

Song court. The work emphasizes that the structure and form of official buildings were of great concern to officials in Song China and beyond, and that the terminology was part and parcel of Song culture. Having provided a means to understand the *Ying-zao fashi* in new ways, the volume is certain to spark renewed interest in this critical text as a source of insight into the architectural imagination of pre-modern China.

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*Memory, Violence, Queues: Lu Xun Interprets China.* By Eva Shan Chou. Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, 2012. Asia Past & Present: New Research from AAS, Number 9. Pp. viii + 333. \$25.00.

Anyone embarking on reading this book will soon realize the immensity and complexity of the secondary literature on Lu Xun (1881–1936), most of it produced since 1950, and still ongoing. In scale it is as if the whole of the literature on Shakespeare published worldwide over four centuries is compressed in six decades of literature on a Chinese author. Lu Xun exerted his influence as a writer of groundbreaking fiction and as an essayist-cum-journalist. If one looks for a twentieth-century counterpart to him in British culture, George Orwell comes to mind. Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984* have much greater scope and lasting relevance than Lu Xun's fiction, and do continue to be noticed and admired, along with some of his essays, but the attention devoted to him is in no way comparable.

The most obvious cause of the difference is the state sponsored Lu Xun cult in force roughly from 1950 to 1980, visually made concrete in museums set up wherever he stayed any length of time, and the subsequent wave of reappraisals which followed the lifting of the halo from his brow. In this second life after death the main focus has shifted from mythmaking about his public life and works to fascination with his private life and personality. In contrast to Shakespeare, about whom there is little to be turned up in the latter regard, masses of new documentation relating to Lu Xun's private life have been able to be gathered. Any fresh study of him therefore requires a vast amount of reading not only of his works but now of his biography. Eva Shan Chou (hereafter abbreviated as "ESC"), having done her reading, concentrates on his inner life.

Clearly there is rich soil to be turned there, because Lu Xun's life was epoch-spanning. His first thirty years passed under the Qing empire; afterwards came the

first president of the republic who attempted to become monarch, a 17-day restoration of the last Qing emperor in 1917, warlords who partitioned the country, the rule of the Guomindang under Chiang Kai-shek, and the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party. He himself went from son of a crumbling gentry family in the backwater southern city of Shaoxing 紹興 to a military cadet in Nanjing, on to a student in Japan, a schoolteacher back home, a civil servant in Beijing, a university teacher in Xiamen and Guangdong, and finally a writer, publisher and public intellectual in the international city of Shanghai, all in fifty-five years. He began to publish his views in student magazines, fired as young people are with the ambition to change the world, fell silent for a decade on his return to China, and found his voice again with the New Culture Movement initiated in 1918, rapidly becoming a prominent actor on the national stage. In this last phase he publicly revealed intimacies of experiences and emotions, including publishing a collection of letters exchanged with his young lover. Painful memories and personal grudges came out, some surprisingly frankly expressed, but inevitably some were transformed and others entirely hidden from public view. Essentially the story he told about himself was that of a soul journey, or more exactly various and somewhat varied fragments of the same soul journey. ESC takes on the task of binding fragments together to make certain wholes. Her preparation for it has been extremely thorough and complete, and her treatment of her sources faultlessly fair: she is bound by no doctrine, pays no dues to academic fashion, seeks only truthfulness. However, the particular truths she endeavours to find, let it be said, are by their nature hard to pin down.

Her webs are spun so fine that they can wrap round only one episode or theme in a decade: one from 1903, one from 1920–22, and one from 1931, though a thread that dangles from the first strings them all together. That is not to say the broad context is neglected: the before, after and intervening facts of life and work are efficiently summarized. At the heart of the selected episodes are poems and stories: a poem from 1903 (never published in his lifetime); a group of short stories from 1920–22; and one poem from 1931 (published two years later). The angle from which she approaches them is explained thus on p. 40:

Each chapter aims to obtain insights into the author's manner of thinking and writing, which is based in that moment but has far-reaching implications. To do so, the analysis focuses on the space where the writing intersects its contexts, which are a mix of political, personal, cultural, and ideological forces as they act on the author. It probes for what the works of the imagination chosen in each chapter can reveal about its author, especially what they can reveal is not otherwise knowable, to bring out features of his thought and psychology that are not otherwise accessible. The approach is akin to taking a core

sample in order to obtain a cross section of information that penetrates to some depth. It is from this complex of imponderables that his interpretations of China emerge.

So let us turn to the first exhibit. Given its central role in this book, it has to be considered in detail. The “1903 poem” was a private effusion composed most probably in that year, that is to say in the second year of Lu Xun’s study at the Kobun College 弘文学院 in Tokyo. The hinterland to the poem was the nationalistic ferment that swept through the Chinese student body in Japan on publication of Zou Rong’s 鄒容 impassioned pamphlet *Revolutionary Army* 革命軍 which openly called for throwing off the Manchu yoke, and set a torch to the ideas of liberty and democracy that had accumulated from students’ reading about foreign countries; more immediately there was the patriotic call to join a volunteer army to resist Russian encroachment on the northern provinces of China. The poem reads like this:

靈臺無計逃神矢  
風雨如磐闇故園  
寄意寒星荃不察  
我在我血薦軒轅

The meaning of the poem is clouded by being couched in the language of the *Chu ci* 楚辭, the visionary songs of the south of the fourth century B.C., of which Lu Xun was very fond. Only two lines are relatively clear, the second line being, word for word: “Storms like heavy boulders darken the homeland,” and the fourth: “I offer up my blood to the Yellow Emperor”—the Yellow Emperor being the founder of the Chinese nation (and pointedly not of the Manchu nation). Together they picture a man living in foreign parts troubled by calamity threatening his fatherland and resolving to give up his life to save it. Their spirit is consistent with that of Zou Rong’s *Revolutionary Army* and Lu Xun’s own article, “The soul of Sparta” 斯巴達之魂 (published July 1903) eulogizing in the same heightened rhetoric as Zou Rong’s the sacrifice of a noble band of Spartan soldiers attempting to hold back the Persian hordes.

It is the first and third lines that are problematic. A close translation would be, “My heart has no stratagem to escape the divine arrows” and “I entrust my thoughts to a cold star / the cold stars but my overlord takes no notice.” What “divine arrows” are those? As ESC notes, the only entry for that compound in the *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典 cites this very poem—no precedent can be found. The dictionary explains it as Cupid’s arrows, and most scholars agree. That explanation is supported by the fact that Lu Xun was known to be interested in Greek myths at the time. But to him Cupid’s arrows were not necessarily “that which knitteth souls and prospers love”

(according to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*): as he later wrote, that god's arrows were shot at random, and were just as likely to unite incompatible partners, or pierce someone who unhappily never finds a partner. The third line closely matches a line from the *Li sao* 離騷：荃不察余之中情兮 “My overlord disregarded my true feelings.” Apparently the speaker looks to the starry sky to carry his thoughts across the sea, but there is no indication what those thoughts are, or who the overlord is.

Now a previously orthodox interpretation published by Ni Moyan 倪墨炎 in 1977 has it that the divine arrows commit the poet to love of country, which he admits only reluctantly because the patriotic revolution it would necessarily entail would bring widespread loss of life. Ni glosses the third line as meaning the poet invests his hopes in the Chinese masses, but as yet they are unawakened and passive. In conceiving of the masses as his ultimate “overlord,” Ni contends, Lu Xun was more foreseeing than either the leaders of the bourgeois democratic revolution who saw themselves as heroes and saviours and the masses as ignorant, or Zou Rong whose pamphlet described the masses as benighted and slavish; in contrast he loved and respected them.<sup>1</sup>

This interpretation has the virtue of making a consistent whole of the poem, but the notion of Lu Xun having a “burning love” of the masses at this stage of his life (or ever, if it comes to that) is such arrant nonsense that ESC does not give it the time of day. She wisely puts forward no confident interpretation of her own, but she does accept that the poem is a unified whole, all lines tending in the same direction. Influenced by a parallel with a line in a poem by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 published in 1902, 獻身甘作萬矢的 “I willingly offer my person as the target of ten thousand arrows,” she understands the first line as “My mind has *no wish* to avoid the arrows of the gods,” thus supporting unidirection. She mentions but rejects the disjunctive interpretation that lines 1 and 3 are pulling in opposite directions to lines 2 and 4. Nevertheless it is worth considering.

This alternative reading is based on the knowledge that the private matter weighing most heavily on Lu Xun's mind at the time was his impending arranged marriage to Zhu An 朱安, an old-fashioned girl chosen by his widowed mother. Negotiations had been initiated in 1899, and engagement concluded in 1901. Lu Xun's departure to Japan had put off the marriage ceremony. He was wholly unwilling to take on a wife who would be a burden rather than a helpmeet in the brave new world opening out to him, but his mother, to whom he was obliged to defer, was obdurate. This scenario seems to fit the poem perfectly: Cupid's random arrows had marked an unsuited couple for union, but there was no escape; he now looks from Japan over

<sup>1</sup> Ni Moyan, *Lu Xun jiushi qianshuo* 魯迅舊詩淺說 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe 上海人民出版社, 1977), pp. 39–42.

the sea to his mother (his overlord), but she ignores his protests (indeed he did write to her in a vain attempt to dissuade her); the troubles brewing in the fatherland are serious enough to make him put all that aside and answer the call to arms (possibly even to enlist in the volunteer army formed to repulse the Russian bear).

However, confidence in that reading begins to ebb when ESC broadens the perspective. Into the mix she introduces a photograph (which we will come to shortly), and the fact that Lu Xun copied the poem out at a very fraught time in the early 1930s, when he had put his marriage to Zhu An behind him and was contented with his new partner, the modern young woman Xu Guangping 許廣平. What relevance would lines 1 and 3 have had then? Could only a half of the poem count?

Neither the original nor the later copy of this poem was made known during Lu Xun's lifetime, so he had no occasion to comment on it himself. The text was first provided after his death by Xu Shoushang 許壽裳, his closest friend in Japan, who said it was inscribed on the back of a photograph taken in 1903 (that particular print was later lost); the recopied poem in Lu Xun's own hand only turned up in his effects. The likeness of Lu Xun captured on that photograph sends us off on a new trail: by showing him with his hair cropped short it made the statement that he had cut off his queue. His brother back home in China had received copies of such a photograph in April 1903, and he named it the "short-hair photo"; in that instance no poem was attached. A still extant print, now held by the Beijing Lu Xun Museum, and reproduced in this book, "was the earliest surviving studio photograph in Lu Xun's possession and he preserved it over the years" (p. 59), and is generally thought to be the one in question. Actually it does not matter which of the photographs from 1903–04 was the one presented together with the poem, for they all show him in the cadet-style college uniform with short hair. The question is how closely this "born-again" image is linked to the patriotic poem. And that comes down to what the relinquishment of the queue meant to him.

Insofar as the cutting of the queue signified revolt against Manchu rule, at least up to the twentieth century, by which time the Qing house was losing its grip on its empire, queue cutting was still nominally a capital offence, so it was definitely no light matter. However, for Chinese students in Japan the social pressure was the reverse. Given the humiliating military defeat China had suffered at the hands of the Japanese in 1895, it was not advisable to advertise the fact that you were Chinese. Besides, wearing a queue under the military style cap that went with the student uniform made you look ridiculous: coiling it on top of the head made the cap stick up like "Mount Fuji," and the wearer something like a throw-back, for short hair had been adopted in the early Meiji 明治 period along with Western dress, and had been specifically prescribed for the military precisely because of the uniform cap. So though the Chinese legation staff threatened dire consequences, nothing very much

happened to those students who dispensed with the queue. Certainly Lu Xun's own student status was unaffected, and he later played down the importance of the act.

But that was only the start of the story of the queue. Back home in Shaoxing for the summer vacation in 1903, short hair made him stand out rather than blend in. The false queue he bought in Shanghai was soon detected and derided, while its abandonment provoked catcalls in the street, an experience which he himself later recounted. Ever sensitive to slights and humiliation, this made a lasting impression on the young man. ESC treats at considerable length and with much interesting detail the whole question of queue cutting in both its national and personal dimensions in her Chapter Two; her conclusion is also useful in elaborating her approach:

Over the years, the writer that Lu Xun became seldom returned to the specific topic of the queue, but each time he did, it was strongly charged. If he had never written about the queue after 1903, the reasons to investigate this early moment would be weaker. But he did. The reuse, the reappearance, even the faintness of the queue's trace in the fiction and the essays, all point to a charged topic and both direct our attention to this early moment and lead on to their later surfacing in the chapters that follow. This chapter has focused on two uneasy topics that have been relatively neglected: the queue in a time of transition and our author in this contingent moment. Regarding the queue in transition, the tendency is to look forward, to the moment of its discarding. Yet the years of its drawn-out end, when in stages people began to act on their changed attitudes, are full of interest and complexity. In this chapter, 1902–3 constitutes one of many such transitional periods. When one of the persons concerned is our author in his youth, then we can catch him in a moment when he is both a developing person and a person of his times, in other words, someone who is not exceptional. The resulting picture is not amazing, though it is fuller, but perhaps it is a contribution to Lu Xun studies to make him less singular. (pp. 97–80)

Her next chapter goes on to examine the figuring of the queue motif in three stories: “Storm” 風波, “The true story of Ah Q” 阿 Q 正傳, and “The story of hair” 頭髮的故事. Although those works are described for themselves, the focus is on how they relate to both the broad national scene and also to disturbances in Lu Xun's personal life. In ESC's hands, hair becomes a touchstone for the climate of an age, a core around which she winds her fine filaments. In terms of Lu Xun's standpoint, despite the dramatic proclamation in that 1903 poem, he had been a political bystander in Japan, and more or less a lone wolf in his literary endeavours, all of which had come to nothing. In this later stage he had been propelled to national prominence

as an author and commentator, and felt sure enough to incorporate in his fiction identifiable historical episodes that had impinged upon him personally.

Lu Xun himself gave the lead in positing political events as the background for his works in his preface to his *Self-selected Anthology* 自選集 of 1933, listing the 1911 Revolution, the Second Revolution of 1913, Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 proclaiming himself emperor in 1916, and Zhang Xun 張勳 restoring the last Qing emperor in 1917. The aftermath of the first and the events of the others made him cynical, then dispirited, he says. But, he continues, when the call for a “literary revolution” came in 1918 he decided that despair was “no less a vanity than hope,” so took up the pen, thinking he “might as well utter some shouts in support and encouragement” 我想……也來喊幾聲助助威吧. (Incidentally, his wording here shows that the title *Nahan* 吶喊 which he gave to his first collection of stories should be understood as “battle cries” rather than the customary “call to arms,” since calls to arms cannot be issued by the rank and file, which is how he pictured himself.) Though ESC dutifully notes (p. 130) that here “Lu Xun provides nothing like the personal history and vivid memories that served as an explanation in 1923” (in his preface to *Nahan*), this revision provides ample justification for pursuing links between the stories and those national events.

In one of the three stories in question, “Ah Q,” the pigtail is omnipresent by virtue of the letter chosen by the author for the hero’s name, its shape suggesting a head with a pigtail dangling from it; in “The story of hair” the title reflects the contents; it is rather “Storm” whose relevance to the discussion is debatable. Certainly the occasion of the upset among the simple villagers is the coup of the “Pigtail General” Zhang Xun mentioned above, yet the focus of the story is not on the reality of the threat but on the reactions to the threat of the relatives and neighbours of the pigtail-less boatman Seven Pounds: they are so unthinking, self centred and even theatrically malevolent that they are amusing. Manifestly the story is framed as a satire in the “low mimetic mode.” ESC’s point is that “the success of the satire makes us lose sight of the gravity of Seven Pound’s situation.” She contends that “Lu Xun did not consider Zhang to be just an anachronism. As a military figure, Zhang was for a while a serious force on the national scene with a history of brutality” (p. 136). Thus this story too can be tied in with Lu Xun’s abiding concern with the arbitrary and frequently murderous role of the despotic regimes under which he lived for most of his adult life. She also notes that “the tavern owner’s glee is in fact triumph at the prospect of another’s possible death. In others of Lu Xun’s works, the same features do appear in darker versions” (p. 135).

For the third phase, ESC moves on to the 1930s, with early 1931 as the focal point. This was when 25 communists attending a party meeting in Shanghai were

arrested and subsequently executed. Among them were five young writers, to two of whom Lu Xun was mentor; and of those two he was particular fond of Rou Shi 柔石. Because of his closeness to them Lu Xun took refuge in a Japanese owned hotel, where he stayed for five weeks, and while there he composed a touching lament for them in the form of an eight-line poem. This poem was included in a celebrated essay published two years later, whose title 為了忘卻的記念 ESC translates as “Remembrance in order to forget.” And also while in hiding he wrote out again those lines composed in 1903. The “remembrance” poem is a nocturnal meditation on its author’s present situation; its key line is 忍看朋輩成新鬼 “I cannot bear to see friends become new ghosts,” so its thrust is very clear. But what relevance could the 1903 poem have at that time? After all, Lu Xun confessed embarrassment at the juvenile sentiments of “Sparta,” which was contemporaneous with the poem (p. 96).

ESC puts forward the plausible explanation that this poem served as a kind of stocktaking, prompted by the turn of the lunar year, only now the willingness to sacrifice life is shared by the young writers: “His long-ago ideals are transferred to these young people with a grimly different outcome. The poem is changed from a young man’s manifesto to a tribute by an old man to the new, young men” (p. 154). This would mean that any possible references to his, individual concerns about a marriage being forced on him are annulled, and only the dedication to the good of the nation matters. ESC amplifies: “By connecting the poem to the Five Martyrs, it can be read not as an affirmation of blood and sacrifice but rather as a sorrowful tribute to the sacrifices made” (p. 155).

If we accept that, there is still one more hurdle to get over with the 1903 poem, the fact that he copied it out yet again, this time for a Japanese doctor who had treated his family (Lu Xun always went to Japanese doctors to cure ailments). The inscription reads: 錄三十年前舊作以應岡本先生 “Copying out an old work from thirty years ago in response to Mr Okamoto,” and its date is Dec 9 1932. Presumably Okamoto had first presented a poem to Lu Xun. Considering that Japanese marines had overrun Shanghai’s Chinese City in the early part of the year, it seems an odd choice of poem to present to a Japanese national, albeit an individual to whom he was grateful. ESC follows the suggestion it might have been already written out on that same day to respond to a likewise innocently youthful poem of Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (a much more likely recipient), and was simply on his mind. In any case the resurrection of this 1903 poem proves that it meant a lot to its author, that it stated things about the person he was. And in that regard it justifies ESC effectively making it the foundation stone of her book.

Finally let us turn to ESC’s subtitle, “Lu Xun interprets China.” A passage on p. 169 typifies what she understands by that:



Such is Lu Xun's power over the interpretation of historical events that his commemorative acts, especially the essay "Remembrance," define for historical memory the bloody contest between the Nationalists and Communists that took its toll on both sides among their civilian fighters. We know much about Rou Shi because of the many projects they undertook together and because of all Lu Xun did to commemorate him. Just as his eulogy for Li Hezhen made her the face of the forty-seven deaths in the March 18 Incident, so Rou Shi came to represent all five of the Five Martyrs and the Five Martyrs have in turn obscured the total of twenty-four who died that night. They became the symbol and the shorthand of public interpretations of the 1931 deaths. The common view of the Five Martyrs as a clear, unique tragedy persists beyond the Communist Party's contemporary propaganda reach because of the grief so eloquently expressed in this essay and poem. The personal dimensions of the essay, which might otherwise act as a constraint on such an appropriation, instead propel it further.

Amen to that.

To correctly use that overworked word, this book can be described as a sustained exercise in empathy, an attempt to probe the half-hidden depths of experience that fuelled a prominent writer's creativity, while not allowing sympathy to corrupt objectivity. In Lu Xun, ESC has a good subject. He did not achieve recognition until the age of 37; the word he used most often of his previous state or states is 寂寞, which covers the meanings of lonely, isolated and desolate: so an ineffectual, disappointed man, frustrated in his hopes and ambitions. After he crossed the threshold to fame he was driven to both play up some aspects of that past and play down or conceal others; besides which his consciousness continued thereafter to evolve and expand, changing him and his role in society. I suppose you could say, though she does not put it this way herself, that ESC has sifted through all this complex data to try to get down to the essential Lu Xun. Her book does not have the clear lines of a biography, and she has to resort to inferences and speculation, making tentative and sometimes tenuous connections, so it is not an easy read, but the material is controlled by a sophisticated intelligence, and her language thankfully free of jargon. Lu Xun experts will encounter in it challenges to their settled views, and newcomers will hopefully be intrigued enough to extend their acquaintance with its subject. Which sounds to me like a decidedly positive recommendation.

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