Lu Xun in the advertising copy for *Morning Blossoms in the Garden of Art*: “Though our resources are meagre, it would nonetheless be edited and published to introduce foreign artworks while also selecting and printing traditional Chinese artworks (Xun, 1981)¹⁰⁹. The aim was not only to ‘revive the heritage of the past that remains relevant today’, but also to ‘unearth the ancestral roots of contemporary Chinese artists abroad and introduce the brilliant new creations of the world’¹¹⁰. This precisely aligns with Lu Xun’s description of ‘introducing new European and American works’ and ‘reproducing ancient Chinese prints’ as ‘the two wings of China’s new woodcut art’. Originally planned as a twelve-volume series with twelve prints per volume, *Morning Blossoms in the Garden of Art* was forced to cease publication after releasing only the first issue, *A Selection of Modern Woodcuts*, along with five additional volumes: *A Selection of New Russian Art*, *A Selection of Paintings by Hong’er of Fugu*, *A Selection of Paintings by Beardsley*, and others.

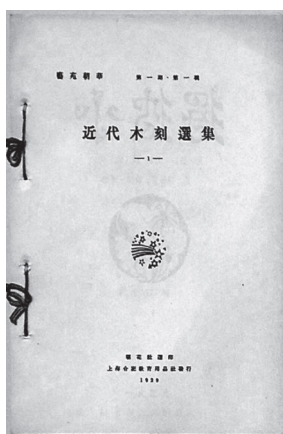


Figure 23. Cover of *Selected Modern Woodcuts, First Series*, First Issue of the Art Journal *Morning Bloom*, containing twelve woodcut prints.

On 26 January 1929, the *Anthology of Modern Woodcuts* was selected and printed by the Morning Flower Society and distributed by the Shanghai Heji Educational Supplies Company. This anthology contained twelve foreign woodcut works, all selected from *The Bookman*, *The Studio*, and *The Wood-cut of To-day* (edited by G. Holme). Three works by the British printmaker Hibbs – *The Viaduct*, *The Farmyard*, and *Goldfish* – were selected. Carved with an original technique, they featured stark black-and-white contrast, where ‘against a pure black ground’ stood ‘exquisite luminous white marks’. The woodcuts “Freshwater Perch” and “Teal” by British engraver Daglish are

¹⁰⁹ Lu Xun, “Advertisement for The Morning Flowers of the Art Garden”

¹¹⁰ Ibid

also featured. A member of the Zoological Society of London, Daglish specialised in woodcut animal depictions, particularly for natural history publications. His work exhibits a naturalistic style with delicate, intelligent ornamentation.

An illustration from the novel *A Farmer's Life* by American author George Burne, created by the selected British engraver Stephen Pong. Two works of popular art in the late style by the selected French engraver Harman Poul, respectively illustrating Rabelais's book and the poetry collection *The Warrior's Doctrine* by André Marty. The Italian artist Di Sildo Li is a versatile painter, skilled in stone engraving, copper etching, and woodcut. The selected work, *The Muses of Loreto*, is a woodcut imbued with rhythmic vitality, executed with natural ease and rich in evocative charm. The Swedish engraver Magnus Lagerlind excelled in floral woodcut compositions; the selected piece, *Buttercup*, serves as an illustration for the poetry collection *Flowers* by the renowned Swedish poet Atterbom. The selected work by American artist Furs, *Temple on the Island*, depicts a small chapel with a cross standing in the jungle, rendered with a light and fluid style. Another American woodcut artist, Edward Worwick, is represented by his piece *Meeting*, which possesses a strong medieval flavour, combining decoration with imagination.

In the preface to *Selected Modern Woodcuts*, Lu Xun briefly outlines the history of printmaking. Woodcut originated in China and reached Europe around the early 14th century in the form of playing cards printed with extremely crude woodblock designs, becoming a crucial element in the nascent development of European printing techniques. By the early 15th century, woodcut images of the Virgin Mary had appeared in Germany. In the early 16th century, Dürer and Holbein elevated woodcut art to new heights, earning them recognition as the founding masters of woodblock printing. In Europe, woodcut prints were primarily used for book illustrations. However, their prominence waned with the advent of copperplate engraving. It was not until the mid-19th century that the emergence of creative woodcuts significantly shifted artistic direction, with 'creative woodcuts' becoming 'pure art'. The defining characteristic of creative woodcut is the substitution of the knife for the brush, and wood for paper or cloth. It is characterised by 'letting the knife run freely,' 'neither imitating nor reproducing; the artist grips the knife and carves directly into the wood' (Xun, 1981)¹¹¹. Lu Xun thus advocated that 'if circumstances permit, we should gradually transport them,' allowing woodcut to 'return home,' enabling this form of creative woodcut to be revived in China¹¹².

The second volume of *Morning Bloom in the Garden of Arts* is a *Selection of Prints by the Japanese artist Fugoku Kōji*, featuring twelve woodblock prints, each accompanied by a poem. Fugoku Kōji (1898–1979), whose given name was Ichio, was a Japanese female painter and poet. Her published works include five volumes of *The Fugoku Niji Art Album*, two volumes of *My Art Collection*, one volume of *My Poetry and Art Collection*, and one volume of *Traces of Dreams*. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, her works were imitated and even plagiarised by certain Chinese painters. Lu Xun expressed strong displeasure at this, beginning in 1928 to introduce her original works to Chinese readers. That November, Lu Xun published Fukiya Kōji's poetry and painting 'Song of Tambourine' in the sixth issue of the first volume of *The Torrent*. In January 1929, after meticulous selection, Lu Xun translated six illustrations from Hong'er's painting album *The Dream of Water Lilies*, five from *The Melancholy Smile*, one from *My Collection of Paintings*, along with the artist's accompanying poems.

¹¹¹ Lu Xun, "Preface to Selected Modern Woodcut"

¹¹² Ibid

Lu Xun compiled the Selected Works of Hong'er of Fugu specifically to meet the learning needs of young apprentices. 'Hong'er's woodcuts, brought to China, tempered Beardsley's sharpness with an elegant and subtle touch. This particularly resonated with the hThe term "subtle brushwork" here refers to the artistic style of Fu Gu Hong'er, characterised primarily by line drawing. Delicacy is its lifeblood, while its strength lies in a scalpel-like sharpness. Thus, the forms she delineates must possess "the agility of a small snake" and "the acute sensitivity of a white fish". In her depictions, she often chose dreamy maidens to embody queens or celestial maidens; when portraying men, she sought mythical allure akin to Apollo; and when rendering infants, she bestowed angelic wings. Ultimately, her works evoked 'the fantasy of love' and 'the clarity of pure water,' greatly inspiring imitation among young artists. earts of modern Chinese youth, hence his influence continues to this day' (Xun, 1981)¹¹³.

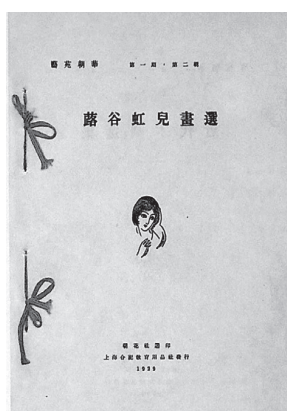


Figure 24. Cover of Selected Paintings by Hong'er of Fugu Valley, First Issue, Second Series of Morning Flowers in the Garden of Arts, containing 12 woodblock prints.

Morning Bloom in the Garden of Art, Volume III comprises *Selected Modern Woodcuts* ②, featuring selections from Britain's *The Studio*, *The Woodcut of To-day*, and *The Smaller Beasts*. It also includes twelve woodcut prints by artists from Britain, France, Russia, Germany, America, and Japan, totalling seventy-eight works. The selected works by British printmaker Gaskins, *Heavy Snow* and *Fairy Tale*, demonstrate an early mastery of handling the gradations of three-dimensional black tones, built upon meticulous engraving. Gibbins stands as a prolific and multifaceted artist among British woodcut creators. In October 1929, Gibbins presented Lu Xun with three prints through Rouxin. This volume includes two of his works: the illustrations for *Idle Sitting* and *Red Wisdom*. Furthermore, Lu Xun introduced Gibbins's woodcut serial *The Seventh Man* in his essay *Southern and Northern Dialects: A Defence of 'Sequential Pictures'*. Gibbs's works often convey profound meanings through the expression of black-and-white concepts. In *Idle Sitting*, the depiction of the two figures and their expressions is achieved through the contrast of black and white composition. When illustrating Boris Mathers's *The Wisdom of Red*, the black-and-white contrast embodies both

¹¹³ Lu Xun, "Preface to The Selected Paintings of Hong'er of Fugu"

‘Oriental splendour’ and the rhythmic movement of ‘delicate white lines’. The selected woodcut works by British printmaker Dagley, *The Shrike* and *The Sea Otter*, both feature animal subjects. Lu Xun particularly admired his ‘creative printmaking’ technique, introducing its methods and characteristics in the preface to *Selected Modern Woodcuts*.

Käheler, originally from Switzerland and later naturalised in France, is renowned for his illustrations of *Thaïs* and *L'Étrangère*, distinguished by their masterful use of line. Woodcut served as a direct medium of expression for him; his works employ light and shadow to indicate the intensity and depth of colour, pulsating with a vibrant vitality. The selected work by German printmaker Olik employs a woodcut technique blending Japanese ukiyo-e with German painting traditions. The Soviet printmaker Tupchinsky's *The Window*, also translated as *The Figure at the Window*, evokes a figure gazing out from beneath the window at the rainy weather, lost in thought, inviting the viewer's imagination. Zola Schuch, an American-Russian painter, favours decorative compositions of white blocks against black backgrounds. The selected piece, *The Swimming Woman*, employs a technique known as ‘linoleum carving’ – commonly referred to today as linoleum printmaking – and depicts a subject frequently used by American woodcut artists. Yoshiro Nagase studied sculpture at Tokyo's School of Fine Arts before turning to printmaking. He authored *For Those Who Study Printmaking*, with major works including *Mother and Child* and *Lake Kawaguchi*. This collection features one of his illustrations, *The Sunken Bell*.

On 10 March 1929, Lu Xun's ‘Preface’ to *Selected Modern Woodcuts* emphasised the characteristics of ‘wood-edge carving’ versus ‘wood-surface carving’ in printmaking, and the distinction between ‘reproduction prints’ and ‘original prints’. Lu Xun noted, ‘Though both involve carving wood, the resulting blocks differ due to the contrasting sawing methods employed’ (Xun, 1981)¹¹⁴. One method involves sawing along the grain, while the other cuts across it. The former yields softer wood, unsuitable for intricate carving, termed ‘wood-face carving’; the latter produces harder wood fibres at the end grain, ideal for detailed engraving, known as ‘wood-edge carving’. The term ‘reproduction print’ refers to the method where ‘during the carving process, a pre-existing image serves as the template; with such a foundation, the knife mimics the brush, following the model rather than creating an original work’¹¹⁵. In contrast, ‘original printmaking’ involves no pre-existing model; the artist wields the iron chisel to create the image directly upon the woodblock. The content Lu Xun wrote in his introduction holds value as an introduction to printmaking knowledge. Lu Xun further extols the ‘powerful beauty’ of creative woodcut art while criticising the prevailing decorative paintings in contemporary China, noting: ‘The fashionable decorative paintings today are mostly of slender-shouldered beauties, emaciated Buddhist disciples, and disjointed compositions’¹¹⁶. Only ‘artists and viewers brimming with vitality’ could produce art imbued with “force” – pictures created ‘with unrestrained vigour’ – which ‘would scarcely survive in a decadent, dainty society’¹¹⁷.

The Morning Bloom of the Art Garden, Volume IV comprises *A Selection of Beardsley's Artworks*. Beardsley, also rendered as Piasley, was a British artist whose principal works include illustrations for *The Death of King Arthur* and *Salome*, alongside numerous illustrations for British literary

¹¹⁴ Lu Xun, “Preface to Selected Modern Woodcuts”

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Ibid

¹¹⁷ Ibid

periodicals such as *The Yellow Book* and *Savoy*. In 1925, Lu Xun remarked in *The Sequel to The Canopy Collection: Not a Letter*: “I do enjoy viewing Beardsley’s artwork.” He subsequently referenced Beardsley in writings such as *A Glimpse of Shanghai Literature and Art* and *The Present State of Chinese Literary and Artistic Circles in Darkness*. In 1929, Lu Xun’s discussion of Beardsley was connected to his criticism of Ye Lingfeng’s imitation of Beardsley, as well as that of Fu Gu Hong’er and Mai Suilei. Around 1927, Ye Lingfeng co-founded the magazine *Fantasy Continent* with Pan Hanyuan, providing covers and illustrations largely modelled on Beardsley. Lu Xun believed that imitators like Ye Lingfeng and Fu Gu Hong’er failed to capture Beardsley’s essence, lacking his ‘sharp, spear-like force’ and the decadent spirit permeating his lines.

Lu Xun maintained that music and literature influenced Beardsley’s artistry, while his artistic training stemmed from individuality. His work possessed satirical qualities: ‘His creations attain pure beauty, yet this is a demonic beauty, often imbued with a sinful self-awareness – sin first distorted by beauty, then laid bare by it.’ Simultaneously, his art was ‘abstract ornamentation,’ ‘devoid of relational rhythm’; He was neither an Impressionist painting what he ‘saw,’ nor a visionary painting what he ‘dreamed,’ but a rational thinker painting what he ‘conceived.’ Beardsley was significantly influenced by others: his early works bore the imprint of Pre-Raphaelite painter Edward Burne-Jones, French printmaker Saint-, and the satirical epic poem *The Rape of the Lock* by the English poet Alexander Pope. This shift transformed the lines in his work from ‘ecstatic, languid spirituality’ to ‘grotesque, sullen carnality’. Later, under the influence of the Japanese ukiyo-e artist Kikugawa Eizan, he combined the ‘frozen reality’ of Japanese ukiyo-e lines with the passionate, anxious imagery of the West. Against a monochrome background, within ‘sharp and clear shadows and curves,’ he manifested a style and tone unprecedented in Eastern aesthetics (Xun, 1981)¹¹⁸.



Figure 25. Beardsley’s illustrations for *Salome*

¹¹⁸ Lu Xun, “A Brief Introduction to The Beardsley Picture”

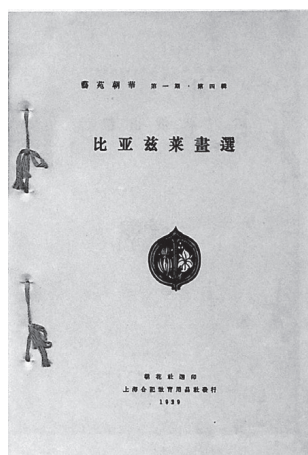


Figure 26. *A Selection of Beardsley's Drawings* Cover, *Morning Blossoms in the Garden of Art* First Series, Fourth Collection, 26 April 1929 Selected by the Morning Blossom Press

Beardsley exerted a profound influence on book design in Republican-era Shanghai. Lu Xun himself drew upon Beardsley's influence in designing certain cover layouts, occasionally adapting Beardsley's frame structures while substituting them with motifs from Han dynasty steles and calligraphic forms of Chinese characters, thereby forging a distinctive visual language and style. The fifth collection, *New Russian Art Selections*, was Lu Xun's earliest anthology introducing Soviet printmaking following the October Revolution. Of the twelve works selected, five were reproduced from Sheng Shumeng's *Panorama of New Russian Art*, whilst the remaining eight were reproduced from R. Fuellep-Miller's *The Mind and Face of Bolshevism*. Khrensky, a Soviet Constructivist painter, contributed *Symbolic Constructions*, *The New Revolutionary System*, and *The Assault on the Kremlin*. In his *Preface to New Russian Art*, Lu Xun described Khrensky's Constructivist art: "Constructivism possesses no immutable laws; its essence lies in addressing new subjects anew according to prevailing circumstances." (Xun, 1981)¹¹⁹.

Its subject matter, 'being modern man,' thus glorifies 'modern industrial endeavours', depicting 'industrial creation' – such as 'steamships, iron bridges, factories, aeroplanes, each possessing its own beauty, both solemn and majestic'¹²⁰. Its expressive technique 'often eschews depicting physical forms, instead employing geometric patterns that advance beyond Cubism'¹²¹. Kruglikova, translated by Lu Xun as Kriglikova, was a Soviet female engraver. Her major works include the series *Paris on the Eve of War*, *Poets' Silhouettes*, and *Portrait of Pushkin*. In 1929, Lu Xun published her engraving *Portrait of Soloviev* in the journal *The Torrent*, which he co-edited with Yu Dafu. The same collection also featured her engravings *Children* and *Portrait of Mrs Trotsky*. Annenkov, also rendered as Yananov, had two works published in the July 1928 issue of *The Torrent*, edited by Lu Xun: *Portrait of Gorky* and another piece. The collection also included his woodcut *Portrait of*

¹¹⁹ Lu Xun, "Preface to New Russian Paintings"

¹²⁰ Ibid

¹²¹ Ibid

the Novelist E. Samyadin. Guplyonov's principal works comprise illustrations for books such as *The Cruiser Amour*, *Mother*, and *Destruction*. This collection included his *Woman Ironing*. Fyodorovsky, also known as Fyodorovsky, contributed his woodcut *Moscow* to this volume. In 1934, Lu Xun included several more of his woodcuts in the anthology *Yinyu Ji*, which he compiled and published. In 1936, Lu Xun once again highly praised his woodcut art in the article *Records of the Soviet Print Exhibition*, calling him a 'master'. Kravchenko's major works include *Lenin's Mausoleum*, illustrations for Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* and Sholokhov's *And Quiet Flows the Don*, and he also produced numerous illustrations for Russian translations of Lu Xun's works. This collection includes his woodcuts *The Remains of Lenin* and *The Funeral of Lenin*. It also features Polinov's *Portrait of Pelinsky*, alongside another woodcut whose artist remains unidentified at present.

On 25 February 1930, Lu Xun composed *A Brief Introduction to New Russian Paintings*, outlining the development of Russian painting from the late 19th century through to the post-October Revolution period, alongside the relationship between revolution and printmaking. Lu Xun noted that by the late 19th century, Russian painting remained predominantly academic in style, influenced by Western European art; By the 1890s, the emergence of the Peredvizhniki (Wandering Exhibition) movement challenged the classical traditions of academic art, though it soon 'became mired in antiquarianism and failed to progress beyond its infancy.' Subsequently influenced by European Impressionism, Cubism, and Futurism, the October Revolution period saw the rise of the 'Leftist' movement (i.e., Cubism and Futurism).

This "Leftist" faction later split into the 'Industrial School' and the 'Constructivist School.' Lu Xun noted that this collection included Constructivist works by artists such as Klinsky. In his 'Preliminary Notes,' Lu Xun further elucidated the relationship between revolution and printmaking: 'Moreover, due to the revolution's requirements for propaganda, education, decoration, and popularisation, printmaking – woodcuts, lithographs, illustrations, decorative prints, and etchings – flourished tremendously during this era' (Xun, 1981)¹²². Consequently, he explained why prints were predominantly selected for introduction: 'During revolutionary times, prints serve the broadest purpose; even under extreme haste, they can be produced in the blink of an eye'¹²³. This renowned assertion, arrived at through Lu Xun's meticulous examination of the historical development and contemporary state of Chinese and foreign art, while also considering the practical needs of China's revolutionary struggle, long served as the guiding ideology for the development of China's emerging woodcut movement. It exerted a profound influence on the history of modern Chinese printmaking.

In his *Preface to New Russian Paintings*, Lu Xun lamented the cessation of *Morning Flowers in the Art Garden*, noting that 'it was ultimately abandoned by the art world, making continuation exceedingly difficult'. By that time, the Morning Flowers Society had already disbanded nearly half a year prior. 'Even an ordinary little dream proves difficult to realise.' On 22 January 1930, Lu Xun's diary records: 'Fang Ren visited in the evening, returning the borrowed 150 yuan. I immediately used 120 yuan to cover the Morning Blossom Society's deficit, thus concluding the society's affairs' (Zhenming, 2010). After the society's dissolution, Lu Xun subsequently published works including *Pictures of Shimin Earth*, *The Passion of One Man*, *The Jade Collection A Thousand Pictures of Dead Souls*,

122 Ibid

123 Ibid

A Selection of Woodcuts by Käthe Kollwitz, and A Collection of Soviet Woodcuts, among others, with print runs of several thousand copies. These woodcut publications, now rare in circulation, have become invaluable historical documents of the early Chinese New Woodcut Movement, bearing witness to the dissemination of foreign art during that era.

Selected Woodcuts by Käthe Kollwitz is a collection of prints meticulously compiled and published by Lu Xun. Käthe Kollwitz, a German female printmaker, is best known for works including *The Weavers' Revolt*, *The Peasants' War*, *War*, and *The Proletarian*. On 7 February 1931, following the martyrdom of Roushi and four other Left-Wing Writers' League members, Lu Xun chanced upon Köhler-Heizig's print *Sacrifice* (part of the *War* series) in a German bookshop catalogue. He promptly sent it to the Left-Wing Writers' League publication *The North Star*, edited by Ding Ling, as a memorial to Roushi and his comrades. This marked the first introduction of Köhler-Heizig's work to China. Subsequently, Lu Xun procured a collection of Koller-Wiesch's original works from Germany through intermediaries including Xu Shiqian and the American writer Agnes Smedley. In January 1936, despite his ill health, Lu Xun began editing *A Selection of Käthe Kollwitz's Prints*, which he self-published in July of the same year. The volume contained 21 of Kollwitz's woodcuts, lithographs and copperplate engravings. Sixteen of these were selected by Lu Xun from his own treasured collection of original prints, while the remaining five were reproduced from the 1927 printed portfolio published by the Art Guardians Society. Within the volume, Lu Xun penned a preface exceeding three thousand characters and provided annotations for each work. He expressed profound resonance with Köhler's depictions of the 'humiliated and injured' toiling masses.

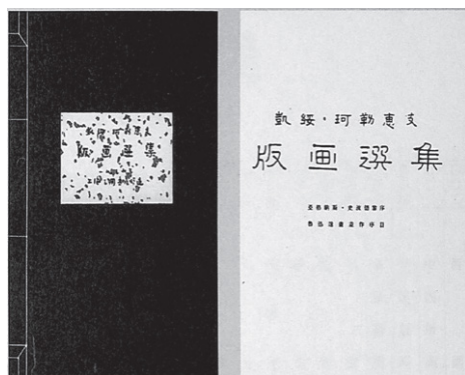


Figure 27. *Selected Woodcuts of Käthe Kollwitz* Cover and title page. Selected and prefaced by Lu Xun. Published privately under the imprint 'Three Leisure Book House' in May 1936.

The Jade Collection was another Soviet print collection meticulously compiled and published by Lu Xun. In 1931, whilst preparing to publish Cao Jinghua's translation of *Iron Stream* under the imprint of Sanxian Book House, Lu Xun chanced upon the woodcut illustrations by Soviet artist Biskalev in the magazine *Woodcut*. He promptly wrote to Cao Jinghua, then teaching in Moscow, entrusting him with the task of locating the original woodblock prints. After considerable effort, Cao Jinghua met Biskayev and secured the original prints through barter, exchanging Chinese xuan paper for them before sending them to Lu Xun. Over the following two years, Lu Xun acquired 118

Soviet prints and resolved to select 60 for compilation into a collection of Soviet woodcut prints. In a letter to Zheng Zhenduo dated 3 November 1933, Lu Xun expressed this intention: ‘I possess original Soviet woodcuts, quite rare in the East. I wish to introduce them to China through phototype reproduction.’ In January 1934, Lu Xun resolved to compile *The Jade-Attracting Collection*, symbolising the use of Chinese rice paper ‘bricks’ to attract Soviet woodcut “jade”. *The Jade-Attracting Collection* was ultimately produced ‘to reciprocate the artists’ generous sentiments and serve as reference for China’s young artists, selecting fifty-nine pieces and commissioning master engravers to produce fine glassplate prints’ (Xun, 1981)¹²⁴.

This illustrated volume features a *Preface* by Chen Jie (alias Qu Qiubai) at the outset, followed by a *Postscript* by Lu Xun. Following its publication, Lu Xun placed an advertisement for the book in the *Advertisements* section of the *Literature* monthly, Volume 2, Issue 6, dated 1 June 1934. He highlighted the book’s rarity and exceptional publishing quality, declaring it ‘a pioneering achievement in China’s publishing world’. Biskaylev was a book illustrator whose major works included illustrations for *The Iron Flood* and *Anna Karenina*. When Cao Jinghua sent Lu Xun the illustrations for *The Iron Flood* in 1931, as the book had already been published, Lu Xun had the illustrations printed as a separate insert for the *Literature* magazine. In 1933, when publishing Qu Qiubai’s translation of *The Liberated Don Quixote*, Lu Xun included 13 of Biskaylev’s woodcut illustrations in the volume, praising them as ‘particularly pleasing to the eye’. In the *Postscript to The Jade Collection*, Lu Xun expressed gratitude to Biskaylev as ‘the first to send his work to China,’ yet having found no biographical information about him, he specially selected and printed Biskaylev’s woodcut *The Biskaylev Family’s New Residence* to convey: ‘Though we know nothing of his life, we feel as if we have witnessed their family’ (Xun, 1981)¹²⁵. Besides Biskaylev, *The Jade Collection* also included works by Klavchynko, Goncharov, Alekseev, Pozharsky, Midroshin, Bikov, and Faursky.

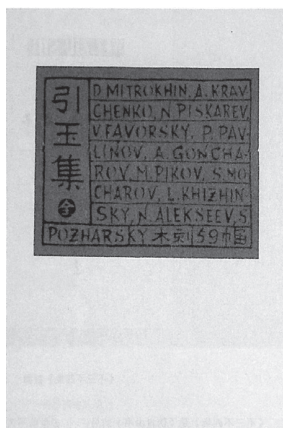


Figure 28. Cover of Yinyu Collection, a print collection featuring 59 works by 11 Soviet printmakers, selected and compiled by Lu Xun. Self-published under the name ‘Sanxian Book House’ in March 1934.

¹²⁴ Lu Xun, “Advertisement for Yinyu Collection”

¹²⁵ Lu Xun, “Postscript to Yinyu Ji”

The final collection of foreign prints compiled by Lu Xun during his lifetime was *Soviet Prints*. In the spring of 1936, the Sino-Soviet Cultural Association borrowed a collection of woodcut works by Soviet printmakers from the Soviet Union, staging exhibitions in Nanjing and Shanghai that proved highly successful. Zhao Jiabi, who oversaw editorial affairs at Liangyou Publishing Company, visited Lu Xun to request permission to compile a selection of woodcut works from the exhibition, prepare plates, and publish them as a book. Though gravely ill at the time, Lu Xun still discussed publishing details with Zhao Jiabi from his sickbed – such as paper quality, pricing, translations of names, and plate preparation – and agreed to write the book's preface. The volume featured numerous masterpieces of Soviet printmaking, including Fyodorov's illustrations for *Father Gonia's Discourse*, Yevgeny Yevtushenko's portraits of Pushkin and the Soviet poet Mayakovsky, Kravchenko's illustrations for Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* and Byron's *The Mystic*, Goncharov's book illustrations, and Panfilov's woodcut portraits. When Lu Xun wrote the preface to this book, he had been gravely ill for over a month, 'lacking even the strength to hold a sheet of paper.' Consequently, the preface was divided into two parts: the first half was an old draft, while the latter half was dictated during his illness and recorded by Xu Guangping. Yet he repeatedly expressed fervent hope that 'the publication of this collection would have a positive influence on Chinese readers, not only showcasing the achievements of Soviet art' (Xun, 1981)¹²⁶.

The foreign art albums compiled and published by Lu Xun exerted a profound and far-reaching influence among young artists in China. The woodcut artist Liu Xian wrote: 'During the 1930s, Mr Lu Xun introduced numerous foreign woodcut works. For me personally, the most significant influences were the British artist Dagley and the Soviet artist Fyodorovsky' (Xian, 1982). In 1933, Lu Xun also commented on *Morning Flowers in the Garden of Art* in the *Preface* to his compilation *Chronicles of Woodcut*, stating: "The introduction of woodcut creation began with the Morning Flower Society. Though the four volumes (author's note: should be five) of *Morning Flowers in the Art Garden* they published were not meticulously selected or printed, and were looked down upon by established artists, they nevertheless captured the attention of young apprentices" (Xun, 1981)¹²⁷.

Additionally, there are illustrated collections compiled by Lu Xun that remained unpublished for various reasons: 1) *Illustrations for Iron Stream* had been prepared for printing, but the plates were destroyed by artillery fire during the Shanghai Incident of 28 January. 2) For Meffert's woodcut series *Your Sisters*, Lu Xun had already written the *Preface* and designed the cover. 3) *City and Year*, for which Lu Xun had written the *preface* in 1936 and arranged for Cao Jinghua to provide brief explanatory illustrations; 4) *Noa, Noa*, written by Gauguin on Tahiti and featuring engraved illustrations, for which Lu Xun had placed advertisements; 5) *Portraits of Literary Figures*, containing caricatures, woodcuts, illustrations and other forms depicting various literary figures. Lu Xun had decided to commission a Tokyo printing house for its production. Additionally, the already compiled *Selected Works of E. Munch*, *The Flower-Plucking Collection* (Soviet woodcuts), and *Selected German Woodcuts* all remained unpublished due to Lu Xun's passing. 6) Planned publications: *Selected British Illustrations* *French Illustrated Works*, *Russian Illustrated Works*, *Greek Vase Paintings*, *Modern Woodcut Selection* (Volumes 3 and 4), and *Rodin Sculpture Selection*. This catalogue of unrealised publications reveals the immense dedication Lu Xun invested in introducing foreign art books to China, making his untimely demise all the more lamentable.

¹²⁶ Lu Xun, "Soviet Print Collection"

¹²⁷ Lu Xun, "Preface to The Woodcut Chronicle"

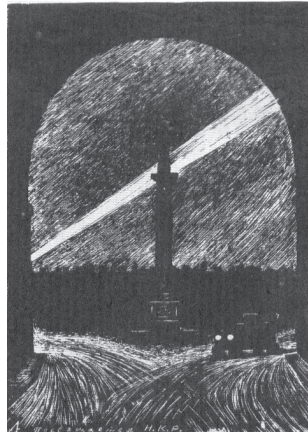


Figure 29. Illustration for *City and Year* (Frontispiece), by Soviet printmaker Alekseyev

3.2.2. Hosting an art exhibition

To foster the emerging art of woodcut and nurture young woodcut artists, Lu Xun organised numerous exhibitions of foreign woodcuts while simultaneously publishing extensive collections of foreign artworks. He maintained that: ‘Holding exhibitions of such works is more crucial than holding exhibitions of domestic works’ (Guangfu, 1982). For, as Lu Xun repeatedly cautioned: ‘To advance one’s technique, it is insufficient to study the works of one’s own countrymen, as they themselves still possess many shortcomings; one must study the works of foreign masters’ (Guangfu, 1982).

On 4–5 October 1930, the ‘World Print Exhibition’ organised by Lu Xun opened in Shanghai. The venue, arranged through Uchiyama Kanzo, was situated on the second floor of the First Store of the Shanghai Purchasing Association at 812 D’Aguilar Road. This exhibition featured over seventy prints selected from Lu Xun’s collection of works by artists from Britain, France, Italy, the United States, Sweden, Russia, and Japan. Among these were ten original woodcut prints of Meffert’s illustrations for the Soviet novelist Glatkov’s *Sintum*, procured from Germany by Xu Shiqian at Lu Xun’s request; hand-printed woodcuts exchanged by Roushi for stationery from the British printmaker Gibbons; and selected woodcuts from *Modern Woodcut Selections I* and *Modern Woodcut Selections II*. Lu Xun framed these exhibits, provided explanatory texts in Chinese, English and Japanese, and printed an exhibition catalogue. Xu Guangping recalled that for this exhibition, ‘Mr Lu Xun personally handled the selection of works, their framing and numbering, and the annotation of nationality and author names in both the original language and Chinese’ (Tiji and Yunjing, 1985). The exhibition ran for two days. According to Uchiyama Kanzo, who participated in its organisation: ‘Every detail of the venue layout and image arrangement... including the lighting, was meticulously planned’ (Kanzo, 1957). Attendance reached 400 visitors, predominantly Japanese. Young printmaker Chen Yanqiao and most members of the Yufeng Painting Society attended the exhibition.

From 4 to 25 June 1932, the ‘German Original Print Exhibition’, jointly organised by Mrs Hamburg, the German manager of Yinghuan Book Company, and Lu Xun, was held at Yinghuan Book Company on Jing’an Temple Road in Shanghai. Originally scheduled for 7 December 1931, the

exhibition was postponed due to the large dimensions of certain original print works, some exceeding two chi (approximately 66.7 centimetres). On 29 April 1931, after Lu Xun procured frames and secured additional borrowings, the mounting issues were resolved, enabling the exhibition to open six months later (Wang, 1982). For this exhibition, Lu Xun loaned his treasured holdings: the lithograph *Aphorisms from Schiller's Play The Robbers* by the German printmaker Grosz; the copper-plate engraving *The Peasants' War* by Käthe Kollwitz; and four woodcuts *Iron Oxen* by the Russian woodcut artist Biskalev.

Around the time of this exhibition, Lu Xun published two articles in the Left-Wing Writers' League's official newspaper, *Literary News*: *Introducing the German Writers' Print Exhibition* and *The Truth Behind the Postponement of the German Writers' Print Exhibition*, detailing the exhibition's proceedings and circumstances. In 'Introduction to the German Writers' Print Exhibition,' Lu Xun presented works by artists including Kokesche, Albinus, Peixstein, and Fannig. He noted that these artists were highly renowned, stating, 'Anyone with even a passing familiarity with modern art would be well acquainted with these figures'¹²⁸. He also highlighted Expressionist printmakers such as Käthe Kollwitz, Max Becher, Max Hoffmann, Ernst Groth, and Max Meyerfeld, noting certain affinities between Expressionist printmaking and the Expressionist literary movement. He further noted that the exhibition featured 'over a hundred works, the largest measuring two or three feet, each bearing the artist's own signature. These stand in stark contrast to mere reproductions and are well worth studying by art students and enthusiasts alike' (Xun, 1981)¹²⁹.

On 14–15 October 1933, the 'Exhibition of Modern Writers' Woodcuts' was held at No. 40 Qian'ai Lane, North Sichuan Road, Shanghai. The exhibition space comprised two large rooms with a long rectangular table positioned centrally. This marked the second exhibition personally organised by Lu Xun. Three days prior to the opening (11 October), Lu Xun and Xu Guangping commenced mounting the exhibits. The exhibition featured 66 newly acquired original woodcut prints from abroad, collected by Lu Xun.¹³⁰

Young woodcut artists who attended the exhibition, including Zhang Wang, Liu Xian, Wu Bo, and Chen Yanqiao, recalled that members of woodcut groups such as the Anonymous Woodcut Society and the MK Woodcut Association, along with students from the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and the Xinhua Academy of Arts, had all visited. During the exhibition period, Lu Xun brought along several foreign art albums, conversing with the young woodcut artists while explaining the state of woodcut creation abroad. Xu Guangping later recalled that the impetus for this exhibition stemmed from the 1932 Shanghai 'January 28th Incident' and subsequent evacuation efforts, where 'fearing the loss of preserved new and old prints, they resolved 'to exhibit them whenever opportunity arose' (Tiji and Yunjing, 1985). She further noted that 'this exhibition proved richer than the first, leaving a favourable impression on all who saw it' (Tiji and Yunjing, 1985).

Zhang Wang (1979) once recalled that he and several comrades from the MK Woodcut Society visited the exhibition, observing that 'the exhibits were considerably richer than the previous two shows, with Soviet works forming the majority, though pieces from France, Belgium, Portugal,

¹²⁸ Lu Xun, "Introduction to the German Writers' Print Exhibition"

¹²⁹ Lu Xun, "Introduction to the Exhibition of Prints by German Writers"

¹³⁰ The exhibition featured 33 Russian woodcuts, 26 German woodcuts, 2 Arab woodcuts, 3 Czech woodcuts, 1 Dutch woodcut, and 1 Hungarian woodcut.

Britain, and the United States were also present'. He further described how Lu Xun engaged in cordial conversation with the young artists, noting: 'He provided more detailed explanations piece by piece, with works by Soviet masters such as Fyodorovsky and Goncharov... naturally being the ones he particularly recommended. Yet he offered equally earnest assessments of pieces from other countries' (Wang, 1979). A catalogue entitled *Catalogue of the Exhibition of Woodblock Prints by Modern Artists* was printed for this exhibition. Mr Wang Guanquan believes it was held in the collection of Uchiyama Kanzo, proprietor of Uchiyama Bookshop. Undoubtedly, this catalogue not only records the exhibition's title and list of exhibits, but also specifies the venue and dates of display. It constitutes an invaluable historical document for researching this exhibit.

On 2-3 December 1933, the 'Russian and French Book Illustration Exhibition' was held on the second floor of a Japanese YMCA building. The precise location was No. 40 Lao Tazi Road, at the corner of Haineng Road, Shanghai. The exhibition featured over one hundred woodcut illustrations from the Soviet Union and France. Among these, only ten were original prints of Soviet woodcuts.¹³¹ Regarding the difficulties in organising this exhibition, Lu Xun wrote to Wu Bo on 6 December 1933: Organising an exhibition proves rather difficult at present. Firstly, the venue must be borrowed and deemed secure. Secondly, the exhibition content poses challenges: Soviet prints are banned and confiscated by the authorities, making a standalone exhibition impossible. "We must therefore invite guests to accompany them; the French illustrations serve this purpose this time" (Guangfu, 1982). This correspondence at least indicates two points: firstly, securing exhibition space proved challenging; secondly, while the exhibition primarily aimed to showcase Soviet print works, French illustrators' pieces had to be included to circumvent official confiscation. According to Lu Xun's tally, approximately 200 Chinese visitors attended this exhibition.

The four foreign art exhibitions organised or co-organised by Lu Xun were staged amidst considerable difficulties. They disseminated new artistic trends in foreign art, holding profound significance for Chinese audiences, particularly young woodcut artists. On the one hand, these exhibitions introduced novel foreign artistic forms to Chinese viewers through the most direct, vivid and comprehensive means. Not only did they create a platform for the public to understand the distinctive characteristics and standards of international printmaking, but they also provided the finest learning opportunities for China's young woodcut artists. On the other hand, whenever an exhibition was held, Lu Xun would notify the young woodcut artists in advance to attend. He also made full use of the valuable opportunities during the exhibitions, bringing along foreign art catalogues to explain the developments in international printmaking to the young woodcut artists visiting the venues. Through visiting these exhibitions, the young woodcut artists not only elevated their creative standards and technical skills, but also found emotional resonance in the themes and content of the foreign artworks. Soviet prints, for instance, profoundly captivated the hearts of countless young Chinese woodcut artists.

3.3. The Introduction of "Book Illustrations"

Lu Xun once observed that 'book illustrations were originally intended to adorn publications and heighten readers' interest, yet their power can supplement what words alone cannot convey'

¹³¹ Soviet exhibits included four illustrations from Alekseev's *Mother* and three original rubbing prints from *The City and the Year*.

(Xun, 1981)¹³². Illustrations¹³³, when applied to literary works, not only aid readers in comprehending textual content and enriching literary narratives to render them more vivid, thereby enhancing reader engagement; they also serve as a further artistic expression by the artist regarding the chosen subject matter. Lu Xun's fondness for illustrations likely began in childhood with tracing 'illustrated portraits.' Beyond collecting literary illustrations from various periods and cultures, he himself drew pictures for the afterword of *Morning Flowers Plucked at Dusk*. He published numerous foreign illustrated works, defended the value of 'sequential pictures,' and advocated for an art form 'striving for accessibility for the masses,' thereby amplifying the social utility of illustration.

3.3.1. The rationale for introducing 'Book Illustration'

From a young age, Lu Xun took an interest in illustrated books. In *From the Garden of Morning Flowers to the Study of Three Tastes*, he mentions using a type of paper called 'Jingchuan paper' to trace the embroidered illustrations on novels. The 'illustrated portraits' Lu Xun referred to can be understood as traditional Chinese book illustrations. In April 1932, Luo Yang (Feng Xuefeng) published *On the Popularisation of Literature* in the inaugural issue of *Literature*¹³⁴, discussing sequential illustrations and arguing that 'we should utilise the old forms of popular art' – namely, revolutionary ballads, opera scripts, sequential illustrations, storytelling, and the like – to create popular literature. Su Wen, a 'third type of person,' wrote a satirical piece in the July issue of *Modern* magazine¹³⁵, disparaging comic strips as a 'low-grade form' that 'cannot produce a Tolstoy, cannot produce a Froebel'¹³⁶. In response, Lu Xun penned *On the 'Third Kind of Person'* and *A Defence of 'Picture Stories'* to counter these views, asserting that picture stories could indeed possess the nature of religious propaganda, as exemplified by the Old Testament, the Life of Christ, and the Lives of the Saints. He cited Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* and Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* as evidence.

Moreover, he argued that 'picture stories not only can become art, but have already taken their place in the pantheon of art.' *The Old Testament, The Life of Jesus, The Lives of the Saints,* and that 'religious propaganda paintings, the Old Testament picture-stories'; moreover, 'picture-stories can not only become art, but have already taken their place within the "palace of art" possessing a long history of artistic development (Xun, 1981)¹³⁷. Lu Xun cited numerous examples to illustrate his point. From the frescoes in Italian churches serving as sequential religious narratives, to the Ajanta Cave murals in India, China's *Illustrated Hymn to Confucius*, the Song dynasty's *Illustrated Tang Customs* and *Illustrated Farming and Weaving*, and Qiu Ying's *Illustrated Biography of Lady Feiyan*

¹³² Lu Xun, "In Defence of 'Sequential Illustrations'"

¹³³ The term '插图' (chàtú, "illustration") is defined in the Modern Chinese Dictionary as: 'pictures inserted within text to aid explanation of content, encompassing both scientific and artistic illustrations.' (See Dictionary Editorial Office, Institute of Linguistics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Modern Chinese Dictionary, Commercial Press, 1996 edition, p. 130.) In Lu Xun's writings, '插图' (chàtú) and '插画' (chàhuà) are frequently used interchangeably, with "插图" even serving as a synonym for '插画'.

¹³⁴ In the same issue of *Literature*, Shi Tie'er (Qu Qiubai) also wrote: 'Given the extremely low literacy rate, the form of illustrated storybooks should still be employed.'

¹³⁵ *Modern*, a monthly magazine launched in May 1932, co-edited by Shi Zecun and Du Heng.

¹³⁶ Su Wen satirised this stance: "Observing that the working masses currently lack reading material, they find them perusing antiquated, feudal-tinged (that is to say, harmful) picture books and songbooks. Consequently, they demand that writers produce beneficial picture books and songbooks for the masses... Can such a lowly medium truly yield fine works? Indeed, comic strips cannot produce a Tolstoy, nor a Froebel..."

¹³⁷ Lu Xun, "In Defence of Comic Strips"

and *Illustrated Meeting of True Love* – all were described as sequential narratives. He further highlighted the book illustration artistry of printmakers from the 18th-century French engraver Tolle¹³⁸ to 19th-century German artists such as Koller and Meffert, Belgian artist Maes, American artists Higgler and Groppell, and British artist Gibbons. These examples demonstrate Lu Xun's considerable familiarity with the historical development of global illustration art, his broad perspective, and his approach to the subject, which extends beyond mere tools and materials to embrace the concept of illustration art in its broadest sense.

Following Lu Xun's broad conception of the art of illustration, we might first acquaint ourselves with this artistic discipline. The emergence of illustration in Europe dates back several centuries. In the early Renaissance of the 13th century, Giotto's *Lives of the Saints* and Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* were both works bearing illustrative qualities. Later, Donatello's *Four Horsemen* and *Battle of the Angels*, alongside Holbein's *Dance of Death* series, stand as treasures in the history of printmaking and exemplify superb illustration. In the 17th century, the English painter William Hogarth was an outstanding satirical illustrator. His masterpieces, *The Harlot's Progress* and *Marriage à la Mode*, are illustrations with profound social significance. In the 18th century, William Blake, as both poet and painter, created numerous poetic illustrations rich in symbolism and fantasy.

During this era, numerous European artists ventured beyond their primary disciplines to dedicate themselves to illustration. Notable figures such as Rembrandt, Goya, Daumier, Lautrec, and Daumier produced commendable illustrative works. In the 19th century, the French illustrator Doré established a new standard for the art of illustration with an unprecedented level of completeness and meticulous detail. Illustration thus entered a new era, with nearly every literary masterpiece requiring an illustrated edition. This trend, pioneered in France, spread throughout Europe. Many artists regarded illustration as equally significant to their artistic creation, willingly accepting commissions from writers and publishers to work on book illustrations. By the early 20th century, advances in painting tools had enriched illustrative techniques and styles, yielding more diverse and dynamic visual expressions.



Figure 30. The Passion of One Man Cover of a woodcut illustrated storybook. By Belgian artist Maurice Leyle, with a preface by Lu Xun. Published by Liangyou Book Printing Company, Shanghai, September 1933.

¹³⁸ G. Doré (1833-1883), French engraver, whose representative works include illustrations for *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Don Quixote*, and *The Crusades*.

Lu Xun always attached great importance to book illustrations. Not only did he extensively collect ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign illustration works, but he also published foreign illustrations in magazines he edited or influenced, organised exhibitions of Russian and French book illustrations, and selected and published collections of foreign illustrations. Lu Xun maintained that illustrations were not merely works of art; they were intrinsically linked to literary works, serving to enhance one another. His introduction of foreign illustrations was intended both as a gift to Chinese literary scholars and enthusiasts, complementing novels in the tradition of ‘pictures on the left, history on the right’ to provide readers with a visual understanding of different nations’ social conditions; but also as a gift to domestic illustrators, ‘to enable them to observe the realistic models of other countries,’ to recognise the differences from China’s traditional “portraits” or “embroidered portraits,” ‘and perhaps find something worthy of emulation’; it stemmed equally from personal interest and the need for cultural enlightenment (Xun, 1981). Lu Xun noted that what began as ‘merely seeking new books to illustrate for *The Torrent*, which sparked an interest through the abundance of material encountered’ (Guangping, 1999), evolved into ‘a mission to introduce Eastern and Northern European literature and import foreign prints, for we all believed it necessary to foster robust and unadorned literary and artistic endeavours’ (Xun, 1981)¹³⁹.

3.3.2. The Introduction of “Book Illustrations”

Following the establishment of the Morning Flower Society in 1928, Lu Xun simultaneously organised the translation of foreign literature while editing and publishing foreign artworks. He also incorporated numerous book illustrations into these translations, enhancing the literary works. From that time onward, Lu Xun devoted considerable energy and dedication to introducing foreign illustrations. Among the twelve illustrated albums initially planned for publication by *Yiyuan Chaohua*, numerous illustrated works were proposed, such as *British Illustrated Selections*, *French Illustrated Selections*, and *Russian Illustrated Selections*, as listed in *Yiyuan Chaohua: Advertisements*. However, due to various difficulties encountered by the Chaohua Publishing House, these publications never materialised. Even among the works that were published, *Selected Illustrations by Hong'er of Fugu Valley*, *Selected Illustrations by Beardsley*, and *Pictures of Shimin Tu* all incorporated illustrative elements. Moreover, the works of artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, Max Suter, and Max Meyerfeld were predominantly presented in the form of series of pictures, illustrations, or sequential images.

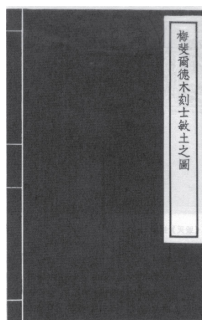


Figure 31. The Map of Meyfield Woodcut Cement Cover, printed February 1931

¹³⁹ Lu Xun, “In Memory of Forgetting”

Lu Xun once cited examples illustrating the difficulties of publishing illustrated works at the time. The publication of illustrated editions of *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* in the late 19th century, though popular and widely purchased, even attracting children who read the original text primarily for the pictures, led him to conclude that illustrations were not only entertaining but also beneficial. Nevertheless, publishers ‘were not very keen on them due to the high cost, hence illustrated editions have become scarce in recent years’ (Xun, 1976). Nevertheless, in his own translations, Lu Xun endeavoured to include original illustrations whenever possible. In November 1928, to promote the illustrations by the French Fauvist painter Taffy¹⁴⁰, Lu Xun translated Apollinaire’s poem *The Flea* from Japanese under the pseudonym ‘Feng Yu’. This translation, alongside the illustrations, was published in the sixth issue of the first volume of *The Torrent*. Lu Xun further noted in an accompanying article: ‘The sole reason for this translation was the illustrations’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁴¹.

When *Little Peter*, translated by Lu Xun and Xu Guangping under the pseudonym ‘Xu Xia’, was published in September 1929, it featured six illustrations by Chagall.¹⁴² In his *Preface to the Translation of Little Peter*, Lu Xun introduced Grosz, noting that while originally a Dadaist, he later turned to the Left because, ‘according to the Hungarian critic Matz, this was because his art demanded substance – ideas,’ thus transcending Dadaism. In 1930, Lu Xun received illustrations for *Your Sisters* and *Seminth* by Karl Meffert¹⁴³, purchased from Germany by Xu Shiqian. The following February, Lu Xun self-published *Illustrations of Meffert’s Seminth* under the Sanxian Bookshop imprint, containing ten illustrations, bound in the traditional Chinese thread-bound style. In the ‘Preface’ to *Illustrations from Meffert’s Cement*, Lu Xun offered high praise for Meffert’s illustrative artistry: ‘He most loved to engrave and print series of woodcuts containing revolutionary content... yet one could still faintly discern a spirit of compassion’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁴⁴. Kyle Meffert’s *Your Sisters* had also been edited by Lu Xun and was ready for publication, but the project was abandoned due to difficulties in recovering the costs incurred in selling *The Jade Collection*.

¹⁴⁰ R. Dufuy (1877–1953), French painter, whose principal works include *Gardens in Paris* and *The Seaside Club at Nice*. He provided illustrations for Apollinaire’s *Book of Animal Poems*.

¹⁴¹ Lu Xun, “Afterword to Editing and Proofreading (VI)”

¹⁴² George Grosz (1893–1959), a German printmaker, satirized the flaws of Western society in his cartoons. After being sentenced to six years for publishing anti-war cartoons, he emigrated to the United States in 1933. In February 1930, Lu Xun published two of Grosz’s cartoons, *Subordination to Divine Will* and *Because They Fought for Freedom...*, in the second issue of *Budding*. The Editor’s Note mentioned that Lu Xun planned a more detailed introduction to Grosz’s art. In May 1931, Lu Xun acquired nine of Grosz’s lithographs and later sent over one hundred German prints, including Grosz’s works, for an exhibition in Shanghai. Lu Xun also praised Grosz’s art in his essay *Cartoons and Yet Cartoons*.

¹⁴³ Carl Meffert (1903–?) was a German printmaker whose principal works include illustrations for *The Semen* (10 plates), *Your Sisters* (7 plates), and *The Disciple of Care* (13 plates).

¹⁴⁴ Lu Xun, “Preface to Carl Meffert’s *Illustrations of ‘Seminus’*”

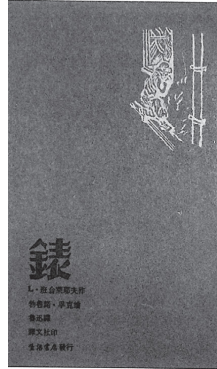


Figure 32. The Cover of the Watch A Medium-Length Fairy Tale
By B.T. Bantayev Translated by Lu Xun Published by Shanghai Life Bookstore, July 1935

In 1931, a maid in Lu Xun's household discovered an illustrated edition of *Eve's Diary* among the discarded belongings of a foreign neighbour who had moved out. This illustrated edition contained over fifty illustrations by the American artist Lelefu for Mark Twain's *Eve's Diary*. Lu Xun treasured it greatly, particularly admiring the illustrations. He recommended it to Li Lan for translation, and it was published that same year by Hufeng Publishing House. In his *Preface*, Lu Xun specifically wrote: 'Leroux's fifty-odd line drawings, though delicate, are remarkably fresh,' strongly endorsing the illustrations within. In August of the same year, Lu provided fourteen illustrations by Alekseyev¹⁴⁵ for Gorky's *Mother* to Han Bailuo in Taiyuan. These were reproduced via photolithography for the *Mother* edition, for which Lu also penned a preface. He lauded Alekseyev's illustrative skill, noting that 'though the technique may not yet be deemed entirely masterful,' the drawings were vivid and powerful, capturing the spirit of the work.

'Even those who have not read the novel, do they not see here the dark politics and the struggling masses?' (Xun, 1981)¹⁴⁶. In 1936, upon learning of Alekseyev's passing, Lu Xun compiled another set of his illustrations – 28 pieces for Fyodorov's *The City and the Year* – alongside Cao Jinghua's translation of the novel's synopsis into *The City and the Year*. He also penned a *Preface* in Alekseyev's memory. However, due to Lu Xun's own death, the illustrations for *The City and the Year* were never published separately. In October 1931, Lu Xun's translation of Soviet author Fadeyev's renowned work *The Ruin* was published by Sanxian Bookstore, featuring six illustrations by V. S. Trefil reproduced from *Roman Magazine*. In his *Afterword*, Lu Xun noted that these illustrations 'bear some resemblance to Chinese embroidered portraits and are not particularly remarkable, but they may nonetheless serve to heighten the reader's interest, hence their inclusion' (Xun, 1983). In July 1935, Lu Xun's translation of the Soviet author Bantaleev's novella *The Watch* was pub-

¹⁴⁵ Nikolai Vasilievich Alekseev (1894-1934), Soviet painter, whose principal works include illustrations for Gorky's *Mother*, Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, and Feidin's *The City and the Year*. In 1932, Lu Xun entrusted Cao Jinghua in the Soviet Union to collect Soviet prints. Alekseev sent forty-one pieces, fourteen of which Lu Xun included in his collection *Jade-Drawing in honour of the Mother*, alongside an excerpt from the artist's autobiography in the afterword.

¹⁴⁶ Lu Xun, "Preface to Fourteen Woodcuts for *Mother*".

lished by Shenghuo Bookstore, featuring 22 illustrations by Fu Ke¹⁴⁷. In the translator's note to *The Watch*, Lu Xun explained that the illustrations were reproduced from a German translation and that the artist Fu Ke was not a particularly well-known young painter. On 11 March 1936, in a letter to Yang Jinhao, he remarked: 'I have never studied children's literature. I once acquired one or two fairy tales merely for their illustrations, *The Watch* being one such example.'

In 1936, Lu Xun translated seven of Chekhov's short and medium-length stories, including *The Bad Boy and Other Curious Tales*, compiling them into the volume *The Bad Boy and Other Curious Tales*. Published as part of the 'Literary Series' by Lianhua Publishing House, it featured six illustrations by Mathurin¹⁴⁸. Lu Xun was greatly captivated by these illustrations. In his 'Translator's Afterword,' he remarked that the impetus for translating this work stemmed less from the prose itself than from a desire to introduce the illustrations. He further noted that as early as 1926, when he edited *The Unnamed Series*, he had included Hu Xie's translation of *Twelve Stories*, whose cover and interior pages featured four illustrations by Mathusin, evidently demonstrating his high regard for Mathuin's illustrative artistry (Xun, 1981)¹⁴⁹.

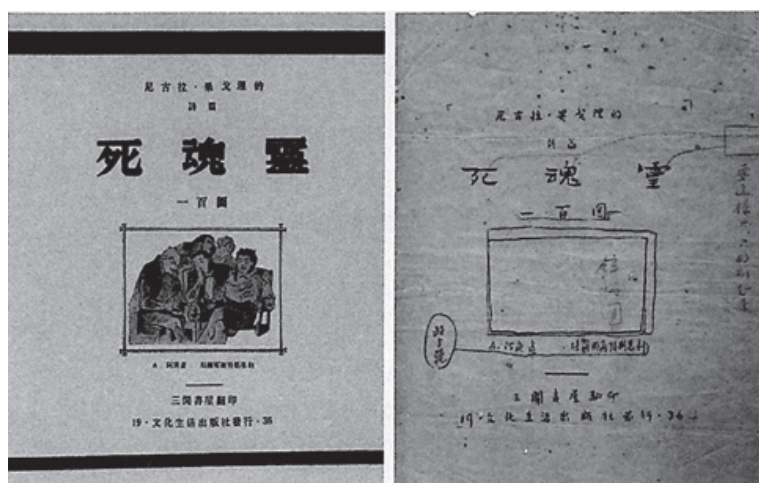


Figure 33. The Dead Souls: Hundred Illustrations Cover and Title Page.

This volume contains 103 woodcut engravings, illustrated by A. Geng of Russia, engraved by P. Nertz, with 13 accompanying plates.

Lu Xun held a great admiration for the illustrative art of the Russian artist Ageng¹⁵⁰. Not only did he include 11 of Agin's illustrations in his translation of *Dead Souls*, but in April 1936, under the imprint of Sanxian Book House, he specially published a volume titled *One Hundred Illustrations for*

¹⁴⁷ Bruno Fuk, German illustrator.

¹⁴⁸ V.N. Masiutin (1859-1937), Soviet painter, who illustrated Blok's epic poem *The Twelve* and Chekhov's short stories.

¹⁴⁹ Lu Xun, "The Bad Child and Other Curious Tales Translator's Afterword"

¹⁵⁰ A.A. Arnh (1817-1875), Russian painter, one of the founders of Russian realist illustration. He illustrated works by Griboyedov, Bayev, Turgenev, Gogol and others, with his illustrations for *Dead Souls* being the most renowned.

Dead Souls. This compilation brought together Agin's critically acclaimed yet long out-of-print illustrations for *Dead Souls* alongside twelve illustrations by L'Erokov. Lu Xun asserted that 'this collection brings together the two most realistic and mutually complementary sets of *Dead Souls* illustrations produced by Russian artists' (Xun, 1981)¹⁵¹. The advertisement for the book even declared: 'Readers consulting this volume alongside the translated text will find the social milieu of Russia during Gogol's era vividly brought to life. To present such a renowned work accompanied by this extensive collection of illustrations constitutes an unprecedented undertaking in China' (Xun, 1981)¹⁵².

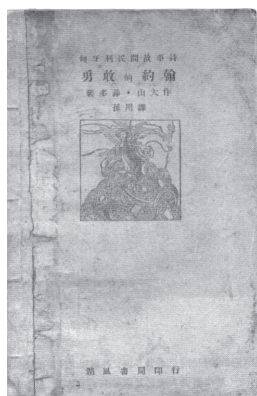


Figure 34. The cover of *Brave John*. Published by Lake Breeze Publishing House, Shanghai, November 1931.



Figure 35. Portrait of Haiying at Sixteen Days Old, oil on canvas, by Yoshikazu Akita. In September 1929, Lu Xun's son Zhou Haiying was born. Upon learning of this, the artist specially visited Lu Xun's residence on 13 October to paint the portrait.

¹⁵¹ Lu Xun, "Preface to *Dead Souls*"

¹⁵² Lu Xun, "Advertisement for *Dead Souls*"

Lu Xun not only incorporated foreign illustrations into his own translations but also advocated for the inclusion of more illustrations in others' works. In 1930, Sun Yongyong translated Petőfi's *Brave John* into Esperanto and sent the book to Lu Xun. Lu Xun had long admired Petőfi both as a man and as a poet, having previously translated his works for *The Collection of Foreign Short Stories*. After reading Sun Yong's translation, he deemed it 'a conscientious and fluent rendering' and suggested it should feature fine illustrations, adding, 'Since you intend to print it yourself, I should very much like to see it illustrated with better pictures.' Lu Xun even wrote to Xu Shiqian in Germany, hoping he could procure an illustrated edition of *Brave John* from Hungary, but to no avail. Later, Sun Yong obtained twelve colour reproductions of the murals created by Sándor Balázs¹⁵³ for *Brave John* from the Hungarian Esperanto translator Károly. Lu Xun treasured these immensely, remarking that 'these illustrations for *Brave John* are rare even in Hungary itself' (Xun, 1981)¹⁵⁴.

Naturally, numerous similar examples exist, though it would be impractical to enumerate them all here. It must be emphasised, however, that Lu Xun did not prioritise promoting illustration art solely because of his own literary pursuits, nor did he advocate that artists should exclusively dedicate themselves to literary illustrations. In fact, he explicitly stated: 'I do not urge young art students to disregard large-scale oil or watercolour paintings, but I hope they will equally value and strive in the creation of comic strips and illustrations for books and periodicals' (Xun, 1981)¹⁵⁵. In previous scholarly works, many academics have mistakenly assumed that Lu Xun's advocacy for foreign art focused solely on literary illustrations or printmaking. In reality, the scope of foreign artworks introduced by Lu Xun was remarkably broad. For instance, in the fourth issue of the first volume of *The Torrent*, Lu Xun published a translation of Japanese author Arishima Takeo's *The Rebel: Reflections on Rodin*. He also featured four of Rodin's sculptures – *The Thinker*, *The Man with the Broken Nose*, *Saint John*, and *Adam* – and introduced several foreign publications on Rodin.

Lu Xun also planned to compile and publish *Selected Sculptures of Rodin* as volume twelve of the *Morning Flowers of the Art Garden* series, having already placed advertisements for it, though the project was ultimately abandoned. In December 1928, to commemorate the centenary of Leo Tolstoy's birth, he specially published Ilya Repin's oil painting *Tolstoy Ploughing Portrait of Tolstoy, the Literary Giant*, in *The Torrent*. In October 1931, Lu Xun introduced Mexican muralist Rivera's¹⁵⁶ *Night of the Poor* in the second issue of the first volume of *The North Star*, praising Rivera's art as 'most capable of fulfilling social responsibilities' and 'belonging to the masses'. While serving as chief editor of *Literary Research*, he proposed 'publishing as many works of sculpture and painting as possible' to introduce and promote sculpture. During the editing and publication of *Morning Flowers in the Garden of Art*, he also planned to compile and print ancient Greek vase paintings, among other initiatives. All these examples serve to illustrate that Lu Xun was closely attuned to the prevailing trends in global art at the time and possessed considerable familiarity with them. For instance, in *Random Thoughts No. 53*, he remarked: 'What of the new art, the true art, that

¹⁵³ Sándor Balatón (1872-1949), Hungarian painter. He created twelve murals for Petőfi Sándor's renowned long narrative poem *Brave John*.

¹⁵⁴ Lu Xun, "Postscript to *Brave John*"

¹⁵⁵ Lu Xun, "In Defense of 'Comic Strips'"

¹⁵⁶ Diego Rivera (1886-1957), one of the leading figures of Mexican modern mural painting, whose representative works include *Night of the Poor* and *Night of the Rich*.

emerged after the nineteenth century?’ He observed that following the Post-Impressionists represented by Van Gogh and Cézanne, ‘by the early 1920s, no new school seemed to have emerged yet’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁵⁷. His keen attention to global artistic developments was matched by the remarkable breadth of foreign art forms and content he introduced to his homeland.

3.4. Organising woodcut creation workshops

The historical value and significance of Lu Xun’s Creative Woodcut Workshop have long been the subject of considerable scholarly attention and research, yielding substantial achievements. As the workshop’s instructor, Yoshikichi Uchiyama penned a memoir entitled *Early Chinese Woodcuts and Myself: Recollections of the Creative Printmaking Workshop* during his visit to China in June 1956, which was serialised in the *China-Japan* magazine from the June 1972 issue to the February 1973 issue. It was later published in 1981 alongside research manuscripts by Kazuo Nara as *Lu Xun and Woodcut*, serving as primary source material for studies on Lu Xun’s creative woodcut workshops. Domestic academia has successively published works such as *Fifty Years of China’s Emerging Print Movement 1931–1981*, *Lu Xun and China’s Emerging Woodcut Movement*, and *Commemorative Collection of the 18 Arts Society*. Scholars including Wang Guanquan, Li Yunjing, and Li Shusheng have also offered in-depth discussions on this subject. Building upon the foregoing, this section examines the woodcut workshop within the context of Sino-foreign artistic exchange, considering Lu Xun’s international artistic vision and the introduction of foreign art forms. It argues for the modern significance of the workshop as the genesis of China’s emerging woodcut movement.

3.4.1. From ‘Woodcut Creation’ to ‘Workshops’

In January 1929, *Selected Modern Woodcuts Vol. 1* was published by Shanghai Heji Educational Supplies Company. The volume included *A Brief Introduction* and *Supplementary Notes* written by Lu Xun. Previous chapters have discussed the origins of woodblock printing as described in *A Brief Introduction*, its influence on European printmaking, and how it evolved into ‘creative woodcuts,’ identifying the characteristics and methods of this form. Japanese scholar Nara Kazuo has researched that Lu Xun’s discourse drew upon or paraphrased the chapter *The Evolution of Western Woodblock Printing* from the work *Methods of Creative Printmaking* by the Japanese author Asahi Masahide, published by Kōbun-sha in 1927 (Yoshikichi and Kazuo, 1985). The term ‘creative woodcut’ refers to works that neither imitate nor reproduce existing images, instead employing a direct, unmediated approach with the carving knife. Such works possess the characteristics of ‘using the knife as a brush’ and ‘substituting wood for paper.’ Their ‘style and technique, varying from artist to artist, have diverged from reproduction woodcuts to become a pure art form’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁵⁸.

Nara Kazuo contends that ‘woodcut’ is an unfamiliar term in Japan, likely Lu Xun’s translation of wood-engraving.⁹⁶ As to why ‘printmaking’ was not adopted, Nara contends that “‘printmaking’ is a general term encompassing woodblock prints, copperplate engravings, lithographs, etc., whereas “woodcut” specifically refers to the foreign woodblock prints introduced by Lu Xun, or the woodcut creations that emerged after the “Creative Printmaking Workshop” (Yoshikichi and Kazuo, 1985). In truth, Lu Xun’s advocacy for ‘creative wood engraving’ distinguished itself from

¹⁵⁷ Lu Xun, “Random Thoughts No. 53”

¹⁵⁸ Lu Xun, “Preface to Selected Modern Woodcuts Vol. 1”

‘reproductive printmaking,’ seeking instead an artistic process where ‘the artist wields the chisel directly upon the wood.’ Since the founding of the ‘Morning Flower Society’ in 1928, Lu Xun had actively ‘introduced Eastern and Northern European literature and imported foreign prints,’ subsequently publishing numerous collections of foreign prints and organising exhibitions of foreign printmaking works. Regarding the rationale for advocating ‘creative woodcut,’ domestic scholarship generally interprets it through the relationship between emerging woodcut art and revolution: firstly, ‘in times of revolution, printmaking proves most versatile, capable of rapid execution even under extreme haste’ (Wang, 1982). Secondly, China’s emerging woodcut art emerged and developed amidst the turmoil of war, ‘making it an art form perfectly suited to modern China’ (Fei, 1996). Thirdly, Lu Xun’s advocacy for emerging woodcut art ‘represented the harmonious inner demand of both the artist and the masses’ (Tiji and Yunjing, 1985). The established view, as introduced by Lu Xun, regarding the motivation for creating woodcuts – even setting aside their ‘combative aspect’ – was to ‘foster a little robust and unadorned literature and art.’

The ‘Creative Woodcut Workshop’ organised by Lu Xun represented a concrete initiative in his advocacy for ‘creative woodcut art’. On 17 August 1931, the workshop was held at a Japanese language school operated by members of the Creation Society at the junction of North Sichuan Road and Changchun Road. The principal lecturer was Yoshikichi Uchiyama¹⁵⁹, who instructed on creative woodcut techniques. Lu Xun served as interpreter. Thirteen participants attended: six members of Shanghai’s Yibai Art Society, two students each from Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and Shanghai Academy of Art, and three students from the White Goose Painting Society. The workshop spanned six days across two phases: the first four days covered introductory theory and monochrome woodcut techniques, while the final two days focused on multi-colour woodcut printing methods. According to Uchiyama Yoshikichi’s recollections, ‘The workshop was initially named the Creative Printmaking Workshop because it taught printmaking techniques, covering everything from the function of prints to the distinction between so-called reproduction prints – such as book illustrations and ukiyo-e – and creative prints’ (Yoshikichi and Kazuo, 1985).

Yoshikichi’s teaching method combined demonstration with explanation, covering topics such as woodcut design, knife handling, carving techniques, printing, and multi-colour printing. Lu Xun attended daily, bringing a bundle of printmaking books and original foreign prints. Using his own collection of print albums and original prints as examples, he provided detailed analysis alongside Yoshikichi’s lectures. Workshop participant Jiang Feng recalled three sessions observing foreign prints: one featured Japanese ukiyo-e and modern prints, with detailed explanations of ‘creative woodcut’ – a modern development where the artist independently executes drawing, carving, and printing, unlike the ancient division of labour in woodblock printing; another introduced the elegant style of British woodcuts; and a third session introducing seven copperplate prints from Käthe Kollwitz’s representative work *The Peasants’ War* (Feng, 1981). Several easily overlooked details from this workshop warrant attention: firstly, Uchiyama Yoshikichi recalled introducing modern Japanese prints following ukiyo-e, noting that woodblock prints were then being employed as prop-

¹⁵⁹ Uchiyama Yoshikichi was the younger brother of Uchiyama Kanzo, proprietor of Uchiyama Shoten. Born on 9 December 1900 in Okayama Prefecture, Japan, he served as an art instructor at Seijo Gakuen Elementary School from 1931. The woodblock prints in his collection were acquired during this period for instructional purposes; he produced no original works beyond these. In late July 1931, he travelled to Shanghai for a holiday at his elder brother Kanzo Uchiyama’s invitation. During this period, he befriended Lu Xun and accepted Lu’s invitation to serve as a lecturer at the Creative Woodcut Workshop.

agenda by Japan's left-wing movement.

Lu Xun had already acquired Japanese printmaking manuals by artists such as Asahide Hidehisa and Nagase Yoshio from Uchiyama Books, suggesting he was well-informed about contemporary developments in Japanese printmaking. For instance, in 1929, when editing *Selected Modern Woodcuts, Volume 2*, Lu Xun included Yoshiro Nagase's work *The Sunken Bell*, and in the *Preface* and *Postscript*, he referenced Nagase's book *To Those Who Study Printmaking* and his woodcut artistry. Secondly, what was the nature of the relationship between the 13 members attending the workshop and Lu Xun? Thirdly, the Chinese Left-Wing Writers' League was established on 2 March 1930, by which time Lu Xun's thinking had become 'left-leaning'. Did his 'left-leaning' ideology influence this workshop?

Lu Xun's artistic activities during his final decade encompassed not only introducing foreign artworks and theories from the 1920s onwards, but also frequent interactions with young artists. The "Yibai Art Society" was one of the earliest art collectives with which Lu Xun engaged. Established in 1929, the eighteenth year of the Republic of China, the society derived its name 'Yiba' from this founding year. Originally a student art collective at the National Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, by around 1930 some members had been influenced by left-wing literary and artistic currents, altering the society's character. Consequently, several members were expelled by the academy. In 1931, several expelled student members relocated from Hangzhou to Shanghai, where they joined forces with local art students to establish the 'Shanghai Eighteen Arts Society Research Institute'. Backed by the Chinese Left-Wing Literary and Artistic Alliance, the Eighteen Arts Society became an openly active art organisation under the umbrella of the 'Chinese Left-Wing Artists' Alliance' (commonly abbreviated as 'Lianmeng').¹⁶⁰

According to Jiang Feng's recollections: Feng Xuefeng, who maintained close ties with Lu Xun, represented the 'General Alliance' (i.e., the 'Chinese Left-Wing Cultural General Alliance') in leading the 'United Front'. Consequently, he frequently visited the Eighteen Art Society. It was through Feng Xuefeng that Lu Xun learned of the society's activities and entrusted him to present several foreign art books to the Eighteen Art Society (Feng, 1981). While the retrospective recollections of certain individuals require further verification for historical research, Lu Xun's Preface to the Exhibition of Studies by the Eighteen Arts Society, written for their Shanghai exhibition in June 1931, indicates that he had established some connection with the society prior to the woodcut workshop. In that renowned preface, Lu Xun asserted that the art represented by the Eighteen Artists Society 'is new, youthful, and progressive within this old society'; it 'with clear-eyed determination and steadfast effort, has revealed a vigorous new shoot growing ever stronger amidst the thicket.' Precisely because it is 'young and small,' it holds the promise of hope (Xun, 1981)¹⁶¹.

According to Mr Li Yunjing's (2005) research, among the 13 members who participated in the woodcut workshop, six were members of the 18th Art Society. They were Jiang Feng, Chen Guang, Chen Tiegang, Gu Honggan, Li Shi, and Huang Shanding. The remaining participants were young artists closely associated with the 18th Art Society, who had received Lu Xun's guid-

¹⁶⁰ The United League was a left-wing cultural organisation led and supported by the Chinese Left-Wing Cultural Alliance, with core members including Xu Xingzhi, Yu Hai, Hu Yichuan, Xia Peng, Jiang Feng, and Chen Zhuokun.

¹⁶¹ Lu Xun, "Preliminary Notes to the Exhibition of Works by the 18 Art Society"

ance and influence. The invitation to the workshop was conveyed by Feng Xuefeng, one of the leaders of the Left-Wing Writers' League (Yunjing, 2005). Consequently, subsequent memoirs – such as those by Xu Xingzhi, Jiang Feng, and Lu Hongji – often characterised this woodcut workshop as a cultural activity within China's early left-wing art movement. This may not have been entirely the case. Although Lu Xun had become 'left-leaning' by the 1930s, he remained a 'fellow traveller' with his 'left-wing' comrades. What merits our attention instead is how the workshop participants embarked upon woodcut creation. What cultural messages did Lu Xun convey during the workshop? Chen Guang, a participant, recalled that inspired by Lu Xun's lecture at the China Art University in Shanghai on 9 March 1930 and "the introduction of Modern Woodcut Anthology and The Map of Shimin Tu," Jiang Feng, Chen Tiegang, Hu Yichuan, and Wang Zhanfei of the Eighteen Artists Society successively began carving woodcuts.'

He also mentioned that at the second 'Eighteen Artists Society Exhibition of Works' held in Shanghai in June 1931, "the woodcuts by Hu Yichuan and Wang Zhanfei were exhibited for the first time, marking the first time woodcut works had been exhibited in China since the inception of art exhibitions" (Guang and Hongji, 1981), and they received favourable reviews from Lu Xun. Hu Yichuan similarly recounted in his essay 'Recollections of Lu Xun and the Eighteen Artists Society': around 1930, 'some members of the society developed an interest in woodcut after seeing Mr Lu Xun's privately funded publications: Meffert's "Illustrations of the Shumintso" and the "New Russian Painting Selection" from the Morning Flower Society' (Yichuan, 1981). Similarly, Jiang Feng's recollections also mention how Meffert's Woodcut Sketchbook inspired him to begin woodcut creation. Kazuo Nara points out that works produced for the woodcut workshop – Chen Tiegang's Arrest and Jiang Feng's Labour – were influenced by Meffert's Woodcut Sketchbook (Yoshikichi and Nara Kazuo, 1985). The circumstances surrounding Lu Xun's self-funded publication of Meffert's Woodcut of the Cement City were previously discussed in the preceding section.

The Semyonov was a 1925 novel by Soviet author Grigory Grigoryevich Grigoryev, depicting class struggles during the Soviet economic recovery following the October Revolution. It explored intertwined ideological phenomena including the fight against bureaucracy and the unity of intellectuals. Lu Xun hailed this work as 'an enduring monument of new Russian literature'. Lu Xun received Dong Shaoming's Chinese translation on 12 February 1930. On the 26th of that month, he also received Xu Shiqian's German translation. On 21 September, he received ten woodcut illustrations for Shimin Tu by Karl Meffert, sent from Germany by Xu Shiqian. Two weeks later, he composed the preface to Meffert's Woodcuts of Sminth. On 2 February 1931, Meffert's Woodcuts of Sminth was printed, with the preface providing an introduction to the artist: 'I hear he is one of the most revolutionary painters in Germany' and 'he is most fond of engraving series of prints containing revolutionary content.' Following the October Revolution, Lu Xun's fervent focus on Soviet revolutionary art and the development of global leftist literary and artistic movements marked a significant shift in his ideological stance.

Evidence of this can be found in the book purchase records from *Lu Xun's Diary: A Survey of New Russian Art* (1925), *Theories of Proletarian Art* (1926), *Revolutionary Art Series*, *Art in Revolutionary Russia*, *Art and Social Life*, *The Triumph of Art in Russian Studies* (1927), *Soviet Russian Art Panorama*, *Marxist Theory of Art*, *Art in Class Society*, *On Art*, *The Social Basis of Art* (1928), *Plekhanov on Art*, *Soviet Russian Cartoons and Propaganda Posters*, *Proletarian Art Tutorial (Volumes I and II)* (1929)... This extensive bibliography merely reflects Lu Xun's preoccupations and

interests at the time. It relates not only to the famous 'revolutionary literature' debate of the late 1920s, but also to Lu Xun's emerging 'leftist' orientation and his focus on ideological studies linking literature and art to the international communist movement and party politics. Examining Lu Xun's writings from this period – such as *Opinions on the Left-Wing Writers' League*, *The Popularisation of Literature and Art*, *A Glimpse of Shanghai Literature and Art*, and *The Task and Fate of 'Nationalist Literature'* – reveals that 'revolution' and 'art,' "class" and 'struggle,' and 'left-wing literature and art' became core keywords. Against this backdrop, it is not difficult to understand why Lu Xun emphasised the relationship between revolution and printmaking in his preface to *A Selection of New Russian Prints*, stating that 'in times of revolution, prints serve the widest purpose; though produced in great haste, they can be completed in the blink of an eye.'

At present, the author lacks sufficient evidence to prove whether Lu Xun's 'leftist' ideology exerted a direct influence on the creation of the Woodcut Workshop. According to Jiang Feng's recollections, the workshop once introduced Kohlheit's representative work, the seven-piece copperplate series *The Peasants' War*. Lu Xun's acquaintance with and interest in Köhler likely began around 1928 (Yoshikichi and Kazuo, 1985)¹⁶². In 1929, he acquired the book *Sociology of the Plastic Arts* by H. Stein, translated by Hiroshi Kawaguchi, which introduced Köhler and described her work as 'a true revolutionary demonstration of passion'. In 1936, Lu Xun cited this assessment in his *Preface to the Catalogue of Käthe Kollwitz's Selected Engravings*, summarising her art as 'grasping the very form of worldly affairs'. *Lu Xun's Diary* records that on 15 July 1930, Lu Xun received three sets of print sheets titled *Workers' Uprising*, *Peasants' War*, *War* from Xu Shiqian in Germany. These contained 20 prints published by Fülch Art Publishing House in Berlin. Subsequently, on 17 April 1931, Lu Xun commissioned Shimatelai to purchase original prints by Käthe Kollwitz. Between May and July of that year, Lu Xun received two shipments of 22 signed original prints by Kollwitz, including four original prints of *The Peasant War*.

Regarding the seven-part series *Peasant War*, Lu Xun provided detailed explanatory notes in his *Preface to the Catalogue of Käthe Kollwitz's Selected Woodcuts*. This sequential series depicts the history of modern German social reform movements, portraying the journey of enslaved peasants from arming themselves and resisting to their eventual defeat and capture, conveying an awakening of humanitarian consciousness. Jiang Feng recalled that at the time, they had viewed the original prints of the *Peasant War* series, alongside Lu Xun's signature on Kollerheis's protest letter against the murder of five young writers from the Left-Wing Writers' League. This demonstrated his profound admiration (Feng, 1981). What exactly did Lu Xun convey to the young woodcut artists through Kollerheis's work? We cannot know for certain, yet we may discern from the text of *Preface to the Catalogue of Selected Prints by Käthe Kollwitz* both Lu Xun's admiration for Kollwitz's work and his admonition to 'artists who cry out and fight' like her regarding how to approach expectations and hopes within China's present circumstances.

¹⁶² Kazuo Nara's research cites Lu Xun's diary entry from 15 April 1924: "Qian Daosun came to borrow four volumes of Central Fine Arts." This publication, issued by the Central Fine Arts Society after the Japanese Art Academy's dissolution, introduced Käthe Kollwitz in its 1928 issue, featuring Sadao Senda's manuscript Käthe Kollwitz alongside illustrations of her works. It is likely that Lu Xun first encountered Kollwitz through this article. His 1928 book purchases also included *Art and the Materialist Conception of History* (by H. Stein), *The Materialist Historical Interpretation of Art* (by L. Maildon), *Modern European Art* (by Mazza), and *Sociology of the Plastic Arts* (by H. Stein), which also included a chapter on Kollwitz

3.4.2. The origins of the woodcut workshop and China's emerging woodcut movement

The day after the woodcut workshop concluded, Lu Xun presented eight books on printmaking to the Woodcut Section of Shanghai's Eighteen Arts Society. On the third day (24 August 1931), his diary records: "Fine, strong wind. In the morning, gave a one-hour lecture for the Woodcut Section of the Eighteen Arts Society." The precise content remains unknown, but it was evidently Lu Xun's guidance and support for the young woodcut artists, serving in a sense as an extension of the workshop.

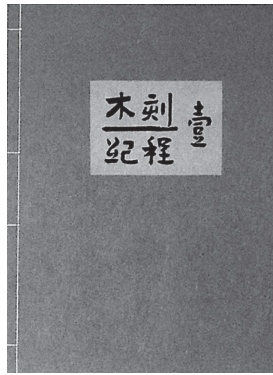


Figure 36. Cover of *Woodcut Chronicle*, a collection of woodcuts featuring twenty-four works by eight artists including Huang Xinbo. Compiled and selected by Lu Xun, with his own Preface. Self-published under the name Tiemu Art Society in October 1934.

Following the conclusion of the seminar, that autumn witnessed the outbreak of the September 18th Incident. Members of Shanghai's Eighteen Artists Society, including Jiang Feng and Chen Tieging, utilised mimeograph machines to print small illustrated pamphlets and woodcut leaflets bearing anti-Japanese content. These were posted throughout the streets as part of their active patriotic propaganda campaign. In 1932, during the Shanghai Incident of January 28th, the Society's research institute in Jiangwan was destroyed by Japanese artillery fire. yet its successor, the Chundi Art Research Institute, was established. Its founding declaration proclaimed its purpose: 'To cultivate our nascent, progressive, realistic, and contemporary art; to expand and deepen art's reach among the masses, making it the art of the people' (Hua et al., 1981).

In late June, the Spring Land Art Research Institute held an art exhibition at the Shanghai Youth Association in Baxianqiao. Lu Xun attended, purchasing over ten woodcuts and donating five yuan. However, in July, the institute was sealed off, and its principal members – Jiang Feng, Li Yang, Ai Qing, Huang Shanding, and others – were arrested and imprisoned. In August, seminar participants Chen Zhuokun, Gu Honggan, Ni Huanzhi and others established the Wild Wind Painting Society in Jiangwan, Shanghai. Lu Xun donated 20 yuan and delivered a lecture there on 26 October titled *The Popularisation of Fine Arts and the Problem of Old Forms*. However, the society was forced to cease activities the following spring and later renamed the Shanghai Painting Research Society, led by Gu Honggan and Ye Fu.

In the winter of 1932, workshop member Chen Tie-geng, alongside Chen Yan-qiao, He Bai-tao, Ye-fu and others, established the Wild Rice Society at the Xinhua Academy of Fine Arts in Shanghai... Following the creation of the Woodcut Workshop, various woodcut organisations emerged successively, including the Wild Wind Painting Society, MK Woodcut Research Society, Shanghai Painting Research Society, Clear Sky Painting Society, and Wood Bell Woodcut Society. Lu Xun showed great affection for these young woodcut artists. He corresponded with them, wrote prefaces, visited exhibitions, purchased works and made donations. He also recommended their work for publication, compiled and published *Chronicles of Woodcut*, organised exhibitions of foreign woodcut prints, gave lectures, and introduced foreign printmaking. Despite the emerging woodcut movement repeatedly facing slander, suppression, and persecution by the authorities – with printmaking societies banned and raided, works confiscated, and artists persecuted – Faced with such severe and brutal circumstances, Lu Xun's passion for 'nurturing' and 'cultivating' the nascent shoots of the emerging woodcut movement remained undiminished.

Around him coalesced a force propelling the development of China's new woodcut art, spreading like ripples in water, circle upon circle... Consequently, the academic world has consistently hailed Lu Xun as the founder and 'mentor' of China's emerging woodcut movement. The 'Woodcut Creation Workshop' is evaluated as follows: "Through this workshop, woodcut knowledge and techniques were initially disseminated, and an embryonic woodcut team began to form in Shanghai. It trained the backbone, sowed the seeds, and raised the curtain for the development of China's emerging printmaking movement" (Yunjing, 2000). Returning to the topic, 'The Workshop and the Origins of China's Emerging Woodcut Movement,' the author prefers to use Lu Xun's own words as the key point: 'But this is a beginning, not a success; it is the advance of a few outposts. May there be endless banners filling the sky in the great army that follows (Xun, 1981)¹⁶³. Perhaps Lu Xun had long foreseen the future development of China's emerging woodcut art.

¹⁶³ Lu Xun, "Preface to the Special Edition of the National Woodcut Joint Exhibition"

Chapter 4

“Art for Life”: The Concept of Art Introduced by Lu Xun

During the 1920s and 1930s, two starkly contrasting artistic philosophies prevailed within China’s literary and artistic circles: ‘art for art’s sake’ and ‘art for life’s sake’. The ensuing debate between these two perspectives remained intensely contentious, with no consensus emerging. ‘Art for art’s sake’ was an imported artistic proposition (Xian, 2005)¹⁶⁴. In 1818, the French philosopher Cousin employed this famous assertion in his lectures, and it later became a common expression for the European Aestheticism movement. ‘Art for art’s sake’ emerged during the process of artistic autonomy, emphasising the independent spirit and negation stance of art; Its aesthetic principles encompass concepts such as art’s non-utilitarian nature, its independence, and the separation of art from life. ‘Art for Life’ represents a literary and artistic stance with realist creative tendencies, emerging since the May Fourth New Culture Movement. In 1921, the Literary Research Society pioneered the ‘Art for Life’ proposition, opposing purely artistic literature and emphasising that literature’s subject is life itself, which it must reflect; ‘Literature is the expression of life, the critique of life; thus the essence of literature is life itself’ – such artistic concepts underscore the social functionality of literary and artistic endeavours (Shiying, 1921).

Lu Xun’s aesthetic philosophy consistently intertwines two diametrically opposed perspectives: the theory of artistic autonomy as ‘the usefulness of the useless’ and the theory of artistic utility as ‘the unexpected usefulness’. He sought to synthesise these divergent perspectives to foster artistic creations that could fulfil both social utility and aesthetic value. This principle of artistic creation, which ‘concerns itself with life while remaining close to art,’ embodies a profound commitment to engaging with reality. Lu Xun’s artistic philosophy may be summarised as an ‘art for life’ perspective. On one hand, it emphasises art’s role in ‘expressing individuality and elevating the spirit,’ venerating the freedom of personal expression as an embodiment of the ‘humanistic’ ideal; while simultaneously underscoring art’s functional role in life through its aesthetic efficacy, reflecting Lu Xun’s stance towards real-world existence. Distinct from the ‘art for life’s sake’ perspective, Lu Xun never relinquished his pursuit of aesthetic value in artistic works. Even during the most intense periods of socio-political struggle, he resolutely refused to reduce art to a mere tool.

4.1. The Art of ‘Illuminating the Human Heart’

4.1.1 Cultivating Individuality and Uplifting the Spirit

The writer Xiao Hong once recalled that during his grave illness, Lu Xun would lie quietly, repeatedly perusing a woodcut depicting a woman in a skirt, her hair flying, running in a fierce wind (Hong, 1997). This work, which Lu Xun cherished throughout his life, was *The Frontispiece of Hafiz’s Lyric Poems* by the Soviet artist Bikov¹⁶⁵, received by him whilst ill. During the 1930s, Lu

¹⁶⁴ Mr Zhou Xian contends that the French philosopher Cousin was the first to articulate the principle of ‘art for art’s sake’. ‘By 1818, in his lecture On Truth, Goodness and Beauty, the French philosopher Cousin explicitly formulated the proposition of art for art’s sake for the first time.

¹⁶⁵ Bi Kefu (1903–1973), Soviet printmaker and book designer, illustrated Victor Hugo’s *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, Hafez’s *Lyric Poems*, Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*, Homer’s *Iliad*, and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. He also illustrated Russian translations of works by Du Fu, Bai Juyi, Xin Qiji, and Lu Xun.

Xun received a total of thirteen woodcuts from Bikhov on three separate occasions, six of which he included in his anthology *Collected Essays*. In 1936, when a Soviet print exhibition was held in Shanghai, Lu Xun commissioned eight works at the event, including Bikhov's *Portrait of Bayanova*. It stands to reason that Lu Xun must have held this particular work, gifted by the artist, in special regard. His passion for art has been discussed previously, yet many questions remain unanswered: what precisely excited him in viewing paintings? Which types of foreign artworks did he favour? And so forth.

In *Lu Xun's Former Home*, Zhou Zuoren explained that during his time in Japan, Lu Xun's magazine *New Life* did not materialise. However, the first issue's illustration had been planned to feature Vasily's oil painting *Hope*, depicting a poet kneeling with his eyes bound, holding a lyre. This was referenced from a purchased German-language print collection, *The Vaszi Collection*, alongside works by the Russian painter Vasily Vasilyevich Vasilyev for potential use in later issues of the magazine. From this, we can discern that Vaszi¹⁶⁶ and Vasilyev¹⁶⁷ were foreign painters of early interest to Lu Xun. In 1908, Lu Xun's essay 'On the Teaching of Science History' for the magazine *New Life* also referenced the renowned Italian Renaissance painter Raphael¹⁶⁸, using Shakespeare, Raphael, and Beethoven as examples to illustrate that art can awaken the human spirit, that matters of the heart are spiritual matters, thereby affirming the efficacy of fine art. In the preceding chapter, we discussed Lu Xun's early writings such as *The History of Man*, *The History of Science and Education* 'On the Bias in Culture,' 'On the Power of Morro Poetry,' and 'On Breaking Evil Sounds', Lu Xun primarily grasped the core idea of 'establishing the person.' He believed that literature and art were tools for exploring the soul's dimension, advocating 'expanding individuality and promoting the spirit,' that is, liberating the individual's unique spirit and allowing the vitality of the subject's life to flourish through the action of the individual spirit. In *On the Power of Moroccan Poetry*, he employed the term 'nurturing' to describe the purpose of literature and art, which lies in cultivating the human spirit to unlock the 'mechanism' of life.

He believed that literature and art exert a direct influence upon the human mind, soul, and disposition – or, to put it in more emotive terms – directly touch the 'human heart.' 'Illuminating the human heart' is an essential function of successful literary and artistic works (Xun, 1981)¹⁶⁹. In *On Breaking Evil Sounds*, he employed the metaphor of 'inner illumination' to describe true art, which should 'illuminate the human heart,' serving as 'the flame ignited by the spirit of the nation, while simultaneously being the beacon guiding the nation's spiritual future' – this constitutes the logical starting point for understanding Lu Xun's artistic philosophy (Xun, 1981)¹⁷⁰. Viewed through this lens, the reasons behind Lu Xun's early focus on Wa Zhi and Weiler Xuqie Geng become more comprehensible. Lu Xun, Zhou Zuoren and others edited the magazine *New Life* with the aim of introducing foreign new cultures and realising the Chinese nation's 'goodness, beauty, strength

¹⁶⁶ Washi (1817–1904), British painter renowned for his imaginative works, including the oil painting *Hope*.

¹⁶⁷ Vasilyevich (1842–1904), Russian painter.

¹⁶⁸ Raphael (1483–1520), renowned Italian Renaissance painter, hailed alongside Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo as one of the 'Three Great Masters' of the Renaissance.

¹⁶⁹ Lu Xun, "Graves: On the Power of Moroccan Poetry"

¹⁷⁰ Lu Xun, "Graves: On Seeing with Open Eyes"

and vigour' (Yoshikichi and Kazuo, 1985)¹⁷¹. Vaz's *Hope* can be seen as the heartfelt expression or symbolic meaning of Lu Xun and his peers who began their literary activities with the publication of *New Life* ¹⁷².

Weller, a Russian anti-war painter, created *The Tower of Skulls* to expose war's brutality. His *British Suppression of Revolutionaries in India* (also known as *The Execution of Revolutionaries*) depicts British troops executing Indian revolutionaries by tying them to cannon barrels (Guanquan, 1979a) ¹⁷³. Willems's works inevitably evoke associations with Lu Xun's experience viewing lantern slides during his medical studies in Sendai, alongside the cultural implications of the bloodshed and sacrifice endured by late Qing revolutionaries.

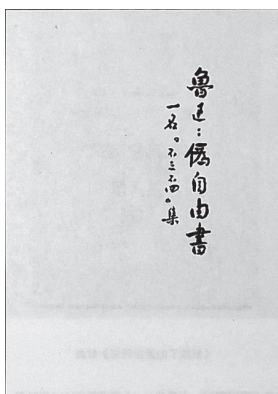


Figure 37. Pseudo-Liberty, Lu Xun's seventh collection of essays. Containing forty-three essays, it was published in October 1933 by Shanghai's Beixin Publishing House under the imprint 'Qingguang Publishing House'.

During his time in Japan, Lu Xun also encountered numerous Japanese ukiyo-e works. Although mentioned previously, his understanding and reception of ukiyo-e merit further exploration. In correspondence with Yamamoto Hatsue during the 1930s, Lu Xun indicated his particular interest in the works of Hokusai, Hiroshige, Utamaro, and Sharaku. Over several decades, he acquired numerous ukiyo-e albums, never ceasing to cherish his fascination with the art form. Japanese ukiyo-e of the Edo period (1603–1867) constituted a form of realistic folk woodblock prints depicting civic life. Their subjects were diverse, encompassing folk customs, historical narratives, landscapes, theatrical scenes, and portraits, all imbued with a distinct national character. Lu Xun's appraisal of ukiyo-e is evident in his letter to Li Hua dated 4 February 1935: Japanese ukiyo-e may lack grand themes, yet its artistic merit remains undeniable (Guangfu, 1982). 'In A Glimpse of Shanghai Lit-

¹⁷¹ Japanese scholar Masako Kitaoka contends that Lu Xun drew upon the concept of 'hope' and composed his essay *Hope* (included in the prose poetry collection *Wild Grass*) from Petőfi Sándor's verse: 'Despair is as illusory as hope.'

¹⁷² Wa Zhi himself remarked on 'Hope': 'Hope is not expectation; it is merely the longing for the lingering melody emanating from that solitary string.'

¹⁷³ Research by Mr Wang Guanquan indicates Lu Xun had selected Russian artist Vasily Vasilievich's *The Suppression of Revolutionaries in India by Britain* as an illustration for *The New Life*.

erature and Art, he elaborated further: "Though ukiyo-e is folk art, its subjects are predominantly courtesans and actors – plump figures with slanted eyes – Erotic eyes" (Xun, 1981)¹⁷⁴.

These two passages reveal Lu Xun's ambivalence towards ukiyo-e's subject matter, which he perceived as vulgar and erotic. Yet he acknowledged its status as 'folk art' possessing 'artistic value.' So, what is its value? Lu Xun remarked that in his youth he favoured Hokusai, while in his later years he preferred Hiroshige and Utamaro. The primary subjects of Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige were landscapes, breaking with the prevailing trend in ukiyo-e of focusing on entertainment or song-and-dance scenes. Hokusai's works drew inspiration from the landscapes surrounding Edo, characterised by simplicity, purity, and understated elegance, imbued with a Zen-like quality. Hiroshige, though influenced by Hokusai, developed a distinct style: his compositions were soft, lyrical, and imbued with a poetic, picturesque atmosphere, uniquely embodying the Japanese aesthetic of yugen and grace. Kitagawa Utamaro stands apart as a master of ukiyo-e beauty prints. Building upon Suzuki Harunobu and Torii Kiyonaga's realistic depictions of feminine beauty, he pioneered a style centred on facial close-ups. His meticulous brushwork captures the inner world of his subjects through nuanced expressions. Lu Xun observed that Hokusai's works were more 'suited to the Chinese eye' – a comment reflecting the social customs of his time. In the late Qing and early Republican eras, when Chinese society had yet to undergo significant enlightenment, Utamaro's depictions of beauty might well have been perceived as excessively aestheticised, dreamlike, frivolous, erotic, and even vulgar, rendering them difficult for the general public to accept.

Nevertheless, Lu Xun did not dismiss their artistic merit. Hokusai's works possess a desolate yet purified quality, imbued with an Eastern poetic charm that resonates spiritually with the Chinese sensibility. In his later years, Lu Xun developed a particular fondness for Hiroshige's work. Mr Li Yunjing (2005) suggested this stemmed from Lu Xun's nostalgic recollections of his youth studying in Japan. The author posits that it may also have been due to Hiroshige's personalised artistic imagery and the refined elegance within the popular style, which provided Lu Xun with inspiration for his writing and thought. Lu Xun also acquired numerous Japanese art albums featuring nudes, including many works depicting 'naked women,' 'nude beauties,' and 'bathing scenes,' with a significant number originating from Edo-period ukiyo-e. Though Japanese artists depicted subjects with boldness, including overtly erotic and licentious elements, Lu Xun made no mention whatsoever of Japan's erotic culture. In contrast, Yu Dafu and Zhou Zuoren frequently described and reflected upon the themes of sexuality, carnal desire, and spiritual longing found in Japanese ukiyo-e and private novels. In *New Tales*, Lu Xun recounted the story of the naked goddess Nüwa creating life with her own body – a Chinese version of the Genesis myth, employing Freud's theory of sexuality to 'explain creation.' Yet Lu Xun's writing contains scarcely any of the frivolous, vulgar, or erotic cultural undertones found in ukiyo-e. Perhaps Lu Xun's understanding of ukiyo-e was an art appreciation filtered and self-purified.

¹⁷⁴ Lu Xun, "A Glimpse of Shanghai Literature and Art"



Figure 38. Japanese Ukiyo-e: “The Restless Wife”

As mentioned earlier, in his letter to Li Hua, Lu Xun discussed Japanese ukiyo-e with particular emphasis on the paintings’ realism. When he referred to ukiyo-e in *A Glimpse of Shanghai Literature and Art*, his focus shifted to the art of Beardsley, whom he considered profoundly influenced by Japanese ukiyo-e. Regarding Beardsley, we have touched upon him previously. Yet why Lu Xun repeatedly declared his ‘fondness’ for Beardsley’s work seems to warrant further discussion. Beardsley’s art, characterised by elegant lines and elongated, grotesque figures, represents a ‘decadent’ aesthetic imbued with morbid eroticism. In 1890s Britain, despite an outward appearance of prosperity and merriment, the rise of mass industrial production intensified social tensions across all strata. The arrogance of the bourgeoisie and the burgeoning labour movement fostered widespread social unease.

Thus, in his Preface to *A Selection of Beardsley’s Drawings*, Lu Xun observed that Beardsley’s art reflected its era: ‘He was the sole expression of this period’s unique mood, summoned forth by the restless, dandyish, and arrogant spirit of the late 1890s’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁷⁵. Lu Xun contended that Beardsley’s art was neither illustration nor impressionism, nor fantasy, but rather an art of satire possessing a ‘demonic beauty’. He employed pure aesthetics to depict the morbid, eroticised social landscape, ‘bound by his love for beauty and the very corruption of beauty.’ Between such extreme “virtue” and ‘vice,’ there ‘often lies a conscious awareness of sin,’ where evil is exposed through beauty’s very distortion. Thus, Lu Xun repeatedly emphasised that Beardsley’s art possesses ‘thought,’ its satirical force expressing profound depths of nerve, emotion, and reason. The imitations by domestic artists such as Ling Shuhua and Ye Lingfeng merely scratch the surface, lacking Beardsley’s ‘sharp, stinging force.’

During his visit to Lu Xun’s former residence in Shanghai, Mr. Leo F. Lo observed a nude painting hanging on the wall and concluded that “Lu Xun experienced considerable divergence and conflict throughout his life between the public and private spheres, society and the individual. If his

¹⁷⁵ Lu Xun, “Preface to The Beardsley Picture Book”

public and social thought evolved from enlightenment-era clamour towards leftist literature and revolutionary activism, his private inner world and artistic inclinations seemed less actively engaged with the world, even occasionally tinged with pessimism and decadence” (Ou-fan, 1986). He contends that Lu Xun’s appreciation of foreign nude paintings, or his depiction of nude figures in his own works, stemmed from subconscious impulses driven by sexuality and erotic desire. In Beardsley’s works, there is no shortage of nude female figures with delicate, elongated forms or erotic depictions of intertwined male and female nudes. Their vivid and erotic nature is evident in the series of illustrations for the *Yellow Book*, the *King Arthur* series, and the *Salome* illustrations. *Salome*. However, contrary to Professor Li Ou-fan’s interpretation, Lu Xun’s appreciation of these works was not driven by a ‘subconscious’ desire for sex and eroticism.

Firstly, it is overly hasty to judge an individual’s aesthetic orientation based on a single work. Nude art featured prominently in Lu Xun’s introductions to foreign artworks. Take, for instance, Diderot’s woodcut *The Muse of Loret*, included in *Selected Modern Woodcuts I*. Lu Xun emphasised its ‘rhythmic imagery,’ noting the naturalistic technique that gave the impression the figure had sprung directly from the woodblock. Similarly, in discussing Khäiler’s *Illustrations for Thais*, Lu Xun analysed the treatment of light and shadow, the gradations of colour, and the work’s embodiment of a ‘vibrant beauty and charm pulsing with life.’ The abundance of nude figures in Japanese ukiyo-e prints and the illustrations in *Contemporary Art History: A Tide of Discourse* also feature numerous artistic depictions of the nude, such as Mantegna’s *The Mountain God*, Caravaggio’s *Perseus*, Ingres’ *The Turkish Harem*, Keller’s *Flora*, Renoir’s *Woman*, Picasso’s *The Woman Wiping Her Feet*, and even the ‘mother’ in Kollwitz’s *The Sacrifice* are all nude figures... Perhaps Mr. Leo Fan had not encountered the extensive collection of nude artworks that Lu Xun possessed or introduced, leading him to rashly conclude that Lu Xun harboured an inherent decadence. Secondly, Lu Xun discerned in these works an individualistic artistic quality, spirit, and even language that ‘dazzled the heart.’ Simultaneously, he recognised the weaknesses and flaws inherent in such highly personalised art. Hence, he remarked that Hokusai’s work was more ‘suited to the general Chinese eye’; and that Beardsley’s art ‘offered not a single reflection of a modern paradise,’ being wholly devoted to the ‘art for art’s sake’ school and mired in grotesque, sensual decadence – a particularly instructive example for understanding Lu Xun’s aesthetic orientation.



Figure 39. The German print “Eve and the Serpent” is currently displayed on the dressing table in the second-floor bedroom of Lu Xun’s former residence in Shanghai’s Dalu New Village. The artist remains unknown; the work is based on the biblical narrative.



Figure 40. German Print: “Susanna and the Elders”



Figure 41. Käthe Kollwitz, Sacrifice

Lu Xun appears to have rarely discussed European classical painting, and even expressed considerable reservations about academic art, the underlying reasons for which are manifold. Lu Xun was well acquainted with the European painting tradition. Beginning with Italian Renaissance art, beyond the aforementioned Raphael, in 1932 Lu Xun referenced Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* and Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* in his works *Defence of ‘Sequential Pictures’* and *On the ‘Third Kind of Person’*, praising them as ‘great murals’ and the two painters as ‘great artists’. Indeed, as early as 1925, Lu Xun had included Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* in his translation of Japanese scholar Shirakawa Shirakawa’s *Symbols of Suffering*, thereby introducing this world-renowned masterpiece to Chinese readers for the first time. In the book-purchasing records of *Lu Xun’s Diary*, concerning acquisitions of European art history texts, the author found that in 1925 Lu Xun purchased *Twelve Lectures on Modern Art History* by Moriguchi Tori, published by Tokyo-do in Japan in 1922.

From 1926 onwards, he began acquiring the ‘Ars Art Series’. Statistics indicate that by 5 December 1927, when Lu Xun purchased Japanese scholar Sakagaki Takahashi’s *Essays on Modern Art History with an Emphasis on National Characteristics* from Uchiyama Bookstore, he had already acquired twenty-two volumes of the ‘Ars Art Series’. This series introduced the world’s renowned artists and

masterpieces through illustrated biographies, particularly commissioning first-rate authorities to provide detailed interpretations of the artists' work and lives (Yoshikichi and Kazuo, 1985)¹⁷⁶. By that time, the 'Ars Art Series' had published illustrated biographies on artists including Cézanne, Van Gogh, Picasso, Kandinsky, Gauguin, Matisse, Millet (i.e., Millet), and Rodin.¹⁷⁷ Lu Xun had acquired all these works. In 1928, Lu Xun's translated work, *The History of Modern Art*, began with the art of the French Revolution era, fundamentally tracing the history of European art from the 18th century to the early 20th century, with French art as its dominant force.

Within the chapter '*The Leading Figures of Classicism*', Lu Xun introduced the art of David, Ingres, and Gérard, accompanied by illustrations including David's *The Woman of Saphiri The Coronation*, *Portrait of Madame Récamier*, and *The Oath of the Horatii*, Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque*, and Gérard's *Portrait of Madame Récamier*. However, his appraisal of the classical painting of David and his followers was not particularly high. This chapter notes that David failed to become an 'illustrator of his age' due to his reverence for realism. Moreover, David's influence on French painting, particularly through his direct pupil Géricault trained in his studio, 'inherited his role as court painter'; whereas Ingres 'carried the classical tendency to its extreme, becoming the model for the depiction of the human form that dominated French painting' (Takahashi, 2001). Subsequently, in his 1930 preface to *Selected New Russian Paintings*, Lu Xun expressed considerable criticism of the 'academic'¹⁷⁸ art movement within his account of 19th-century Russian artistic development. Lu Xun contended that by the late 19th century, Russian painting, under the influence of Western European art, had become dominated by academicism (Academismus), characterised by 'blind imitation with scant originality'; The emergence of the Wanderers (Peredvizhniki) movement, in contrast, 'vigorously attacked the classical tendencies of the academic school, denounced imitation, and championed independence' to promote their own artistic vision and ideals. It is evident that Lu Xun clearly rejected the rigid and formulaic creative approach of academic painting.

Earlier, we discussed how Lu Xun, in a random notes piece dated 15 January 1919, proposed that artists must possess not only consummate technical skill but also 'progressive thought' and 'noble character', thus being among the earliest to address artistic creation from the perspectives of "thought" and 'character' (Xun, 1981)¹⁷⁹. With this aesthetic orientation, we may further explore Lu Xun's receptiveness towards other artistic schools or styles. On 15 September 1928, in his editor's note for the fourth issue of Volume I of *The Torrent*, Lu Xun remarked upon Rodin's¹⁸⁰ mastery

¹⁷⁶ The author is a leading authority in his field today. The volume features over sixty pages of colour illustrations, employing vibrant colour overprinting to comprehensively showcase representative works from various artists. The extensive biographical commentary, spanning over a hundred pages, provides a detailed account of the artistic achievements and career of this master of the art.

¹⁷⁷ In 1927, the 'Ars Art Series' had published: Isomaru's Cézanne, Kazumasa Nakagawa's Van Gogh, Yasushi Kambara's Picasso, Tomoyoshi Murayama's Kandinsky, Shozo Yamamura's Gauguin, Tokuzaburo Masamune's Matisse, Tokuzo Sagara's Millet, and Kotaro Takamura's Rodin.

¹⁷⁸ The Academic School, also known as Academicism, was a movement that emerged within European feudal aristocracy or art academies from the 17th to the 19th century. Adopting conservative and antiquated perspectives, they drew subjects from Christian legends and mythological tales, producing works that predominantly flattered the powerful. Artistically, they employed rigid formats, pursuing "realism" in detail and ostentatious splendour. They served either classical traditions or bourgeois political interests, or catered to their aesthetic preferences.

¹⁷⁹ Lu Xun, "Random Thoughts, No. 43"

¹⁸⁰ Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), French sculptor, whose major works include *The Bronze Age*, *The Thinker*, and *The Burghers of Calais*. His creative output exerted a profound influence on the development of modern European sculpture. Lu Xun, reflecting that 'Rodin's sculptures, though causing a sensation for a time, bear little relation to China,' published a translation of Japanese author Arishima Takeo's essay 'The Rebel: An Examination of Rodin' in the fourth issue of the first volume of *The Torrent*.

of painterly techniques in sculpting vividly expressive and powerful artistic forms, praising him for possessing ‘the spirit to revive Gothic art’. On 21 February 1930, whilst lecturing at the China Art University in Shanghai, Lu Xun displayed Millet’s¹⁸¹ *The Angelus* and offered commentary, describing the peasant woman in the painting as ‘a devout adherent of religious faith, a woman subjugated by the caprices of fate’ (Ruli, 1982).

If Millet was a great realist pastoral painter, whose primary subjects were rural life and peasants, employing realist techniques to extol the image of labourers and express the sentiments and thoughts of ordinary folk in that era, thereby moving Lu Xun; then Rodin favoured tragic themes, adept at uncovering strength and beauty from ruin, imparting profound beauty and a character of great depth and breadth that resonated more deeply with Lu Xun’s sensitive and pained sensibilities. On 11 July 1912, *Lu Xun’s Diary* records receiving Gauguin’s *Noa, Noa* (i.e., the book *Noa, Noa*), purchased by Zhou Zuoren in Tokyo and sent from Shaoxing to Beijing. In the diary entry, Lu Xun remarked, ‘I found it most beautiful.’ Whether Lu Xun encountered Gauguin’s paintings during his studies in Japan remains unknown, yet his enduring fascination with the artist persisted. Two decades later, on 28 April 1932, Lu Xun purchased the Japanese translation of *Noa, Noa* published by Iwanami Bunko. The following year, he resolved to include it as the fourth volume in the Literary Series, selecting twelve woodcut illustrations¹⁸². He resolved to publish the work and even penned a promotional advertisement under the pseudonym ‘Luo Dun’.¹⁸³ In that promotional text, Lu Xun expressed his high regard for Gauguin: firstly, positioning him as a ‘mighty warrior’ within the French painting world; secondly, Gauguin’s escape from capitalist civilisation to live a primitive “savage” existence on Tahiti captivated Lu Xun, who even described it as ‘rather interesting’ in a reply to his Japanese friend Yamamoto Hatsue.¹⁸⁴ Gauguin’s art discarded the constraints of modern civilisation, employing vivid colours, bold brushstrokes, and decorative compositions to express intense individuality and will, returning to simpler, more essential artistic expression. It was an artistic style that combined symbolism, subjectivity, and ornamentation. The stimulation Gauguin’s art, with its flaunting of vital life force and intense individuality, provided Lu Xun is easy to imagine, so much so that he remained preoccupied with it for decades.

Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Cézanne are regarded as the leading figures of French Post-Impressionism, and Lu Xun was no stranger to Van Gogh and Cézanne either. *Lu Xun’s Diary* records that on 16 August 1912, Lu Xun received a German edition of Van Gogh’s *Correspondence* sent by Zhou Zuoren; On 23 November, he received the 1912 Munich edition of *Vincent van Gogh* by Peper Verlag; on 19 October 1930, he received *Vincent van Gogh’s Sketchbook* sent from Germany by Xu Shiqian;

¹⁸¹ Jean-François Millet (1814-1875), translated by Lu Xun as ‘Mi Lei’, was a French painter and leading figure of the Barbizon School. In 1929, Lu Xun published four of his masterpieces in the fourth issue of the first volume of *The Torrent: The Man with the Hoe, Spring, The Water-Carrier, and a self-portrait*.

¹⁸² These 12 woodcut illustrations were created by de Moufreid based on Gauguin’s paintings. ‘Nōa, Nōa’ is a transliteration of the Māori term meaning ‘fragrance’.

¹⁸³ As the Japanese edition proved troublesome to translate, Lu Xun considered the German edition preferable. Consequently, on 2 April 1933, he wrote to his Japanese friend Masuda Wataru requesting assistance in procuring a German edition of *Noa, Noa*. However, Lu Xun ultimately received the French edition instead. Unable to comprehend French, he was compelled to abandon his translation project.

¹⁸⁴ On 30 October 1934, in a reply to his Japanese friend Yamamoto Hatsue, Lu Xun wrote: “The book I sought was *Noa, Noa* by the Frenchman Paul Gauguin, chronicling his travels in Tahiti. The Iwanami Bunko series also contains a Japanese translation, which is rather interesting. However, I was seeking the German translation. Mr Masuda scoured every corner of Maruzen Antiquarian Books on my behalf but ultimately came up empty-handed. Consequently, he sent me a copy of the French edition, which I cannot comprehend. I doubt it remains available in Tokyo now, and as it is not urgently required, there is no need to trouble your acquaintance.”

Subsequently, he acquired *The Van Gogh Collection*, *Vincent van Gogh*, and *The Great Van Gogh Collection* (Volumes I–IV) from Uchiyama Books and Maruzen Books. In 1919, in *Hot Wind: Random Thoughts No. 53*, Lu Xun discussed modern Western art, referring to France's Cézanne and Holland's Van Gogh as the 'great masters' of Post-Impressionist painting; In February 1930, in the *Preface to New Russian Paintings*, Lu Xun observed that late 19th-century Russian painting had 'followed the French colourist Cézanne and his school'. Regarding Van Gogh and Cézanne, Lu Xun offered insightful analyses in *Essays on Modern Art History*.

On Van Gogh, he wrote: 'His paintings transcend the realm of form to express the "force" concealed within its depths' (Takahashi, 2001). and regarding Cézanne: 'In stark contrast to the Impressionists who sought to capture the superficial phenomena of objects, he endeavoured to express the underlying constraints inherent in their form' (Takahashi, 2001). Numerous domestic scholars have highlighted the convergence of artistic aesthetics and spiritual affinity between Lu Xun and the Post-Impressionist painters. For instance, Sun Yu notes in *The Shadow of Impressionism*: "In Lu Xun's fiction, one occasionally senses faint traces of Impressionist sensibilities" (Yu, 2008); while Cui Yunwei (2006), in *Lu Xun and Western Expressionist Art*, observes that in Lu Xun's view, artists like Van Gogh and Gauguin steadfastly upheld their convictions, imbuing their works with profound religious spirit. This religious resonance provided Lu Xun with immense spiritual enlightenment and literary inspiration. In my view, one may discern within Lu Xun's literary works – primarily his fiction – the visual impact characteristic of late Impressionist artistry. This encompasses the vividness of colour, the brushwork, the rendering of forms, and the palpable sense of melancholy and unease – the very struggle of a stubbornly melancholic soul.

In 1929, during the first National Art Exhibition organised by the Ministry of Education, the 'Xu-Xu Debate' erupted. The crux of the dispute centred on how to approach Western modernist art: whether to prioritise "realism" or 'expressionism'. Lu Xun did not participate in this debate, yet for him, the appreciation of art extended beyond mere formal or linguistic concerns like 'realism versus expressionism.' He placed greater emphasis on the awakening of the artist's individual self-awareness – the manifestation of "thought" and 'personality' within the artwork. For instance, he held in higher regard painters such as Goya, Daumier, Munch, Férid, Alekseev, George Grosz, Meffert, and Kollwitz. The more distinctive the artistic language, the more profoundly it could express the spirit. This may stem from his early exposure to Nietzsche and the Moroshi poets, whose ideas of the Übermensch, the Last Man, the strong, and the Moroshi resonated with him, all rooted in the creative subject of 'man'. When reading paintings, Lu Xun often penetrated the formal language of the image to discern the deep well of thought behind it, even evoking literary imagery reminiscent of his favoured authors: Gogol, Karamzin, Andreiev, Arzhabasov, and Dostoevsky.

In letters to friends, Lu Xun expressed reservations about the works of Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu at that time (Yu, 2015a)¹⁸⁵. The reasons for this were undoubtedly multifaceted. Mr Sun Yu observed, "The reason he held Chinese artists in low esteem was that he felt they were too Chinese, too akin to the literati tradition; and yet too Westernised, lacking their own vision... They had become formulaic, enslaved by conventionalised forms, ultimately lacking any selfhood" (Yu, 2015a).

¹⁸⁵ Between 1932 and 1934, artists Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu organised exhibitions of Chinese paintings in several European countries. In correspondence with friends, Lu Xun remarked ironically that a batch of 'antiquities' had been 'sent' to Paris for exhibition, though 'the outcome remains unknown.' He also noted that several 'masterpieces' of ancient paintings and new works by 'masters' were being "paraded" across Europe, a practice described as 'promoting national prestige.'

Sun's perspective is incisive, though not novel. Returning to Lu Xun himself, his understanding of Western modernist painting was profound. Yet his critique of modernist formalism was dialectical – he analysed specific issues concretely rather than offering sweeping generalisations (Danqing, 2011)¹⁸⁶. Consulting *Lu Xun's Diary* reveals he acquired numerous books and albums on Western modernist painting, including German-language works such as *Expressionism* and *Cubism*, and Japanese publications like *Modern Art*, *After Matisse*, and *Surrealism and Painting*.

In the preface to his anthology *New Russian Paintings*, Lu Xun analysed the succession of Cubism, Futurism, Industrialism, and Constructivism within Soviet Russian art circles before and after the October Revolution, introducing works by Constructivist painters such as Klinsky. On 4 June 1932, he organised the 'German Writers' Print Exhibition' in Shanghai, featuring works by German Expressionist painter Pechstein and modernist artists residing in Germany, including Kokoschka (Austria), Arp (originally Russian), and Feininger (American). In his article 'Introduction to the German Writers' Print Exhibition,' he noted: "anyone with even a passing familiarity with modern art will recognise these names (Xun, 1981)¹⁸⁷." Lu Xun further noted that their works 'are well worth studying by art students and art enthusiasts alike'¹⁸⁸. These historical records demonstrate that Lu Xun had indeed engaged with Western modernist painting to some extent. In the art pages of the journal *Bengliu*, he introduced works by the Russian Futurist painter Annenkov, and similarly featured the French Fauvist master Dufy in the same publication, writing in praise of the sublime and powerful lines of his woodcuts (Xun, 1981)¹⁸⁹. Yet in *On Reproduced Woodcuts*, he wrote: "... If one must insist on asking: "Would German printmaking and similar artworks be comprehensible to the Chinese public if introduced here?" Then I might reply: "Provided they are not Cubist, Futurist, or other such peculiar creations, they might be understood to some extent" (Xun, 1981)¹⁹⁰. Lu Xun rejected Cubism and Futurism based on the artistic receptivity of his contemporary Chinese audience. Unlike Xu Beihong, who criticised modernist painters like Cézanne, Matisse, and Bonnard with terms such as 'mediocre,' 'vulgar,' 'superficial,' and 'inferior,' and unlike Xu Zhimo, who advocated for modernist painting from the perspective of the autonomy of art and language, Lu Xun's distinctiveness lay in viewing fine art through the lens of a humanist, focusing on its spiritual resonance with both reality and the soul.

4.1.2. The beauty of strength

On 10 March 1929, whilst composing the preface to *Selected Modern Woodcuts 2*, Lu Xun cited the works of British printmaker Dagley Shaw and Japanese artist Nagase Yoshirō to illustrate that art may strive for naturalistic realism or meticulous detail, yet beyond these qualities, 'there exists beauty and vigour'. He further noted that 'only when both the artist and the viewer are brimming

¹⁸⁶ Chen Danqing, the renowned painter, assessed Lu Xun's scholarly approach to Western painting: "Lu Xun approached scholarship with rigor. In his later years, responding to challenges from the Left, he studied historical materialism and closely followed Western avant-garde movements like Cubism, Fauvism, and Surrealism. By the 1930s, his perspective aligned closely with experimental art in Europe. He understood Western art more profoundly than artists like Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu, who had studied abroad. In his essays on contemporary Western art, Lu Xun engaged with new movements in France and Germany with a balanced, objective approach, maintaining a stance of refined curiosity. What he criticized were shallow remarks from local literary figures." Although Chen's assessment is subjective, historical records support its validity.

¹⁸⁷ Lu Xun, "Introduction to the German Writers' Print Exhibition"

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Lu Xun, "Postscript to the Editing of The Torrent"

¹⁹⁰ Lu Xun, "On Reproducing Woodcuts"

with vitality can art imbued with “power” emerge’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁹¹. The ‘powerful beauty’ Lu Xun emphasised carries multiple implications: on one hand, it refers to the vigorous energy of wood-cut works in their ‘unrestrained and direct execution’; on the other, it pertains to the spirit and quality of paintings. This ‘beauty of power’ differs from ‘popular decorative art’ and from ‘the slender-shouldered beauties, emaciated Buddhist disciples, and disintegrated Constructivist paintings’ prevalent at the time (Xun, 1981)¹⁹². For Lu Xun, the “beauty of force” placed greater emphasis on the aesthetic quality of art. His personal aesthetic sensibility was profoundly sombre and rebellious, imbued with the intensity of blood and fire. Both his literary creations and his artistic philosophy overflowed with this “beauty of force”. Mr Sun Yu (2015) employed the term ‘painful sensation’ to describe this characteristic of Lu Xun: ‘An ancient and ailing China cannot alter its present state through tranquil means; only a fierce force piercing through, causing numb nerves to ache, can awaken an inner sense of renewal.

‘Thus, paintings that were insipid and droned on with their little tunes left Lu Xun utterly unmoved. His assessment of Japanese woodblock prints, for instance, was that ‘they all strive desperately to distance themselves from society, cultivating an air of reclusiveness; in terms of content, there is nothing to be learned from these works’ (Guangfu, 1982). It was rather the hysterical cries of anguish in the boundless darkness of Munch’s work that pierced his nerves; The mockery, irony, and self-interrogation in Ah Geng’s *Dead Souls Hundred Pictures* resonated with his inner experience; the sharp, incisive caricatures of Goya and Daumier, fighting for justice and truth, stirred his indignation; and the agonised cries and soul-piercing sorrow in Käthe Kollwitz’s works pierced his very spirit. Unlike his polemical opponents – Shao Xunmei¹⁹³, Xu Zhimo, Lin Yutang and others – whose refined, refined tastes favoured pleasant conversation and indulged in the mundane, Lu Xun’s singularity lay foremost in his introspection on life. His contemplation of paintings was imbued with profound sorrow and exultation, pulsing with the surging vitality of existence.

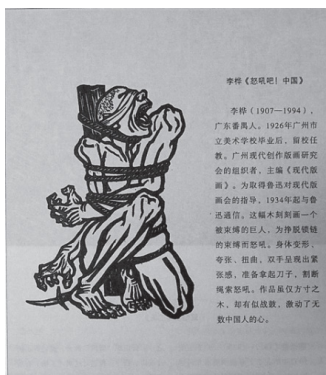


Figure 42. Li Hua: Roar, China!

¹⁹¹ Lu Xun, “Preface to Selected Modern Woodcuts 1”

¹⁹² Lu Xun, “Preface to Modern Woodcut Selections 2”

¹⁹³ Shao Xunmei (1906-1968), originally from Yuyao, Zhejiang, was born in Shanghai. He studied at Cambridge University in Britain before pursuing art studies in France. Returning to China in 1927, he successively edited or founded publications including: “The Lion’s Roar”, “Golden House”, “The Crescent Moon”, “The Analects”, “The Times Pictorial”, and “Ten Thousand Phenomena”. He participated in the literary and artistic debates between the Crescent Moon School writers and Lu Xun.



Figure 43. Illustration for *Dead Souls*, by Soviet realist illustrator Ageng

In 1934, Lu Xun penned the *Preface to the Anonymous Woodcut Collection* for the Anonymous Woodcut Society. His praise for the young woodcut artists was encapsulated in four words: ‘robust and distinct’. He asserted that ‘new woodcuts are the art of the new youth’, revealing Lu Xun’s advocacy for the ‘beauty of strength’. On 27 September 1930, while composing the preface to *The Map of Meffert’s Semenito*, Lu Xun noted that the illustrations in *Semenito* ‘demonstrate to the viewer the power of boldness and organisation’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁹⁴. The novel *The Sminth* by Russian author G. K. Gorky had just been published when German artist Meffert created its illustrations. *Meffert’s Sminth* depicted the industrial revival emerging from stagnation following the Russian October Revolution. Its ten boldly composed, organised panels featured exaggerated figures in an expressionist style. The vigorous brushwork stood in stark contrast to the novel’s realism, earning Lu Xun’s praise for its ‘majestic grandeur, unmatched by any traditional artist’ (Xun, 1981)¹⁹⁵.

Works by members of the Workshop, such as Chen Tie-geng’s *Arrest* and Jiang Feng’s *Labour*, were created under the influence of *The Cement Ground*, highlighting the artistic aspirations of young woodcut artists. In 1933, Lu Xun compiled and published Max Sieler’s series of woodcuts entitled *The Passion of One Man*, which recounts the life experiences of an illegitimate boy who is ultimately killed for resisting capitalists. Lu Xun wrote the preface and provided commentary for each woodcut. This series of works, characterised by stark black-and-white contrasts and concise carving techniques, stands as a realistic portrayal of everyday life. It laments the tragic life experiences of an individual, possessing a sharp and tangible ‘power of truth’.

Lu Xun held such works in considerable esteem, as evidenced by his purchase of two paintings – *Five Policemen and a Zero* and *Before the Steamed Bun Shop* – at Szeto Chiu’s exhibition in 1926. Though these pieces may not demonstrate the most sophisticated artistic techniques, they lay bare the harrowing realities of life. *Five Policemen and a Zero* depicts the artist’s witnessing of police brutality against a pregnant woman on the streets of Beijing during New Year’s Eve 1925.

¹⁹⁴ Lu Xun, “Preface to The Map of Meffert’s Silt”

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

Before the Steamed Bun Shop portrays a starving old man passing a steamed bun shop on an early winter morning, the aroma overwhelming yet, penniless, he can only endure the torment and turn away. These paintings, depicting the raw flesh and blood of real life, inevitably bring to mind Käthe Kollwitz. In 1931, Lu Xun published Kollwitz's woodcut *Sacrifice* in the inaugural issue of *The North Star* as a memorial to the assassination of Roux Shi. Kohlheis's work, while expressing loathing and fury towards the present age, was more profoundly imbued with compassion and pity, 'mourning, protesting, raging, and fighting for all who are insulted and harmed' (Xun, 1981)¹⁹⁶. Her subjects predominantly encompassed 'hardship, hunger, displacement, illness, and death', though naturally, they also depicted 'cries, struggles, solidarity, and uprisings'¹⁹⁷.



Figure 44. Szeto Chiu, *Five Policemen and a Zero*, Sketch, created on New Year's Eve 1925

Beyond lamenting the injustices of the present age, Lu Xun also championed rebellious art. Numerous scholarly studies have likened his essays to 'daggers' and 'javelins,' equating them with his advocacy for defiant artistic expression. Indeed, among the foreign artworks Lu Xun introduced, rebellious art was not lacking. Examples include Alexeyev's illustrations for *The City and the Year*, Grosz's *Atrocities*, Matyushin's *Twelve*, and Biskalev's *Pictures of the Years*, all of which carry undertones of vengeance, resistance, and rebellion. Even works by young domestic woodcut artists supported by Lu Xun, such as Zhang Wang's *Wounded Head*, Huang Xinbo's *Roar*, and Li Hua's *Roar, China!*, all carried themes of rebellion.

Lu Xun also noted the potency of irony, pointing out that the essence of satirical cartoons lies in 'exposing society's deep-seated ills'. In 1919, alongside publishing works such as *Diary of a Madman* in *New Youth*, he also released *Random Thoughts*, which discussed the satirical function of fine art. He used American painter Bradley's *Moon at Harvest Time* as an example to illustrate the efficacy of progressive artists' satirical drawings. In 1935, in '*A Casual Discussion of "Cartoon"*', he emphasised that the power of cartoons lies in their 'strength through truthfulness'. He further praised the cartoon artistry of Spanish painter Goya and French artist Daumier, asserting that both artists' works possessed the force of irony and authenticity.

¹⁹⁶ Lu Xun, "Written in the Dead of Night"

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

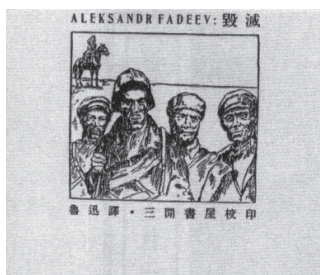


Figure 45. Cover of *Destruction*, printed by Shanghai's Dajiang Bookshop, September 1931



Figure 46. Goya's *The Rude Mirror*, 28 February 1935 In his essay 'A Casual Discussion of "Cartoon"', Lu Xun mentioned 'Goya'.

It must be noted that the foreign artworks introduced by Lu Xun, while possessing the aforementioned elements of lamentation, rebellion, and irony, also included many tender and heart-warming pieces. For instance, the works of Soviet painters such as Fyodorovsky, Klavchynko, and Medroshin reflected the achievements and spirit of Soviet economic construction, serving as a channel through which Lu Xun gained insight into the economic development of the Soviet Union following the October Revolution. Similarly, Orlova-Mochalova's *Mushroom Gathering* and Pozharsky's *Pavlovsk Landscape in the Leningrad Scenic Area*¹⁹⁸ depict figures and scenery exuding a fresh vitality, evoking aspirations for a renewed life. For a long time, scholarly research into Lu Xun's aesthetic thought has often emphasised its spirit of resistance and defiance against despair, while overlooking the tender aspects within his aesthetic consciousness. Works such as Guskin's *Heavy Snow*, introduced by Lu Xun, Edward Whittier Fawcett's *The Meeting*, and Magnus Lagerlöf's *The Buttercup*. Might these elegant and moving scenes offer fresh insights into another facet of Lu Xun's temperament and aesthetic sensibility?

¹⁹⁸ Sergei Mikhailovich Pozharsky (1900–1970), Soviet printmaker.



Figure 47. The characters and landscapes in Orlova-Mochalova's *Mushroom Picking* exude a freshness that inspires new hopes for life.



Figure 48. *Pocharsky, Pavlovsk Landscape in the Leningrad Region*, Sergei Mikhailovich. Pocharsky (1900–1970), Soviet printmaker.



Figure 49. Goncharov illustrated Ivanov's short story *The Field*

4.2. The artistic perspective of ‘For Life’

4.2.1. The intellectual origins of the ‘Art for Life’s Sake’ perspective

In 1913, Lu Xun articulated two opposing artistic perspectives in his *Proposed Statement on the Dissemination of Fine Arts*: a ‘non-utilitarian’ approach to fine art and a ‘utilitarian’ approach to fine art. “Those who speak of the purpose of fine art are exceedingly numerous, yet its ultimate aim is to provide enjoyment for mankind. The proponents of aestheticism maintain that the purpose of fine art lies solely within the art itself, having no further bearing on other matters whatsoever (Xun, 1981)¹⁹⁹. This ‘non-utilitarian’ perspective on art holds that its purpose lies in aesthetic pleasure and in art itself – that is, art possesses the function of providing beauty and delight, yet bears no relation whatsoever to practical interests or objectives. Conversely, the ‘utilitarian’ view of art asserts that it serves three major purposes in life: it can express culture; it can support morality; and it can aid the economy. On the one hand, Lu Xun opposed the ‘obsession with utility’ in aesthetic appreciation, contending that artistic beauty should be ‘utterly divorced from practical gain’ and rejecting narrow utilitarianism. On the other hand, having refuted narrow utilitarianism, he subsequently advocated that art should ‘transform human character and disposition,’ urging people to ‘strive towards the realm of sincerity, goodness, grandeur, beauty, strength, and daring’ (Xun, 1981)²⁰⁰.

Lu Xun enumerated the potential ‘uses’ of artistic works from sociological and ethical perspectives. Yet he did not regard these “uses” as the essence of art, viewing them instead as supplementary functions – primarily to cultivate the spirit. ‘To nurture the spirit and thoughts of people is the very duty and use of literature’. That is, through spiritual refinement, art provides aesthetic experiences and fulfilment, invigorating the spirit, thereby serving societal progress²⁰¹. Lu Xun categorised the ‘uses’ of art into two types: one concerns whether artists pursue specific political or moral objectives before or during creation; the other being that while the artist may not have intended the social or political value of the work as a creative goal, once the work is created, it inevitably acquires a social character and inevitably generates political or moral functions that the artist himself did not anticipate. Furthermore, Lu Xun distinguished the function of art from moral objectives. ‘The purpose of art, though not entirely aligned with morality, possesses the power to deepen human sentiments and elevate human aspirations, thereby aiding morality in governance’ (Xun, 1981)²⁰². While art cannot directly serve morality, it exerts an indirect influence upon it. Specifically, art can promote the improvement of social morality by ‘deepening human sentiments and elevating human aspirations.’

The autonomy of art in Lu Xun’s aesthetic philosophy lies in its inherent efficacy as an ‘unused utility’; The potential social utility of artistic works constitutes an ‘unanticipated utility,’ whereas “utility” is not an inherent property of ‘art.’ Within these two starkly contrasting perspectives on art – the ‘use through non-use’ and the ‘use through the unanticipated’ – he sought to reconcile them, aiming to forge an artistic creation philosophy that is both ‘concerned with life and yet close to art.’ We summarise this strongly reality-focused artistic perspective as an ‘art for life’ philosophy. This ‘art for life’ approach, whilst emphasising artistic autonomy, champions personalised artistic

¹⁹⁹ Lu Xun, “Supplementary Notes to Miscellaneous Writings: A Draft Proposal on the Dissemination of Fine Arts”

²⁰⁰ Lu Xun, “On the Power of Moroccan Poetry”

²⁰¹ Ibid

²⁰² Lu Xun, “Supplement to Miscellaneous Writings: Draft Proposal for the Dissemination of Fine Arts”

expression that ‘asserts individuality and elevates the spirit’ – an embodiment of the ‘human-centred’ philosophy. Simultaneously, it underscores art’s aesthetic functionality in influencing life, reflecting art’s engagement with real-world existence. It pursues the aesthetic value of artworks while opposing the instrumentalisation of art. Consequently, it differs from the ‘art for art’s sake’ perspective, which prioritises artistic autonomy, non-utilitarianism, and independence, and also diverges from the ‘art for life’s sake’ viewpoint, which emphasises art’s functional role in serving life and society.

In the formation of his aesthetic philosophy centred on “life for its own sake”, Lu Xun was influenced by the works of Western modernist pioneers such as Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Kant, alongside the writings of Romantic poets like Byron and Shelley, representing diverse Western literary and artistic traditions. Nietzsche exerted a profound influence on Lu Xun’s early literary and artistic ideas. In essays penned around 1907, such as *On the Teaching of the History of Science*, *The History of Man*, *On the Bias of Culture*, *On Breaking the Evil Voice*, and *On the Power of Moro Poetry*, Nietzsche’s shadow is unmistakably discernible. On the one hand, Nietzsche’s concept of the ‘superman’ and its powerful will introduced Lu Xun to the emerging Western individualist current, enabling him to recognise the importance of artistic creation rooted in the creative subject of “humanity” and advocating for ‘honouring individuality and promoting the spirit.’ On the other hand, by reflecting on technocracy and scientific positivism, and emphasising the ‘humanistic heart’ in the concept of ‘establishing humanity,’ he grasped the social efficacy of ‘literature and art saving the nation.’

Kant’s aesthetic philosophy of artistic autonomy exerted a certain influence on the formation of Lu Xun’s artistic thought. According to the author’s available sources, Lu Xun’s reception of Kantian aesthetics likely stemmed from three primary channels: firstly, Wang Guowei’s introduction to Kant’s aesthetic ideas. Wang Guowei devoted considerable time to the study of German aesthetics, offering profound interpretations and detailed presentations of both Kantian and Schopenhauerian aesthetics.²⁰³ Although Lu Xun’s scholarly inclinations differed from Wang Guowei’s, he held Wang’s character and erudition in high esteem²⁰⁴ and was an avid reader of his academic works. Secondly, during Lu Xun’s studies in Japan, it coincided with a pivotal period when Japanese academia was extensively promoting Kantian aesthetics. This academic promotion likely sparked Lu Xun’s interest in Kant’s scholarship. Furthermore, this may have been influenced by his mentor Zhang Taiyan’s high regard for Kant’s academic thought.²⁰⁵

The above represents merely the author’s conjecture; the definitive evidence lies in Lu Xun’s repeated references to Kant’s aesthetic philosophy within his own writings. In *Critique of Judgment*, Kant proposed the concept of art’s autonomy, asserting that art can impart a ‘pleasure with-

²⁰³ After the 1898 Coup d’état, 22-year-old Wang Guowei worked as a clerk and proofreader for the Affairs Gazette, edited by Huang Zunxian and Liang Qichao, while studying at the Dongwen Society in Shanghai. The society employed Japanese instructors Fujita Toyohachi and Tadaoka Sayoji, who lectured on Kant and Schopenhauer, deeply captivating Wang. After reading Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1900, he studied Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*, which greatly impressed him. Wang noted, “Schopenhauer’s writings are profound in thought and incisive in expression; I read them twice around that year.” Through Schopenhauer’s aesthetic, Wang accessed Kant’s philosophy, mastering its key concepts.

²⁰⁴ Lu Xun offered a remarkably incisive assessment of Wang Guowei’s life, remarking: “Only Wang Guowei had already concluded his life as an old-fashioned scholar in the water; he was an honest man. Yet his lamentations often echoed Luo Zhenyu’s sentiments, though the breath they exhaled differed in authenticity”.

²⁰⁵ During his time in Japan, Zhang Taiyan authored works on Buddhism, Kantian philosophy and other academic subjects. His influence profoundly shaped the Japanese-educated scholars of the era. Eight students, including Qian Xuantong, Xu Shouchang, Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren, studied under Zhang Taiyan. They absorbed his ideology of ‘opposing the Manchus and preserving the race’ alongside his scholarly cultivation in Buddhism and Western philosophy.

out interest' – its value being self-sufficient and independent of ethical or political objectives. Kant posited that the foundation of the aesthetic process lies in the 'coordination of imagination and reason.' Through imagination, diverse perceptions are synthesised to attain beauty. He excluded all conceptual and logical thinking employed in the aesthetic process, proposing that beauty and logic are concepts unrelated to the world. Lu Xun's early views on fine art reveal Kantian influence. He endorsed art's non-utilitarian nature, maintaining that fine art is unrelated to contemporary politics, and demonstrated a degree of agreement with the theory of artistic autonomy.

He stated: "From the perspective of pure literature, the essence of all fine art lies in evoking excitement, emotion, and delight in its audience. Literature is one such fine art; its nature should likewise be detached from the existence of individuals or nations, devoid of practical utility and free from the pursuit of reason" (Xun, 1981)²⁰⁶. The phrase 'devoid of practical utility, devoid of theoretical substance' signifies art's non-utilitarian nature, its essence lying in evoking emotion and delight. He further cited the Irish poet Doherty, suggesting that the sensory experience of art induces a spiritual effect of 'transcendence of the material' through 'spiritual contemplation.' Concurrently, Lu Xun maintained that within the aesthetic process, works of art possess a dimension of aesthetic effect. Art, while 'less intricate in its principles than scholarship, yet embodying the very essence of life,' directly envelops its meaning within its very phrases. Hearing its voice, the spirit becomes luminous, and one immediately resonates with life itself (Xun, 1981)²⁰⁷. Thus, art fulfils a social function: revealing truth to humanity and transforming the spirit.

The aesthetic philosophy of the Japanese literary figure Kuriyagawa Hakuson²⁰⁸ exerted a certain influence upon Lu Xun. In the 1920s, Lu Xun translated Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbol of Torment* and *Out of the Ivory Tower*. Shirakawa posited that literature and art arise from the torments of human existence. This anguish, in turn, stems from the collision between the creative subject's vitality and their personal circumstances; this suppressed vitality is the source of anguish, and the artistic expression of this anguish gives rise to literary and artistic works. This notion that 'art arises from anguish' emphasises the importance of the concepts of "inspiration" and 'creative mood' (schaffensstimmung), tending towards an aesthetic theory of autonomy. However, Shirakawa Hakuson's artistic views are multifaceted: on the one hand, he employs the philosophy of Henri Bergson to explain the autonomy of artistic creation (Zaifu, 1981b)²⁰⁹.

On the other, he simultaneously draws upon the perspectives of German poet Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education*, emphasising the creative subject's influence on society through

²⁰⁶ Lu Xun, "On the Power of Moroccan Poetry"

²⁰⁷ Ibid

²⁰⁸ Shirakawa Tatsuo (1880–1923), a Japanese literary critic from Kyoto, graduated in 1904 from the English Department of Tokyo Imperial University. He taught at various institutions, including Kyoto Imperial University, and gained fame in 1912 with Ten Lectures on Modern Literature. His graduate thesis, A Study of Love in Poetry and Prose, was submitted at graduate school. In 1915, he studied abroad, returning the following year. In 1919, he earned a Doctor of Literature degree and became a professor at Tokyo Imperial University. He died in the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake in Kamakura. His works include Ten Lectures on Modern Literature, Impressions, Beyond the Ivory Tower, Modern Views on Love, The Symbol of Torment, and On Literary Trends. The Complete Works of Kuchikawa Hakuson was published posthumously.

²⁰⁹ Bergson emphasised the 'intuitive faculty' in aesthetic activity, positing that 'life's activity' counters rational and logical processes. He contended that one could comprehend life and grasp truth through this internal 'intuitive faculty' without recourse to rational thought.

artistic expression (Shirakawa, 1959)²¹⁰. In absorbing Shirakawa Hakuson's aesthetic perspectives, Lu Xun developed further insights. In the translator's preface to *The Symbol of Suffering*, he observed: 'The author employs philosophy akin to Bergson's, positing ceaseless vital force as the foundation of human existence, while drawing upon science akin to Frotté's to uncover the roots of this vital force – thus employing it to explain art and literature' (Xun, 1981)²¹¹. Lu Xun compared Bergson and Freud's ideas with those of Shirakawa Hakuson, pointing to the possibility of interpreting literary creation from the perspective of the creative subject.

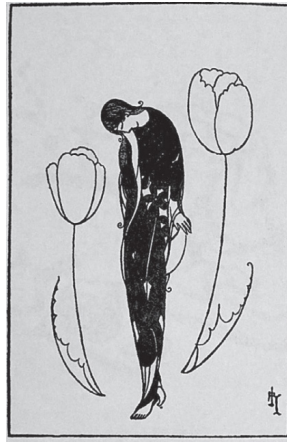


Figure 50. Fukuya Kōj Viola tricolor

Lu Xun also took note of and drew upon Schopenhauer's aesthetic philosophy. On the one hand, he encountered the introspective philosophical ideas of the German thinkers Schopenhauer and Fichte through his mentor Zhang Taiyan. During his studies in Japan, Lu Xun was a disciple of Zhang Taiyan, who had fled to Japan following the *Suzhou Gazette* incident and received honourable treatment from revolutionary pioneers. Around 1906, he participated in editing the *Minbao* in Japan, successively writing and publishing works such as 'Speeches,' 'The Theory of Joint Evolution,' 'Atheism,' 'The Morality of Revolution,' 'On the Establishment of Religion,' 'A New Critique of the Party, and The Doctrine of No-Self. These works largely revolved around a central theme: emphasising the concept of authentic, unique individuality. Zhang argued that this notion of individuality transcended evolutionary theory, which he believed led to the levelling of all things. In the realm of literature and art, he advocated for introspective artistic expression. On the other hand, Lu Xun's *Diary* records that on 16 December 1924, he purchased the Japanese edition of Schopenhauer's *Essays*.

Through her research, Ms Zhang Yun (2004) concluded that, judging from Lu Xun's subsequent citations of Schopenhauer's works, most of his quotations were drawn from *Metaphors, Similes,*

²¹⁰ Drawing upon Schiller's *Letters on Aesthetic Education* (Letters XIV and XV), Kuchikawa Hakuson expounded on the relationship between the genesis of literary art and the impulse to play: "Yet within us resides a vital reserve, ever seeking through this force to attain a realm of perfect harmony and freedom – a separate world where sensibility and reason, duty and imagination, are harmonised with utmost propriety. This is play. Art arises from this impulse to play, and play constitutes an illusory world transcending real life. Such a state is termed the 'spirit of beauty'".

²¹¹ Lu Xun, "Translator's Preface to 'The Symbol of Suffering'".

and *Parables* in Volume II of *Supplementary Essays and Addenda*. The main points were: “First, the “non-utilitarian” nature of literature and art means that they do not submit to any external purpose or utilitarian principle; 2. Art is the product of the creator’s inner world” (Yun, 2004). In *The Warrior and the Fly* from *The Canopy*, Lu Xun quoted Schopenhauer: “To measure human greatness, the principles governing spiritual grandeur and physical stature are entirely opposite. The latter diminishes the greater the distance, while the former grows the greater the distance”, highlighting the distinction between spiritual and physical greatness and extolling the value and significance of introspective philosophical reflection (Xun, 1981)²¹².

In his early years, when introducing foreign literature and art to Zhou Zuoren, Lu Xun placed greater emphasis on the literary and artistic creative ideas of Russia and other European nations. *The Overseas Short Story Collection* introduced works by numerous Russian authors such as Gorky, Andreyev, and Arshinov. Russian literature often voiced resistance against feudal systems, and this ‘literature for life’ significantly influenced Lu Xun’s literary perspective, which emphasised the social utility of literature. In later writings, Lu Xun recalled that when selecting works for translation, he most admired the characteristic of Russian literature that, since the time of Nicholas II, had been ‘for life.’ Whether its purpose lay in inquiry, resolution, or even descent into mysticism and decadence, its main current remained singular: for life (Xun, 1981)²¹³.

Lu Xun was also influenced by the prevailing literary and artistic trends of his time. Within modern Chinese aesthetic discourse, the ‘non-utilitarian theory’ represented by Wang Guowei²¹⁴, Cai Yuanpei, and later Zhu Guangqian emphasised the independence of art while neglecting its social utility. Conversely, the ‘utilitarian theory of art’ – represented by Liang Qichao’s advocacy of political fiction – emphasised the social utility of literature and art, highlighting their significant role in politics. Yet it failed to distinguish between art and politics, or art and propaganda, thereby neglecting the aesthetic value of art itself. Both these distinct perspectives exerted considerable influence on modern Chinese literary and artistic creation²¹⁵. Among these perspectives, the utilitarian theory veered towards the extreme of political expediency, while the non-utilitarian theory leaned towards the extreme of aesthetic hedonism. In his early years, Lu Xun was influenced by both schools of thought. Yet remarkably, he swiftly recognised the one-sidedness of these two major strands. He neither fully endorsed the notion of art’s ‘super-utilitarianism’ as its sole purpose, nor did he regard the utilitarian theory of art as the only objective of artistic creation. Instead, he endeavoured to strike a balance between the autonomy of art and the theory of art’s function.

²¹² Lu Xun, “The Warrior and the Fly”

²¹³ Lu Xun, “Preface to ‘The Harp’”

²¹⁴ Wang Guowei’s ‘non-utilitarian’ and ‘non-political’ aesthetic philosophy sought its ‘source’ in the aesthetics of Kant and Schopenhauer. He maintained that literature and art are purely the subjective preconceptions of artists, arising from the desires of life itself. It is from these desires that human history and artistic creation emerge, and such “desire” is innate, existing prior to human existence. He pointed out: ‘Whether the source of art lies in the innate or in experience constitutes the paramount question in Western aesthetics.’

²¹⁵ In May 1922, Zheng Zhenduo observed in *Constructing a New Literary Perspective*: “Though China styles itself the “land of culture and civilisation”, the traditional Chinese conception of literature is erroneous and profoundly contradictory. Broadly speaking, it may be divided into two major schools: one advocates “literature as a vehicle for moral principles”, believing that literature must address matters of the world... The other school holds the diametrically opposite view, maintaining that literature serves solely for entertainment. For the literati themselves, it is a means of self-amusement through the carving of ornate phrases and the composing of poetic verses that play upon the moon and wind.”



Figure 51. Advertisement for Käthe Kollwitz: Selected Prints, designed and produced by Lu Xun

Of course, The above pertains to external influences on Lu Xun's thought. Regarding his personal development, from his decision to abandon medicine for literature – believing literature to be foremost in transforming the spirit – to his later recollection that his novel-writing stemmed from early exposure to 'Enlightenment' ideas, asserting that fiction 'must be "for life" and must improve that life,' we discern Lu Xun's utilitarian emphasis on art serving life. Moreover, in his letter to Li Hua, Lu Xun emphasised that woodcut creation must not forget its essence as art. Furthermore, in his correspondence with other young woodcut artists, he repeatedly stressed artistic criticism perspectives such as form, proportion, and realism. These reveal the other side of his advocacy: the autonomy of art.

4.2.2 The artistic perspective of "For Life"

Firstly, the concept of art 'for life' differed from the contemporary notion of 'art for art's sake'. At that time, most literary circles advocating "art for art's sake" emphasised only the autonomy of art, to some extent denying its utilitarian value and its social function. In the 1930s, Lu Xun examined European art history from a materialist perspective, concluding that the "art for art's sake" viewpoint was untenable. In Lu Xun's view, the emergence and function of fine art ultimately could not be divorced from human life. "The wild ox painted in the Altamira caves of Spain is a renowned relic of primitive man. Many art historians claim this is precisely "art for art's sake" – the primitive man painted for amusement. Yet this interpretation is rather too "modern", for primitive man possessed not the leisure of nineteenth-century artists. His depiction of a bull had purpose – concerning the wild ox, or hunting it, or warding it off" (Xun, 1981)²¹⁶. Lu Xun contended that primitive painting did not originate from "painting for amusement".

Primitive people lacked the leisurely sensibilities of 19th-century artists; their art stemmed from practical necessities like hunting. Thus, the non-utilitarian notion of art for art's sake does not align with the historical reality of art's emergence in primitive societies. In 1916, Lu Xun articulated the origins of human artistic creation with remarkable clarity: 'Art arose from practical necessity. In the age of ignorance, simplicity prevailed without adornment, content to serve util-

²¹⁶ Lu Xun, "Essays from the Qiejie Pavilion: Literary Discussions Beyond the Gate"

itarian ends. Gradually, embellishments emerged, yet the spirit remained profoundly unadorned. Though later generations saw evolving trends, they never transcended this fundamental domain' (Xun, 1981)²¹⁷. Here, the primary emphasis lies on 'utility,' while 'gradually embellishing' signifies first observing artistic creation from a utilitarian perspective before refining it through aesthetic scrutiny.

On the question of whether human art originated from the materialist "imitation theory" or the idealist "play theory", Cai Yuanpei (1920), in his essay *The Origin of Fine Arts*, espoused the "imitation theory", maintaining that artistic creation possesses purpose. He illustrated this with examples: 'The beginnings of primitive art almost invariably contained a practical purpose. For instance, patterns served utilitarian convenience; ornamentation and dance acted as mediators between the sexes; poetry, dance, and music served to stir the spirit of struggle; just as family crests and the songs and dances of peace-making assemblies held significant relations with social cohesion.' The origins of human art were thus 'reasoned,' influenced by society and exerting effects upon it. In his preface to the Chinese translation of Plekhanov's *Theory of Art*, Lu Xun similarly noted: "The third chapter, 'Further Discussions on the Art of Primitive Peoples', critiques the erroneous view that play instincts preceded labour.

Through abundant empirical evidence and rigorous reasoning, it establishes the fundamental thesis of historical materialism: that the production of useful objects (labour) precedes artistic production. To elaborate, Plekhanov demonstrates that social beings initially perceive things and phenomena from a utilitarian perspective, only later shifting to an aesthetic viewpoint" (Xun, 1981)²¹⁸. In 1913, Lu Xun's translations of Japanese aesthetician Kōyō Yōichi's *Education in Art Appreciation* and *Social Education and Taste* similarly upheld a materialist aesthetic perspective emphasising utilitarianism before aesthetics in the question of art's origins²¹⁹. Lu Xun further contended that not only was the emergence of ancient art intrinsically linked to human practical existence, but also that the frequent fluctuations in European modernist painting, its rise and fall in popularity, reflected the inner turmoil and disorientation imposed upon artists by social life, constituting a form of artistic response to societal realities and human existence. Thus Lu Xun remarked: "Those who dabble in literature and art are generally sensitive souls, ever mindful of their own decline, like drifters on the open sea grasping desperately at anything within reach. The rise and fall of Expressionism, Dadaism, and all manner of "isms" in the 20th century are but signals of this very truth' (Xun, 1981)²²⁰.

²¹⁷ Lu Xun, "Preface to The Moulding of the Shrine"

²¹⁸ Lu Xun, "Preface to the Translation of 'On Art'"

²¹⁹ In his preface to *The Education of Art Appreciation*, Lu Xun wrote: "This treatise by a Japanese psychologist offers profound insights and meticulous argumentation. As our nation seeks to advance aesthetic education, this work is highly instructive, so I hastened to translate it into Chinese." In *Social Education and Taste*, the author argues, "Beyond natural beauty lies the beauty created by art." He suggests that even among savages, art existed, originally for self-defense and later for decoration. Practices like primitive tattooing, body adornment, and rituals were meant to both intimidate and attract, marking the dawn of artistic expression. Though seemingly impractical, these practices brought joy and contributed to the development of the arts. Ueno Yoichi uses examples like primitive tattooing to illustrate that art first emerged for survival before evolving into decorative forms.

²²⁰ Lu Xun, "The Hazy Vision of 'Drunken Eyes'"



Figure 52. Lunacharsky, *On Art*, translated by Lu Xun, published by Shanghai's Da Jiang Bookshop, June 1926

Lu Xun held reservations regarding the tendency among various new painting schools emerging in late 19th-century Europe to 'revere the bizarre,' and he opposed the inclination of certain radical young Chinese painters – such as those in modern art groups like the 'Juelan Society' and the 'Chinese Independent Artists Association' – to imitate these styles. As he pointed out: 'Some young artists of that era delighted in viewing "Futurist" and "Cubist" works, yet refused to produce proper paintings through diligent practice. Faces were invariably distorted, complexions often greenish, yet they could not produce a single undistorted human face... It was like a child who could only perform somersaults but was incapable of marching in step' (Xun, 1981)²²¹ Firstly, there was the tendency towards 'bizarre' art: 'Even when indulging in wild experimentation, grotesque and deformed forms thus proliferated throughout the art world' (Xun, 1976). Secondly, 'another faction held that all revolutionary art should be bold and sweeping, hacking and slashing indiscriminately, featuring fierce eyes and clenched fists; otherwise, it was deemed aristocratic' (Xun, 1976)²²².

Lu Xun observed that these young artists 'have long harboured a pernicious habit'²²³: averse to scholarship, they turn to literature; failing at writing, they become artists – growing long hair, wearing oversized bow ties, and deeming their mission accomplished' (Xun, 1976)²²⁴. Yet their eccentric paintings 'have wrought utter chaos upon the art world.' This "eccentric" and "chaotic" new style emphasised personal subjective expression and the liberation of pictorial forms, yet its appreciation remained severely limited. Such paintings became mere "artists" privileges', "cut off from the masses – a misfortune for art" (Ruli, 1982). Thirdly, new-style painting was 'easy to make

²²¹ Lu Xun, "Letter to Yao Kexin"

²²² Lu Xun, "Letter to Zheng Zhenduo"

²²³ In a letter to Yang Jiyun on 3 June 1934, Lu Xun criticized young Chinese artists, stating, "The literary world in China has always been full of scum. Over the past decade, some youths, rejecting science, turn to literature; lacking skill, they pursue art but refuse to practice, content with long hair and large bow ties. If China were filled with such people, it would surely be doomed." He further remarked, "Painters must study material before applying it, yet they ignore good books, instead preferring art that can be quickly consumed – patterns, advertisements, or a single volume of 'Da Guan'. How could one volume offer a 'grand panorama'? Worse, some even tear out the color plates without buying the books."

²²⁴ Lu Xun, "To Yao Ke"

strange' yet also 'easy to deceive', lacking foundational skills and failing in formative ability, 'often revealing errors' such as anatomical inaccuracies or violations of perspective. Thus Lu Xun cautioned young artists against becoming 'empty-headed artists', urging them to note: 'First, do not dazzle with strangeness; second, pay attention to fundamental techniques; third, broaden your horizons and thoughts' (Ruli, 1982). Beyond merely depicting still lifes, landscapes, and portraits, artists should 'observe social realities and use their brushes to reveal events the masses overlook or fail to perceive' (Ruli, 1982).

In the 1920s, the Creative Society emerged, represented by figures such as Guo Moruo and Cheng Fangwu²²⁵. In its early phase, the society advocated opposing feudal culture and returning to ancient thought, venerating genius, and championing 'art for art's sake' – a pursuit of self-expression and individual liberation. It emphasised that literary and artistic creation should remain faithful to the artist's own 'inner demands,' exhibiting tendencies towards romanticism and aestheticism. By its later phase, most core members of the Creative Society had either embraced revolutionary ideals or engaged in practical revolutionary work. Consequently, its literary and artistic principles underwent a 'shift in direction,' vigorously advocating proletarian revolutionary literature. Works such as Feng Naichao's *Art and Social Life*, Cheng Fangwu's *From Literary Revolution to Revolutionary Literature*, and Li Chuli's *How to Construct Revolutionary Literature*, influenced by prevailing leftist ideologies both internationally and domestically, demanded literature adapt to revolutionary demands and serve the working masses.

Yet their theoretical advocacy and literary activities inevitably carried dogmatic and sectarian tendencies – shifting from outright denial of art's social function to its boundless exaggeration, and from the 'art for art's sake' creative principle to promoting slogan-like 'revolutionary literature'. Lu Xun launched a scathing critique of this phenomenon: 'This reveals how the likes of China's Creation Society, who once championed "art for art's sake" and now loudly proclaim revolutionary literature, perpetually remain blind to reality while themselves lacking any genuine ideals – mere empty clamour' (Xun, 1981)²²⁶. Lu Xun contended that the Creativity Society's adeptness at shifting positions stemmed from a lack of sufficient courage to confront China's realities. They employed the 'art for art's sake' slogan to evade life, depicting isolated inner worlds; later, they used revolutionary literature to paint pictures of a future society for readers, thereby evading China's realities.

Lu Xun pointed out: 'Those now styled as revolutionary writers emphasise struggle and so-called transcendence of the era. Transcendence is in truth evasion. If one lacks the courage to confront reality yet seeks to hang the banner of revolution, one will consciously or unconsciously, inevitably, tread that path. How can one depart from the present world? This is as deceitful as claiming one can leave the earth by grasping one's own ears' (Xun, 1981)²²⁷. Similarly, Lu Xun

²²⁵ The Creation Society, formed during the early May Fourth New Culture Movement, was officially established on 8 June 1921 at Yu Dafu's residence in Tokyo. Its founding members included Guo Moruo, Cheng Fangwu, Yu Dafu, Zhang Ziping, Tian Han, and Zheng Boqi, all studying in Japan. In autumn 1921, they published the Creation Society Series in Shanghai, featuring works like Guo Moruo's *Goddess*, Yu Dafu's *The Downfall*, and Guo's translation of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. From May 1922, the group published the quarterly *Creation*, the weekly *Creation Weekly*, and the literary supplement *Creation Daily*. The society rejected naturalism and realism, opposing both classical traditions and the views of the Literary Research Society. It later critiqued bourgeois perspectives in the 'revolutionary literature' debate, with members like Feng Naichao and Cheng Fangwu advocating for revolutionary literature based on historical materialism.

²²⁶ Lu Xun, "Preface and Postscripts to Translations: Translator's Notes on Premonitions of a New Era"

²²⁷ Lu Xun, "Literature and Revolution"

contended that the 'third type of person'²²⁸ – those espousing a wholly neutral literary stance – masked their lack of true neutrality with a pretence of 'impartiality,' rendering their position fundamentally disingenuous. Using the analogy of human physique, he illustrated that 'when compared, one is either closer to being plump or closer to being thin,' there being no such thing as a third person who is neither fat nor thin.

He pointed out that those representing the 'third kind' under the banner of 'art for art's sake,' such as Zhang Zhiping, 'actually harbour certain biases, which they consciously or unconsciously conceal in ordinary times, but which become distinctly apparent when crucial events occur.' Thus, the professed stance of complete neutrality is in fact a self-deceiving and absurd viewpoint. 'Yet it is said that at least some literature and art transcend class struggle, existing for the future – the "truth" cherished by the "third kind of person," the eternal literature and art'(Xun, 1981)²²⁹. In Lu Xun's view, 'social beings initially perceive things and phenomena from a utilitarian standpoint', only later shifting to an aesthetic perspective. 'All things deemed beautiful by humankind possess utility – significance in the struggle for survival against nature and other social existences. ... If the foundation of aesthetic pleasure lacks utility, the object ceases to be beautiful.

Beauty does not exist for art's sake, but for humanity's' (Xun, 1981)²³⁰. Here, Lu Xun clearly delineates the dialectical relationship between art's social utility and its aesthetic entertainment value. His opposition to the notion of 'art for art's sake' is further corroborated by his critique of Zhu Guangqian's propagated aesthetic view of art's 'tranquil beauty'. In 1932, Zhu Guangqian published his work *On Beauty* (also titled *The Thirteenth Letter to the Youth*), emphasising an idealistic, surreal, and utilitarian perspective on literature and art, advocating for a 'contemplative' worldview that transcends material concerns. In December 1935, he further articulated this perspective in his article 'When the Music Fades, Only the Green Peaks Remain on the River,' published in the magazine *Middle School Students*. Using Winckelmann's famous description of Greek art – 'noble simplicity and serene grandeur' – to interpret Qian Qi's verse, he promoted a 'serene' aesthetic for literature and art. Lu Xun criticised Zhu Guangqian's surreal, utilitarian 'serene' aesthetic, arguing that literature detached from reality 'hangs suspended in an "extreme realm", destined to plunge into an "abyss" (Xun, 1981)²³¹. Lu Xun contended: 'Former literature was like watching a fire from the opposite bank, bearing no personal relevance; present literature burns us within it, compelling profound personal resonance. Once we feel this resonance, we must inevitably engage with society!'(Xun, 1981)²³². If the "serene" aesthetic perspective relates to reality like 'standing aloof from worldly affairs' or 'watching a fire from the opposite bank,' then 'being burned within it oneself' represents an aesthetic perspective with direct personal relevance and undeniable social utilitarianism.

²²⁸ The 'third type of person' was a literary school in modern Chinese history, emerging after the Crescent Moon School. It claimed neutrality, avoiding praise or criticism of any class or form of literature, and opposed reducing art to political propaganda. The school rejected proletarian leadership in literature and art, advocating for a super-class perspective. Key figures included Hu Qiuyuan and Su Wen. In the early 1930s, the Left-Wing Writers' Association debated with the 'Free Men' (led by Hu Qiuyuan) and the 'Third Kind of People' (led by Su Wen), a faction representing bourgeois right-wing literary views, which were criticized by Lu Xun, Feng Xuefeng, Qu Qiubai, Zhou Yang, and others.

²²⁹ Lu Xun: "Discourse on the 'Third Kind of Person'"

²³⁰ Lu Xun, "Preface to the Translation of 'On Art'"

²³¹ Lu Xun, "Draft with Undecided Title (VII)"

²³² Lu Xun, "The Divergence of Literature and Politics"

Secondly, art “for life” must uphold the “interest” of art. Lu Xun believed that in artistic creation, one should not consider the social implications of the work, yet this does not imply that art is unrelated to life, society, or politics. Not only the subject matter of artistic creation, but also the very process by which artworks are produced and exert their influence, is inherently social. In his early discussions on the essential characteristics of fine art, Lu Xun asserted that ‘fine art possesses three elements: first, natural objects; second, intellectual reasoning; third, aestheticisation. Because fine art must possess these three elements, its boundaries with other things are extremely strict’ (Xun, 1981)²³³. He achieved a high degree of unity among the three factors of ‘nature,’ ‘intellectual reasoning,’ and ‘aestheticisation’ – that is, using intellectual reasoning to aestheticise natural objects, thereby distinguishing it from natural beauty. Here, ‘rational thought’ possesses the artistic aesthetic of transforming society, embodying ‘aesthetic enjoyment.’

In the *Preface to Methods of Woodcut Creation*, Lu Xun outlined three reasons for introducing woodcut art: firstly, because it is ‘amusing’; secondly, because it is “convenient”; and thirdly, because it is ‘useful.’ This elucidates three characteristics of woodcut creation: first, its pleasurable nature, offering people ‘aesthetic enjoyment’; second, its broad accessibility; third, its utilitarian value to society. Thus, the playful quality of enjoyment stands as a crucial criterion in artistic evaluation, serving simultaneously as a vital conduit through which art fulfils other purposes and realises social functions. Lu Xun termed this process of art exerting social influence ‘propaganda,’ defining the concept expansively beyond narrow political connotations: All literature and art constitutes propaganda, the moment it is shown to others. Even individualistic works, once written, possess the potential for propaganda – unless one refrains from writing or speaking. Thus, employing it as a tool for revolution is naturally permissible” (Xun, 1981)²³⁴.

But he also pointed out the distinction between art and propaganda: ‘I believe that all art is indeed propaganda, yet not all propaganda is art. This is akin to how all flowers possess colour, yet not all colours are flowers. The reason revolution requires art alongside slogans, banners, proclamations, telegrams, textbooks... is precisely because it is art’(Xun, 1981)²³⁵. Lu Xun contended that art’s propagandistic function differs from that of other propaganda tools; the reason artistic works can exert a certain propagandistic effect is primarily because they are artistic creations possessing aesthetic value. If a work lacks aesthetic value, it ceases to be an artistic creation and becomes merely propaganda material or something else. If the boundary between literature and art and propaganda is blurred, substituting propaganda for literature and art, not only is the intrinsic value of literature and art lost, but the effectiveness of propaganda is also diminished: “From the theories I have examined, all merely assert that all literature and art must carry some message; none claim that propaganda-style writing constitutes literature. Admittedly, since the year before last, China has indeed produced numerous poems and novels stuffed with slogans and catchphrases, self-styled as proletarian literature. But this is because neither their content nor form possessed proletarian spirit; without slogans and catchphrases, they could not express their

²³³ Lu Xun, “Proposed Memorandum on the Dissemination of Fine Arts”

²³⁴ Lu Xun, “Literature and Revolution”

²³⁵ Ibid

“emergence”. In reality, they were not proletarian literature²³⁶. Lu Xun held significant divergences with the ‘revolutionary literary figures’ of his time regarding the social function of literature and art. Lu Xun rejected the notion that artistic works possess the capacity to directly influence society or bring about social transformation.

He stated: ‘In China’s present social circumstances, only actual revolutionary warfare holds sway. A poem cannot drive away Sun Chuanfang; only a cannonball can do that. Naturally, some believe literature possesses great power for revolution, but I personally remain sceptical. Literature is fundamentally a product of leisure; it can indeed express a nation’s culture’(Xun, 1981)²³⁷. In Lu Xun’s view, ‘revolutionary literary figures’ directly applied art to the revolution, acknowledging a direct relationship between art and revolution while neglecting art’s inherent laws and intrinsic value. For instance, they employed their artistic works as slogans to propagate and agitate for revolution, aiming to incite and accomplish it. Lu Xun contended: ‘Such writings are feeble, for fine literary works have always emerged spontaneously from the heart – unbidden by command, heedless of gain or loss. To first hang a theme before composing is no different from the eight-legged essay; it holds no value in literature, let alone the capacity to move the reader’²³⁸. Lu Xun rejected the direct utilitarian exploitation of literary works for political or moral ends. On the one hand, he maintained that slapping the label of ‘revolutionary’ onto slogan-like works did not transform them into genuine literature. On the other, he acknowledged that while literary works should not bow to political or moral dictates, they nevertheless possess a social function.

Lu Xun’s insistence on aesthetic sensibility in art was once regarded by ‘revolutionary literary figures’ as a ‘mismatch with the times.’ They deemed his artistic perspective outdated and backward, the notion of a ‘literary figure of yesterday’ and ‘feudal remnant,’ fundamentally incapable of meeting the demands of revolutionary development at the time. Despite facing a barrage of criticism from these ‘revolutionary literary figures,’ Lu Xun steadfastly upheld his artistic principles. In his view, the question of whether an artistic work possessed aesthetic value was fundamental to defining the very essence of art. He maintained that works lacking aesthetic value did not belong within the realm of art, hence his emphatic insistence that artistic creations must possess aesthetic value and must have ‘interest.’ ‘As for “interest” – that has indeed become something of a criminal charge nowadays. Yet whether we speak of humanity or class, I still hope that one day the ban will be lifted, and those engaged in literature and art need not necessarily be “devoid of interest”’(Xun, 1981)²³⁹. Lu Xun declared, ‘I myself shall continue to speak of “interest”’²⁴⁰.

In the realm of painting, Lu Xun once remarked: “Woodcut is indeed a tool for a specific purpose. But one must never forget that it is art. It is precisely because it is art that it functions as a tool. An axe is a carpenter’s tool, yet it must remain sharp. If it loses its edge, though the axe’s form remains, it ceases to be a tool. Yet some still call it an axe and regard it as such, precisely because

²³⁶ A similar viewpoint was expressed in Lu Xun’s letter to Cai Feijun dated 20 September 1935: “In truth, slogans are slogans, poetry is poetry. If incorporated, it remains good poetry and may be used; if it is poor poetry, its use or non-use makes no difference. For instance, literature and propaganda originally meant merely that all literature is propaganda, for it invariably disseminates something. Yet later, some misinterpreted this to mean literature must deliberately adopt the form of propaganda texts. That poetry must employ slogans is an error of precisely the same order.

²³⁷ Lu Xun, “Literature in the Revolutionary Era”

²³⁸ Ibid

²³⁹ Lu Xun, “Postscript to the Editing of ‘The Torrent’ (V)”

²⁴⁰ Lu Xun, “The Hazy Vision in ‘Drunken Eyes’”

they are not carpenters and do not understand the nature of the craft” (Xun, 1981)²⁴¹. Lu Xun believed that art devoid of aesthetic quality is like a blunt axe: “Though retaining the form of an axe, it ceases to be a tool”, incapable of fulfilling its artistic purpose²⁴². In a conversation, Lu Xun remarked: “What is art? The meaning is profound, yet it is not that complicated. Art cannot be divorced from social life. Take a bowl, for instance: originally plain white porcelain, it must be painted with the Three Friends of Winter – pine, bamboo, and plum – or adorned with chrysanthemums or the inscription “True Gentleman”. The white bowl is perfectly functional as it is, so why add these paintings and inscriptions? Because doing so renders it aesthetically pleasing, and thus it becomes art.

Art is not some abstruse concept” (Guang, 1958). In this passage, Lu Xun identifies a fundamental characteristic of art: it imparts aesthetic pleasure. If art lacks this quality, it cannot evoke an experience of beauty and thereby forfeits its essential nature. On 29 June 1935, in a letter to Tang Yingwei, Lu Xun stated: ‘Man is a link in the long chain of evolution. Woodcut art, like other arts, fulfils its role as a link along this path, contributing to the struggle, the ascent, and the beautification of all endeavours’ (Xun, 1981)²⁴³. Lu Xun accorded particular importance to the aesthetic principle of art for two reasons: Firstly, the enjoyment of beauty is an inherent quality of art itself; Secondly, ‘aesthetic enjoyment’ serves as a bridge for art to achieve other objectives. Through this enjoyment, people receive multifaceted cultivation from art, which not only contributes to the social utilitarian function of striving and progress but also aids in beautifying life and refining thoughts and emotions. Art exerts its efficacy and corresponding influence upon society via this bridge of ‘aesthetic enjoyment.’



Figure 53. Blue-and-White Bowl, 1923 Lu Xun presented this Ming Dynasty blue-and-white bowl bearing the character for longevity to the Ministry of Education for its newly established historical museum.

The art of living: truth is the lifeblood of art. When discussing aesthetic criteria in art criticism, Lu Xun remarked: ‘Have we ever encountered critics without a defined circle in the history of literary criticism? They all belong to one – be it the circle of beauty, the circle of truth, or the circle of progress. A critic without a defined circle – now that would be a peculiar fellow indeed’ (Xun, 1981)²⁴⁴. The three circles Lu Xun enumerated – ‘truth,’ ‘progress,’ and “beauty” – precisely constituted the

²⁴¹ Lu Xun, “Letter to Li Hua”

²⁴² Ibid

²⁴³ Lu Xun, “Letter to Tang Yingwei”

²⁴⁴ Lu Xun, “The Critic of Critics in Trivial Literature”

most crucial aesthetic criteria he consciously upheld in his art criticism. Lu Xun maintained: 'Only authentic voices can move both the Chinese people and the people of the world' (Xun, 1981)²⁴⁵. The 'authenticity' Lu Xun espoused encompassed two dimensions: Firstly, art must reflect genuine social life. Second, the emotions expressed in art must be 'sincere' – that is, the artist must pour forth the entire spectrum of genuine feelings surging from their very blood into the artistic content they portray. He regarded the opposite of 'truth' – falsehood and hypocrisy – as the foremost enemy of art. On 16 June 1935, in a letter to Li Hua, Lu Xun pointed out: The content of *Modern Printmaking* carries an excessively strong petty-bourgeois ethos.

While this is undeniably true, it stems from a particular consciousness, hence the ethos... To eliminate this atmosphere, one must first alter this consciousness. This requires experience, observation, and reflection – it cannot be transformed by empty rhetoric. If one pretends to progress, it is actually worse than directly expressing one's inherent emotions. For in the former, we can still see the reflection of the sentiments of a segment of society, while the latter becomes mere hypocrisy" (Xun, 1981)²⁴⁶. Lu Xun criticised distorted and insincere art in accordance with the genuine principles of artistic creation: 'If China is to have literature and art again, it must first dispel the emptiness that follows deception through works that speak plainly of their inherent content. For artists must at least possess the sincerity and courage to express their true views; if they refuse to reveal their innermost thoughts, there can be no question of any consciousness whatsoever' (Xun, 1981)²⁴⁷. Lu Xun repeatedly pointed out that since their emergence in the Tang Dynasty, the 'human relations novels' or 'social novels' within Chinese historical fiction had gradually ossified into fixed patterns, ceasing to evolve. The 'marriage by imperial decree' conclusion common in these works epitomised the Chinese propensity for "concealment" and 'deception.' This 'concealment' and "deception" manifested in artistic works represented a deep-seated affliction of the Chinese 'national character' and 'national spirit.' Consequently, Lu Xun vigorously advocated for an art that 'opposed concealment and deception,' calling upon writers to 'remove their masks, and with sincerity, depth, and boldness, observe human life and depict its flesh and blood...' (Xun, 1981)²⁴⁸.

How might one sincerely perceive life? Firstly, Lu Xun opposed any art that sought to evade life – be it the literary pursuits of the "ivory tower" or "snail's shell dwelling", or the "revolutionary writer's" art transcending its era. Lu Xun believed that art created within the 'palace of art' or 'ivory tower' – art for art's sake – becomes disconnected from life. Such works, lacking a solid foundation in lived experience, become hollow in content. Whether in the creation of art or its impact, it must remain intimately connected to life; art cannot emerge from an ivory tower isolated from existence. Moreover, the social environment of contemporary China offered no place for such an ivory tower. "There exists a school of literary discourse that advocates detachment from life, speaking only of moons, flowers, and birds, or focusing exclusively on "dreams" and utopian futures, avoiding any immediate concerns. Such writers all hide within ivory towers; yet an "ivory tower" cannot be inhabited for long! An ivory tower must ultimately be placed within the human world, and thus cannot escape political oppression. ... Now, they can no longer be lofty literary figures either, and must flee southward; for through the windows of the "ivory tower", no loaves of bread are passed in!" (Xun, 1981)²⁴⁹.

²⁴⁵ Lu Xun, "Silent China"

²⁴⁶ Lu Xun, "Letter to Li Hua"

²⁴⁷ Lu Xun, "Preface to 'A Short Decade'"

²⁴⁸ Lu Xun, "Graves · On Seeing with Open Eyes"

²⁴⁹ Lu Xun, "The Misguided Path of Literature and Politics"

Lu Xun not only believed that the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly School of writers treated aestheticism as some fashionable trend, endlessly singing the tired refrains of ‘drunkenness’ and “beauty” in publications like *The Saturday* and *The Red Magazine* – approaches that, within a specific historical context, could scarcely find fertile ground for real survival – but he also felt a strong aversion towards those who spoke only of ‘wind, flowers, snow, and moon,’ flowers,’ ‘intoxication,’ and similar aesthetic tendencies. In a letter to Xu Guangping dated 9 July 1925, he noted: ‘What I wish to publish more of are essays, yet what is sent in is mostly fiction and poetry. First came the insincere poetry of “flowers” and “love”; now we have the insincere poetry of “death” and “blood”. Alas, it gives me a terrible headache!’ (Xun, 1981)²⁵⁰. He advocated art for life and art for social transformation, not art centred on ‘romanticism,’ flowers,’ or ‘love.’ Secondly, Lu Xun maintained that art cannot transcend its era or its class character.

He observed: ‘Literature cannot express “human nature” without depicting people. Yet once it employs human subjects – especially within class-based societies – it inevitably bears the stamp of its class character. This is not a matter of “constraint” but of historical necessity’ (Xun, 1981)²⁵¹. In class-based societies, no individual exists outside the social structure. Consequently, if a society is class-divided, no one can remain detached from their class affiliation. Since human beings exist within such class-based societies, they cannot escape the influence of class consciousness, which inevitably manifests itself in an author’s works. In his Preface to the 18 Society Exhibition of Student Works, Lu Xun observed: ‘There are those who consider themselves highly enlightened, proclaiming “art for all humanity”. Yet such art is utterly non-existent in the present society’ (Xun, 1981)²⁵². In Lu Xun’s view, art transcending time and space, or transcending its epoch, does not exist. In his early writings on art, he stated: ‘All art sufficiently represents the thinking of a particular time and a particular people’, asserting that art possesses a certain epochal quality (Xun, 1981)²⁵³. Lu Xun repeatedly advocated that art should become ‘the record of the times,’ ‘the portrait of the times,’ and ‘the mirror of the times.’

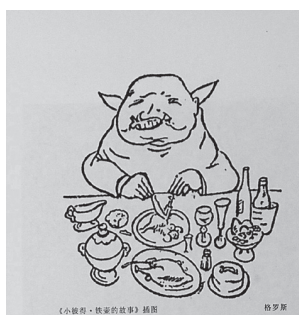


Figure 54. Illustrations for Gross’s *The Story of Little Peter and the Iron Kettle*. The Chinese translation of this book was rendered by Xu Xia. Lu Xun composed the Preface to the Little Peter Translation on 15 September 1929.

²⁵⁰ Lu Xun, “Letters from Two Places: 34”

²⁵¹ Lu Xun, “Hard Translation and the Class Character of Literature”

²⁵² Lu Xun, “Preface to the 18th Society Exhibition of Student Works”

²⁵³ Lu Xun, “Proposed Memorandum on the Dissemination of Fine Arts”

In the 1930s, after absorbing Marxist literary thought, Lu Xun developed a distinctive personal perspective on the class character of art. He contended that precisely because a writer can only compose through the consciousness of their class affiliation, they cannot escape their class imprint; thus literary works are inevitably linked to the interests of a particular class.²⁵⁴ At this time, Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu engaged in a debate over whether art possesses class character. Liang Shiqiu contended that many aspects of social life and human phenomena transcend class boundaries. However, in Lu Xun's view, the 'transcendent class humanity literature'²⁵⁵ advocated by Liang Shiqiu (1924) was in fact a 'biological literature' that negated the social attributes of humanity, a situation that could never be tolerated²⁵⁶. Similarly, Lu Xun maintained that artistic works embody specific class interests. Considering art's origins and social function, literature and art could not be entirely divorced from such interests. His thinking coincided with the views of the German Expressionist painter Grosz.

In 1934, Lu Xun translated Gross's 1925 essay *Paris, the Metropolis of Art*, deeming Gross's perspectives highly relevant to contemporary realities²⁵⁷. He noted that Gross's writings remained largely applicable to China: 'The book was published in 1925, a decade ago, yet much of it still holds true' (Xun, 1981)²⁵⁸. Whether the artist wills it or fully comprehends it, he inevitably exists within an interplay of relationships with the public and society, unable to escape the constraints of its developmental laws; nor can he evade the class struggle manifested by these laws in the present...²⁵⁹ By the 1930s, Lu Xun had become a realist class theorist. Within the modern Chinese art movement, he vigorously supported young artists in developing the emerging art of woodcut, proceeding from the class consciousness of the 'proletarian masses.' He hoped to cultivate an art form universally accessible to the Chinese populace, expressing 'the soul of modern society' with 'proletarian fervour' and presenting 'the art of the new youth, the art of the good masses' (Xun, 1981)²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁴ Lu Xun believed that literature, reflecting human life, could not transcend its era or the politics of that time: "Those who claim to be revolutionary writers often focus on struggle and so-called transcendence of the era. But transcendence is evasion. If one avoids confronting reality but still claims to be revolutionary, consciously or unconsciously, one will inevitably be led astray. How can one depart from the present world? This is as absurd as believing one could leave the earth by grasping one's own ears."

²⁵⁵ Liang Shiqiu noted: "The sufferings of proletarian life deserve depiction, but such deep anguish, if genuine, transcends any single class... Many aspects of human existence are supra-class. Take love – does it bear class distinctions? Or the beauty of mountains, rivers, flowers, and grass – does it? It does not. Human nature is fundamentally the same for all: everyone feels the transience of birth, aging, sickness, and death; everyone seeks love, experiences compassion and fear, has moral duty, and seeks pleasure. Literature expresses this fundamental human nature."

²⁵⁶ When criticising Liang Shiqiu, Lu Xun pointed out: 'If literature that expresses the most common human nature is deemed supreme, then literature expressing the most universal animal nature – nutrition, respiration, movement, reproduction – or, omitting "movement", literature expressing biological nature, must surely rank even higher.'

²⁵⁷ In his essay "Paris, City of Art", George Grosse observed: "The classical era now stands in greater discord with the bourgeoisie's class culture than the social consequences of its obsolescence – more antagonistic, hypocritical, and unfocused. The final outcome is the meagre public bonds of France's once-great bourgeoisie. This sentiment of classical assimilation is rooted in post-war aspirations for respite – in the victor's complacency." Yet such idylls could only take shape on France's surface, when class antagonisms were not yet as sharply defined as in Central Europe, and without leaving a trace of blood upon this world".

²⁵⁸ Lu Xun, "Translator's Note to 'Paris, the Metropolis of Art'"

²⁵⁹ Gross: *Art in Peril*, Munich, 1981 edition, p. 29. Quoted from Zhang Yun: *Seeking New Voices Not in Foreign Lands: Lu Xun and Western Culture*, China Social Sciences Press, 2004 edition, pp. 234–235.

²⁶⁰ Lu Xun, "Preface to the Anonymous Woodcut Collection"

4.3. The materialist conception of history in art theory

4.3.1. Lu Xun's acceptance of the Marxist view of art

Around 1925, Lu Xun began to focus intensively on issues pertaining to Marxist literary theory. For instance, in the preface to his 1925 work *The Literary Debate in Soviet Russia*, he referenced 'Marxism in the study of literature and art' (Xun, 1981)²⁶¹. That same year, he obtained Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, one of the earliest Marxist literary criticism monographs to come into Lu Xun's possession.²⁶² Thereafter, Lu Xun's theoretical interests in literature and art gradually pivoted towards Marxist perspectives on the subject, culminating in the formation of his distinctive literary philosophy through revolutionary practice.

In fact, as early as the period around the May Fourth Movement, Marxist literary theory began to be introduced domestically. In 1918, within less than a year of the outbreak of the Russian October Revolution, Li Dazhao published essays such as *The Triumph of the Common People*, *A Comparative View of the French and Russian Revolutions*, and *The Triumph of Bolshevism*. He also organised academic groups dedicated to studying Marxist doctrine and established special columns devoted to Marxist research.²⁶³ Chen Puxian (1919) published a translation of Japanese scholar Kawakami Hajime's *Marx's Materialist Conception of History* in the *Marx Studies* column of the *Morning Post* supplement. This work is regarded as the first detailed translation introducing Marxist historical materialism during the May Fourth period. That same year, Li Dazhao published *My Views on Marxism* in *New Youth*. The first half of this article excerpted over 3,000 words from more than ten passages concerning the materialist conception of history in Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *The Communist Manifesto*, and *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, drawn from Dr Kawakami Hajime's Japanese translation. These passages addressed the relationship between literature and art as 'social ideology' and 'forms of ideology' with the superstructure and economic base.²⁶⁴ – This constitutes Marx's classic articulation of the materialist conception of history in relation to art within the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*.

He regarded art as a form of 'social ideology' and 'ideological form,' highlighting its social positioning and essence as a creative intellectual activity. This precisely constitutes the core tenets

²⁶¹ Lu Xun, "Preface to The Literary and Artistic Debate in Soviet Russia"

²⁶² This work was written between 1922 and 1924, at a time when Trotsky had not yet publicly opposed the activities of the All-Union Communist Party. It is primarily a treatise exploring revolutionary literary theory, presenting personal views on the relationship between art and social life, the function of art, and the party's cultural policy. It also includes Trotsky's critical perspective on proletarian literature and his associated assertions.

²⁶³ In 1918, Li Dazhao and Gao Yihan organised the 'Marxist Theory Study Group' at Peking University, establishing China's earliest academic organisation dedicated to researching Marxist theory. In 1919, Li Dazhao established the column 'Marx Studies' and the special issue 'Marxist Studies' in the supplement of the Beijing Morning Post, which he edited. This initiative organised and published articles and translations researching and introducing Marxist theory, ushering in a new era of conscious, organised, and large-scale introduction and study of Marxism by the Chinese people.

²⁶⁴ Humans must engage in social production for survival, forming fixed relationships known as the relations of production, which correspond to the stage of development of their productive forces. These relations form the economic structure, upon which the legal and political superstructure rests. Social existence shapes consciousness, not the other way around. As productive forces clash with existing relations, social revolution occurs, transforming the superstructure. Material changes in production should not be confused with the legal, political, and philosophical forms reflecting human consciousness.

of the Marxist conception of art.²⁶⁵ Subsequently, between 1923 and 1926, early Communists such as Qu Qiubai, Yun Daiying, Deng Zhongxia, Shen Yanbing, Shen Zemin, Jiang Guangci, Xiao Chunu, Li Qiuishi and other early Communists published numerous articles on Marxist art theory in periodicals such as the supplements *Awakening*, *New Youth* and *Chinese Youth* of the *Republican Daily*, exploring a series of significant art-theoretical issues.²⁶⁶

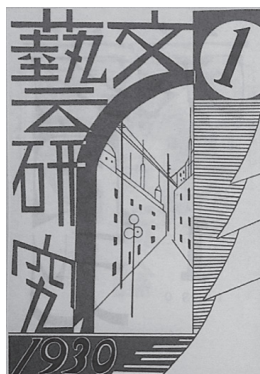


Figure 55. Cover of *Literary Research*, a quarterly journal edited by Lu Xun, published by Shanghai's Dajiang Bookshop, printed in May 1930.

Three Soviet literary critics primarily entered Lu Xun's field of vision: Trotsky, Plekhanov, and Lunacharsky. In July 1926, Lu Xun translated the third chapter of Trotsky's²⁶⁷ *Literature and Revolution*, which specifically addressed Blok, and wrote the *Postscript to 'The Twelve'*²⁶⁸. Blok was a Soviet

²⁶⁵ In 1920, Li Dazhao reiterated Marx's materialist conception of history in his *Lectures on the History of Historical Thought*: "Marx's historical perspective, known as the materialist conception of history, compares society to architecture, with a foundation (Basis) and a superstructure (Überbau). The foundation is the economic structure – economic relations – while the superstructure includes law, religion, art, and philosophy, which are forms of human consciousness. Those who explain social transformation solely through the superstructure, without considering the foundation, fail to understand history. Changes in the superstructure depend on shifts in the economic foundation, making economic relations the key to understanding history. This is Marx's historical perspective."

²⁶⁶ In 1923, Deng Zhongxia's 'Contribution to the New Poets' emphasized that literature and poetry were vital tools for awakening revolutionary consciousness and inspiring courage. In 1924, Yun Daiying's 'Literature and Revolution' argued that revolutionary literature can only emerge from revolutionary sentiment, exploring the connection between literature, revolution, and the importance of revolutionary feeling. That same year, Xiao Chunu's 'Art and Life' applied Marxist historical materialism to the relationship between art and life, claiming that art is a reflection of life and a cultural layer of society's socio-economic structure. He criticized the notion that art creates everything, asserting instead that art is a superstructure influenced by material conditions. Xiao concluded that life creates art, and art reflects life. In 1922, Shen Zemin translated Jacques Mesnil's *Trends in New Russian Art* in *Fiction Monthly*, introducing the rise of proletarian art in Russia. He posed questions on the nature of "proletarian art" and "communist art."

²⁶⁷ Lev Davidovich Trotsky, also known as Lev Davidovich Bronshteyn in Chinese, was the supreme military commander of the Soviet October Revolution and a key figure in Russian and world history. A leading figure in the 20th-century international communist movement, he was a principal architect of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, the Third International, and the Fourth International. Hailed as "the closest comrade of the Bolsheviks," Trotsky faced persistent marginalization, suppression, and persecution after Stalin's rise to power in the 1920s and 1930s. His key theoretical works include *The Revolution Betrayed*, *History of the Russian Revolution*, *The Third International After Lenin*, *Summing Up and Looking Ahead*, 1905, *Literature and Revolution*, and *Stalin and the Chinese Revolution*. He is renowned for his development of Marxist concepts such as "permanent revolution" and "world revolution."

²⁶⁸ Lu Xun's earliest exposure was to certain perspectives on proletarian revolutionary literature espoused by Leon Trotsky, who had served as one of the Soviet Union's party and state leaders. In 1925, he obtained a copy of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*. By March 1926, he had cited Trotsky's perspectives for the first time in his short essay *On the First Anniversary of Dr Sun Yat-sen's Passing*, employing Trotsky's revolutionary theory of art to demonstrate that Sun Yat-sen was 'a comprehensive and eternal revolutionary'.

‘fellow traveller’ writer, not a member of the revolutionary ranks. Yet as a Communist, Trotsky regarded the contradictions and convictions of such ‘fellow traveller’ writers with the perspective of a philosopher and benevolent observer. In this, Lu Xun discerned Trotsky’s acuity and intellectual depth. In his postscript, Lu Xun assessed Trotsky thus: ‘In the minds of the Chinese, Trotsky is likely still perceived as a thunderous revolutionary and warrior; yet reading this essay reveals him also as a critic with profound understanding of literature and art’ (Xun, 1981)²⁶⁹. On the 7th of the same month, *Diary on Horseback II* further noted: ‘Yet I find Trotsky’s literary criticism not quite so rigidly formal’ (Xun, 1981)²⁷⁰. Mr Sun Yu observes that ‘Trotsky’s theory derives partly from Marxism, while retaining traces of the Belinsky era’ (Yu, 2015a).

Consequently, “his analysis of Blok’s work, beyond its critical engagement with reality, also exhibits a temperate spirit of poetic appreciation. For intellectuals who remained within the old camp while their ideas had advanced towards revolution, his attitude was one of tolerance, not lacking in sympathetic understanding” (Yu, 2015a). From 1918 onwards, the Soviet literary and artistic circles engaged in intense debate over how to construct new literature and art following the revolution’s success. Japanese scholar Kurabe Tadahito summarised these discussions in his work *Literary Policy* as three distinct viewpoints: “First, the position represented by Vyshinsky and Trotsky; second, the stance of Vyshinsky and the “Nabastu” faction; and third, the position of Bukharin, Lunacharsky, and others.’ Literary theorists such as Trotsky and Vyshinsky maintained that ‘art is not a field that the Party can arbitrarily command’, and that ‘every literary school emerges from the past and develops by breaking with it’ (Trotsky, 1992; Zhongchen, 2013).

They advocated that the Party should not interfere in literature and art, granting it independence. They denied the existence of an independent proletarian literature, acknowledging that new literature arises from a natural connection with tradition, yet develops through the process of breaking with it. The ‘Nabast’ school of artists harboured doubts about this stance, perceiving the ideas of bourgeois ‘fellow travellers’ as profoundly outdated and problematic. They advocated, with strong ideological conviction, that the Party must intervene in the management and governance of culture and the arts. Lunacharsky, however, maintained that in revolutionary times, politics should not be narrowly interpreted; art possessed its own distinct character, and the proletariat could generate its own literary and artistic forms. This literary and artistic debate reached its climax with Lenin’s involvement in 1922. Leninism contended that Trotsky’s polemic against ‘fellow travellers’ and the ‘N. Bastu’ faction’s extreme advocacy of proletarian culture were both one-sided. It asserted that the party should cultivate proletarian art and artists while also absorbing cultural legacies from the old era, such as Tolstoy’s literature, thereby reinforcing class-based discourse, party discourse, and attitudes towards traditional art.

However, the subsequent emergence of Stalinism demanded that party loyalty take precedence above all else. The stringent coercion imposed on literature and art led to a one-dimensional development of culture. In 1927, Trotsky was expelled from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In April 1928, Lu Xun wrote: “Although Trotsky has now “fallen from grace,” he once stated that writings devoid of vested interests belong to a future society under a different system. I believe this statement remains valid.’ (Xun, 1981)²⁷¹. Trotsky’s understanding of revolutionary literary theory,

²⁶⁹ Lu Xun, “Afterword to ‘Twelve Stories’”

²⁷⁰ Lu Xun, “Second Diary Entry from the Horseback”

²⁷¹ Lu Xun, “My Attitude, Forbearance and Age”

the concepts of 'fellow travellers' and 'revolutionaries,' and cultural policies all demonstrate that his literary thought was fundamentally grounded in historical materialism. However, his views on the abolition of proletarian culture were heavily criticised within the CPSU's cultural policies.

From 1925 to 1927, Lu Xun held deep admiration for Trotsky, describing him not only as 'a critic with profound understanding of literature and art,' but also as 'the most thorough advocate of proletarian culture and literature, alongside Comrade Trotsky and Vyshinsky.'²⁷² He further emphasised Trotsky's 'erudition' and "eloquence" in affirmative terms, describing his speeches as 'like raging waves, mighty and thunderous, spraying foam in all directions' (Xun, 1981)²⁷³. Japanese scholar Maruyama Noboru noted that Trotsky's influence on Lu Xun reveals the deeper reasons for Lu Xun's shift to the left and reflects certain profound changes within Lu Xun's own mindset (Noboru, 2005). Mr Sun Yu contends that Lu Xun's endorsement of Trotsky's artistic theory stemmed primarily from these considerations: 'First, could the old intellectuals genuinely transform into revolutionary pioneers? Second, what elements within their legacy could underpin the seeds of a new culture? Third, where should the breakthrough for new literature lie in the process of social transformation?' (Yu, 2015a).

Sun's perspective undoubtedly strikes at the heart of the matter. The path forward for literature, art, and intellectuals in revolutionary times was a profoundly pressing concern for Lu Xun. Although the 'fellow travellers' were not revolutionaries, and the literature and art they created were not revolutionary in nature, the literature and art of the socialist transition period following the Soviet October Revolution primarily relied upon the creations of 'fellow travellers' – artists who had sympathised with and participated in the revolution before it began. These were the works of artists from movements such as Futurism, Impressionism, and Symbolism that had emerged since the 1905 Revolution.²⁷⁴ Moreover, in terms of Lu Xun's own role, he should be regarded as a revolutionary "fellow traveller" of his era. The awkwardness of his position and his inner transformations and reflections as an independent intellectual amidst social upheaval were further illuminated by Trotsky's theories.

Through the debates within Soviet Russia's literary circles, Lu Xun discerned the profound crisis within culture and the depth of the ideological clashes. In 1928, Lu Xun's translation of *The Soviet Union's Literary and Artistic Policy* was serialised in *The Torrent*. This included Trotsky's speech delivered at the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's literary policy review meeting on 9 May 1924. The translation was later included in *Literary and Artistic Policy*, one volume of the 'Scientific Art Theory Series'.²⁷⁵ *Literary and Artistic Policy*, as part of the 'Scientific

²⁷² When translating the work *Literary Policy*, Lu Xun amended the original text's phrasing 'The most obstinate enemies of proletarian culture and literature are Trotsky and Varansky' to 'The most thoroughgoing opponents of proletarian culture and literature are Comrades Trotsky and Varansky.'

²⁷³ Lu Xun, "Postscript to the Editing of *The Torrent*"

²⁷⁴ Following the Soviet October Revolution, Futurists represented by Mayakovsky proactively aligned with the revolution. In 1922, Mayakovsky, alongside several writers and painters including Rodchenko, established the 'Left Front of the Arts' (abbreviated as 'Lev'), proclaiming that art was the creation of life. Its principal members comprised Rodchenko's Constructivism and Mayakovsky's Left-Wing Futurism. Others, including Nikolai Kryuev, the Serapion Brothers, Pavel Pulinjak, and Alexander Blok, became 'fellow travellers'.

²⁷⁵ The Cultural Policy contains two resolutions. The Resolution on the Party's Policy in the Field of Literature and Art (June 1925, Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party [Bolsheviks]) affirmed Trotsky and Volonsky's 'fellow-traveller' perspective. However, the Resolution on the Ideological Front and Literature (January 1925, First Congress of Proletarian Writers) criticised Trotsky and Volonsky's theory advocating the abolition of proletarian literature and art.

Art Theory Series,’ actually contained no literary policy but only debates. It primarily comprised three sections: ‘*On the Party’s Policy Regarding Literature and Art*,’ *The Front of Ideological Forms and Literature*, and *The Party’s Policy in the Field of Literature*. These three sections were retranslated from the Japanese edition of *The Literary Policy of the Russian Communist Party* (published by Nansong Academy in November 1927), a collaborative work by Shingo Tomura and Tadahito Kurabe.

The volume thus constitutes a compilation of documents concerning the Soviet literary debates.²⁷⁶ In 1929, Lu Xun presided over the compilation of the ‘Scientific Art Theory Series’²⁷⁷, first translating Lunacharsky’s ²⁷⁸ *Literature and Criticism* and *On Art* (1929); the following year, he translated Plekhanov’s²⁷⁹ *On Art* (also known as *Letter Without an Address*)²⁸⁰, while Feng Xuefeng, in 1929, translated Plekhanov’s *Art and Social Life* and Lunacharsky’s *The Social Basis of Art* based on Kuranohara Tadahito’s Japanese translation. On 15 February 1930, Lu Xun translated Plekhanov’s *Chernyshevsky’s Views on Literature and Art*, which was also published in the quarterly *Literary and Art Studies* (Shanghai edition) under his editorship.²⁸¹ It may be said that the literary and artistic ideas of Plekhanov, Lunacharsky, and Trotsky became a significant source for Lu Xun’s later literary and artistic thought. Of course, alongside these, the influence of Japanese Marxist literary theory was also important.²⁸²

²⁷⁶ The “Preface” to this volume is actually the “Translator’s Preface” from the original Japanese edition by Kuranomoto Yui. The “Appendix” includes part of Feng Xuefeng’s translation of Okazawa Hidetora’s work, published in the April 1930 issue of *Literary Lectures* (No. 1). The “Preface” and three main sections were first serialized in the monthly journal *Rush* from 1928 to 1929. Lu Xun wrote the Afterword on 12 April 1930. The complete work was published by Shuimo Bookstore in June 1930 as part of the Scientific Theory of Art Series, edited by Lu Xun and Feng Xuefeng. While Lu Xun serialized *Literary Policy*, Feng Xuefeng simultaneously translated the Japanese text *Literary Policy of the Russian Communist Party*, jointly translated by Sōgen Shiro and Tsuruhara Hitoshi. This translation was later published as *Literary Policy of New Russia* by Guanghai Bookstore in September 1928.

²⁷⁷ The Scientific Theory of Art Series was influenced by two Japanese publications: the Marxist Theory of Art Series (1928–1931, Sōbunkaku) and the Marxist Literary Theory Series (1928–1929, Hakuyōsha). Judging by the actual publication and distribution plans of the ‘Scientific Theory of Art Series’, the art theories of Plekhanov and Lunacharsky occupied a significant proportion within the collection.

²⁷⁸ Anatoliy Lunacharsky (1875–1933), Soviet literary scholar, educator, aesthetician, philosopher and political activist.

²⁷⁹ Georgi Valentinovich Plekhanov (1856–1918), Chairman of the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, was a key founder and leader of the Russian Marxist political movement. A prominent advocate of Marxism in Russia and Europe, he played a significant role in the Russian and international labour movements. However, after the 1903 Second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, he broke with the Bolsheviks and aligned with Menshevism. During World War I, he supported nationalism and later opposed the October Revolution. His notable works include *Letters Without Addresses* and *Art and Social Life*.

²⁸⁰ Lu Xun’s translation of Plekhanov’s *On Art* consists of four essays, with the first three based on Shiro Sato’s Japanese translation and the final essay drawn from Kuranohara Tadahito’s rendition of *The Art of Class Society*. Published in July 1930 by Guanghai Book Bureau, the title *On Art* was added by Lu Xun. Initially, only three essays were known, but later discoveries in the Soviet Union led to the compilation of six essays. The work was published in the Soviet Union in 1948 as *Letters Without Addresses*. The first three letters were published in the late 1890s, while the remaining letters were assigned hypothetical numbers. Plekhanov’s *Art and Social Life*, translated by Feng Xuefeng in 1929, was part of the Scientific Art Theory Series. This work, originally serialized in *Sovremennik* in 1912–1913, explores art’s role in class society and the relationship between art and the emancipation movement, offering a historical materialist theory of art.

²⁸¹ In 1930, Lu Xun served as editor-in-chief of *Literary Research* (published in Shanghai), which was intended as a quarterly publication but only managed to produce a single issue.

²⁸² In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Japan’s proletarian literary movement heavily influenced China’s left-wing literary circles, particularly through Chinese students abroad, such as those in the Creation Society. This period saw extensive translation of Japanese works, including writings by Kiyoshi Aono, Tadahito Kurahara, Shin Katagami, and Shōmu Noboru, as well as Soviet art theory texts translated via Japanese sources. Notable translations include Gao Lao’s *The Essence of Socialism* (1923), Huashi’s *The Dawn of New Russian Literature* (1926), and Lu Xun’s *Literature and Art Policy* (1930). From December 1928, Chen Wangdao edited the ‘Literary Theory Series’, featuring works by Katagami Noboru, Aono, and Máté. Japan became a key hub for China’s left-wing literary movement, with a branch in Tokyo and key ideologies first conceived there.

We recognise that during the formative stages of Lu Xun's early literary philosophy, the doctrines of Nietzsche, Kant, Schopenhauer, Bergson, Kierkegaard, and Freud exerted profound influence upon him. The fundamental core of his literary thought may be likened to an 'intelligent idealism' (Zhixin, 1997), emphasising a dialectical literary philosophy that highlights the active role of the spirit and the subjective. In the late 1920s, amidst literary debates with the Creation Society, the Crescent School, the 'Nationalist Literary Movement,' and the 'Free Men' and 'Third Kind of Men,' Lu Xun was "forced" to 'examine several scientific literary theories' (Xun, 1981)²⁸³. Consequently, he extensively studied Marxist literary theory, deeply contemplating the relationship between literature and political revolution. He observed that 'the utilitarian views of society, race, and class, so deeply detested by idealist historians, had been introduced into art', thereby constructing the materialist historical view of art that characterised Lu Xun's later literary thought (Xun, 1981)²⁸⁴.



Figure 56. Manuscript of Destruction. Lu Xun translated the Soviet novel Destruction by Fadeyev in 1931, publishing it at his own expense and retaining all original manuscripts.

4.3.2. Lu Xun's introduction and interpretation of the materialist conception of history in art theory

Plekhanov stands as one of the pivotal founders of Soviet Marxist aesthetics. In his preface to the translation of *On Art*, Lu Xun honoured him as 'the father of the Russian proletariat,' a 'pioneer of Russian Marxism and the teacher and guide of the awakened labouring masses' (Xun, 1981)²⁸⁵. Plekhanov's core artistic philosophy employed Marxist principles of consciousness to explain the materialist origins and development of art, constituting a materialist historical theory of art. Employing a mathematical-like 'inverse method' – by revising Saint-Simon's²⁸⁶ and Comte's²⁸⁷ views derived from Hegel's absolute idealism and the Encyclopédistes'²⁸⁸ perspectives – he formed an

²⁸³ Lu Xun, "Preface to Three Leisurely Collections"

²⁸⁴ Lu Xun, "Preface to the Translation of 'On Art'"

²⁸⁵ Ibid

²⁸⁶ Henri Saint-Simon (1760-1825), French utopian socialist.

²⁸⁷ Auguste Comte (1798-1857), French bourgeois positivist philosopher.

²⁸⁸ The Encyclopédistes were a group of Enlightenment philosophers and intellectual precursors of the late 18th-century French bourgeois revolution. They coalesced around the undertaking of publishing the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1780). Diderot and d'Alembert led the compilation, with contributions from Voltaire, Helvétius, Holbach, and Rousseau.

idealist conception of history and the notion that ‘the development of thought and knowledge constitutes the ultimate and most remote cause of human historical motion’, thereby inversely demonstrating the conclusion of historical materialism: ‘Literature – the reflection of a nation’s spiritual nature – is itself the product of the historical conditions that create that very nature.’

That is to say, it demonstrates that his literature is neither human nature nor the inherent character of a given nation, but rather his history and the structure of his society.’ In *Preface to the Translation of ‘On Art’*²⁸⁹, Lu Xun argued: Firstly, Plekhanov posed the question of ‘how art is produced.’ He employed Marxist principles to explain how art – as a form of production relations grounded in society – along with productive forces, production relations, and even class contradictions, influences art. This approach applies Marxist historical materialism as a method for artistic research, analysing the origins of art and the relationship between artistic beauty, attributes, and social production. This approach drew upon sociological and anthropological methods and materials, drawing from extensive field investigations and archaeological reports to discuss primitive human thought and ways of life, thereby elucidating the inherent laws of art itself.

Secondly, Plekhanov advanced a utilitarian conception of art. Art, superficially appearing as an imitative form, is in fact an illusion; the underlying social relations constitute the decisive factor. Thus, ‘the social individual perceives things and phenomena initially from a utilitarian standpoint, only later shifting to an aesthetic perspective. Everything humanity deems beautiful is so because it is useful... Beauty does not exist for its own sake, but for the sake of humanity’ (Xun, 1981)²⁹⁰. In other words, beauty’s existence is inseparable from utility. ‘Utility is recognised through reason, but beauty is apprehended by intuitive faculty. Whilst enjoying beauty, one scarcely contemplates its utility, yet it may be discerned through scientific analysis.’

Plekhanov’s discourse on the relationship between art and politics reveals an inherent contradiction between aesthetic and utilitarian perspectives. On the one hand, he viewed matters through an aesthetic lens, thereby deducing that aesthetic judgements possess utilitarian qualities; yet on the other, he maintained that aesthetic pleasure ceases once utilitarian considerations intrude. Thus, he identified a chasm between the utilitarian and the pleasurable aspects of aesthetics, pointing to the distinct independence and particularity of art and politics. For instance, in *Letter Without an Address*, he stated: Historically, viewing things through conscious utilitarian lenses has often preceded their aesthetic contemplation’ (Plekhanov, 1983).

Yet he also asserts: “Judgements of taste unquestionably presuppose that the individual making them harbours no utilitarian motives whatsoever” (Plekhanov, 1983). This underscores that utilitarian elements within the aesthetic process reduce aesthetic pleasure to a mere substitute for art’s utilitarian function. Based on his rejection of politically utilitarian writing, Plekhanov adopted a critical stance towards Gorky’s literary output. He viewed Gorky as a socialist propagandist, deeming his politically charged works failures. He erroneously labelled Gorky’s *Mother* as ‘anti-artistic,’ attributing this to Gorky’s infection by Lenin’s ‘romantic optimism.’ In truth, Gorky’s piercing

²⁸⁹ Plekhanov’s influence on Lu Xun began with the essay *Plekhanov and the Question of Art*, included in the 1925 edition of *Soviet Literary and Artistic Debates*, translated by Ren Guozhen. Plekhanov’s artistic theory was central to the ‘Postal School’ faction in Soviet literary debates. In 1929-1930, Plekhanov was formally introduced to China, with Chinese translations of his major works *On Art* and *Art and Social Life*. In his preface to the Chinese translation of *On Art*, Lu Xun focused on Plekhanov’s political career, briefly summarizing the materialist conception of history in the conclusion.

²⁹⁰ Lu Xun, “Preface to the Translation of *On Art*”

depictions of the underclass, the intellectual strata, and his scrutiny of aristocratic and servile cultures produced works that sharply critiqued and resisted reality. These works, situated between literature and politics, were neither empty sloganeering nor mere political tools, but possessed both concrete relevance and profound intellectual richness. In his preface to 'Revisiting Gorky's Translation (9 January)', Lu Xun observed: "Yet the revolutionary mentor²⁹¹ had already recognised him over two decades prior as a great artist of the new Russia – a comrade-in-arms wielding a different weapon against the same foe for the same cause. His weapon – the language of art – holds profound significance", repeatedly emphasising Gorky's artistic language and aesthetic sensibilities (Xun, 1981)²⁹².

For Plekhanov, however, the reason he regarded artists such as Gorky and Chernyshevsky as political "propagandists" lay in severing the effective connection between two ordinary phenomena during his discussion of the relationship between art and social existence. He pitted "tendentious creation" and utilitarian considerations against so-called 'true art' (including artistic taste and artistic language), thereby committing the error of confusing determinism with mechanical determinism. Lunacharsky inherited Plekhanov's emphasis on analysing beauty and art from the perspective of social existence. Yet concerning the aesthetic creation of art, certain views he held stood in direct opposition to Plekhanov's.

In matters of literary theory, he stressed subjective, non-material factors and the inherent independence of art. In his *Treatise on Art*, Lu offers astute interpretations of art's relationship with socialism, industry, class, and beauty and its varieties. Traces of Trotsky's aesthetic influence are discernible. For instance, Lu quotes Trotsky's assertion that art constitutes 'the highest form of life's organisation, which is approaching completion in all spheres'. On one hand, he approached art from an idealist perspective, emphasising its aesthetic appeal; on the other, he examined art through revolutionary theory and sociological lenses, offering intriguing observations on various art forms and phenomena. His stance avoided both extreme idealism and extreme determinism, occupying a middle ground between the two. At that time, 'Lap'²⁹³, as a Soviet proletarian literary and artistic group, advocated a proletarian view of literature and art, maintaining that literature and art belonged to the same political category as politics. It declared that 'literature and art must be viewed from a purely political perspective', treating it as a 'subordinate' and "instrumental" to politics.

It emphasised that proletarian literature and art must first possess distinct class and party characteristics, stressing that proletarian literature and art constitute 'a powerful weapon in class

²⁹¹ The revolutionary mentor refers to Lenin. In 1907, Lenin praised Gorky's *Mother* as 'a most timely book,' stating, 'This is an essential work. Many workers have unconsciously and spontaneously joined the revolutionary movement; now, reading *Mother* will be of great benefit to them.' In 1910, Lenin further remarked in Brief Remarks on Statesmen: 'Gorky is undoubtedly the most outstanding representative of proletarian art. He has made many contributions to proletarian art and will make even more.'

²⁹² Lu Xun, "Preface to the Translation of Gorky's 'The Ninth of January'"

²⁹³ RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers) was the largest Soviet literary organization in the early 1920s to 1930s. It included the October Literary Group (1922), the Moscow Union of Proletarian Writers (1923), the All-Russian Union of Proletarian Writers (1925), and the All-Union Federation of Proletarian Writers (1930). Led by figures like Avraham Avrahamov, RAPP's early phase (1923–1925) focused on the journal *On the Job*, opposing Trotsky and non-political literary ideologies while defending proletarian literature. The group later became sectarian, attacking writers like Gorky and Mayakovsky. After the 1925 Party resolution, extremist leaders were removed, and RAPP shifted to a more conciliatory stance (1926–1932), but continued persecuting dissenting writers. In April 1932, RAPP was dissolved following a resolution by the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party.

struggle'. To a certain extent, Lu's literary and artistic perspective builds upon Plekhanov's ideas in this field, yet it exaggerates the deterministic extreme to the point of becoming one-sided. Based on the aforementioned fundamental view of literature and art in relation to politics, Plekhanov emphasised aesthetic objectivism in addressing the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in artistic creation. That is to say, 'people habitually love beautiful things without any utilitarian considerations' (Plekhanov, 1983). He contended that aesthetics should be as objective as physics, 'striving, as the famous saying goes, neither to weep nor to laugh, but to understand', and maintained that aesthetics should not issue any directives or convey messages to art (Plekhanov, 1962).

Plekhanov extended this objectivism of appreciation and judgement to the principles of creation and criticism, even to the point of absolutism, thereby excluding the active role of the creator's subjective spirit in the creative process. Lunacharsky criticised Plekhanov's artistic philosophy for gravely neglecting 'the emotional and ethical dimensions within scientific socialist ideology,' denouncing it as subjective mechanical materialism. In his 'Outline of Marxist Critical Tasks,' he asserted: 'The artist's value lies precisely in his cultivation of uncharted territory, where he ventures by intuition into realms generally inaccessible to statistics and logic' (Lunacharsky et al., 1949). Evidently, Lunacharsky placed great emphasis on the individuality of the artist and the active role of subjective cognition in artistic creation. In his discussions on the relationship between literature and politics, Lu Xun did not unreservedly adopt the literary views of either of the aforementioned parties.

Firstly, on the one hand, Plekhanov's assertions regarding art as a form of social ideology and a spiritual product of social life led Lu Xun, through his translation and study, to recognise the limitations of earlier literary theories that reduced art to notions such as 'relying on one's own willpower to forge a path' and 'literature is the spark ignited by the spirit of the nation,' and even the notion that literature arises from the 'source of anguish' – all of which overemphasised subjective spirit to an extreme (Xun, 1981)²⁹⁴. On the other hand, Lu Xun noted that 'the particularity of aesthetic enjoyment lies in its directness; if the foundation of aesthetic pleasure is not grounded in utility, the object may not appear beautiful'²⁹⁵. These perspectives reinforced the organic connection and close integration between aesthetic pleasure and political utilitarian demands, starkly contrasting with Plekhanov's deliberate separation of aesthetic utility from aesthetic taste. Secondly, regarding the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, Lu Xun vividly addressed this question through his own struggles and creative practice, linking art with life. For instance, Lu Xun maintained that art must reflect life, adhering to the principle of truthfulness. Yet he distinguished between the truth of art and the truth of life. In painting, 'if artistic truth were to mirror the truth of physical objects, then figures measuring but two or three inches would cease to be true, and without paper the size of the Earth, the Earth itself could not be depicted' (Xun, 1981)²⁹⁶.

Thus Lu Xun emphasised that artistic creation need not depict 'actual events that have occurred, but must portray situations that could occur'²⁹⁷. This signifies that the transition from life's reality to artistic truth necessitates a distinct creative process where the artist exercises subjective initiative. In this way, Lu Xun delineated a clear distinction between his understanding of the

²⁹⁴ Lu Xun, 'On Cultural Bias'

²⁹⁵ Lu Xun, "Preface to On Art"

²⁹⁶ Lu Xun, "Miscellaneous Notes on Comic Strips"

²⁹⁷ Lu Xun, "What Is Satire? – A Reply to the Literary Society"

relationship between art and life and the tenets of naturalism regarding the subjective versus the objective. Generally speaking, naturalism demands strict adherence to 'actual events,' requiring accuracy and precision, and forbidding fiction, embellishment, expression, or association. Artistic authenticity does not exclude naturalness, encompassing the truth of natural forms, the truth of phenomena, and the truth of artistic experience. As Lu Xun further noted in a letter to Li Hua dated 4 February 1935: 'Depicting the hardships and struggles of the people is naturally commendable. Yet if one has not personally been caught in such a maelstrom, true depiction is impossible. To create from mere imagination would yield nothing authentic or profound, and thus no art' (Guang-fu, 1982). If a painter lacks concrete experience of the people's struggles and creates through subjective imagination without genuine aesthetic perception, the artistic effect will inevitably lose its authenticity.

Yet artistic creation differs from naturalism; it is not content with the authenticity of natural forms. It demands a transition from the naturalness of these forms to the authenticity of typical forms. That is to say, it requires the painter's subjective initiative to process and generalise the truth of natural forms, infusing them with emotion through re-creation to achieve typification. This attains a high degree of unity between the authenticity of phenomenal forms and the authenticity of typical forms. Therefore, Lu Xun maintained that artistic creation differs fundamentally from 'news reporting'²⁹⁸ and 'historical truth'²⁹⁹.

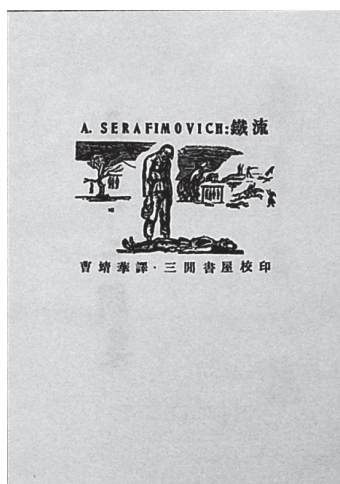


Figure 57. Iron Stream cover, a novel by Soviet author Sergei Serafimovich, translated by Cao Jinghua. Published in December 1931 at Lu Xun's own expense under the imprint 'Three Leisure Book House'. Lu Xun designed the cover, selecting one of the illustrations from Iron Stream carved by Soviet woodcut artist Biskalev as the cover artwork.

²⁹⁸ Lu Xun distinguished artistic truth from the veracity of news reporting, asserting: News reports and poorly written fiction may indeed depict events that could form the basis of literary works; yet such reports and fiction are not, in themselves, literature.

²⁹⁹ On 20 December 1933, Lu Xun wrote to Xu Maoyong: "Artistic truth is not identical to historical truth, as we have heard; for the latter must have occurred, while creative work may be pieced together and expressed – provided it is convincing, it need not have actually happened. Yet everything he weaves and expresses is drawn from social existence. By extrapolating from present people and events and developing them further, this resembles prophecy, for later these individuals and events indeed unfolded precisely as depicted."

From the 1920s onwards, realism was championed by Soviet literary theorists and became the dominant creative approach of the era. The realism they espoused had become politicised, primarily driven by the demands of the times and the revolution. Adopting a purely objective perspective to examine reality while rejecting all subjectivity and denouncing any other ‘non-realist creative methods’ inevitably led to a one-sided approach. More significantly, Plekhanov further politicised the condemnation of ‘non-realist creative methods’. Employing sociological concepts such as ‘social system’, ‘social relations’, and ‘mode of production’, he analysed the social origins and class characteristics of these methods. He condemned both the ‘non-realist creative methods’ and their practitioners, the artists, as decadent bourgeois literature and art. For instance, Plekhanov broadly characterised modern artistic methods as ‘the product of “jaundice” caused by the decline of the class currently dominating Western Europe’, viewing the Impressionist creative method as such that ‘if the Impressionists are realists, it must be said their realism is entirely superficial, not exceeding the “outer shell of phenomena”’ (Soviet Academy of Arts, 1985).

Identifying the lack of ideological substance in Impressionist technique as its original sin. Trotsky did not endorse Plekhanov’s exclusive definition prioritising realism. Though he too approached realist aesthetics through a lens of political critique and failed to entirely escape Soviet-style thinking, he did not equate philosophical realism with realist artistic technique: Firstly, he advocated for realism. In his work *Literature and Revolution*, he asserted: “The new art will be realism. Revolution cannot coexist with mysticism, nor can it coexist with romanticism. This is a monism of realism in the sense of a philosophy of life, not a realism in the sense of literary schools. On the contrary, to comprehend the new life, the new art will require all that has evolved in the past, along with all supplementary processes and methods’ (Trotsky, 1928). Advocating for the inclusion of other creative methods within the realist approach. The Lappe faction, however, amplified Plekhanov’s more extreme stance, rejecting outright all creative methods beyond realism and championing a ‘dialectical materialist creative method’, dismissing all creative approaches beyond realism. They characterised proletarian literary realism as ‘objective realism’ while denigrating the realism of writers like Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as ‘subjective psychologism’ (Yao, 1991)³⁰⁰. The Lappe movement also sought to establish a single proletarian artistic programme for artists to adhere to, demanding rigid regulations on subject matter, form, creative methods and so forth. These rigid regulations carried a certain degree of policy-driven and directive nature.

³⁰⁰ The dialectical materialist creative method was first proposed by ‘Lap’ and appeared in the resolution ‘Cultural Revolution and Contemporary Literature’ from the First All-Union Congress of Proletarian Writers in April 1928. The document declared: Only proletarian writers guided by the dialectical materialist method can create a proletarian literary school with a distinctive style.”



Figure 58. Maiseyler's *The Passion of One*: Part Two 6 August 1933 Lu Xun Preface to *The Passion of One*



Figure 59. *Faust and the City*: Cover, Script by Lunacharsky of the Soviet Union, translated by Roushi, published by Shenzhou Guoguang Press, Shanghai, September 1930. Lu Xun selected a woodcut print for the cover illustration.

The Soviet literary and artistic debates, along with realist theory, exerted a direct influence on China's left-wing literary and artistic movement through dissemination and translation. For instance, alongside timely newspaper coverage of the Soviet debates, Ren Guozhen compiled the book *The Literary and Artistic Debates in Soviet Russia* around 1925. Lu Xun meticulously proofread the manuscript and composed its *Preface*. During the 1930s, Chinese left-wing art theorists paid close attention to the theoretical movement concerning realist creation within Soviet art circles. Figures such as Qu Qiubai, Feng Xuefeng, Zhou Yang, Qian Xingcun, alongside members of the Taiyang Society and the later Chuangzao Society, systematically introduced or specifically advocated Soviet realist theory. Among them, Qu Qiubai exerted considerable effort. In 1932, drawing upon materials from issues 1-2 of the Soviet journal *Literary Heritage*, he translated and published the essay collection *Realism: Marxist Essays on Literature and Art*.

This work focused on introducing Marx and Engels' discussions on realist creative methods, the development of Soviet realism, and the fundamental principles of realist literary and artistic creation. Having visited the Soviet Union and served as a lecturer at the University of the East, Qu Qiubai possessed a mastery of Russian. During the formative stage of Chinese realist literary creation, he systematically introduced a series of theoretical propositions, concepts, and terminology from Soviet Russia. His accurate and systematic translation and introduction of Marxist art theory were of inestimable merit. In the *Preface to the Collected Works of Qu Qiubai*, Lu Xun described Qu Qiubai as 'our highest achievement and exemplar in literary translation' (Xun, 1981)³⁰¹. Even four days before his death, Lu Xun wrote an article praising Qu Qiubai's translations: 'The essays in *Reality*... originally belonged to the "difficult to understand" category. Yet in translating such works, no one in China could match Shi Tie's clarity. For this alone, his passing feels a great loss' (Xun, 1981)³⁰².

Yet whether it was Qu Qiubai, Feng Xuefeng, Zhou Yang, or members of the Sun Society and later the Creation Society, their approach to absorbing Soviet literary thought was often one of academic analysis – primarily a transfer from pure theory to pure theory. This led to phenomena such as superficial engagement, rote imitation, or failure to digest the material, overlooking the particularities of China's revolutionary reality and social context. Lu Xun differed from them. His assimilation of Soviet literary thought was comparatively gradual, involving both theoretical exploration and practical experimentation. Though the foundational discourses of Soviet literature presented challenges for Lu Xun, his acceptance of Soviet realism stemmed from practical experience, which in turn corrected the biases in his theoretical perspectives. As Mr Sun Yu has noted: Within the discourse of revolution and literature, what most profoundly resonated with Lu Xun's vital sensibility were the living literary texts themselves. ... Compared to theoretical treatises, Lu Xun devoted greater attention and evident effort to novels and painting' (Yu, 2015a).

Mr Zhang Zhixin, in *Lu Xun's Literary Thought in Comparative Perspective*, similarly observes: 'In Lu Xun's reception of Soviet literary thought, there exists a historical fact that ought not to be overlooked yet is often neglected: Lu Xun employed only the term "realism"; he never mentioned or utilised the concept of Soviet-style realism, nor did he systematically introduce or specifically advocate for Soviet-style realist theory in the manner of his contemporaries Qu Qiubai, Qian Xingcun, Zhou Yang, or Feng Xuefeng' (Zhixin, 1997)³⁰³. In truth, Lu Xun's embrace of Soviet Russian realism stemmed from the specific realities of contemporary China and the struggles of his era. Guided by a pragmatic approach to incorporating, he developed a distinctive methodology. For Lu Xun, his creative philosophy and practice encompassed not only realist techniques but also romantic approaches, alongside various methods – such as expressionism and symbolism – rejected by Plekhanov.

He selectively adopted modern art theories, 'discarding what was unnecessary' and 'gaining what was beneficial.' For instance, his introduction of modern painting movements began as early as the 1920s, when he translated Ueno Yoichi's Japanese treatise on modern art, supplementing' with theoretical insights from modern artistic creation. For instance, his engagement with modern

³⁰¹ Lu Xun, "Introduction to the First Volume of Sea Forest"

³⁰² Lu Xun, "Letter to Cao Bai"

³⁰³ Zhang Zhixin notes that in Lu Xun's "Translator's Note to 'Happiness'", the term "realism" is frequently used. He explains that Arzhasuif's work, while misanthropic and egocentric, truthfully depicts reality without advocating for it. Critics who dislike realism yet embrace factual depictions are contradictory. People often overlook harsh realities, focusing instead on more pleasant scenes, which is why writers may lean toward misanthropic egocentrism.

painting movements began as early as the early 1920s when he translated Japanese scholar Ueno Yoichi's essay 'The Education of Art Appreciation'. This work, grounded in Impressionist painting, was deemed by Lu Xun as 'highly instructive'. Between 1924 and 1928, he translated Japanese scholars Katayama Kokon's Expressionism and Yamagishi Mitsunobu's *Various Aspects of Expressionism*, thereby grasping the essence of Expressionism. This led him to formulate assertions such as: Expressionism holds that 'art is manifestation, not reproduction'³⁰⁴, represents 'the exaltation of spirit and soul,' and constitutes 'the transformation or metamorphosis of nature.' (Kokon, 1958)³⁰⁵.

In 1929, he translated and published Japanese scholar Sakagaki Takahoshi's Tide of Modern Art History, asserting that 'in a nation where new art lacks any foundation, piecemeal introductions are utterly futile; what is most needed is a coherent system'³⁰⁶. This 'system' encompassed multiple art movements within European artistic development since the 19th century: modern classicism, romanticism, realism, impressionism, cubism, symbolism, and expressionism. Returning to the question of accepting Soviet realism: if one observes that Qu Qiubai, the Sun Society, and later members of the Creation Society confined their acceptance of Soviet realist ideology to a singular displacement; then Lu Xun's reception of Soviet literary and artistic creation theory was multidimensional³⁰⁷. This multifaceted orientation occasionally generated internal conflicts within Lu Xun's literary and artistic practice – more precisely, it tended to accentuate certain facets of his literary philosophy while obscuring others, thereby creating numerous obstacles and difficulties for interpreting his literary and artistic thought. Numerous scholars have noted that Lu Xun's 'realist creative philosophy' can be glimpsed in the preface to *The New Chinese Literature Anthology: Novels, Volume II*.³⁰⁸

In this preface, Lu Xun criticised both the school that 'artificially constructs idealised characters,' overemphasising subjective consciousness, and the school that remains solely faithful to objective reality without incorporating critical reflections on the meaning of life. For instance, when

³⁰⁴ Lu Xun's translation of Katayama Kokon's Expressionism was based on Lantzberg's essay collection Impressionism and Expressionism. Katayama explains that expressionism emerged as a reaction against naturalism and impressionism, aiming to express the artist's inner world rather than replicate nature. Expressionists believed that imitating nature reduced the artist to a slave. Rejecting perspective techniques and spatial illusions, they argued that art's truth lies in harmony with the artist's inner world, not in mimicking the external world. "Art is manifestation, not reproduction," as Professor Lampegl stated.

³⁰⁵ Lu Xun's understanding of Expressionist theory stemmed primarily from two sources: Japanese academic introductions to German Expressionism, and his direct engagement with relevant German-language materials. For instance, his personal library contained a 1916 Munich edition of Hermann Bahr's essay collection Expressionism. In the 1920s, Lu Xun translated two Japanese essays on Expressionism, publishing them as 'Expressionism' in Wall Translations and 'Various Aspects of Expressionism' in Supplementary Translations.

³⁰⁶ Lu Xun's reading was vast and diverse. He recommended the Danish critic Brande's The Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature to young literary enthusiasts, showing his awareness of European literary developments. In the 1920s and 1930s, Lu Xun translated Kiyooki Chiba's critique A Survey of World Literary and Artistic Trends in 1928, introducing European literary and artistic trends and mentioning prominent German writers like Gerhart Hauptmann, Leonard Frank, and Ernst Toller, along with Austrian writer Frank Molnar.

³⁰⁷ Lu Xun's reading was extensive and his sources diverse. He recommended the Danish critic Brande's The Main Currents of Nineteenth-Century Literature to young literary enthusiasts, reflecting his awareness of European arts and literature. In the 1920s and 1930s, Lu Xun translated Kiyooki Chiba's An Overview of World Literature in 1928, outlining artistic developments in Europe and mentioning prominent German writers like Gerhart Hauptmann, Leonard Frank, and Ernst Toller, as well as Austrian writer Frank Molnar.

³⁰⁸ As noted by Zhang Zhixin in his commentary on Lu Xun's preface to The Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature: Novels II, Lu Xun's later literary philosophy sought the unity of form and spirit, as well as the harmony between subject and object. Liu Zaifu argues that Lu Xun's view of reality involves understanding the specific laws of art through historical materialism, merging sensory images of human beings with thought and uniting ideas with emotion.

appreciating ancient paintings, he criticised both the painterly works that prioritised ‘form’ and the literati paintings that emphasised “spirit”. This demonstrates that Lu Xun’s ‘realist’ theory was constructed upon the foundation of unifying subject and object, and embodying both form and spirit. It reflects his exploration of how the creative subject can subjectively and actively express the objective world in the practice of creation. Moreover, given the diverse origins of Lu Xun’s literary and artistic thought, his articulation of ‘realist creative ideology’ interweaves Soviet-style realism with Western modern art, reflection theory with expressionism, sociology with literary psychology, and other disparate theoretical doctrines, forging a singular form. It is intriguing that Lu Xun’s ‘realist creative philosophy’ stood apart within the Left-wing literary movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Emerging from practical creation tailored to his specific needs and purposes, it became a target for criticism and condemnation by his numerous ‘opponents.’ Yet precisely this constitutes the luminous essence of Lu Xun’s literary thought.



Figure 60. Sketch, Print, by Japanese Artist Tanaka Yasukazu

The relationship between art and the masses occupies a significant position within the Marxist materialist conception of history. This perspective holds that the people are the principal agents of human history, not only creators of society’s material wealth but also architects of its spiritual riches. Consequently, it champions the renowned assertion that ‘art belongs to the people,’ advocating that art should serve the masses.³⁰⁹ The Chinese Leftist Literary and Art Movement constituted a vital component of the global Leftist artistic currents during the 1920s and 1930s. From its inception, it drew upon Marxism as its discursive foundation, placing strong emphasis on the intimate, organic connection between art and the masses. It called upon artists to ‘go to the soldiers, go to the people, go to the factories’, composing ‘socialist realist literature sympathetic to the proletariat’, expressing the thoughts, emotions, and lives of the masses in their own language (Moruo, 1963).

In the 1930s, influenced by the Japanese proletarian group “Nappu”, China’s left-wing literary

³⁰⁹ Marx asserted: ‘The people have always been the sole judge of a writer’s “qualifications” and “lack thereof”.’ At the dawn of the 20th century, Lenin advanced the crucial proposition that art must ‘serve the millions upon millions of working people’; in his discourse with Zetkin, he further articulated the renowned view that ‘art belongs to the people’.

and artistic circles actively engaged in debates advocating for the ‘popularisation of art’.³¹⁰ In March 1929, Lin Boxiu published a lengthy essay on the popularisation of literature and art, ‘Several Urgent Issues Concerning Literature and Art in 1929’, pioneering the concept of ‘the popularisation of proletarian literature’ (Guochang, 2006)³¹¹. The article emphasised three points: first, art must ‘approach the masses’ and ‘be comprehensible to them’; second, proletarian art differs from ‘popular fiction’ in that it ‘combines the thoughts, emotions, and will of the masses to elevate them’; third, ‘proletarian literature must never diminish its value through its popularisation’. From 1931 onwards, Qu Qiubai published a series of essays on the popularisation of literature and art, systematically and comprehensively addressing the issue of making literature and art accessible to the masses. These concerns, in Qu Qiubai’s own words, could be summarised as five fundamental questions: ‘for whom is it written?’, ‘what is written?’, ‘in what language is it written?’, ‘how is it written?’, and ‘what must be done?’. In March 1930, the Left-Wing Writers’ League’s journal *Mass Literature and Art* launched two dedicated columns: *Issues in the Popularisation of Literature and Art* and *Symposium on the Popularisation of Literature and Art*³¹², initiating in-depth discussions on this topic.

Concurrently, as a ‘shared publication of left-wing writers,’ the March 1930 issue of *The Pioneer* also featured a series of articles debating the popularisation of literature and art³¹³. The issue of popularising art swiftly captured the attention of left-wing artists, who championed the slogan of ‘mass art.’ They emphasised that art should serve the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, asserting: ‘On what basis, then, is the practice of the new art movement grounded? Here we can answer without hesitation: it is grounded in the revolutionary movement of the proletarian masses; furthermore, it is grounded in the ideological system that expresses the revolutionary struggle of the emerging class’ (Xingzhi, 1930). The introduction of the ‘mass art’ slogan signified that the subject of expression and the target audience for emerging artistic creation were China’s vast toiling masses. Its aim was to produce artworks reflecting the lives of the people, expressing what they cherished, and capturing the spirit of the new era. In May 1932, the Springland Art Institute was established.

Its founding declaration explicitly proclaimed: ‘To immerse ourselves in the masses and become the art of the people’. It held that art, like other cultural forms, ‘grows and evolves’ in tandem with the great tides of the era. Therefore, ‘the art of the masses’ must inevitably forge new paths,

³¹⁰ In April 1928, following the March 15 Incident, left-wing literary groups like ‘Proletarian Art’ and ‘Pre-Art’ formed the ‘All-Japan Proletarian Art League’ (NAP). This movement focused on popularising art and forming a united front of left-wing artists. Kurahara Yoshihito emphasized the need for unity to effectively fight for freedom of publication and against imperialism. The Chinese Left-Wing Writers’ League, established shortly after, adopted NAP’s program, with many members having studied in Japan. The League translated significant Japanese left-wing literary works and engaged with Japanese proletarian literary journals. The League’s founding members included Lu Xun, Zheng Boqi, Feng Naichao, Peng Kang, Xia Yan, and others. In March 1930, Pan Hanyuan outlined the League’s purpose: to lead China’s proletarian literary movement, intensify ideological struggle, and popularise Marxist literary theory. This mission mirrored NAP’s goals, showing strong similarities between the two movements.

³¹¹ Guo Guochang notes: ‘Lin Buxiu proposed “the popularisation of literature” to resolve the practical predicaments confronting “revolutionary literature” creation, yet its direct source was undoubtedly Zang Yuan Weiren’s The New Stage of the Proletarian Art Movement.’

³¹² The collection *Issues in the Popularisation of Literature and Art* included theoretical articles by Shen Duanxian, Guo Moruo, Tao Jingsun, Feng Naichao, Zheng Boqi, Lu Xun, Wang Duqing, and others. The *Symposium on the Popularisation of Literature and Art* was chaired by Tao Jingsun, with Shen Duanxian, Feng Naichao, Xu Xingzhi, Meng Chao, Zheng Boqi, Tao Jingsun, Jiang Guangci, Hong Lingfei, Pan Hanyuan, Yu Huai, and Qiu Yunduo participating in the discussions.

³¹³ The March 1930 issue of *Pioneer* published a series of essays discussing the popularisation of literature and art, including *Several Important Issues in the Literary and Artistic Movement* (Shen Duanxian), *Mass Literature and Art and the Popularisation of Literature and Art* (Qian Xingcun), and *The Significance and Tasks of the Left-Wing Writers’ League* (Pan Hanyuan).

serve the new society, and become a potent instrument for educating, enlightening, mobilising, and guiding the masses in revolutionary struggle. 'New art must advance bearing this mission'. Lu Xun possessed profound insight and intense conviction regarding the democratisation of art. Long before the concept gained widespread discussion, he published *The Democratisation of Literature and Art* in 1929. Within this work, Lu Xun articulated two crucial questions concerning the democratisation of art: firstly, the 'form' of democratisation – what form would enable the masses to appreciate and readily accept it.

Lu Xun maintained that for art to be appreciated by the majority, it must be accessible in content and language. 'There ought to be more writers who consider the masses, striving to produce simple and comprehensible works that everyone can understand and cherish, thereby displacing some of the stale rubbish' (Xun, 1981)³¹⁴. Secondly, the issue of popularisation versus elevation, namely whether to lower artistic standards to pander to the masses or to elevate the public's aesthetic standards (Lei, 1933)³¹⁵. Lu Xun contended: Firstly, literature and art should be appreciated by the masses, but the masses themselves must possess a certain level of sophistication. 'First comes literacy, followed by a general, broad knowledge. Moreover, their thinking and emotions must also reach a certain level. Otherwise, they cannot form a connection with literature and art' (Xun, 1981)³¹⁶. Secondly, the popularisation of literature and art must not descend into vulgarity. 'If literature and art deliberately stoop to cater to the masses, they easily degenerate into pandering and flattery. Such pandering and flattery will not benefit the masses'³¹⁷. Thirdly, the value of the masses and of popular art must not be underestimated.

Lu Xun emphasised that the masses are not 'as foolish as scholars imagine'; they require enlightenment, knowledge, and learning, yet 'their capacity for assimilation may surpass that of scholars steeped in prejudice'³¹⁸. Throughout the 1930s, Lu Xun repeatedly argued that the value of popular art must not be underestimated, as many great works originate from this tradition. For instance, comic strips 'can produce painters as great as Michelangelo or Da Vinci' (Xun, 1981)³¹⁹. In 1931, when introducing the renowned Mexican painter Rivera, Lu Xun emphasised the public nature of mural art as fulfilling a social responsibility and belonging to the masses. He criticised the tendency of painting detached from reality and the people, created solely for art salons, calling it 'the worst tendency in modern art' (Xun, 1981)³²⁰.

During the 1930s, Lu Xun vigorously championed accessible comic strips and the emerging woodcut art form, firmly believing that these 'new art forms' were 'what the masses wish to see, and for which they are grateful!' (Xun, 1981)³²¹. Under Lu Xun's direct guidance and influence, many young left-wing artists came to realise: 'The task of artists today is not merely to labour over ab-

³¹⁴ Lu Xun, "The Popularisation of Literature and Art"

³¹⁵ Fu Lei dismissed the slogans of mass art, contending that "artists who champion the proletariat and popularisation believe that any essay or painting whose subject matter touches upon the proletariat can become an artistic work of the age. The technical skill of the work, the authenticity of its sentiment – none of this matters. Is this not turning art into propaganda advertising? Is this not creating a tool for opportunism for the generally shameless and tedious?"

³¹⁶ Lu Xun, *The Popularisation of Literature and Art*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ Lu Xun, "On the 'Third Kind of Person'"

³²⁰ Lu Xun, "Explanation of Rihui's Mural 'Night of the Poor'"

³²¹ Lu Xun, "Defence of 'Sequential Illustration'"

stract forms and colours; what truly matters is bringing artistic content closer to the masses – that is the very lifeblood of art itself’ (Ke, 2006). Nor was it about ‘Impressionism, Dadaism, Fauvism, Cubism or “Constructivism”, nor any “Classicism”, “Romanticism” or “Realism”’, but rather about reflecting social reality, caring for the people’s suffering, embodying ‘the content produced in the revolutionary struggles of the workers and peasants and the form determined by it’ – ‘mass art’ serving the people (Ken, 1932).



Figure 61. The Night of the Poor, mural, by Mexican painter Rivera

Chapter 5

The Use of “Incorporating”: Lu Xun’s Art Criticism

On 24 April 1936, Lu Xun wrote to Duan Ganqing: ‘I myself cannot engrave, though I have introduced some foreign works. Recently, due to miscellaneous duties and illness, even this introductory work has been set aside. But I still intend to reprint some pieces soon. As for theory and technique, I am truly an outsider’ (Guangfu, 1982). Though Lu Xun professed to be unskilled in printmaking and a ‘layman’ in theory and technique, while introducing foreign artworks he actively employed imported artistic concepts. He engaged in extensive art criticism, integrating these ideas with the practical realities of domestic artistic creation. This encompassed critiques of artistic subjects, language, and spiritual character, alongside discussions concerning creators, appreciators, and modes of dissemination – all reflecting Lu Xun’s distinctive critical stance and perspective. Although Lu Xun’s art criticism is scattered across various prefaces, letters, and articles, it can be synthesised into a significant component of his artistic philosophy. Moreover, his critical perspective played an indelible guiding role in China’s modern emerging woodcut movement. To this day, Lu Xun’s art criticism continues to exert influence, shaping contemporary Chinese artistic creation. For the sake of clarity and coherence in this chapter, Lu Xun’s art criticism activities will be examined through three distinct lenses: his woodcut creations, his book illustrations, and his cartoons.

5.1. Critiques on the artistic creation of Woodcuts

5.1.1. Technical requirements for Woodcut creation

Before discussing the techniques of creating woodcuts, let us first clarify the concept of “creative woodcut”. In 1929, Lu Xun stated in *Selected Modern Woodcuts (2)*: “Original woodcut” refers to a work created without any other model, where the artist wields an iron chisel to carve directly onto the woodblock’ (Xun, 1981)³²². This distinguishes it from “reproduction woodcuts”, which use existing drawings as templates and rely on replication rather than original creation. In 1933, Lu Xun reiterated in the *Preface to Methods of Woodcut Creation*: ‘A print entirely created by the artist’s own hand – that is, the original artwork – when executed on woodblock, is termed “original woodcut”. It constitutes the artist’s direct creative work, requiring no assistance from engravers or printers’ (Xun, 1982)³²³. Although Lu Xun frequently addressed the concept of ‘original woodcut’ in correspondence with young woodcut artists, his core points generally fell within these two expressions: firstly, an original woodcut must be personally executed by the artist in drawing, carving, and printing; secondly, it constitutes artistic creation that neither imitates nor reproduces, and may even be produced without a model. As discussed earlier, woodcut originated in China before spreading to Europe. By the early 16th century, Dürer and Holbein had established the creative framework for woodcut prints: ‘Beyond single-sheet works, woodcuts serve primarily as book illustrations’ (Xun, 1981)³²⁴.

³²² Lu Xun, “Preface to Selected Modern Woodcuts (2)”

³²³ Lu Xun, “Preface to Methods of Woodcut Creation”

³²⁴ Lu Xun, “Preface to Modern Woodcut Selections (1)”

Subsequently, with the advent of copperplate engraving, woodcut experienced a sudden decline. Only the British artist Stigby's reform of woodcut, employing woodcut engraving – the 'white line engraving method' – prompted its revival. From the mid-19th century, 'artistic woodcuts' emerged in Europe. Thus, the artistic woodcuts introduced by Lu Xun represented a distinct form of woodcut art from China's traditional tradition. 'Chinese woodcut art enjoyed a respectable history from the Tang to the Ming dynasties. Yet the new woodcuts of today bear no relation to this history. These new woodcuts were influenced by Europe's artistic woodcuts' (Xun, 1981)³²⁵.



Figure 62. Lu Xun, Yan Zhong, black-and-white woodcut, 1959

Woodcut prints are generally categorised as either woodblock prints or wood-surface prints. In 1929, Lu Xun noted in *The Preface to the Second Selection of Modern Woodcuts* that, 'Western woodblocks employ various materials, but those used for engraving intricate designs are typically carved from solid wood. Even when using solid wood, differing sawing techniques yield distinct types of blocks' (Xun, 1981)³²⁶. Thus, wood-surface woodcut employs the longitudinal section of timber for carving. Characterised by coarser fibres and softer wood, it facilitates carving but is unsuitable for fine detailing. The nomenclature 'wood-surface woodcut' has an interesting origin. In 1933, the young woodcut artist Wu Bo, under Lu Xun's guidance and drawing upon the Japanese author Asahi Masahide's *Methods of Creating Printmaking*, compiled *Methods of Woodcut Creation* and wrote to Lu Xun requesting him to pen the foreword. Upon receiving the manuscript, Lu Xun made revisions. In his reply to Wu Bo dated 9 November, he noted: 'The term "wood-grain woodcut" is awkward to pronounce, and "wood-grain" is Japanese terminology that may prove difficult to comprehend. I have therefore changed it to "wood-surface woodcut"' (Guangfu, 1982). Thus, the term 'wood-surface woodcut' was established and has been in continuous use ever since.

It employs the cross-section of timber for artistic creation, characterised by its fine grain, making it suitable for intricate carving. On 31 December 1934, Lu Xun elaborated on the characteristics of 'woodblock printing' in a letter to Huang Xinbo: 'Firstly, the carving tools and techniques differ; secondly, the materials vary. Typically, woodblocks are carved along the grain using longitudinal

³²⁵ Lu Xun, "Preface to The Woodcut Chronicle"

³²⁶ Lu Xun, "Preface to Selected Modern Woodcuts (2)"

sections, whereas this technique employs transverse sections' (Zhenming, 2010). In the Preface to *Methods of Woodcut Creation*, Lu Xun introduced 'wood-edge woodcut' – also known as 're-production woodcut'. During the Guangxu reign of the Qing dynasty, the British scholar Francis Younghusband had already employed meticulously carved wood-edge woodcut plates in his compiled work, the *Compendium of Natural Sciences*. As a child, Lu Xun had encountered the exquisite woodblock-printed plates in English books, 'astonished by their exquisite workmanship and lively quality, treasuring them as precious possessions' (Xun, 1981)³²⁷.

The original plate is commonly referred to as the "master plate". In 1960, the International Association of Plastic Arts conference held in Vienna adopted three resolutions concerning the question of "what constitutes an original print": Firstly, for the creation of print works, the artist has utilised materials such as stone, wood, metal, or silk to participate in the plate-making process, thereby transferring the imagery conceived in their mind onto the print surface through this plate. Secondly, works produced directly from the artist's original plate, either by the artist themselves or under their direct supervision and guidance. Thirdly, the artist bears responsibility for signing the completed original print" (Xueqing, 2004). Consequently, international print exhibitions worldwide incorporate these three resolutions into their regulations. Additionally, nearly all stipulate the following two conditions: '(1) Monotypes shall not be accepted. (2) Original prints must bear the artist's signature and be marked with either a trial proof or limited edition number. The current international practice is to indicate the signature, edition number, and title in pencil (an international art world convention, though not a rigid requirement) at the bottom of the work' (Xueqing, 2004). Lu Xun was exceptionally well-versed in printmaking types and classifications.

For instance, in a 1934 letter to Li Hua, he advocated reducing copperplate and lithography in favour of woodcut: "With copperplate and lithography, tools are of paramount importance. In China, these are unavailable, so it is hardly surprising that results prove unsatisfactory. The general public remains largely unaware of the terms "etching" and "lithography", while "monotype" was likely never mentioned before" (Guangfu, 1982). Monotype refers to unique prints. Another source mentions printmaking techniques such as copperplate engraving, lithography, photogravure, and Monotype in a letter to Zhao Jiabi dated 2 April 1936. On 14 February 1935, he advocated for 'original plate' creation in a letter to Jin Zhaoye: Woodcuts must be printed from the original plate, and only by the artist's own hand. Machine printing is unacceptable, for the artist seldom anticipates this stage beforehand, and the plate surface may not be sufficiently smooth" (Guangfu, 1982). The reason being that creating woodcuts requires the artist's personal hand-printing; machinery cannot replace the artistic emergence and expression inherent in the processes of drawing, carving, and printing.

Thus, in his letter to Li Hua, Lu Xun articulated this more clearly: 'Woodcuts must be hand-printed. Half the beauty of woodcuts lies in the paper quality and the printing process itself – this is the original form, the mother womb. From this, zinc plates may be made, or copper plates directly electroplated for mass printing – this is the offspring. Yet the artistic value of the latter will always differ from the former. Thus, wherever you go, renowned oil paintings, though reproduced in copperplate prints, remain treasured masterpieces in art galleries' (Guangfu, 1982). In another letter to Li Hua, he repeatedly emphasised: "Though woodcut creation is a form of printmaking, the artist must still print it themselves. Only then are its merits fully realised. Once subjected to

³²⁷ Lu Xun, "Preface to *Methods of Woodcut Creation*"

mechanical processing, it diverges significantly from the original work. Moreover, China's printing techniques remain so underdeveloped' (Guangfu, 1982). In advocating for original plates, Lu Xun maintained two principles: firstly, the artistic expression inherent in the paper medium and printing process constitutes the 'mother form'; secondly, while "descendants" such as zinc-plate prints may be generated from this 'mother form,' the original plate itself is an art form equivalent to oil painting, worthy of inclusion in art galleries.



Figure 63. New Year's Painting: The Mouse's Wedding

On the same block, when applying various colours, I imagine there will inevitably be some blending where two colours meet, for both surfaces being wet will cause them to bleed into each other. If the boundaries are to remain distinct, then one must likely print several times over; though the block need not be more than one, merely applying the colours in separate passes with a brush. I possess a Guizhou floral paper (sold for New Year entertainment), whose colouring technique employs several paper plates. Each plate is carved with openings corresponding to specific colour areas, which are then pressed onto the paper. A particular colour is then randomly applied within these openings, repeated several times until complete. I have also seen a two-colour woodblock by E. Munch, where the plate could be carved into two sections, each painted separately before being assembled and printed. Presumably, the printing methods for so-called coloured woodblock prints extend beyond these few examples" (Zhenming, 2010). In this passage, Lu Xun describes three distinct colour-printing techniques: one involving separate colour application on a single block, another using the perforated paper plate method for Guizhou floral prints, and a third employing

Munch's two-colour woodblock assembly technique. Although colour woodcuts could yield splendid artistic effects, Lu Xun did not advocate for them, citing the scarcity of appreciative audiences in China at the time. In a letter to Li Hua, he explicitly stated this view: 'Colour woodcuts are also good, but in China, they are unlikely to flourish, for there are no connoisseurs' (Guangfu, 1982).

The creation of woodcuts places certain demands upon the paper during the printing process. Lu Xun possessed considerable knowledge of printing papers for woodblock prints. In correspondence with Zheng Zhenduo, he elaborated on the properties of various papers, including Luodian paper, yellow-patterned paper, rough-edged paper, dyed patterned paper, white Xuan paper, single-ply Xuan paper, laminated Xuan paper, jade-plate Xuan paper, Hangzhou's Liuji paper, Shanghai's Special Xuan paper³²⁸, and Japanese paper (Guangfu, 1982). He held particular views on the paper best suited for printing his own woodcut creations, frequently writing to young woodcut artists to advocate for Chinese xuan paper as the optimal choice. For instance (Guangfu, 1982):

To Luo Qingzhen: 'For woodblock printing, Chinese paper is ultimately preferable, as it is not overly slippery.' (26 October 1933)

To Luo Qingzhen: 'Henceforth, for printing paintings, I believe Chinese paper ought to be used, as Western paper is too slippery and can cause the lines to blur.' (5 December 1933)

To Luo Qingzhen: 'As all my paper is Western-made, being slippery and reflective, it yields prints less aesthetically pleasing than Chinese paper.' (7 December 1933)

To Luo Qingzhen: 'Xuan paper prints lack the clarity of Western paper, which I believe stems from two causes: firstly, the ink is too dry; secondly, the grinding is too light. Observing European prints on Xuan paper, I note they are invariably heavily ground on the reverse. By experimenting with various methods over several attempts, one ought to achieve better results.' (26 December 1933)

To Luo Qingzhen: "The paper used for woodblock prints is actually quite good, as you employed this time. Should it be published as a book, simply lining it with additional paper would enhance its appearance; mounting it on thicker paper would also be most suitable. As for the stationery I've been using (the pale crimson variety – this is the paper dyed, though the texture remains the same), it's called "chao-gen paper", produced in Shanghai. It's actually made by pulping and reprocessing shredded paper – what's termed "recycled paper" – and isn't particularly good. Recently, another type called "special xuan" has appeared; it's quite thick and rather good." (21 October 1934)

To He Baitiao: 'I should like another copy of your work, preferably printed on white Chinese paper.' (15 December 1934)

To Li Hua: 'Setting aside content selection, the paper's smoothness and the ink's oiliness do considerable harm to the work's merits.' (4 January 1935)

When comparing colour printing with black-and-white printing in woodcut creation, Lu Xun believed the latter better suited contemporary societal needs. However, achieving artistic refinement in monochrome prints proved far from straightforward, particularly concerning the selection of reference editions when drawing inspiration from foreign woodcut techniques. On 8 October 1933, after viewing the newly published woodcuts for Max Sieler's *The Passion of One*, Lu Xun wrote in his reply to Zhao Jiabi that Sieler's woodcuts offered valuable lessons for young woodcut artists. Yet he noted the difficulty in mastering Sieler's black-and-white stylistic techniques: 'The stark

³²⁸ Shanghai's 'Special Xuan', a variety of Xuan paper. The paper is pure white, fine-textured, and soft, with enduring colour quality and resistance to insect damage.

contrast between black and white is indeed the most challenging to learn, though there are many aspects worthy of reference.’ I believe it will prove highly beneficial to students of woodcut. Yet ordinary readers may well find it unwelcome” (Zhenming, 2010).

That same year, in correspondence with Zhang Hui, he remarked that woodcut creation represented an emerging art form, more accessible and readily popularised than oil painting. However, the treatment of black and white in woodcut composition must not rely on crude carving techniques or simplistic execution; instead, it should adopt a meticulous and balanced artistic style. ‘The four woodcuts published by Liangyou Company demonstrate excellent craftsmanship. Yet I fear studying them may prove detrimental, for their simplified carving technique and stark black-and-white contrast demand exceptional foundational skill to achieve. A single misstep risks descending into crudeness. As a reference, however, they are certainly permissible. When beginning one’s own work, it seems wiser to draw inspiration from those characterised by meticulous and steady execution’ (Guangfu, 1982).

As for colour printing, Lu Xun had never been particularly in favour of it nor mentioned it often. In a letter to Li Hua dated 4 January 1935, he noted: ‘No one in China has yet attempted colour-printed woodcuts’ (Guangfu, 1982). The term ‘colour-printed woodcut’ refers to a method of colour printing for woodcuts. This designation likely originated in Japan before being introduced to China, though this remains unverified due to limited documentation. The term ‘colour-printed woodcut’ is still in use within the Japanese printmaking community today.



Figure 64. He Baitao’s “Snow Scene”

Scholarly research has yielded considerable insights into Lu Xun’s engagement with foreign artistic subjects. For instance, Mr Sun Yu (2015) offers a thorough analysis of the motivations and typologies behind Lu Xun’s interest in Soviet Russian visual imagery; while Mr Zheng Zuhua categorises Lu Xun’s focus on foreign art subjects as ‘two types of socially contrasting themes’: “one depicting the misfortunes of the masses, themes of suffering; the other depicting the contemporary

Soviet Union, embodying a spirit of renewal” – that is, elegiac versus celebratory painting subjects (Zheng, 2011). Research into Lu Xun’s advocacy for domestic woodcut themes, however, still warrants further in-depth exploration.



Figure 65. Chen Tieging: Mother and Son

In 1935, Lu Xun noted in the preface to the *National Woodcut Joint Exhibition Album* that China’s earlier woodcut illustrations – such as Buddhist images, playing cards, novel illustrations, and educational prints – ‘were inherently popular, that is to say, “vernacular”’ (Xun, 1981)³²⁹. Yet new creative woodcuts differed: ‘they represent the harmonious inner demand of both the artist and the masses’, thus gaining popular support³³⁰. Beyond landscapes and still lifes, ‘what is most needed now, and where artists focus their efforts, are figures and narrative scenes’³³¹. Though inevitably imperfect – with some depictions of tools and forms lacking realism – they ‘reveal the ardour of artistic apprentices’³³². Lu Xun consistently opposed art detached from society, advocating instead for art oriented towards the masses. In a letter to Liu Xian, he observed that the prevailing trend in Japanese printmaking at the time was ‘desperately distancing itself from society, adopting an air of reclusiveness; its content offers nothing worth learning, only a few techniques can be adopted’ (Guangfu, 1982). Lu Xun maintained that artistic subjects should focus on content suitable for and familiar to the masses. For, ‘understanding is paramount, and art that can be understood can still be art’ (Xun, 1981)³³³. To ensure accessibility, he encouraged young woodcut artists in correspondence to draw upon local characteristics, landscapes, and folk tales in their creations, thereby embodying distinctive artistic qualities.

On 18 July 1933, Lu Xun wrote to Luo Qingzhen: ‘I believe that when young artists learn woodcut engraving, their choice of subject matter should be entirely free. Landscapes, still lifes, insects – even a single flower or leaf – are all suitable. Through ample observation and mastery

³²⁹ Lu Xun, “Preface to the Special Edition of the National Woodcut Joint Exhibition”

³³⁰ Ibid

³³¹ Ibid

³³² Ibid

³³³ Lu Xun, “Miscellaneous Notes on Pictorial Sequences”

of technique, they may gradually progress to larger works'(Guangfu, 1982). He cautioned that novices must avoid ambitious or unfamiliar subjects, warning that 'artwork failing to convey meaning, retaining only outlines without substance, inevitably yields results contrary to one's aspirations' (Guangfu, 1982). In 1935, Lu Xun addressed the issue of creative subject matter in a letter to Li Hua: 'Many now believe one ought to depict the hardships and struggles of the people. This is naturally not wrong. But if one is not immersed in such turmoil, it is truly impossible to express it authentically. If one attempts it merely through imagination, it will never be genuine or profound, and thus cannot become art' (Guangfu, 1982). Consequently, he advocated that artists 'need only depict what they have experienced' and 'portray the ordinary social conditions they observe' (Guangfu, 1982).

In correspondence with Duan Ganqing, he further stated: 'I maintain that landscapes and the most commonplace social phenomena should also be carved' (Xun, 1981)³³⁴. Why did he champion these subjects? On the one hand, China's nascent woodcut movement was in its infancy. Given that many artists lacked mature foundational skills and technical vocabulary, landscapes served as a common entry point into painting – the most frequently chosen and 'extremely ordinary' subject matter. On the other hand, while landscapes were indeed a standard introductory subject, Lu Xun believed young woodcut artists should focus their efforts on figures and narrative scenes. Drawing lessons from foreign woodcut movements – such as Germany's Action and Brucke schools, whose brief existence nonetheless left a significant mark on international art through their socially conscious themes – Lu Xun contrasted this with Japan's Hakubutsuka group. He observed that Hakubutsuka's decline stemmed from their 'retreat into landscapes and still lifes, where even the spirit of the ancient "ukiyo-e" had vanished' (Guangfu, 1982). Thus Lu Xun concluded that the Japanese Black and White Society phenomenon offered 'little benefit' to Chinese woodcut art, serving instead as a cautionary lesson.



Figure 66. The Boatman of the Han River by Luo Qingzhen (1905–1942)

³³⁴ Lu Xun, "Letter to Duan Ganqing"



Figure 67. The Wharf, by Zhang Ying (1910–1961), a native of Kaiping, Guangdong. In 1934, he co-founded the Modern Creative Printmaking Research Society with Li Hua and others.



Figure 68. Dock Labourers, by Jiang Feng (1910–1982), a native of Shanghai and one of the leading figures in the Chinese Left-Wing Artists' League.

Lu Xun observed that many young woodcut artists tended to excel more in landscape subjects, while a common shortcoming persisted: their creations in figure subjects were generally less effective. Consequently, he repeatedly addressed this matter in correspondence with young woodcut artists, prescribing a remedy – demanding that they devote greater effort to foundational modelling skills, sketching training, and observational experience. On 18 January 1935, in a letter to Duan Ganqing, Lu Xun pointed out that young woodcut artists were reluctant to carve landscapes, yet it was precisely landscapes they executed relatively well – due to their familiarity with such subjects. As for figurative subjects, whether single figures or group scenes, they remained exceedingly simplistic (Zhenming, 2010). On the same day, in his reply to Zhang Ying, he noted: ‘The inability to capture figures as effectively as landscapes is a common failing among young art students to-day. Moreover, the depiction of motion often falls short of that of stillness’ (Zhenming, 2010). For instance, a piece titled ‘Rushing About’ might fail to depict the subjects’ sense of haste. In correspondence with Cao Bai, he further observed: ‘The greatest weakness among China’s contemporary woodcut artists lies in their portrayal of figures, stemming fundamentally from a lack of foundational training’ (Guangfu, 1982).

Acknowledging this weakness in young woodcut artists' figure-based subjects, Lu Xun nonetheless repeatedly urged them to adopt socially relevant themes centred on people – particularly ordinary, familiar individuals and events, i.e., contemporary subjects. He simultaneously advocated producing more works based on historical themes familiar to the masses. In letters to He Jiajun and Chen Qixia, Lu Xun emphasised the significance of historical narratives: 'Select figures from Chinese history who are widely recognised, though their deeds may be adapted' (Xun, 1981)³³⁵. His emphasis on widely recognised historical subjects stemmed from two considerations. Firstly, familiar themes possess broad public resonance, bridging the gap between the audience and the artwork's expression, evoking a sense of intimacy and achieving emotional communication through art. Secondly, he was acutely aware that depicting figures or events familiar to the masses presented considerable artistic challenges. For instance, in the Afterword to *Morning Flowers Plucked at Dusk*, Lu Xun noted that depicting filial sons and their deeds was difficult 'because they are invariably full of sorrow and suffering', making them hard to portray (Xun, 1981)³³⁶.



Figure 69. Zhang Wang's "The Wounded Head"

On 26 October 1933, Lu Xun wrote in his reply to Luo Qingzhen: 'Few are acquainted with the landscapes, customs, flora and fauna of Guangdong. Should you take these as subjects, emphasising local colour would undoubtedly render them more engaging. Why not attempt a few pieces, sir?' (Guangfu, 1982). On 26 December of the same year, he wrote to Luo Qingzhen again: 'Why not take the scenery, flora and fauna, and customs of Shantou as subjects for your work? Local colour can enhance both the beauty and impact of a painting. Having grown up there, you may take it for granted, but to outsiders, it can be remarkably eye-opening and educational' (Guangfu, 1982). In a 1934 letter to Wucheng, Lu Xun similarly addressed regional themes in woodcut creation: "My approach advocates incorporating still lifes, landscapes, local customs, and street scenes precisely for this reason. The same holds true for contemporary literature: works imbued with local colour

³³⁵ Lu Xun, "Letter to He Jiajun and Chen Qixia"

³³⁶ Lu Xun, "Afterword to *Morning Flowers Plucked at Dusk*"

are more likely to gain international resonance, that is, to capture the attention of other nations” (Guangfu, 1982)

Lu Xun advocated for painting subjects with regional distinctiveness for two reasons: firstly, artists are more familiar with such subjects, facilitating artistic expression; secondly, the distinctive features of a particular region yield a refreshingly novel effect. He illustrated this with the example of the ‘star fruit’ – a multi-lobed fruit native to the south, familiar to southerners but utterly unfamiliar to northerners, akin to ‘seeing a fruit from Mars’ (Guangfu, 1982). Consequently, he also believed that genre paintings depicting local customs were beneficial for woodcut creation. Lu Xun paid particular attention to the creation of folk paintings across different regions. In a letter to Liu Xian, he argued that subjects like Henan door gods were widely understood by the public and should be utilised as much as possible. However, he stressed that new works must differ from traditional folk paintings: ‘The old ones require one to know the story before viewing the painting; the new ones, however, should make one understand the story upon seeing the painting’ (Guangfu, 1982). In a 1934 letter to Wu Bo, he explained his absence from an Austrian exhibition: ‘Newspapers described it as foreign landscapes; had they mentioned folk customs’, he would have attended. This reveals his keen interest in foreign art’s treatment of folk subjects (Guangfu, 1982).

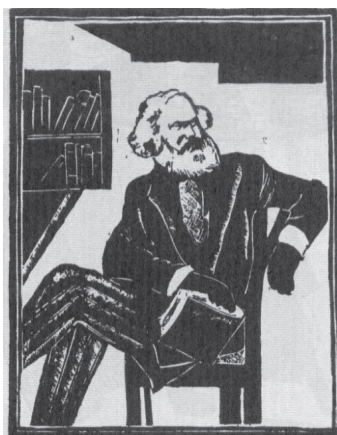


Figure 70. Portrait of Marx. This is the cover of Liu Xian and Huang Xinbo’s collaborative work Anonymous Woodcut Collection. When Lu Xun wrote the foreword, he kindly pointed out that placing Marx’s portrait on the cover was inappropriate, as it would effectively bury him beneath it, rendering the publication unsuitable for public distribution.

5.1.2. The expressive language of realism

On 24 April 1936, Lu Xun wrote to Duan Ganqing, noting: ‘Woodcut art has declined from its former prevalence precisely because there are no technical guides to steer it. Consequently, it cannot advance; even with excellent subject matter, it remains unable to express itself’ (Guangfu, 1982). Lu Xun thus recognised the crucial importance of both content and technique in woodcut creation. On one hand, addressing the tendency among many young woodcut artists to neglect creative technique, he stressed that technical cultivation was paramount. Without adequate technical

skill, the intended content could not be conveyed, 'just as a writer who cannot employ rhetoric cannot express their meaning.' On the other hand, the substance of the work must advance alongside technique; if one pursues purely formal skill while neglecting content, 'it is all too easy to fall into the deep pit of mere technical play.'

Lu Xun advocated themes accessible to the masses and familiar to everyday life. Regarding their representation, he offered guidance rooted in realism. As he once stated: 'I believe depicting the proletariat should be realistic, portraying workers in their true likeness'(Xun, 1981)³³⁷. This 'true likeness' in realism encompasses two dimensions: first, the authenticity of objective facts; second, the authenticity conveyed through artistic logic. This concerns not only the relationship between painting and real life (i.e., the connection between an artwork's subject and the myriad people, events, or objects that may exist in actual life), but also issues within artistic treatment such as technique, composition, and language. In Lu Xun's correspondence with young woodcut artists, there is no shortage of guidance on phenomena within woodcut creation – such as the pitfalls of 'carelessness,' the advocacy of foundational sketching skills, and the importance of realistic composition.

It is well known that Lu Xun held Käthe Kollwitz's art in high regard, viewing it as an art that 'grasps the very essence of the world's affairs'; He also admired the meticulous realism of Soviet prints, finding that 'each piece conveys a sincere spirit' without 'artifice or affectation,' nor the notion that 'all revolutionary art must wield a broad-brush approach, hacking and slashing indiscriminately, with fierce eyes and heavy fists – otherwise it is deemed aristocratic.' He enthusiastically promoted *Dead Souls in Pictures*, valuing its 'unpretentious realism, which earned it critics' acclaim.' By contrast, he pointed out the pitfalls of traditional literati ink painting, which 'pursued lofty simplicity to the point of becoming hollow,' criticised Song dynasty paintings for their 'languid and coquettish' quality, and vigorously championed the realist spirit of realism.

Yet in Lu Xun's era, China's nascent woodcut movement was still in its infancy. Some young woodcut artists exhibited a tendency to 'shirk the weighty for the trivial' in their treatment of human subjects, while others blindly imitated foreign artists, producing decadent, effeminate works of poor quality. Consequently, in letters to young woodcut artists, Lu Xun repeatedly highlighted the 'carelessness' plaguing woodcut creation. For instance, in a letter to Tie Geng dated 6 June 1934, he remarked: 'I understood the fifteen sequential illustrations, as we have this story in our region too. Yet the composition and carving technique, as you rightly noted in your letter, were somewhat careless' (Guangfu, 1982). On 1 October 1934, in a letter to Luo Qingzhen, Lu Xun emphasised: 'I advocate that young artists should be "bold yet meticulous" in publishing their work, for without meticulousness, one easily slips into carelessness.'

Regarding woodcut creation, distinctions exist between meticulous and cursory approaches based on carving technique and line treatment. Yet the prevailing issue in domestic woodcut art at the time was that 'generally speaking, Chinese woodcut artists share two common shortcomings: first, figures are invariably poorly rendered and frequently distorted; second, they tend to avoid weighty subjects in favour of trivial ones' (Guangfu, 1982). Lu Xun, citing Zhang Hui's *The Boatman* as an example, pointed out that it depicts only people, not the boat, with a relatively simple composition. The merely sketched rooftops and ridges are, in fact, indicative of a tendency towards care-

³³⁷ Lu Xun, "Preface to New Russian Paintings"

lessness. At the same time, he also noted that the woodcut collections by Max Sieler, published by Liangyou Company in September 1933, *The Passion of One Man and The Pursuit of Light My Confession*, and *The Story Without Words*, published by Liangyou Company in September 1933. The artist's foundation was exceptionally strong, his technique concise and his use of black and white starkly defined, making his work worthy of reference. However, artists without a solid grounding should not attempt to copy or imitate it, lest their work descend into crudeness at the slightest misstep. Lu Xun advocated a realistic approach rooted in realism, favouring a meticulous and steady style.



Figure 71. Käthe Kollwitz, “German Children Starving”

‘Sketching’ is a term originating from Western painting, serving as an introductory training subject for beginners in Western art and a necessary path for the development of most artists. The so-called ‘fundamental sketching skills’ emphasise the mastery of realistic techniques, encompassing the accurate depiction of a subject’s form and proportions, artistic anatomy, and the capture of movement. How might one cultivate foundational sketching skills? To address this question, we might consider the points Lu Xun raised regarding sketching fundamentals in his letter to young woodcut artists (Guangfu, 1982):

To Zhao Ye: ‘The foundation of woodcut remains sketching; thus, if one lacks mastery of line and chiaroscuro, the woodcut will not be well executed.’ (18 December 1934)

To Luo Qingzhen: “The woodcut French Park... I feel the labourer’s foot is somewhat unrealistic, which stems from my lack of proficiency in depicting the human form.’ (26 October 1933)

To Luo Qingzhen: ‘Your woodblock prints... I find the landscapes most successful, whereas the figures fall short. Should you undertake further study of the artistic anatomy of the human body, that would be most beneficial.” (21 October 1934)

To Duan Ganqing: ‘As for figures, the first reason is insufficient foundational practice (such as sketching and human anatomy), which often results in lifeless or unrealistic depictions. The second reason is detachment from their actual lives, lacking detailed understanding. ...

To remedy this flaw, I believe one must practise sketching and observe everything constantly.’ (18 January 1935)

To Zhang Hui: 'Woodcut carving is no different from painting; its foundation lies in sketching, and the composition must be unified.' (9 October 1934)

Lu Xun believed that creating woodcuts, like other forms of painting, required mastery of fundamental form-building skills. It could not be separated from the foundational training of sketching, demanding both an understanding and practice of human anatomy, as well as frequent sketching exercises to cultivate the ability to observe and visually express at any time and place. To provide young woodcut artists with more comprehensive guidance, on 30 April 1933 he specifically purchased a five-volume set of *New Techniques in Sketching*, compiled by the Japanese artist Yoshio Kitahara and published by Tokyo Atelier in Shōwa 7 (1932). This enabled him to gain deeper insight into the types and current state of sketching techniques abroad, which he then applied to instructing young woodcut artists. This demonstrates Lu Xun's dedicated commitment to fostering the development of woodcut art.



Figure 72. Portrait of Lu Xun by Tao Yuanqing, charcoal drawing, 1926

Lu Xun once remarked: 'Art ought to be truthful; it is improper for the artist to deliberately distort his subject' (Xun, 1981)³³⁸. This notion of artistic truth encompasses both the depiction of facts that exist or could exist in real life, and the realistic composition and linguistic expression of experiential facts according to the logic of painting. From this perspective, Lu Xun analysed certain 'non-representational' tendencies in Western modernist painting³³⁹, bluntly declaring that 'Futurist art is incomprehensible', and maintaining that a return to realism was an inevitable trend. Simultaneously, adhering to the logic that experiential facts from real life serve as painting subjects demanding realistic expression, Lu Xun also criticised the works of some young woodcut artists (Wang, 1982). He noted that their depictions of workers bore the appearance of Shanghai ruffians,

³³⁸ Lu Xun, "Preface to New Russian Paintings"

³³⁹ The new school of painting rejects lines, claiming it liberates form, while Futurist theory goes further by depicting momentary records of the artist's observations. Paintings like *Skirt-Edged Puppy* and *Galloping Horse* show multiple legs, suggesting dogs and horses have more than four limbs in motion. While this theory has some merit, it is exaggerated. These techniques, rather than liberating, lead to disintegration, as dogs and horses only have four legs. Thus, the recent shift towards realism is inevitable.

stating: ‘When carving labourers, pay close attention to proportions – small heads and thick arms – to avoid giving the viewer a sense of “deformity”.’

When depicting peasants, one must not deliberately distort their image: ‘Peasants are simple and honest; if one insists on smearing their faces with blood and grime, that is artificial and inconsistent with reality’ (Xun, 1981)³⁴⁰. Beyond this, Lu Xun maintained that woodcut compositions should employ accessible artistic techniques and compositions. As he wrote to He Baitiao: ‘*The Shepherdess* and *Lunchtime Rest* share a similar style, yet the facial depictions are comparatively non-realistic. I suspect this stems from the influence of certain German woodcut artists, though I cannot say for certain. Such an approach, however, should only be employed occasionally, not as a standard practice’ (Guangfu, 1982). Similarly, in correspondence with Chen Tiegang, he remarked: ‘*The Priest...* is likely to be difficult for the general public to comprehend; for the sake of accessibility, such a painting technique is inadvisable (Guangfu, 1982). Conversely, woodcut creation must adhere to the compositional structures and artistic language dictated by the logic of representational painting. Regarding Luo Qingzhen’s work, Lu Xun remarked: ‘*After Abandonment* possesses a powerful composition, yet... the standing figure appears disproportionate. Perhaps the piece would be stronger without her. *Late Winter* is the finest, though the figures are slightly too large. Were they to stand upright, would they not rival the memorial arch in height?’ (Xun, 1981)³⁴¹.

This critique clearly stems from an assessment grounded in the proportional logic of pictorial composition. Regarding young painter Wu Bo’s work, he remarked: ‘The composition isn’t entirely unfocused, though it’s a pity that ox appears too distant and diminutive, almost resembling a seated figure’ (Xun, 1981)³⁴². This assessment prioritised compositional necessity, demanding both experiential realism and effective artistic manipulation. Regarding Bai Tao’s work, he remarked: ‘*The Horseman* appears vivid at first glance, yet it suffers from a flaw: the horseman depicted is pulling a horse beyond the picture’s frame, while the horse within the frame is being led by another unseen horseman. To be harshly critical, this constitutes a composition that “avoids the crucial and focuses on the trivial”’ (Guangfu, 1982). This assessment weighs the merits and demerits based on the compositional effect within the painting.



Figure 73. Hu Yichuan: To the Front Lines

³⁴⁰ Lu Xun, “Letter to Luo Qingzhen”

³⁴¹ Ibid

³⁴² Lu Xun, “Preface to the Selected Woodcuts of Käthe Kollwitz”

Lu Xun once remarked: 'I believe that China's new woodcuts may adopt foreign compositions and carving techniques, yet they should also draw upon the compositional patterns of traditional Chinese woodcuts. Simultaneously, every effort must be made to render the figures distinctly Chinese in character, so that the viewer instantly recognises them as Chinese people and Chinese events' (Xun, 1981)³⁴³. How, then, might one absorb the artistic essence of past and present, East and West, to create works bearing distinctly Chinese characteristics? Lu Xun firmly grasped the artistic principle that creative expression must reveal the essence of objective reality through truthful, realistic representation. Consequently, he criticised instances in young woodcut artists' works that deviated from objective reality. For example, his critique of Chen Yanqiao's piece: 'This composition is quite sound, with scarcely any wasted strokes. Yet I find the chimneys somewhat excessive. Ordinary factories scarcely possess so many; moreover, in "The Steam Whistle Blows" – signifying the start of work – why is there no smoke rising from the flues?' (Xun, 1981)³⁴⁴. Undoubtedly, many works by young woodcut artists deviated from facts that should or could exist in real life, and Lu Xun criticised this phenomenon. Similar instances abound; the following examples serve as corroboration (Guangfu, 1982):

To Bai Tao: '*October in the Fields* is otherwise splendid, yet the principal rice-thresher appears too static and somewhat stylised (though such rendering is common in ancient Western woodcuts), which detracts from its perfection.' (25 December 1934)

To Luo Qingzhen: '*Under the Willow Shade* lacks clear definition; the smoke from the chimneys in *At the Huangpu Riverbank* regrettably fails to connect with the clouds.' (29 September 1933)

To Luo Qingzhen: 'Evening Homecoming is superior, Homecoming Path second-best. Though each has flaws (such as the wood-bearer appearing feeble while the bundle too small, and in the latter piece the houses disproportionately small for distance, trees too rigid), both are remarkably lively.' (18 July 1933)

To Cheng Wozha: 'You work diligently. For a novice, this level of carving is commendable. You ought to practise more. The nose of the starving peasant beside the waterwheel seems rather high, not quite Chinese. Observe more closely henceforth to truly understand Chinese peasants.' (14 February 1935)

To Li Hua: 'Your work retains the influence of late 19th-century German bridge-school aesthetics while simultaneously seeking to develop Eastern techniques. These two elements remain unresolved. For instance, the figure seated at the bow in *The Old Fisherman* is not truly an Eastern character.' (9 September 1935).

Guided by the realist spirit of truthfulness, Lu Xun criticised young woodcut artists for works that defied both the logic of reality and the logic of painting. He earnestly cautioned them: 'Without deep social experience and thorough observation, no artist can create truly great works.' (Zhenming, 2010). Thus, he urged young woodcut artists to 'observe all things with precision and thoroughness,' for only then 'can one put pen to paper' (Guangfu, 1982).

³⁴³ Lu Xun, "Letter to Li Hua"

³⁴⁴ Lu Xun, "Letter to Chen Yanqiao"

5.2. Art criticism concerning book illustration creation

Regarding book illustrations, although analysed in preceding chapters and even citing Lu Xun's explanation of their concept: 'Book illustrations were originally intended to adorn books and heighten readers' interest, yet their power lies in supplementing what words cannot convey, thus constituting a form of propaganda art' (Xun, 1981)³⁴⁵. Following Lu Xun's interpretation, we may further derive several implications: Firstly, book illustrations are grounded in textual content, requiring artistic creation that remains faithful to the original work. Secondly, the application of illustrations within a book constitutes an organic fusion of text and image, representing a re-creation and elevation of the literary work. Thirdly, illustrations play a vital role in books, conveying textual information through visual imagery, heightening readers' engagement, aiding deeper comprehension of the text's themes and connotations, and effectively supplementing the narrative. Fourthly, book illustrators require a certain literary foundation, necessitating a profound grasp of the themes and spirit embodied in the text, and employing appropriate artistic techniques to effectively interpret it.

Lu Xun's classification of book illustrations is not entirely clear; in his writings, book illustrations should encompass inserts, cover art, sequential illustrations, and woodcut series. Lu Xun contended that sequential illustrations 'should in fact be termed "serialised pictures", as they are not "endless like a ring" but rather picture books with a beginning and an end', citing the Chinese scroll paintings *The Endless Yangtze River* and *The Return to the Fields* as examples (Xun, 1981)³⁴⁶. As a literary figure, Lu Xun paid close attention to book illustration art throughout history and across cultures. He not only collected, translated, and published numerous foreign book illustrations but also wrote extensively on China's own book illustration traditions. He actively encouraged young artists to pursue illustration as a creative field, offering valuable guidance. After comprehensive analysis of these directives, the author proposes that book illustrations can be categorised and analysed based on their function, subject matter, and artistic techniques.

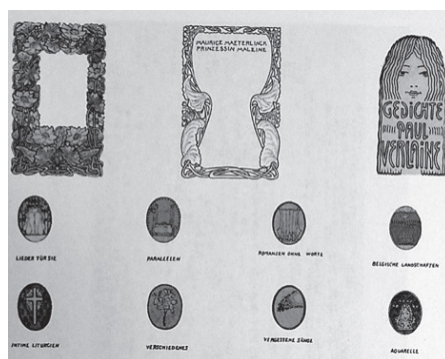


Figure 74. Illustrations copied by Lu Xun from German books, comprising 17 pages in total.

³⁴⁵ Lu Xun, "In Defence of 'Sequential Illustrations'"

³⁴⁶ Lu Xun, "Preface to *The Passion of One Man*"

5.2.1. The function of book illustrations

In 1934, Lu Xun noted in his essay *Miscellaneous Discussions on Pictorial Narratives* that folk publications such as *The Wisdom Lamp: Difficult Characters*, *Everyday Miscellaneous Characters*, *Recognising Characters Through Pictures*, and *Illustrated Explanations of Sacred Edicts*³⁴⁷, *The Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars*, and the like, all 'utilise illustrations for enlightenment.' For the common populace, Chinese characters proved exceedingly difficult, necessitating pictorial explanations. Thus, Lu Xun contended, 'if enlightenment is the aim, they are indeed a potent tool' (Xun, 1981)³⁴⁸. Simultaneously, he noted: 'To enlighten, one must first be able to comprehend'³⁴⁹. What, then, constitutes the standard of 'understanding'? On one hand, 'one must not pander to the feeble-minded or imbeciles' by deliberately lowering standards; 'the focus should be on the general populace'³⁵⁰. On the other hand, 'it must address the genuine, immediate concerns of the masses'³⁵¹.

For instance, farmers at the time disapproved of Western paintings or photography because the chiaroscuro shadows aroused their aversion; thus, 'illustrated picture books' would only gain popularity if devoid of shadows. Furthermore, although such picture books 'can indeed benefit the masses, it first depends on what kind of pictures they are' (Guangfu, 1982). In his reply to Lai Shaoqi, Lu Xun emphasised that determining the intended audience for pictorial works necessitates differing approaches to composition and engraving technique. He observed: 'Most contemporary woodcuts remain primarily aimed at the educated classes; consequently, employing such engraving methods for "illustrated storybooks" would remain incomprehensible to the general populace.' (Guangfu, 1982). Here he proposed creating sequential illustrations comprehensible to the masses. Yet the prevailing attitude within China's art circles at the time, as Lu Xun noted in his letter to Yao Ke, was that most young artists regarded illustration as a 'minor craft,' paying scant attention to its functional impact. This stemmed from their "preference for viewing "Futurist" and "Cubist" works, which made them unwilling to produce proper paintings through diligent practice. Faces were invariably distorted, complexions often greenish; yet they could not produce a single undistorted human face.

Thus, while capable of large-scale oil paintings, they proved incapable of executing the "minor art" of illustration" (Zhenming, 2010). Secondly, their teachers were often eccentric and eccentric, failing to impart meaningful instruction to the young artists. Consequently, these artists possessed scant knowledge of traditional Chinese illustration or modern foreign illustration. Consequently, Lu Xun contemplated establishing a periodical dedicated to introducing book illustrations. Though this ambition remained unrealised, his subsequent actions – publishing foreign illustrations in magazines he edited or influenced, organising exhibitions of Russian and French book illustrations, and compiling anthologies of international artwork – demonstrated his profound understanding of the educational value of sequential imagery. In his essay *Children of Shanghai*, Lu Xun further em-

³⁴⁷ Illustrated Commentary on the Imperial Edicts, compiled by Liang Yannian during the Qing dynasty, consists of 20 volumes with 260 illustrations. It provides visual and explanatory notes for the Sixteen Imperial Edicts of 1670, published in 1681. On 21 June 1934, Lu Xun cited this work in a letter to Zheng Zhenduo, praising it as a model of ancient Chinese woodblock printing and recommending its inclusion in the popular Woodblock Print Series.

³⁴⁸ Lu Xun, "Miscellaneous Discussions on Pictorial Series"

³⁴⁹ Ibid

³⁵⁰ Ibid

³⁵¹ Ibid

phasised the vital role of picture books in children's early education. He contended that illustrations could serve as models for children to emulate, thereby cultivating their aesthetic sensibilities whilst also offering insights into a nation's character and folkways through its children's illustrations.³⁵²

In 1936, Lu Xun noted in his *Preface to The Dead Souls in Pictures* that Gogol's *Dead Souls*, written in 1835, had already been a century old by Lu Xun's time. Without illustrations, it would have been difficult to imagine the daily life of people in that foreign land. Thus, "besides introducing foreign art, the primary purpose is to offer Chinese literary scholars or enthusiasts a visual complement to the novel – as the saying goes, "illustrations on the left, history on the right" – to gain clearer insight into the circumstances of Russia's middle class during the first half of the nineteenth century. Secondly, it is intended for illustrators, enabling them to observe realistic models from other nations, discerning how these differ from China's traditional "portraiture" or "embroidered portraits", or identifying aspects worthy of emulation" (Xun, 1981)³⁵³.

The phrase 'left with pictures, right with history' originates from the New Book of Tang: Biography of Yang Wan, originally meaning 'solitary in a room, left with pictures, right with history,' describing a space rich in books and signifying a passion for learning. However, after Lu Xun's citation, academia often extends its meaning to encompass multiple layers: left with pictures, right with text; pictures and text complementing each other; using illustrations to explain text; and using pictures to narrate stories. In his *Preface to The Passion of One Man*, Lu Xun noted that from ancient Egyptian stone carvings to late 19th-century Western European painters, artists favoured creating sequential illustrations – establishing a theme and crafting it into an illustrated album to narrate stories through pictures. Indeed, Maesler's *The Passion of One Man* exemplifies this narrative technique through imagery.

From the latter half of the 19th century, European printmakers frequently favoured engraving 'series' (Blattfolge) comprising several connected prints to narrate stories. Examples include Mefert's *Siemens-Tüte* and Kollwitz's *The Peasants' Struggle*, *War*, and *The Proletariat* – all narrative series. In 'A Few Notes on Pictorial Sequences,' Lu Xun further observed that whether it be the 'illustrated chapters' of Song and Yuan dynasty novels, featuring text beneath images on each page; the "portraits" in Ming and Qing novels, depicting characters at the beginning of each volume; or the 'complete illustrations' depicting each chapter's story, all employed pictures to narrate tales. 'This was likely intended to entice potential readers to purchase and read the work, while enhancing the interest and comprehension of existing readers' (Xun, 1981)³⁵⁴.

³⁵² In *Children of Shanghai*, Lu Xun commented that China finally had its own children's picture books, but the depicted children were often either tyrannical, mischievous, or overly conformist, reflecting poor illustration skills and rigid standards. He compared Chinese illustrations to those from other countries – British children are composed, Germans are robust, Russians vigorous, French elegant, and Japanese clever – while Chinese children appeared feeble. He argued that national character can be observed not only through literature but also through paintings, including children's works.

³⁵³ Lu Xun, "Preface to *The Dead Souls in Pictures*"

³⁵⁴ Lu Xun, "Miscellaneous Notes on Pictorial Series"



Figure 75. Chen Laolian's Antiquities Wine Label: "Eighty Thousand Strings of Cash"

In 1933, Lu Xun learned that the literary youth Zou Taofen had translated the book *Gorky*. He thought it was quite good, but regretted the lack of illustrations. Thus, in a letter to Zou Taofen, he wrote: "I believe it would be even more engaging with illustrations" (Zhenming, 2010). He explained that he possessed a copy of *Portraits of Gorky*, containing various portraits and caricatures of the writer from his prime to old age. He offered to lend it if needed and agreed to assist Zou in translating the captions for selected illustrations. Though a minor detail in book editing and publishing, this incident reflects Lu Xun's considerable emphasis on the role of illustrations within texts, and it was not an isolated case. For instance, when Sun Yong sent Lu Xun his translation of *Brave John*, Lu Xun, upon reading it, felt illustrations were indispensable and wrote to Sun Yong requesting he endeavour to find relevant illustrations for the text. After considerable effort, Sun procured twelve mural-style illustrations. However, the high cost of colour printing plates ultimately compelled Lu Xun to self-publish the book to ensure its aesthetic quality.

Similarly, in 1931, when Cao Jinghua sent Lu Xun his translation of *The Iron Stream*, Lu Xun, upon proofreading, felt the stories required illustrations. He wrote to Cao Jinghua requesting him to seek out suitable artwork. After considerable effort, Cao Jinghua located illustrations by Biskayev to enhance the text, creating a harmonious blend of words and images. Furthermore, in the history of modern Chinese publishing, the 'Slave Series' holds considerable significance. It was published by the 'Slave Society'³⁵⁵ in 1935. For the covers of Ye Zi's *Harvest* and Xiao Jun's *August in the Countryside* within the Slave Series, Lu Xun proposed and recommended the young woodcut artist Huang Xinbo to create the woodcut illustrations. These works received Lu Xun's commendation after publication. Lu Xun consistently placed great importance on book design. He personally

³⁵⁵ The key members of the 'Slave Society' were Ye Zi, Xiao Jun, and Xiao Hong. Ye Zi (1910-1939), born Yu Helin in Hunan, moved to Shanghai in 1933 and wrote short stories set around Dongting Lake, highlighting peasants' struggles. Her 1934 collection *Harvest*, with a foreword by Lu Xun and design by Huang Xinbo, included six such stories. Xiao Jun (1907-1988), born Liu Honglin, initially used the pen name Sanlang in Northeast China before adopting Xiao Jun, a name recommended by Lu Xun.

designed the covers for *The Collection of the Canopy*, *The Torrent*, *The Exploration of the Heart*, *The Collection of Merits*, *Translations from the Pen*, *The Strange Sword and Other Stories*, and *In the Desert*. He also commissioned Tao Yuanqing, Sun Fuxi and others to create cover art, achieving excellent artistic results. This simultaneously demonstrated Lu Xun's emphasis on the role of illustrations within the textual framework.

5.2.2. Sources for book illustrations

On 1 August 1933, in a letter to He Jiajun and Chen Qixia, Lu Xun addressed the selection of subjects for book illustrations. He noted: 'Draw upon figures from Chinese history who are widely recognised by the public, though their deeds may be altered as necessary' (Zhenming, 2010). That is, the subjects depicted should be widely recognised, such as in *The Legend of the White Snake*. One might 'add certain elements (such as unyielding courage) and tone down others (such as repaying personal favours or flooding the Golden Mountain for self-interest)' (Zhenming, 2010). Similarly, in the Afterword to *Morning Flowers Plucked at Dusk*, he mentioned that the filial sons and their deeds celebrated in Chinese historical texts could form the subject matter for *A Hundred Illustrations of Filial Piety*. Though challenging to depict – 'for they are invariably filled with sorrow and hardship' – they nonetheless constitute a valid category of creative subject matter (Xun, 1981)³⁵⁶.

In a 1935 letter to Li Hua, Lu Xun noted that 'China naturally requires the most engravings of figures or stories' (Zhenming, 2010). Historical subjects and their narratives should likewise remain a focus for young artists, as they possess broad appeal and a solid foundation among the public. On 22 May of the same year, in a reply to Meng Shihuan, Lu Xun remarked: I recall that at the turn of the nineteenth century, the illustrated edition of *Strange Tales* from a Chinese Studio was published, and many people bought it to read, finding it highly enjoyable. Moreover, some children even read the stories because of the illustrations. Therefore, I believe that illustrations are not only entertaining but also beneficial' (Zhenming, 2010). He also mentioned the illustrated storybooks of 'historical romances' published by Shanghai's Huaiwen Tang Publishing House, which sold very well.



Figure 76. Lu Xun's depiction of the "Living Impermanence" from the Baojing Pavilion edition of the Jade Calendar in Guangzhou

³⁵⁶ Lu Xun, "Afterword to *Morning Flowers Plucked at Dusk*"

On 16 September 1934, the inaugural issue of *Translation* magazine, edited by Lu Xun, was published. In his Preface to the First Issue of *Translation*, he stated: 'Beyond the written word, we shall include numerous illustrations. Some will relate to the text, intended to enhance its appeal; others will stand independently, serving as our modest contribution to readers. Reproduced images, after all, retain more of their original flavour than reproduced text' (Xun, 1981)³⁵⁷ Here, illustrations must be grounded in textual reference, evolving from the written word. For instance, 19th-century Russian literary illustrations served 'the primary mission of depicting the era's history through painting,' meaning their purpose was to 'portray people, customs, and trends – in short, the mundane details of everyday life' (Lebedev, 1957).

For instance, Ah Geng's illustrations for Gogol's *Dead Souls* were deemed by Lu Xun as 'the most realistic work by a Russian artist' – illustrations that complemented the novel as 'left-hand pictures, right-hand history,' authentically presenting 19th-century Russian society (Xun, 1981)³⁵⁸. By this token, literary illustrations generally serve such functions: supplementing and extending the text; enabling sensory comprehension through imagery; and expressing the illustrator's aesthetic vision, technical skill, and even their worldview and philosophy of life. For instance, regarding Biskalev's illustrations for Gorky's *Mother*, Lu Xun remarked: "Vivid and powerful, they capture the very spirit of the entire work. Even those who have not read the novel, do they not see here the dark politics and the struggling masses?" (Xun, 1981)³⁵⁹.

Here, the art of illustration not only brings the original work to life but also powerfully reveals the darkness of society – this is the charm of literary illustration. During the 1930s, Lu Xun held in high regard the literary illustrations emerging from Soviet Russia after the October Revolution. Examples include Klavdiyev's illustrations for Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don*, Mashutdinov's illustrations for Blok's epic poem *The Twelve*, Meffert's illustrations for Glatkov's short story *Cement*, and V. Truf's six illustrations for Soviet revolutionary writer Fadeyev's novel *Destruction*. These illustrations of Soviet literature captivated Lu Xun like a powerful magnet, opening a channel of knowledge for him to understand the new social landscape of post-October Revolution Soviet Russia.

Lu Xun's translated edition of *The Symbol of Suffering* featured a cover illustration by Tao Yuanqing. Employing metaphorical techniques, it depicted a half-naked female figure struggling desperately against oppression to express the theme of 'the symbol of suffering'. Lu Xun praised it as 'cladding this book in a new, poignant and exquisite garment' (Xun, 1981)³⁶⁰. For the cover of *Wandering*, Tao Yuanqing employed decorative figures and a sun to concisely define the pictorial space, evoking the tense atmosphere of 'wandering.' Lu Xun praised it as: "The cover of *Wandering* is truly powerful; viewing it stirs the soul" (Guangfu, 1982). In these two instances, from text to image, the practice of "interpreting the meaning from the words" demonstrates how book illustrations – through their subject matter and artistic expression – can enhance a literary work's appeal, rendering its content more vivid and tangible.

Lu Xun once remarked that he had encountered illustrations of Confucius on three occasions: 'One was an illustration within *The Family Sayings of Confucius*; another was the frontispiece of *The*

³⁵⁷ Lu Xun, "Preface to the First Issue of *Yiwen*"

³⁵⁸ Lu Xun, "Preface to *The Dead Souls in Pictures*"

³⁵⁹ Lu Xun, "Preface to Fourteen Woodcuts of 'Mother'"

³⁶⁰ Lu Xun, "Introduction to 'Symbol of Torment'"

Qingyi Journal, published in Yokohama whilst Liang Qichao was in exile in Japan, which was subsequently imported back into China from Japan; and the third was an engraving on a Han Dynasty tombstone depicting Confucius meeting Laozi' (Xun, 1981)³⁶¹. Taking Confucius as an example, this illustrates that portraiture of historical figures is a widely explored creative theme. Lu Xun consistently placed great importance on literary portraits, extensively collecting depictions of foreign writers from the 1920s onwards. These included Fauré's *Portrait of Mérimée*, Caposet's *Portrait of Ibsen*, Bacharach's self-portrait *Portrait of Bacharach*, N.A. Sybold's *Woodcut Portrait of Gogol*, Möller's *Portrait of Gogol*, and P. Polynov's *Portrait of the Critic V. Belinsky*. These portraits were successively published in the books and periodicals edited by Lu Xun, serving as significant illustrations within his translated literary works.

Concurrently, he conceived plans to compile and publish an anthology of literary figures' portraits. On 31 October 1934, he articulated this vision in a reply to Meng Shihuan: "My intention to publish portraits of literary figures (excluding painters) is designed for three types of readers: first, painters, particularly portrait artists; Secondly, those collecting materials for literary history; Thirdly, the curious. Therefore, I wish to publish exclusively portraits rendered in painting, woodcut, or engraving – no photographs shall be included." (Zhenming, 2010). Explaining his rationale for compiling literary portraits, Lu Xun further noted: 'A reliable autobiography of the author, coupled with a reasonably clear portrait or caricature by a portraitist, serves as an invaluable tool for readers to grasp the essence of a writer' (Xun, 1981)³⁶².

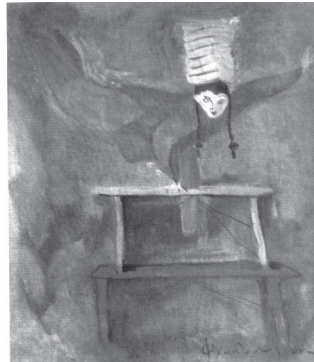


Figure 77. The Daughter Performing a Handstand, oil on canvas, by Japanese artist Uruka Yasuro. In 1928, he was introduced to Lu Xun by Uchiyama Kanzo. In 1929, he held an exhibition in Shanghai, which Lu Xun attended and purchased this painting.

5.2.3. Techniques for book illustration

In his essay '*In Defence of Comic Strips*', Lu Xun summarised his views on the approach to book illustration: 'Yet I hope equal weight and effort will be given to comic strips and newspaper illustrations; naturally one should study the works of European masters, but even greater attention should be paid to the embroidered portraits and illustrated books found in old Chinese texts, as well as

³⁶¹ Lu Xun, "Confucius in Modern China"

³⁶² Lu Xun, "Describing Myself: Postscript"

the New Year's single-sheet decorative papers'(Xun, 1981)³⁶³. Here, Lu Xun advocates: first, that book illustration is not a 'minor art' but a genre on par with oil or watercolour painting, deserving equal esteem; second, that one must study and learn the techniques and artistic language of European illustrators; third, that one should absorb the painting methods found in traditional Chinese books; and fourth, that one should incorporate the artistic language of decorative paper from folk art. Fifthly, the creative principles and language of book illustration must align with popular taste. Only thus 'will the masses read it, and the masses will be grateful!'³⁶⁴. In summary, Lu Xun's advocacy for book illustration techniques essentially involves combining traditional Chinese methods with the absorption of foreign masters' techniques to create art suitable for the masses.

In his letters to He Jiajun and Chen Qixia, Lu Xun elaborated on how book illustrations should adopt traditional Chinese methods: on the one hand, 'flowered paper, the embroidered portraits in old novels, and Wu Youru's pictorials may all serve as references, adopting their strengths while discarding their weaknesses'(Zhenming, 2010). On the other hand, 'one must not employ the currently fashionable impressionistic techniques, nor woodblock prints that emphasise chiaroscuro; line drawings are preferable' (Zhenming, 2010). The overarching principle is that "even those without any training in the fine arts should be able to understand it at a glance. Another crucial point is to avoid the dead end where the educated class deem it inartistic, yet the masses remain unable to comprehend it (and thus refuse to engage with it)" (Zhenming, 2010).

Here, the primary concern is the 'adoption of old forms'; secondarily, it addresses the issue of highbrow versus popular art. In his essay *On the Adoption of Old Forms*, Lu Xun observed: 'When a new idea (content) seeks a new form, the first step is to adopt an old form. This very act of adoption marks the beginning of the new form, signifying the metamorphosis of the old' (Xun, 1981)³⁶⁵. Thus, 'adopting an old form necessarily involves deletion; and where there is deletion, there must be addition'³⁶⁶. Wu Youru's meticulous painting style captivates and moves the viewer, yet he proved less adept at historical painting. Long residing in the Shanghai concessions, his greatest skill lay in depicting contemporary scenes such as 'wicked madams tormenting prostitutes' and 'rogues dismantling spies,' vividly capturing the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Shanghai. Yet his artistic influence proved detrimental. Illustrations in novels and children's books, influenced by him, often depicted all women as courtesans and children as petty hooligans.

Thus, 'the peril of emulating Wu Youru's painting lies in adopting only his slickness,' while 'what is commendable is his meticulous observation' (Guangfu, 1982). Folk flower paper, though 'sometimes so densely filled that the blank paper scarcely shows', differs from Buddhist paintings with their full-page clouds and luxurious decoration, embodying instead 'a frugality that spares the paper' (Xun, 1981)³⁶⁷. Folk flower paper also featured portraits of beauties, yet these differed markedly from Tang Bohu's depictions of slender-waisted, delicate-handed maidens. Though 'similar in form yet fundamentally distinct', 'painters serving the masses need not hesitate' to adopt folk flower paper's artistic conventions (Xun, 1981)³⁶⁸. By appropriating these traditional forms, making

³⁶³ Lu Xun, "Defence of 'Comic Strips'"

³⁶⁴ Ibid

³⁶⁵ Lu Xun: "On the 'Adoption of Old Forms'"

³⁶⁶ Ibid

³⁶⁷ Lu Xun, "On the Use of Old Forms"

³⁶⁸ Ibid

necessary adaptations or omissions, the ‘result is the emergence of new forms – that is, transformation’ (Xun, 1981)³⁶⁹. Serialised picture books, like poetry, fiction, and drama in literature, are merely one category of pictorial art. Their popularity stems naturally from ‘possessing the potential and necessity for circulation; recognising this, they should be guided’ (Xun, 1981)³⁷⁰. This represents art for the masses, striving for accessibility – the correct direction for artists’ endeavours. Between the refined and the popular, the creation of sequential pictures must be tailored to this mass audience, ‘not descending into the dead end where the intellectual class deems it non-artistic while the masses remain unable to comprehend it (and thus refuse to view it)’ (Zhenming, 2010).

Thus, in balancing the adoption of traditional forms with accessibility to both refined and popular tastes, Lu Xun believed the artistic language of book illustration held much merit within China’s established methods. He repeatedly wrote to young woodcut artists advocating this artistic philosophy.³⁷¹ For instance, in a letter to He Baitao, Lu Xun noted that Chen Tiegang’s sequential illustrations were generally well-executed, but to better serve popular appreciation, ‘I believe one could incorporate more Chinese painting techniques, and certain scenes could be rendered with greater intensity – such as the beating of the blind man’ (Guangfu, 1982). Numerous similar examples exist, though they cannot all be enumerated here.



Figure 78. The Beiping Stationery Compendium

In 1932, Su Wen, a proponent of the ‘third type of person,’ published an article titled ‘On the Literary Debate Concerning “Wenxin” and Hu Qiuyuan’ in Volume 1, Issue 3 of the journal *Modern*. The piece addressed the issue of popularising literature and art advocated by the Left-Wing Writers’ League, arguing that ‘lowbrow’ art forms such as comic strips and opera scripts could never produce great artists. Lu Xun refuted this view in *On the ‘Third Kind of Person’ and In*

³⁶⁹ Ibid

³⁷⁰ Ibid

³⁷¹ As Lu Xun noted in his letter to Meng Ke: “I believe there are many illustrations in old Chinese books that could be utilised, but unless one frequently frequents second-hand bookshops, they are not easily encountered. Moreover, in the late Qing dynasty there was Wu Youru, a master at depicting Shanghai rogues and courtesans. A few years ago, a collection titled Youru’s Masterpieces was published – have you seen it?”

Defence of 'Comic Strips'. In 1933, Su Wen again questioned in his edited *Chinese Literary and Artistic Yearbook* whether Lu Xun's introduction of 'German woodcuts to China would be comprehensible to the general public'. Lu Xun responded in *On Reproducing Woodcuts*: 'If they were not such peculiar works as Cubist or Futurist pieces, they might be somewhat comprehensible.' Despite regional differences in customs and mutual incomprehension, images of people, buildings, and trees remain recognisable and understandable. For instance, anyone who has been to Shanghai should recognise the electric lamps, trams, and factory scenes depicted in the artwork. As for why foreign serial woodcuts were reproduced, the primary reason was to 'gain an insight into the general nature of modern foreign serial illustrations' through the works of renowned artists.

Take, for example, *The Passion of One Man* by Maes, a story told entirely through pictures. It is a realistic work, but Maes's woodcuts are starkly black and white. 'They are the most difficult to learn, but there are many points of reference, and they will certainly be of great benefit to students learning woodcut'. As Lu Xun pointed out: Since the Song dynasty, our painting has favoured freehand brushwork. Two dots represent eyes, leaving one uncertain whether they are elongated or round; a single stroke depicts a bird, leaving one unsure whether it is an eagle or a swallow. This excessive preference for brevity has led to vagueness, a flaw still frequently encountered in the works of contemporary young woodcut artists. Klavdij Kamenev's *Nepalese Construction* serves as an alarm bell to rouse us from this lazy reverie." Klavdiy Kamenev's depictions of Soviet economic construction following the October Revolution, rendered in a meticulous and realistic style, indeed provided a model for China's nascent woodcut movement.

Similarly, in a 1934 letter to Yao Ke, Lu Xun remarked: 'Compared to Europeans and Americans, our illustration techniques are truly like showing off one's axe-handling skills before a master carpenter. Yet depictions of situations and objects can still be rendered with relative accuracy.' To illustrate the calibre of Western illustrators, Lu Xun cited what he deemed the 'most striking example' in his *Defence of Comic Strips*: the French artist Doré. "He is a master of the illustrated print, most famously for his works on *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Mr. Gideon*, and the *Chronicle of the Crusades*... merely by glancing at these, one can grasp the book's outline." On 9 September 1935, in a letter to Li Hua, Lu Xun observed: 'After these two months of summer break, reviewing the works reveals no significant departure from previous efforts, yet concerning phenomena emerge.

Firstly, a tendency towards minor pieces, lacking the depth and stability found in Japanese artists' work – this becomes evident when compared with Tanaka's single print.' The 'Mr Tanaka' referred to by Lu Xun is the Japanese printmaker Tanaka Yasukane. As previously discussed, Lu Xun consistently held that Japanese woodblock prints, with their subjects predominantly landscapes, still lifes, and toy-like vignettes, offered little benefit to Chinese woodcuts aimed at the 'common folk.' Yet he held Tanaka Yasukane's work in high regard. *Lu Xun's Diary* records that on 12 January 1933, Lu Xun purchased Tanaka Yasukane's *Picture Book for Young People* from Uchiyama Bookstore, inscribing it with the words 'For posterity'. Linking this inscription with his letter to Li Hua, one may readily infer that the composed and steadfast spirit embodied in Tanaka Yasukane's technical mastery offered valuable lessons for young Chinese woodcut artists seeking to elevate their artistic standards.

It is worth noting that absorbing the techniques of foreign masters does not mean blind imitation or indiscriminate adoption, but rather discerning their strengths and weaknesses. Lu

Xun once pointed out that in the illustrations for *The Parrot Story*³⁷² by the Soviet printmaker Pozharsky³⁷³, ‘Chinese people depicted five or six hundred years ago are also wearing red-plumed caps’ and sporting queue hairstyles, though such hairstyles and headgear were not prevalent in China at that time (Xun, 1981)³⁷⁴. This inaccuracy, coupled with the crude execution, revealed the Russian printmaker’s ‘limited knowledge of China.’ Consequently, Lu Xun sent several volumes of ancient Chinese costume paintings, hoping they might assist in creating illustrations for Chinese-themed works. Similarly, in his essay ‘Records of the Soviet Print Exhibition,’ Lu Xun noted that during the Russian Civil War, Fyodorov spearheaded a reform in woodcut artistry, establishing a distinct school. Successors like Dunezha, Goncharov, Yekastov, and Bikov, who followed in his footsteps. ‘Each expressed a sincere spirit in their work, yet through different methods, showing us that only when the content is the same may the methods differ; imitation and dependence can never produce true art’ (Xun, 1981)³⁷⁵. In the two aforementioned cases, if Pozharsky’s thematic missteps led to a skewed creative technique that warrants our reflection, then Fyodorovsky, Dunezha, Goncharov, Yekastov, and Bikov – though their subject matter was largely similar – employed distinct creative approaches. Their work prompts profound contemplation on the roles of ‘imitation’ and ‘emulation’ within artistic creation.

5.3. Art criticism concerning comic creation

In Lu Xun’s writings, there are numerous passages concerning caricature and satire. During the May Fourth New Culture Movement, his *Random Thoughts* series published in *New Youth* – specifically entries No. 43, No. 46, and No. 53 – contain extensive discussions on caricature. In the 1930s, he further penned essays such as *A Casual Discussion on “Caricature”, What Is Satire?, and From Satire to Humour*. ‘Cartoons and Yet Cartoons,’ ‘On Satire,’ and ‘From Satire to Humour’. During Lu Xun’s lifetime, caricature had been introduced to China as an imported art form. For instance, in 1903, Zheng Guanggong founded the *World Public Welfare Journal* in Hong Kong. Utilising witty prose, satirical illustrations (also termed ‘awakening pictures’), and playful articles, it mocked contemporary politics, enlightened the populace, and promoted the Xinhai Revolution. It was acclaimed as a ‘satirical copperplate pictorial journal of current affairs’. Among the earliest cartoon works to exert significant influence on domestic and international public opinion was the renowned *Pictorial Commentary on Current Affairs*³⁷⁶ by Xie Zhantai³⁷⁷, a key figure in the Revolutionary Alliance.

From its debut until 1904, this work was widely reproduced across newspapers and publications, with its illustrations and captions continually updated to reflect evolving political

³⁷² The Parrot Tales is an ancient Indian literary work, a collection of numerous short stories.

³⁷³ Bocharsky (1900-1970), a Soviet printmaker and illustrator, created illustrations for works including the Indian folktale collection *The Parrot’s Tales* and British novels *Robinson Crusoe* and *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*. He sent five of his works and his autobiography to Lu Xun, which were later included in the collection *Yinyu Ji*.

³⁷⁴ Lu Xun, “Letter to Yang Jiyun”

³⁷⁵ Lu Xun, “Notes on the Soviet Print Exhibition”

³⁷⁶ The year of creation and the earliest publication of *The Pictorial Chronicle of Current Affairs* have been the subject of numerous scholarly investigations and differing conclusions. What is certain, however, is that its publication immediately attracted the attention of newspapers both in China and abroad.

³⁷⁷ Xie Zantao, a revolutionary, cartoonist, and journalist from Guangdong, co-founded the *Furen Literary Society* and *Restoration Association* in 1890 with Yang Qiyun. In 1895, they partnered with Sun Yat-sen to establish the Hong Kong headquarters of the *Xingzhong Society*. In 1903, Xie co-founded the *Southern China Daily* with British nationals, later renamed *South China Morning Post*, where he handled English editorials and cartoons.

developments. In 1903, Cai Yuanpei's Shanghai-based publication *Russian Affairs Bulletin* featured this cartoon alongside a caption explaining its 'current significance': 'This illustration, titled *The Partition of China*, was translated from British newspapers two years prior. The translator, surnamed Xie, had it printed in Hong Kong in vivid colours. Shanghai's Foreign Trade Agency distributed it.'³⁷⁸ Undoubtedly, early Chinese cartoons – such as those by Pan Dawei and He Jianshi – were often closely tied to revolutionary politics and social commentary. Lu Xun's engagement with caricature and satirical art stemmed largely from an academic interest in introducing and interpreting this foreign literary form, while also being intrinsically linked to his ideas of 'social criticism' and 'civilisation criticism.' Consequently, it is worthwhile to examine and analyse Lu Xun's conceptual expressions regarding caricature – including its definition, characteristics, and modes of expression – by connecting them with his broader discourse on satirical art.

5.3.1. The concept of comics

In 1935, Lu Xun noted in his essay 'A Casual Discussion of "Cartoon"'³⁷⁹: "Cartoon is the translation of Karikatur. The "casual" here is not the "casual" of the "casual inscriptions" or "casual writings" referred to by China's literati of old. Of course, they may be produced without deliberation, in a single swift stroke; yet because they spring from an honest heart, the result is never mere jesting" (Xun, 1981)³⁸⁰. Here, Lu Xun at least clarified the German concept and artistic characteristics of caricature. The German 'Karikatur' is also translated as 'satirical drawing' ; its English equivalent is 'Caricature' a term derived from the Italian 'Caricare' meaning 'to exaggerate' Thus, the artistic definition of comics is termed 'an expression brimming with exaggeration'³⁸¹ Lu Xun believed that the '漫' in comics was not the "漫题" or '漫书' of China's traditional literati; nor, of course, the 'casual sketches' 'whimsical brushstrokes' 'playful works' or 'amateurish drawings' of traditional Chinese painting, where artists 'dabble with the brush to express their feelings' Although traditional Chinese painting includes exaggerated depictions such as *The Hundred Ugly Figures*, *The Thirty-Six Voices of the Powder Bell*, and *Ghostly Amusements*, regrettably, these works either depict clowns from theatrical plays; or depict supernatural beings, thus remaining distant from human society and failing to truly qualify as cartoons. Lu Xun noted that cartoons 'can be created without deliberation, in a single stroke' but crucially, they must 'spring from an honest heart'. The phrases 'without deliberation' and 'in a single stroke' refer to the artistic language of cartoons.

The expressive techniques of caricature are unconstrained by the rules and dogmas of painting. Unlike other genres, it does not adhere to principles of proportion, form, perspective, anatomy, chiaroscuro, or colour theory. It embraces exaggeration, distortion, metaphor, and symbolism, appearing seemingly 'careless' or 'sketched offhand,' yet fundamentally embodying the spirit of caricature that demands 'springing from an honest heart.' Polish author Joseph Conrad, in his work *Nostromo*, wrote: 'Placing a jester's face upon a real body', succinctly capturing the essence of

³⁷⁸ The Russian Affairs Bulletin began publication on 15 December 1903 as the organ of the Qing revolutionary group 'Society of Comrades Against Russia,' later renamed the 'Society for Survival.' The newspaper opposed imperialism and Russian influence, with key contributors including Cai Yuanpei, Wang Yuanzong, Liu Shipai, Chen Qubing, and Lin Xie. On 25 February 1904, it was renamed The Alarm Bell Daily.

³⁷⁹ This essay was originally printed in the collection Essays and Cartoons. Essays and Cartoons was a commemorative special edition marking the first volume of the Taibai Bimonthly, compiling 58 articles on essays and cartoons. It was published by Shenghuo Bookstore in March 1935.

³⁸⁰ Lu Xun, "A Casual Discussion of 'Cartoon'"

³⁸¹ This assertion draws upon the account provided by the British scholar Bohan Lynch in his 1926 work A History of Western Cartooning.

caricature – ‘realistic exaggeration’ (Lynch, 2011). French philosopher Henri Bergson remarked in *The Study of Laughter*: ‘Beneath the harmony of superficial forms, the cartoonist perceives the stubborn resistance rooted in the character’s heart’ (Bergson, 2011). This observation at least subtly articulates certain spiritual qualities of the art of caricature, which shares an underlying resonance with Lu Xun’s notion of ‘sprouting from an honest heart’ in its essential thought.

5.3.2. Characteristics of comics: a critical spirit

For a long time, people have favoured likening Lu Xun’s satirical essays to ‘javelins’ and ‘daggers’ in their critical spirit. Similarly, cartoons possess a unique critical spirit that pricks at social ills and exposes deep-seated problems. Whether these are contemporary evils or entrenched maladies, they exist in any society. The crucial question is: with what kind of pen does the cartoon prick at these ills and expose these maladies? In his essay *On Cartooning*, Lu Xun observed that in Europe, ‘the readers of such cartoons are mostly upper-class “connoisseurs”’. Thus the cartoonist’s pen is often directed solely at the powerless and defenceless, using their ridiculousness to highlight the perfection and nobility of the connoisseurs, thereby securing a share of the cigar trade’ (Xun, 1981)³⁸². These ‘cultured individuals’ – members of the educated upper classes – used their aesthetic sensibilities to satirise the absurdities of ‘common folk’ and defenceless ‘helpless victims.’ Lu Xun expressed dissatisfaction with such cartoons, whose ‘exposure, ridicule, and even outright attack’ were directed at these very targets.

In *From Satire to Humour*, Lu Xun pointedly remarked: “If his satire were directed at the illiterate, the slaughtered, the imprisoned, or the oppressed, that would be commendable – providing a chuckle for the so-called educated intellectuals who read his work, thereby reinforcing their sense of courage and superiority. Yet today’s satirists are so called precisely because they satirise this very class of so-called educated intellectuals” (Xun, 1981)³⁸³. Here, Lu Xun emphasises the subject and stance of caricature. On the one hand, he opposes – even condemns – directing satirical barbs at the persecuted and defenceless masses; on the other, he holds that the cartoonist’s ideological awareness and level of understanding are paramount. In ‘*Notes on “Cartoon”*’, Lu Xun observed that ‘in the history of European cartoons, the heaviest criticism has been levelled at women, Jews, peasants, reformers, and all the oppressed’, condemning these cartoonists for their ‘generally backward thinking’ (Guangfu, 1982).

Simultaneously, Lu Xun cautioned cartoonists to adopt a correct attitude towards ‘social criticism’ and ‘civilisational critique’ – one characterised by goodwill and fervour. While it involves finding fault, the purpose is to affirm the positive aspects by exposing the ugly and mediocre elements within social phenomena. In *What Is Satire?*, Lu Xun stated: “Though satirists are generally detested by their subjects, they are often well-intentioned. Their satire seeks improvement, not to drown this group in the water” (Xun, 1981)³⁸⁴. He further noted: If a work appears satirical yet lacks both goodwill and passion, leaving readers feeling that all worldly affairs are utterly worthless and hopeless, then it is not satire but what is termed “bitter sarcasm”³⁸⁵. Furthermore, Lu Xun cautioned cartoonists against turning caricature into ‘a tool for personal attacks’. In 1919, the weekly sup-

³⁸² Lu Xun, “A Casual Discussion of ‘Cartoon’”

³⁸³ Lu Xun, “From Satire to Humour”

³⁸⁴ Lu Xun, “What is Satire?”

³⁸⁵ Ibid

plement Poke to Shanghai's Times published several caricatures imitating Western techniques, yet they were 'new in form but unchanged in spirit', becoming tools for personal attacks.

Lu Xun indignantly questioned why cartoonists 'remain so stubborn in thought and so base in character' (Xun, 1981)³⁸⁶. That same year, Poke published cartoons attacking those studying 19th-century art, branding such artists as 'blind in both eyes and mind.' Lu Xun incisively identified this as an act of professional infighting, an assault on new literature and ideas, a manifestation of 'professional jealousy', and the true embodiment of 'blindness of both eyes and mind' ³⁸⁷. Lu Xun advocated that satire should be social in nature, serving to 'expose society's chronic ills' rather than becoming entangled in personal mockery. He asserted that 'insults and threats are no substitute for combat' (Xun, 1981)³⁸⁸. He held greater admiration for the works of German caricaturist Karl Marx and American satirical artist H. H. Beerbohm, noting that both produced anti-war cartoons mocking unjust conflicts with a sense of social justice. Thus he remarked: 'This is what truly constitutes the satirical art of a progressive artist' (Xun, 1981)³⁸⁹.

In 'A Casual Discussion of "Cartoon Art"', Lu Xun extolled the cartoon artistry of Goya and Daumier, asserting that 'cartoonists such as Spain's Francisco de Goya and France's Honoré Daumier remain truly rare indeed' (Xun, 1981)³⁹⁰. The satirical works of Spanish painter Goya³⁹¹ exhibited democratic leanings and a realist style, profoundly exposing societal darkness and satirising aristocratic hypocrisy. His brush brought to life figures such as greedy monks, thieves and robbers, and midwives. His crude yet truthful artistic style won the affection of a broad audience, though it also brought him considerable trouble and even led to various trials. French artist Daumier's³⁹² political satire frequently exposed the darkness of autocratic rule and denounced the hypocrisy of high society. In 1823, Daumier created the political cartoon *Le Grand Gaulon*, depicting a 'Grand Con' with an enormous appetite, an allegorical embodiment of King Louis-Philippe. His voracious maw ceaselessly plundered wealth from the French populace, while at the monarch's feet stood a cohort of ministers awaiting their share of the spoils. The image profoundly exposed the rapacious essence of the July Monarchy. Lu Xun not only praised Goya and Daumier but also introduced their satirical works to artists within groups such as the Yefeng Painting Society for study and reference. He believed their biting satire stood firmly on the side of the people, exposing the dark underbelly of rule and embodying the very spirit of caricature.

5.3.3. Expressive techniques in comics: realism and exaggeration

In 'A Casual Discussion of "Cartoon"', Lu Xun observed: 'The foremost requirement of cartoon is honesty; it must accurately depict the posture of events and characters, that is to say, their spirit'(Xun, 1981)³⁹³. This notion of 'honesty' carries several implications. Firstly, it demands

³⁸⁶ Lu Xun, "Random Thoughts, No. 43"

³⁸⁷ Ibid

³⁸⁸ Lu Xun, "Insults and Threats Are No Substitute for Combat"

³⁸⁹ Lu Xun, "Random Thoughts No. 43"

³⁹⁰ Lu Xun, "A Casual Discussion on 'Cartoon'"

³⁹¹ Francisco de Goya (1742–1828), Spanish painter. Representative works include *The Disasters of War*, *The Royal Family*, *The Naked Maja*, *The Inquisition*, *The Madhouse*, *The Uprising in the Plaza de Mayo*, *The Execution of the Rebels on 3 May*, and *The Girl with the Water Jug*. Etching series *Fantaisies*, and the album *Ridicule and Arrogance*.

³⁹² Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), French caricaturist and oil painter. Major works include *Goncourt*, *Masques*, *Rue de Trensonien*, *The Exiles*, *Third-Class Carriage*, *Monsieur Guiraud*, etc.

³⁹³ Lu Xun, "A Casual Discussion on 'Cartoon'"

authenticity in the subject matter – the truthfulness of the object. For instance, “Snowflakes on Mount Yan as large as mats’ is a factual exaggeration possessing the authenticity of the object’s existence. Yet to claim ‘Snowflakes in Guangzhou as large as mats’ would become a farce”³⁹⁴. Since Guangzhou scarcely sees snow, distorting the subject matter renders it comical, even amounting to fabrication and deception. Secondly, there is the issue of distorting the spirit. Lu Xun once observed: ‘A resident resentful of passers-by relieving themselves opposite his door might paint a turtle on the wall with a few words scrawled beside it. Yet this could never be termed a “cartoon”. Why? Because it bears no relation whatsoever to the physical form or spirit of the depicted subject’³⁹⁵. This so-called ‘spiritual’ distortion hinges on distinguishing satire from mere abuse.

The ‘spirit’ of caricature lies in exposing societal ugliness to illuminate the beautiful and virtuous. Its attitude and stance are paramount: urging improvement requires passion, not tedious abuse. ‘Drawing a turtle’ itself bears no relation to the satirised subject’s form or spirit; what remains is merely turning satire into abuse divorced from life’s reality. Lu Xun observed in *Flowery Literature: Abuse*: ‘If one points at a person and declares, “This is a whore!” – if she is of good family, that is abuse; if she truly earns her living by selling her charms, it is not abuse but stating the truth’(Xun, 1981)³⁹⁶. He further states: ‘While abuse undoubtedly wrongs many good people, the vague suppression of “abuse” shields all manner of scoundrels’³⁹⁷. On the one hand, Lu Xun opposed transforming satire into pointless abuse; on the other, he rejected using the label of ‘abuse’ to stifle the satirical beauty born of life’s truth. Thirdly, the lifeblood of caricature is truth. Only caricature grounded in truth possesses satirical power. In *What Is Satire?*, Lu Xun stated: “The lifeblood of satire is truth; it need not be a past event, but it must be a truth that could occur’ (Xun, 1981)³⁹⁸.

The terms “event” and “truth” both emphasise that the subject of the drawing must possess objective reality. In Lu Xun’s discourse, the imagery of caricature derives from the truth of real life, encompassing both the truth of detailed form and the truth of typical form. This authenticity is neither accidental nor rare, but rather ‘openly visible and commonplace, things that no one finds remarkable in daily life’, representing a universal social truth³⁹⁹. Lu Xun further emphasised: “In truth, so-called satirical works today are largely realistic; without realism, they cannot become what is termed “satire”. any so-called satirical work that is not realistic, even if such a thing could exist, would amount to nothing more than rumour-mongering and slander” (Xun, 1981)⁴⁰⁰. What is emphasised here is that any cartoon work possessing satirical qualities must, for the most part, contain a degree of authenticity; otherwise, it is mere rumour-mongering and slander.

In *A History of Western Caricature*, the Englishman Bohan Lynch (2011) introduced several descriptions of caricature’s exaggerated nature: Dr Johnson termed it ‘a drawing which employs exaggeration to express resemblance’; Murray defined caricature as ‘pictures conveying the grotesque and the ridiculous by exaggerating the obvious features and characteristics of persons or things’, maintaining that ‘caricature is a portrait or other artistic representation which, through the use of exaggeration, renders the subject’s features in a manner producing a comic effect’. Walker and

³⁹⁴ Ibid

³⁹⁵ Ibid

³⁹⁶ Lu Xun, “Trivial Literature: Insults”

³⁹⁷ Ibid

³⁹⁸ Lu Xun, “What Is Satire?”

³⁹⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰⁰ Lu Xun: “On ‘Satire’”

Webster, meanwhile, note that caricature constitutes 'a form of representation imbued with comic significance'. In essence, all these perspectives underscore the pivotal role of 'exaggeration' in caricature creation. Lu Xun similarly emphasised the 'exaggeration' characteristic of caricature.

In *A Casual Discussion of "Caricature"*, he stated: 'While exaggerating the features of an event or person certainly makes caricature more effective, exaggerating non-distinctive features proves even more potent.' Here, 'exaggeration' refers to the act of overstating or magnifying. Concurrently, he maintained that such exaggeration must be grounded in truth, rationally exposing the ugly 'reality' to achieve the intended satirical effect. For instance, he observed: 'A short, stout figure or a tall, thin one inherently possesses comic qualities. Add to this a bald head, short-sightedness, or exaggerate the stoutness or thinness further, and one can invariably provoke laughter from the reader' (Xun, 1981)⁴⁰¹. Such judicious exaggeration readily highlights the subject's superficial traits, yielding the intended satirical effect. Conversely, satirising a fair-skinned, slender beauty by depicting her as 'a skeleton or fox' merely exposes the artist's incompetence.

The outcome differs when employing the 'magnifying mirror': 'The magnifying mirror revealed her powdered arm, exposing the wrinkles in her skin, and within these folds, the black and white strokes of powder and dirt.' Thus the cartoon sketch succeeded, yet this was truth. If you doubt it, everyone – or you yourself – may try examining it with a magnifying glass'⁴⁰². This example merely illustrates that exaggeration through the magnifying glass must be grounded in reality. 'Cartoons must be instantly comprehensible, so the most common method is "exaggeration" – but not mere nonsense'⁴⁰³.

Moreover, Lu Xun believed exaggeration should be moderate, opposing excessive embellishment. The woodcut artist Bai Wei once recalled Lu Xun's guidance to him: 'When carving figures, they should resemble Chinese people; there is no need for excessive exaggeration. Art requires exaggeration, but when exaggeration is taken too far, it becomes hollow' (Wei, 1956). This example illustrates Lu Xun's advocacy for measured exaggeration. He had pointed out that excessive emphasis on ugliness constitutes works of 'excessive ugliness,' which often veer towards the opposite of their intended subject, becoming hollow and devoid of substance – a cautionary principle worthy of heed. This perspective coincides with the ideas of Francis Gros on caricature. In his 1788 work *The Rules of Caricature*, Grosse cautioned that 'the caricaturist ought to be careful to avoid exaggerating the features of his subject to excess, lest his caricature become grotesque rather than humorous, failing to rouse thought from laughter' (Linqi, 2011). He further distinguished within caricature's artistry between 'elegant ugliness' and 'vulgar ugliness' in exaggeration, stating that 'the former is positive or substantial, while the latter is negative or deficient' (Linqi, 2011). Whether considering the reflections of François Grosse or Lu Xun, their contemplations on the measured exaggeration in caricature present a subject worthy of our profound consideration.

⁴⁰¹ Lu Xun, "A Casual Discussion on 'Cartoon'"

⁴⁰² Ibid

⁴⁰³ Ibid

Conclusion

In contrast, Lu Xun's "incorporating" approach offers exceptionally rich insights, encompassing both the recognition of modern resources within contemporary China and the selective adoption of new Western intellectual resources. Like a mirror, Lu Xun's "incorporating" approach – embodying the contemplation, choices, and actions during modern China's journey towards modernisation – represents not only a spiritual trajectory for a new breed of intellectuals, but also a historical blueprint and practice of modern China's quest for "modernity". It not only encapsulates the central thread of China's modern cultural renaissance but also constitutes a cultural framework through which China establishes its identity within the globalisation process. Even today, as we confront similar crossroads in the convergence of Chinese and foreign cultures, though our reflections differ with the times, Lu Xun's principles, stance, vision, and experience within his 'incorporating' continue to offer valuable reference points for China's cultural development as we grapple with globalisation challenges.

This monograph explores Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art through the following approaches: firstly, it analyses the origins, essence, stance, attitude, efficacy and value of Lu Xun's "incorporating" philosophy; secondly, it attributes Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art to the "demands" of intellectual enlightenment, providing a detailed analysis of the reasons, propositions and methods behind these demands; Thirdly, it discusses the 'incorporating approach' from the perspective of Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art, encompassing the concepts, methods, and content of "incorporating" foreign art. This demonstrates that the "incorporating approach" is not mere replication but must be grounded in one's own historical and contemporary context, originating from the deepest core of national subjectivity. It must be transformed into an organic element within the world of China's modern cultural subjectivity. Fourthly, Lu Xun's late-period art essays are summarised as practical applications of "incorporating," with specific analyses conducted across three dimensions: criticism of woodcut creation, illustration criticism, and cartoon criticism. This approach opens a pertinent and innovative angle for discourse.

Indeed, Lu Xun's singularity lies in the profound entanglement of his life with the trajectory of modern Chinese civilisation. Like a mine shaft, the exploration of Lu Xun's "incorporating" philosophy undoubtedly holds significant importance for clarifying and understanding the intellectual resources of modernisation in contemporary China. Herein lies the problem, and here too the difficulty arises. On the one hand, Lu Xun engaged with a remarkably diverse array of foreign resources, encompassing texts in Japanese, German, French, English, Russian, and other languages; his intellectual and practical activities involved numerous individuals and events, and his own writings are voluminous. On the other hand, the field of Lu Xun studies boasts a vast scholarly community and a rich body of research. Merely digesting the existing scholarship is no easy task, let alone formulating new questions. Whilst this monograph provides a detailed analysis of Lu Xun's practice in introducing foreign art, its achievements remain limited, with numerous issues requiring further elaboration. Firstly, there is the matter of materials.

This study relies on published sources, which, whilst sufficient to underpin its fundamental arguments, necessitate continued effort to analyse Lu Xun's extensive collection of books and paintings, his foreign-language publications, and overseas academic research. Secondly, while the author has endeavoured to clarify Lu Xun's "borrowing" philosophy, meticulously examine

his writings on culture, literature and art, summarise the artistic ideas he introduced, and catalogue his achievements in art dissemination and criticism, further exploration remains necessary in conjunction with current intellectual and literary scholarship. Moreover, several aspects of Lu Xun's reception history of foreign art remain under-explored. For instance, while this monograph addresses his recognition and understanding of modernist painting, analysing his receptive stance and position, further discussion could incorporate the diverse Japanese and German art history texts he acquired. This includes his translations of works such as *The Tide of Modern Art History*, *Expressionism*, **The Various Aspects of Expressionism**, and **The Revolution in Art and the Art of Revolution**, alongside his critiques of contemporary domestic artistic creation. Furthermore, it could be examined in relation to the state of art translation and introduction within China at the time, thereby illuminating its influence and significance. Moreover, Lu Xun himself stated that 'adopting the sound principles of foreign countries' and 'selecting the heritage of China' – these 'two wings' – when fused, could generate new vitality, 'enabling future works to break new ground.' Discussions centred on Lu Xun's introduction of foreign art and the 'adoption of old forms' in traditional Chinese art, exploring the connections and comparisons between the two, could form an independent chapter and constitute another research topic for further in-depth study in this monograph.

Appendix

Rereading Lu Xun and Reconstructing the Perspective of Art Criticism

Interview: Yang Jieyu and Chen Guohui

Yang Jieyu (PhD candidate in Film History at Peking University, hereafter referred to as ‘Yang’): As is widely acknowledged, Lu Xun stands as a pivotal literary figure and thinker in modern China, with scholarly works on him numbering in the thousands. I recently learnt that your doctoral thesis will focus on Lu Xun, specifically exploring his role in introducing foreign art to China. What motivated you to select this particular topic? Might you share some insights gained during your research process?

Chen Guohui (hereafter referred to as ‘Chen’): I have always held a deep interest in Lu Xun. Not only was he a renowned literary figure and thinker, but he also achieved remarkable accomplishments in the field of fine arts. For instance, he played a pivotal personal role in introducing Western art and guiding the development of China’s emerging woodcut movement. Throughout my reflections on contemporary art theory and my practice of art criticism, Lu Xun remains the modern Chinese writer I constantly bear in mind. Why has Lu Xun exerted such a profound influence on me? I believe there are two primary dimensions: firstly, re-examining Lu Xun within the framework of international modernism to explore why he introduced foreign art, how he did so, and what selections he made during this process. This inevitably involves examining how Lu Xun approached the artistic heritage of past and present, East and West, within the context of international modernism. Secondly, through Lu Xun’s artistic philosophy, I re-examine the value orientations of contemporary Chinese art, the politics of artistic language, the ontology of art, and the question of art’s boundaries.

This further leads to discussions on “contemporaneity” and the reactivation of the category of “art criticism”. Simply put, Lu Xun’s approach to thinking about and problematising art forms the starting point of my research interests. During Lu Xun’s era, China witnessed the emergence of diverse artistic currents – radicalism, eclecticism, conservatism, and gradual reformism. Internationally, this coincided with the turbulent rise of modernist art and the vigorous development of international leftist art movements. How Lu Xun perceived these various artistic currents and made his own choices presents a relatively intriguing topic. This holds significance not only for art history but, more crucially, offers insights and prompts reflection. Though times have changed, we still confront similar questions today: how to engage with artistic traditions and how to integrate into the international art scene. Lu Xun’s artistic thought and practice retain value for reference and reflection; they effectively internalise the issues of modernity in Chinese art and modernism as we understand them today, holding significant importance for ‘reconstructing the perspective of art criticism’. Naturally, in this research, I do not seek to re-canonise Lu Xun, nor to re-establish him as some enlightenment-era authority or standard for ‘art discourse’ or ‘artistic thought’. My inquiry and interest lie in discovering within Lu Xun’s work a foundational element of art criticism, thereby elevating our contemporary thought and critical activity to a height of cultural and aesthetic self-awareness.

Yang: The origins of China's new culture lie in the May Fourth Movement. Whether in literature, film, or the visual arts, as successful cultural practices that established fundamental frameworks, it offers abundant spiritual and cultural resources for utilisation and regeneration. It must inevitably serve as the point of departure and return for our thoughts and emotions. However, I feel that when we discuss May Fourth or Lu Xun, we often essentialise the issue, reducing May Fourth to a singular entity. In reality, the circumstances surrounding the utilisation of this resource are highly complex. Some seek in the May Fourth Movement the intellectual resources for freedom and democracy; others find within it the resources for reflecting on modernity, drawing from Lu Xun's ambivalent stance towards modernity; still others uncover resources for critiquing capitalism. Thus, the May Fourth Movement is a highly complex "resource repository", possessing far more than a single, simplistic facet. Similarly, Lu Xun himself represents a profoundly complex "resource repository". Lu Xun scholars of the 1980s often found themselves compelled to seek moral, psychological, and spiritual intellectual resources from Lu Xun – that is, to find a Lu Xun superior and more reliable than ourselves. Today, however, we must employ our own critical and theoretical language to re-establish the relationship between art, criticism, and politics through a renewed reading of Lu Xun's texts. The purpose of this endeavour is ultimately to return to ourselves. Only by starting from ourselves can we conceive a new notion of 'Lu Xun'.

Chen: Yes, I concur with your perspective. I have a profound realisation that research into Lu Xun's artistic activities and aesthetic philosophy has once again opened up space for us to redefine the concept of modern art. This encompasses not only debates within modern art itself, but also concerns the relationship between modern art and tradition, as well as the relationship between Chinese modern art and Western and Japanese art. For instance, regarding how to define "fine art", Lu Xun was one of the earliest pioneers to introduce foreign concepts of art. He believed art possessed both an aesthetic, non-utilitarian aspect and an aesthetic, utilitarian aspect, arguing that art could express culture, support morality, and rescue the economy. His vision for China's new art demanded that 'progressive thought' and 'noble character' serve as benchmarks, elevating the 'ideas' and "character" within artistic works to paramount importance. Such questions represent foundational issues in the origins of Chinese modern art. Yet, if we approach the subject solely through contemporary ideological definitions of 'modern art,' we often fail to engage with these primordial concerns.

Yang: Though you speak of Lu Xun, there appears to be a clear direction – that of constructing an ontology for modern art and addressing the origins of related art criticism discourse. Yet a significant question arises: how does your research methodology integrate specific issues into their historical context?

Chen: The historian Collingwood once remarked that all history is contemporary history, implying that all historical questions unfold between history and the present. Why study Lu Xun? Personally, I find myself rather weary of the unread, hollow, bombastic, impressionistic, even amateurish approaches prevalent in contemporary art criticism. Some remain mired in experiential art criticism writing; others appropriate new terms and concepts from Western academia without digestion, perpetually reinventing their critical styles. Admittedly, I myself once traversed such a writing phase before consciously choosing the path of 'history,' hoping to rediscover problems amidst concrete materials and within a broader historical context, thereby restarting thoughtful

and critical research. Returning to the question of Lu Xun, I find in him at least the inspiration for an art criticism philosophy centred on ‘art for life’: during the 1920s and 1930s, China’s literary and artistic circles were dominated by two starkly contrasting perspectives – ‘art for art’s sake’ versus ‘art for life’s sake’. ‘Art for art’s sake’ was an imported artistic proposition.

In 1818, the French philosopher Cousin employed this famous assertion in his lectures, and it later became a popular expression of the European Aestheticism movement. ‘Art for art’s sake’ emphasised the spirit of artistic independence and its negating stance, emerging from the process of artistic autonomy; its aesthetic principles encompass concepts such as the non-utilitarian nature of art, artistic independence, and the separation of art from life. ‘Art for Life’ represents a literary and artistic stance with realist creative tendencies that emerged since the May Fourth New Culture Movement. In 1921, the Literary Research Society pioneered the ‘Art for Life’ proposition, opposing purely artistic literature and emphasising that literature’s subject is life itself, which it must reflect; ‘Literature is the expression of life, the critique of life; thus the essence of literature is life itself’ – such artistic concepts underscore the social functionality of literary and artistic endeavours. Throughout Lu Xun’s art criticism, two diametrically opposed perspectives coexisted and intertwined: the theory of artistic autonomy, emphasising ‘the usefulness of the useless,’ and the theory of artistic utility, highlighting ‘the unexpected usefulness.’ He sought to synthesise these divergent perspectives to foster artistic creations that could fulfil both social utility and aesthetic value. This principle of artistic creation, which ‘concerns itself with life while remaining true to art,’ embodies a profound commitment to engaging with reality. Lu Xun’s critical philosophy may be summarised as an ‘art for life’ perspective.

On one hand, it emphasises art’s role in ‘expressing individuality and elevating the spirit,’ championing the freedom of personal expression as an embodiment of the ‘human-centred’ philosophy. On the other, it stresses art’s aesthetic functionality in serving life, reflecting Lu Xun’s stance towards real-world existence. Contrary to the notion of ‘art for the sake of life,’ Lu Xun never relinquished his pursuit of aesthetic value in artistic works. Even during the most intense periods of socio-political struggle, he resolutely rejected the instrumentalisation of art. In simpler terms, Lu Xun emphasised that while art should possess individuality, it must also embody a universal spirit of the masses. This constitutes a profoundly valuable topic, offering significant insights for contemporary approaches to contemplating artistic creation within a globalised context. For me, revisiting Lu Xun represents an exploration of the possibilities inherent in criticism.

This constitutes an action – not merely a theoretical inquiry or discussion of critical methods – but also involves a very classical question of judgement, encompassing aesthetic and value judgements in the broadest sense: addressing what constitutes good and bad, good and evil, beauty and ugliness. The current state of Chinese art is chaotic and diverse, with a severe lack of humanistic values. Value judgements concerning good and bad, good and evil, beauty and ugliness are the root of all problems. Naturally, I do not intend to pass judgement on the state of China’s contemporary art world. Rather, my aim is to construct a personal, distinctive discourse, stance, and methodology for art criticism within a century-long historical context. Drawing upon Lu Xun’s art criticism texts, I seek to open up multiple formal, historical, and philosophical spaces, posing illuminating questions for contemporary Chinese art criticism across the dimensions of history and reality, politics and aesthetics, the individual and the masses.

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