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Lu Run and Modern China

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Abstract

As a giant of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun wrote prolifically addressing the social issues in progress. Especially, his work reflects a spirit that makes an impossible summit. Widely acknowledged, Lu Xun's thoughts are regarded as a new direction of "New Chinese Culture" of the time he lived-a time of wars, invasion, colonialism, political instability, social conflicts, poverty in a rural area, and a lost generation. For Lu Xun, a society's development can be maintained not only in its materials but also in its spirit, culture, civilization, and rules, which is the case both in the 1910s and 1990s

Keywords: Lu Run, Modern China

1 Introduction

Lu Xun was the pen name of Zhou Shuren (25 September 1881 – 19 October 1936), a Chinese writer, essayist, poet, and literary critic. He was a leading figure of modern Chinese literature. Writing in Vernacular Chinese and Classical Chinese, he was a short story writer, editor, translator, literary critic, essayist, poet, and designer. In the 1930s, he became the titular head of the League of Left-Wing Writers in Shanghai.



Figure 1 Lu Xun⁹(Open Source)

Lu Xun was born into a family of landlords and government officials in Shaoxing, Zhejiang; the family's financial resources declined over the course of his youth. Lu aspired to take the imperial civil service exam, but due to his family's relative poverty he was forced to attend government-funded schools teaching "Western education." Upon graduation, Lu went to medical school in Japan but later dropped out. He became interested in studying literature but was eventually forced to return to China because of his family's lack of funds. After returning to China, Lu worked for several years teaching at

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local secondary schools and colleges before finally finding a job at the Republic of China Ministry of Education. After the 1919 May Fourth Movement, Lu Xun's writing began to exert a substantial influence on Chinese literature and popular culture. Like many leaders of the May Fourth Movement, he was primarily a leftist. He was highly acclaimed by the Chinese government after 1949, when the People's Republic of China was founded, and Mao Zedong himself was a lifelong admirer of Lu Xun's writing. Though sympathetic to socialist ideals, Lu Xun never joined the Communist Party of China.

In modern China, significant changes happened. Especially in the last decades of the last century, China witnessed serious changes inside and outside the nation. What role do Lu Xun's thoughts play in the new progression of Chinese culture and social reformation? What can Lu Xun's views bring to the new generation to address the contemporary issues and trends of a New Millennium? To answer these questions, we need to expand our scope beyond literature to social, cultural, and ideological dimensions.

2 Literature Review

Let us have a look at Lu Xun's writings first. In his paper *How I Started Writing Novels*, Lu Xun says that he started his dream of being a novelist under the direction of "Enlightenment." For Lu Xun, writing is to change lives and to improve the future of destiny. He started his writing career for the end of his countrymen. In that case, he revealed the conflicts of the social classes and was significantly concerned about the people's life and the crisis of the nation (Kowallis, 1996). I have to point out that a key theme in Lu Xun's literature is his locus of life, in reality, the survival of the people and human development. In his article *A letter for Trotsky*, he shows his pride in Chinese communism in leading the people for a better way of surviving the hard life of that time. This is to say, if we look into the relationship between Lu Xun and contemporary China, we can never ignore his connection with the Chinese communist movement and his fighting for the weak part or class of Chinese society- the labor force, the farmers, and the working class. In the last decade of the 20th century, social reform has been pushed through steadily under the new leadership of the Chinese communist party. With the uprising of the private economy, we observed the expanded property division, the rich and the poor. After a golden decade of the 1980s, the new China under Deng Xiao Ping's "open door policy" is driving fast to more developed states. However, for Deng Xiao Ping, it should allow some people or areas to develop first, which would, in turn, drag the poorer counterparts to catch up. In this scenario, the last decade of 20 century in China witnessed a wider division between the rich and the poor. Social conflicts and hostility were inevitable (Kowallis, 1996). With the reconstruction of the industrial structure, many factories were closed, causing a significant number of workers jobless (early retirement so-called).

3 Some Thoughts on Lu Xun's Works

Lu Xun's work reflects his position to be with the underprivileged people rather than the elite. The dark side of life of those unemployed during a particular time, reflecting the inevitable victims of social reform. If Lu Xun were living at this time, he would write addressing these people's misfortune and misery (Kowallis, 1996). Throughout his writing, Lu Xun also represents the mass. He lauds the bravery and intelligence of the familiar figures. In the last decade of the 20th century, China experienced a unique period of national development and social conflict. In a particular period of national growth, emptiness and void also spread widely among the people. Lu Xun's approach is focused on the grass-root of the society and addresses how they feel and struggle to fight against the status of getting "lost behind."

To look for the dialog between Lu Xun and modern China, I should mention his "harmonious cultural resource" thinking based on social fairness and justice. This is a perspective on the attitude towards cultural traditions. During his life, Lu Xun has actively called for social justice and fairness. Since his youth, he promoted his idea of building a "people's nation" (人国). Later on, he called the young generation to establish an unprecedented 3rd Era (第三样时代) in Chinese history. Such thoughts are consistent with the contemporary idea of building up a new "harmonious society." Lu Xun deeply concerns with those who live at the bottom of society. He critiques the bureaucratic system, which values the official rank of a person and brings a modern stereotype of "slavery." In his famous novel *Hometown*, he laments the "barrier" among the people, which was "thick" and destructive. He hopes that the next generation people are more united "一气." They should enjoy a new type of life, which was never experienced by the older generation. Lu Xun expresses his aspiration for a harmonious society based on unique human relationships and social life mode.

Lu Xun's thoughts of harmonious society can be further extended to address the relationship between humans and nature. The last decade of the 20th century in China witnessed colossal damage to natural resources and the environment. During to fast industrial development, especially in urban areas, and a lack of advanced technology, China was rather polluted. Take my hometown Shanghai, for example; Su Zhou River was turned entirely black with a disgusting smell because of polluting chemicals. Lu Xun has been profoundly concerning the harmonious relationship between humans and the environment. The idea of desertification and lack of water resources is not unfamiliar in his writing. In his article *Evolution and Devolution*, he argues that the expansion of desert southward in China will threaten the nutrient supply of the whole nation, and towards the end, will lead the country to a doomed future if this issue is not well addressed by the authority. At the same time, Lu Xun feverishly calls for the attention of the importance of the water resource and forestry to human society. He argues that if the tress is all cut down, the rivers and lakes will disappear one day. In that case, soon, every drop of water will be as valuable as blood. In his time, he fought with the then Guo Ming Tang party, which was highly corrupted and anti-revolutionary. In modern times, I believe he would also call for attention from the communist party if it also committed a similar mistake like what its rivalry party did 60 years ago. In this case, I would say Lu Xun is a writer who belongs to all times and way beyond his own era. His thoughts carry significance which is highly relevant to modern times as well. His national harmonious culture resource thought is comparable to that of Confucius regarding its social value and contemporary relevance.

4 Lu Xun and Modernism

Lu Xun, as a writer, highly cares about the urbanization movement in China. With the uprising of capitalism under the governance of the Guo Ming Tang party, the economy in rural China was broken down. Accompanying this is the blossoming urbanization movement. People flood to such major cities as Shanghai, Nanjing, and Beijing for better opportunities. In one sense, the ongoing urban training in China during the last decade of the 20th century continued this trend starting 80 years ago. In such a milieu, Lu Xun is a pioneer in spearheading the urban cultural movement. We can see clearly from the transition of social background from "rural areas" to "cities" in his writing. His early period writing (primarily novels) was written based on his downtown-Shaoxing, Zhe Jiang province. At the same time, his later works (mainly essays) were more oriented towards urban backdrop, especially his second hometown-Shanghai. If I were allowed to speak out of the box, I should point out that Lu Xun's professional career life was as colorful as his work. He has served in several universities as a professor and administrator and garnered diversified experience in higher education management in rural areas and mega-cities. His papers on college culture have been calling more and more attention these years in China. I can mention his papers-My thoughts on Beijing University, Some words for Zhong Shan University Inauguration Ceremony, Letters on Two Cities. etc. Though, for most people, Lu Xun, the writer, is far more well-known than Lu Xun, the administrator, and educator. However, we should never neglect his idea of urbanization and its corresponding new cultural development in old and new times. Lu Xun is a culturalist that leads the unique national cultural development, whether it is in the 1910s or 1990s. For him, culture is a way of forging a nation's identity. And education plays an essential role in the whole process of rebuilding a new government after suffering from foreign invasion militarily, economically, and culturally.

The modern times bring new tastes in its arts also. The new last decade last century also see recent trends in its pop culture. The singers from Hongkong and Taiwan, like Xiao Hu Dui, Zhang Guo Rong. Etc aroused great attention from youngsters in mainland China. If Lu Xun were here with us at that time, I would say such a cultural phenomenon could not escape his critique and attention. Sixty years ago, Lu Xun talked about Bei Jing opera artist Mei Lan Fang (Davies, 1992). Though he satirized his anti-gender performance (male performing female role), his concern was to address the aesthetic direction of the nation in general. For him, what kind of culture should be promoted is a question that leads a government to a significant step forward. It reflects the psycho of the mass and the spirit of the nation. So the Hongkong or Taiwan widespread cultural invasion in the late 1990s would call his attention, which concerns greatly about the loss of the nation's characteristic in such a cultural invasion and transformation (Jameson, 1986).

Lastly, the negative side of social values coming from a fast social change would also touch Lu Xun's nerves, who stressed the integrity of both individuals and society (Davies, 1992). Social development can be a double-edged sword-it can bring about great materialistic satisfaction while also cost its morality decomposition. The 1990s in China witnessed a distorted life value and world view in some members. A lack of credibility and moral breakdown characterized Chinese society to some extent. As a great moralist, Lu Xun emphasizes the importance of moral integrity for the nation-building-up. A sound organization can only come from individuals with independent, steadfast, and firm characteristics. However, such a trait can only be based on an attitude of self-reflection. Lu Xun asks people to be continuously alert to moral changes. He says a man should both critique others and himself. Only under such consideration, a society can realize what goes wrong in its value system and put itself on the right track. Or else, its progress can not be sustainable. Lu Xun acknowledges that such self-criticism is not an easy task for everyone. In his essay Remembering Mr. Liu He Zheng, he says that it is rather complex for one to face his pale life and dripping blood. However, only such a spirit of self-critiquing can prompt the nation's progress on the right track and avoid distortion in the society's value system. For Lu Xun, a society's development can be maintained not only in its materials but also in its spirit, culture, civilization, and rules, which is the case both in the 1910s and 1990s.

Appendix

Lu Xun's Main Works

1. Short stories

- Nostalgia (1909)
- A Madman's Diary (1918)
- Kong Yiji (1918)
- Medicine (1919)
- Tomorrow (1920)
- An Incident (1920)
- The Story of Hair (1920)
- A Storm in a Teacup (1920)
- Hometown (1921)
- The True Story of Ah Q (1921)
- The Double Fifth Festival (1922)
- The White Light (1922)
- The Rabbits and the Cat (1922)
- The Comedy of the Ducks (1922)
- Village Opera (1922)
- New Year Sacrifice (1924)
- In the Drinking House (1924)
- A Happy Family (1924)

Soap (1924)
The Eternal Flame (1924)
Public Exhibition (1925)
Old Mr. Gao (1925)
The Misanthrope (1925)
Sadness
Brothers
Divorce (1925)
Mending Heaven (1935)
The Flight to the Moon (1926)
Curbing the Flood (1935)
Gathering Vetch (1935)
Forging the Swords (1926)
Leaving the Pass (1935)
Opposing Aggression (1934)
Resurrect the Dead (1935)

2. Essays

"My Views on Chastity" (1918)
"What Is Required to Be a Father Today" (1919)
"Knowledge Is a Crime" (1919)
"My Moustache" (1924)
"Thoughts Before the Mirror" (1925)
"On Deferring Fair Play" (1925)

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