

# Lu Xun and World Literature

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# Contents

List of Figures and Table	vii
Note on Sources	viii
List of Contributors	ix
Preface	xiii
<i>Carlos Rojas</i>	
Introduction: Lu Xun, China, and the World	1
<i>Xiaolu Ma</i>	
<b>Part 1: Lu Xun and the World</b>	
1. Lu Xun, World Poetry, and Poetic Worlding: From Mara Poetry to Revolutionary Literature	19
<i>Pu Wang</i>	
2. The Young Lu Xun and <i>Weltliteratur</i> : The Making of <i>Anthology of Short     Stories from beyond the Border</i>	33
<i>Wendong Cui</i>	
3. Lu Xun's Russian Intertexts and the Dialectics of Optimism and Pessimism	49
<i>Keru Cai</i>	
4. What Happens after a Text Leaves Home? Lu Xun, Ibsen, and Ichiyō	65
<i>Satoru Hashimoto</i>	
5. Guarded Pages, Borderless Books: Lu Xun and the Revolution of the Book in Modern China	83
<i>Xiaoyu Xia</i>	
<b>Part 2: Lu Xun into the World</b>	
6. (Geo)politics of Aesthetics: Transculturation of Lu Xun in Korea	101
<i>Shijung Kim</i>	
7. Belated Reception and Residual Influence: Lu Xun and Spain	117
<i>Carles Prado-Fonts</i>	

8. Penitence, Mercy, and Conversion: Lu Xun as a Topos of World Literature	131
<i>Xiaolu Ma</i>	
9. Ghostwriting the Subalterns: Rereading Ah Q through Wong Bik-wan's <i>Lielaozhuan</i>	146
<i>Wayne C. F. Yeung</i>	
10. "Each of Them Is a Lu Xun": Lu Xun's Virtual Children in Southeast Asia	163
<i>Carlos Rojas</i>	
<b>Part 3: Lu Xun and Worlding</b>	
11. Structure of Suspicion: Body, Time, and the Worlding of Nontranscendence in Lu Xun's and Guo Moruo's Fiction on Laozi	179
<i>Kun Qian</i>	
12. Beyond Oneself: Writing and Effacement in <i>Wild Grass</i> and <i>Morning Blossoms Gathered at Dusk</i>	195
<i>Eileen J. Cheng</i>	
13. The Severe Style: Law, Irony, and the Absolute in Lu Xun	210
<i>Roy Chan</i>	
14. Lu Xun, Nonhumans, and the Critique of Domination	226
<i>Christopher K. Tong</i>	
Postface	239
<i>Carlos Rojas</i>	
Appendix: Chinese Characters of Lu Xun's Names, Pen Names, and Work Titles Cited in This Volume	243
Bibliography	249
Index	279

# Preface

Carlos Rojas

Two of the earliest publications by the author now known as Lu Xun were produced in 1903, shortly after the twenty-two-year-old arrived in Japan with the intent to study medicine. Evidently taking inspiration from Chen Shoupeng and Xue Shaohui's Chinese translation of Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the aspiring medical student tackled two of Verne's earlier science fiction works: *From the Earth to the Moon* and two chapters of *Voyage to the Center of the Earth*.<sup>1</sup> Although Chen and Xue had retranslated *Around the World in Eighty Days* from an English version of Verne's novel, Lu Xun, who did not read English, instead relied on Inoue Tsutomu's Japanese retranslations of English translations of Verne's original French texts. The resulting Chinese texts diverged significantly from the originals, not only because of inevitable slippages resulting from this process of multiply mediated relay translation but also because Lu Xun took considerable liberties in adapting the novels for a local Chinese audience. Speaking of one of the texts, Lu Xun later remarked, "Even though I called this a translation, it was actually a transformation" (雖說譯，其實乃是改作).

The 1903 translation of *From the Earth to the Moon* was published under the pen name Zhou Chuo, while the first two chapters of the translation of *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* were published under the pen name Zhijiangsuozi (though when a more complete translation of the novel was released three years later, it was instead published under the pen name to Zhijiangsuoshi). Zhou Chuo, Zhijiangsuozi, and Zhijiangsuoshi are just three of the hundred-plus pen names Lu Xun used over the course of his lifetime. The author's birth name was Zhou Zhangshou, and his courtesy names were Yushan and Yuting, which he later changed to Yucai. In 1898, he adopted the name Zhou Shuren, which is now commonly identified as his real name,

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1. Lu Xun published translations of *From the Earth to the Moon* and the first two chapters of *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* in 1903, and he released a more complete translation of the latter work in 1906. Curiously, however, he misidentified the original author of both novels, claiming that *From the Earth to the Moon* had been written by an American author while *Journey to the Center of the Earth* had been written by a British author.

and he did not use the pen name Lu Xun until the 1918 publication of “Diary of a Madman.” To the extent that Lu Xun’s persona is currently the author’s public face, accordingly, his early translations of Verne’s novels and other works could be viewed as part of his “pre-face”—part of the literary work that he produced before becoming the iconic figure that he has now become. Even during this early prefatory period of his literary career, however, we can find an anticipation of some of the characteristics that would come to define his overall oeuvre and particularly his interest in processes of translation and textual transformation.

To begin with, although Lu Xun is currently best known as an author and essayist, translation is a practice to which he remained committed throughout his adult life. While his approach ranged from a process of loose translation (a “domesticating” approach that creatively transforms the source text for the benefit of the target audience) to his later emphasis on what he called “hard translation” (a “foreignizing” approach that attempts to preserve as much of the syntax of the source text as possible), his interest in translation reflects his commitment to introducing foreign literary works into the Chinese literary sphere. Although Lu Xun translated literary works from many different nations, with approximately half of his total translations being of works originally written in Russian, he frequently had to rely on intermediary translations of the original works when producing his own Chinese versions, given that Japanese and German were the only foreign languages he knew well.

Even as Lu Xun remained actively involved in translating foreign literature into Chinese, translations of his own Chinese-language works into foreign languages began to appear as early as the mid-1920s, only a few years after Lu Xun began publishing original fiction. For instance, the first English rendering of one of Lu Xun’s fictional works was George Kin Leung’s 1926 translation of Lu Xun’s 1921 story “The True Story of Ah Q” and Jing Yinyu completed a French translation of the story that same year. The 1915 Nobel laureate Romain Rolland wrote a letter in support of the latter translation, in which he observed that “at first glance this story is an unremarkable work of realism. However, then you discover the sharp humor contained in it. After reading it, you surprisingly feel that this tragic and comic fellow won’t leave you. You can’t bear to part with him.” Rolland’s original text was later found in his posthumous manuscripts, but his comments initially circulated primarily through a series of mediated translations and paraphrases, such as when the French translator Jin Yinyu himself claimed that Jing had proclaimed that “the story of Ah Q is a superb work of art, the proof being that I felt it was even better on the second reading.” This sort of loose translation of Rolland’s original assessment that may have contributed to Lu Xun being considered for the Nobel Prize in literature in 1927—although when fellow author Liu Bannong and Swedish Academy member Sven Hedin reached out to Lu Xun to inform him that he was being considered for

the prize, Lu Xun reportedly responded that he felt that “China still really has no person who should receive the Nobel Prize,” and consequently declined to be considered for the award.<sup>2</sup>

In her study *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova argues that works’ inclusion into the category of world literature is predicated on a process of vetting and validation by prestigious literary institutions based primarily in the West, which thereby grant literary works the symbolic capital necessary to be recognized a transnational sphere.<sup>3</sup> Lu Xun’s consideration for the Nobel Prize may be viewed an early example of this process of institutional validation, a similarly symbolic moment in Lu Xun’s entry into the world literature pantheon occurred in 2009, when he became the first modern author to be included in the Penguin Classics series with the publication of Julia Lovell’s retranslation of Lu Xun’s complete fiction in *The Real Story of Ah-Q and Other Tales of China: The Complete Fiction of Lu Xun*.<sup>4</sup> Before the publication of the Penguin Classics volume, the most influential English-language versions of Lu Xun’s works were the ones completed in the 1950s by the husband-and-wife team Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. Whereas the Yangs’ mid-century translation was part of a China-driven project to introduce Chinese literature to a global audience, the Penguin Classics project instead reflects an inverse process wherein Lu Xun’s work has increasingly come to be embraced by literary institutions based in the West.

Discussions of world literature are informed by considerations not only of works’ global circulation and reception but also of how the world itself is perceived and imagined. Unlike Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*, which describes a realistic voyage through the contemporary world, both *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* featured journeys to sites far removed from the planet’s surface. In adopting this sort of otherworldly perspective, both works offer a fresh perspective on issues relating to the world at that time. In this respect, Lu Xun’s decision to translate these two works of science fiction reflects his early interest in processes of worldmaking and worlding, whereby literary works permit readers to view and imagine the world otherwise.

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2. The preceding three quotes are all cited in Paul Foster, “The Ironic Inflation of Chinese National Character.”

3. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*.

4. Although Lu Xun was the first modern Chinese author to be included in the Penguin “Black Classics” subseries (the name alludes to the fact that all the volumes in the series have black covers), which includes “works written up to the beginning of the 20th century”), the subseries does contain several premodern Chinese works such as the *Daodejing* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*. The press’s parallel “Modern Classics” subseries, which includes “an ever-evolving list of books from the 20th- and 21st centuries that have achieved classic status,” features several works by two other Chinese-language authors (Eileen Chang and Qian Zhongshu), <https://www.penguin.co.uk/company/publishers/penguin-press/penguin-classics>.

In addition to his translations of foreign literary works into Chinese, Lu Xun also produced many “virtual” translations in which he incorporated elements from other literary works into his own. This practice is perhaps most obvious in his 1935 story collection, *Old Tales Retold*, which consists of eight works that each retells different Chinese myth or legend, but even his first work of fiction, the 1918 story “Diary of a Madman,” draws on Nikolai Gogol’s homonymous 1835 story, which Lu Xun had read in Japanese and which his brother Zhou Zuoren translated into Chinese five years later. One of Lu Xun’s best-known and most influential works, “Diary of a Madman,” follows the lead of Gogol’s earlier story in adopting the first-person perspective of a narrator who has apparently gone insane, but Lu Xun adds an external frame in the form of a preface that describes how a friend of the madman had found the (fictional) diary and decided to preserve it for medical research. In this way, Lu Xun’s work affirms its indebtedness to Gogol’s precedent, while simultaneously illustrating the way that texts can be reappropriated for divergent purposes.

Like Lu Xun, Gogol specialized in writing short stories, but in 1835, the same year he published his original “Diary of a Madman,” Gogol began working on his first full-length novel, *Dead Souls*. The work’s protagonist, Pavel Ivanovich Chichikov, travels through Russia visiting the estates of Russian landowners to purchase administrative responsibility for the serfs who have died since the last census but who remained on the tax ledgers—with the idea being that he would then cover the residual tax liability resulting from the deceased serfs while simultaneously mortgaging the (virtual) peasants to raise funds to purchase his own estate. Gogol had originally planned to write the novel as a trilogy, but after publishing the first volume in 1842, he never managed to complete the other two. Shortly before his death in 1852, Gogol burned most of what he had completed of volume 2, and only portions of the first four chapters of volume 2 ended up being preserved for posterity.

Meanwhile, in 1935, precisely a century after Gogol began working on his novel, Lu Xun began translating the novel into Chinese. At the time Lu Xun began his project, there was already a Chinese translation based on an English version of the work, but Lu Xun had read a German-language version and noticed many discrepancies between the two translations. He therefore resolved to retranslate the novel into Chinese, based on German and Japanese translations of the Russian-language work. Lu Xun serialized the translation of the first volume of the novel in two different literary magazines but was eventually forced to discontinue the serialization, and when he passed away in October 1936, his own translation of Gogol’s incomplete novel was itself still incomplete.

Throughout most of his career, Lu Xun did not grant much importance to his original manuscripts, and consequently many of those texts are no longer extant. In 1936, however, as he was reviewing the proofs for his translation of volume 1 of *Dead Souls*, he noticed numerous typographical errors and asked that the press

return his handwritten manuscript so that he could double-check it against the printed version. The five-hundred-plus-page manuscript—which includes Lu Xun’s translation of volume 1 and the first three chapters of volume 2 and is filled with his own handwritten emendations and corrections—was still in the author’s possession when he passed away and has subsequently been published in manuscript form. Like Gogol’s original text, the final chapter of Lu Xun’s manuscript literally ends on an ellipsis, and it is immediately followed by a brief translator’s note on the original text. The first line of the note specifies that Gogol began writing the novel in 1835, but in the manuscript version of the text Lu Xun accidentally miswrote the year 1835 as 1935—inadvertently substituting the year that Gogol began working on the original text with the year, a century later, that Lu Xun himself began working on the translation, perhaps suggesting that Lu Xun was unconsciously conflating his process of translation with Gogol’s original process of literary creation (Figure 0.1).<sup>5</sup>

The happenstance that Lu Xun was completing a translation of *Dead Souls* when he died is fitting, not only because the novel itself is literally about death but also because the entire premise of Gogol’s novel offers a compelling metaphor for Lu Xun’s own postmortem legacy. That is to say, Chichikov’s attempts to purchase the administrative rights to dead serfs in order to derive a speculative value from those same “dead souls” directly mirrors the ways in which generations of scholars, publishers, politicians, and general readers have attempted to lay claim to different portions of Lu Xun’s legacy for the sake of a resulting set of symbolic benefits. Lu Xun’s postmortem legacy, in other words, can be viewed as a continual process of translation and transformation, of translation *as* transformation. In this way, the focus on translation that dominated his initial pre-face has come to characterize the public face of his entire literary oeuvre and its legacy.

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5. Beijing, *Lu Xun yi Si Hunling*, vol. 5, 513.

# Introduction

## Lu Xun, China, and the World

Xiaolu Ma

Lu Xun is one of the most widely read Chinese writers of the twentieth century. In China, he has been revered as the voice of the nation's conscience, while outside of China he is frequently compared to authors such as Gogol, Chekhov, Gorky, and Orwell. Similarly, he has inspired numerous disciples abroad, who have earned epithets such as Taiwan's Lu Xun and Malaysia's Lu Xun.<sup>1</sup> Gloria Davies praises Lu Xun as a "founder of discursivity"—someone who, through his stories helped create "a possibility for something other than [his] discourse, yet something belonging to what [he] founded."<sup>2</sup> It is not only literary tropes and rhetorical devices that establish Lu Xun's stature but ultimately the circulation and appropriation of his ideas and themes both inside and outside of the Sinophone world. Lu Xun's spirit that continues to inspire admirers of modern Chinese literature should not simply be reducible to a single type of humanism popularized by China's current government but rather as a spirit of inquiry flexible enough to accommodate the historically situated concerns of generations to come.

In 1827, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) welcomed the era of world literature (*Weltliteratur*) in his conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann (1792–1854), remarking that "national literature is now rather an unmeaning term; the epoch of World-literature is at hand."<sup>3</sup> As David Damrosch has highlighted, Goethe envisioned "an era of international exchange and mutual refinement, a cosmopolitan process in which Germany would assume a central role as a translator and mediator among cultures, leading an international elite to champion lasting literary

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1. Zhang Kangwen, "'Mahua Lu Xun' yu 'Dongya Lu Xun'—duihua de keneng yu bukeneng."

2. Gloria Davies, *Lu Xun's Revolution*, 10–11.

3. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Conversations with Eckermann*, 133.

values against the vanities of narrow nationalism and the vagaries of popular taste.”<sup>4</sup> But Goethe’s *Weltliteratur* is not a stable term, and in the modern period many scholars have proposed various conceptual models that can be applied to world literature. For instance, inspired by Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno endorsed a heterogenous constellation to address the possibility of a literary epistemology.<sup>5</sup> Even-Zohar describes the networking of world literature as a polysystem,<sup>6</sup> whereas Franco Moretti illustrated the evolution of world literature as either a tree or a wave.<sup>7</sup> Pascale Casanova, meanwhile, borrows an economic and sociological paradigm to assign value to different works according to their distance from the center of world literary capital.<sup>8</sup> These various models suggest that the conceptualization of world literature may be a utopian project, yet they offer a critique of the contemporary system of aesthetic value and a reminder of the importance of cultural otherness and transfusion. Instead of attempting to propose a better model of world literature, this volume asks a simpler question: What is the relationship between Lu Xun, world literature, and underlying processes of worlding?

By situating Lu Xun as being always already an indispensable part of world literature, this collection seeks to clarify Lu Xun’s relationship to world literature and vice versa. Scholars have long acknowledged the importance of the connection Lu Xun established with foreign literature to the understanding of his literary contributions. For this purpose, this project can be viewed as an addition to the study of Lu Xun (or “Luxunology”), which has become a substantial subdiscipline within the study of modern Chinese literature. We move beyond hagiographic treatments of Lu Xun and instead consider the ways in which the ripples, refractions, and differences generated by the author shed new light on our understanding of world literature more broadly.

What makes Lu Xun an essential component of world literature? How has he been canonized in different cultural contexts? To what extent is his literary influence a result of geopolitical, economic, and intercultural negotiations? If Lu Xun’s works provide a literary paradigm in East Asia and the Sinophone world, how has this paradigm been reinterpreted and transformed over time? In what ways does Lu Xun contribute to the establishment of a new order or hierarchy of world literature? These are the questions we address as we explore Lu Xun’s worldliness.

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4. David Damrosch, “Introduction,” 1.

5. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*; Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*.

6. Itamar Even-Zohar, “Polysystem Studies.”

7. Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature.”

8. Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*.

## Lu Xun Reading World Literature

Lu Xun would not have become who he was without his lifelong reading of and engagement with world literature. Although he is mostly known outside China as a fiction writer, it is no exaggeration to say that his literary career began and ended with the practice of translation. As an avid reader of foreign literature, he had already immersed himself in the translation of foreign literature long before he began writing fiction;<sup>9</sup> at the end of his life, he was still working on translating the second part of Nikolai Gogol's (1809–1852) *Dead Souls* (*Mertvye dushi*). In all, Lu Xun translated the works of over a hundred writers from Russia, Japan, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Spain, Finland, Poland, and several other Eastern European countries.<sup>10</sup> These translated works, which included fiction, poetry, drama, fairy tales, and literary criticism, totaled over three million Chinese characters.

Lu Xun's early translations involved both canonical writers such as Victor Hugo (1802–1885) and popular writers such as Jules Verne (1828–1905), but he soon turned to less known writers as the scope of his reading expanded. A snapshot of Lu Xun's correspondence with his brother Zhou Zuoren from the summer of 1921, during the period of their mutual interest in literature of injured nations, suggests the scope of Lu Xun's vision of world literature. Writers mentioned by Lu Xun in these letters include the Polish poet Adam Asnyk (1838–1897), the Finnish author Juhani Aho (originally Johannes Brofeldt 1861–1921), the Romanian poet Luca Ion Caragiale (1893–1921), the Croatian writer Ksaver Šandor Gjalski (1854–1935), and the Bulgarian writer Ivan Vazov (1850–1921).<sup>11</sup> Lu Xun was not only translating and introducing these writers to the Chinese audience but also was encouraging his brother to collaborate on this project. It has been calculated that, in his writing, Lu Xun mentions 571 writers from 27 different countries.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly noteworthy given that, in contrast to someone like Goethe, Lu Xun's access to world literature was constrained by the smaller number of languages he could read fluently, which meant that instead of reading foreign works in the original, he often had to rely on Japanese and German translations.

It was also not always easy for Lu Xun to obtain foreign books. Zhou Zuoren described how, while in Tokyo, Lu Xun studied German mostly on his own,

9. Lu Xun claims that initially he was not overly enthusiastic about literary creation and instead paid more attention to the introduction and translation of foreign literature (Lu Xun, "Wo zenme zuoqi xiaoshuo lai," 525).

10. Ge Baoquan, "Lu Xun zai shijie wenxue shi shang de diwei," 415; Wang Jiaping, "Lu Xun fanyi wenxue yanjiu de xiangdu yu chuangxin."

11. Lu Xun, "210713 Zhi Zhou Zuoren," 11:392; Lu Xun, "210731 Zhi Zhou Zuoren," 11:401; Lu Xun, "210806 Zhi Zhou Zuoren," 11:404.

12. Wang Xirong, "Lu Xun de 'shijieren' gainian he shijie de 'ren' gainian."

scavenged old bookstalls for German translations of and introductions to foreign literature, and often waited for months for books to be delivered from Europe.<sup>13</sup> When it became more difficult for Lu Xun to access German books after he returned to China, Japanese publications became his main source of information. This shift in reading practice is reflected in the references included in his translations in which the proportion of Japanese titles increased significantly in his later career. In particular, his translation of Soviet literary theory and proletarian literature relied mainly on Japanese sources. Furthermore, of the books that Lu Xun did manage to acquire, one genre predominates: multilingual dictionaries, including German-Japanese, English-Japanese, and Russian-Japanese ones.<sup>14</sup> The preponderance of multilingual Japanese dictionaries suggests that Japanese was a key route by which Lu Xun accessed global literature, though in some cases he was forced to rely on a combination of both Japanese and German as intermediary languages, such as when he used a German-Japanese dictionary to translate Gogol's *Dead Souls* into Chinese from Otto Buek's (1873–1966) German translation of the original Russian.

As an exchange student from a declining traditional Chinese literati family who hoped his education abroad would prepare him for a career in medicine, Lu Xun eventually decided to turn to literature because he considered it a better remedy for what he perceived to be the paralysis of Chinese people's spirit and the deadening of their hearts. Lu Xun's pragmatism ultimately led him to advocate a practice of "grabbism" (*nalaizhuyi* 拿來主義), which is described by Eileen J. Cheng as "the selective appropriation of the foreign as a means to self-strengthening,"<sup>15</sup> on the assumption that "new voices from alien lands" (別求新聲於異邦)<sup>16</sup> could help revitalize elements of indigenous culture—a vision that surpasses the national and colonial discourses enforced by superficial adoption of foreign/Western culture.<sup>17</sup> Lu Xun was convinced that "all great works of world literature can open one to the wonder of life and allow one to intuit the facts and laws of life, something science is unable to do."<sup>18</sup> Lu Xun's grabbism also motivated him to advocate for a practice of "hard translation" that prioritized word-for-word correspondence between source

13. Zhou Zuoren, "Zai shi Dongjing (Lu Xun de qingnian shidai shi'er)," 614–15.

14. Xu Guangping in an interview recalled at least fourteen dictionaries that Lu Xun constantly used for his work (Deng Xiaolin, "Zui yaojin de shi you yibu hao zidian—zaitan Lu Xun xiansheng he cidian," 97). The titles of some of the dictionaries Lu Xun used are included in the catalog of Lu Xun's book collection (Beijing Lu Xun bowuguan, *Lu Xun shouji he cangshu mulu*, 3). Although Lu Xun never gained the sufficient ability to read Russian and English fluently, his collection contained a significant number of multilingual dictionaries in addition to the books in Russian and English languages, suggesting that Lu Xun never gave up his hope of reading Russian and English originals.

15. Eileen J. Cheng, "In Search of New Voices from Alien Lands," 589.

16. Lu Xun, "Moluo shili shuo," 1:68.

17. Eileen J. Cheng, "In Search of New Voices from Alien Lands," 589–90.

18. Lu Xun, "On the Power of Mara Poetry," 106; Lu Xun, "Moluo shili shuo," 1:74.

and target text—an approach, he believed, that better rendered the foreignness of the translated text.<sup>19</sup>

Even as Lu Xun relied mainly on German and Japanese sources for his access to world literature, he paid special attention to Slavic and Eastern European literatures.<sup>20</sup> His literary preferences are also reflected in his literary creation. As Julia Lovell, a translator of Lu Xun's stories, points out, "the traces of Lu Xun's cosmopolitan reading habits (in Chinese, Japanese and German translations) are in evidence throughout [his narratives]."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in his writing, Lu Xun frequently incorporated elements from his reading of foreign literature, but rather than reflecting a passive acceptance of colonial influence, Lu Xun's grabbism instead resonates with his simultaneous aspiration to and resistance against Western modernity.<sup>22</sup>

Lu Xun's search for the "new voices from alien lands" demands a careful listening to the "voice of the heart" (*xinsheng* 心聲) of the foreign poets, as a crucial means for cultivating the Chinese people and revitalizing Chinese culture. For him, the reading of such literature sets the path to the "nation of human beings" (*renguo* 人國)—a nation that cherishes self-esteem and respects individual value.<sup>23</sup> This nation is the ultimate goal of his eclectic, cosmopolitan selection of world literature, and the intimate tie between world literature and nation building constitutes one of the important reasons for Lu Xun's global popularity.

## Lu Xun in the World

David Damrosch defines world literature as "all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in the original."<sup>24</sup> By this definition, an indispensable factor in the entry of Lu Xun's works into the domain of world literature is their circulation outside of China. By the 1980s, Lu Xun's works had been translated into more than seventy languages in over fifty countries.<sup>25</sup> These works' strong national character made them easily legible for international readers. In the meantime, they stimulated different interpretations. In Japan, there even appeared

19. Lu Xun, "Tuo'ersitai zhi si yu shaonian Ouluoba yi hou ji," 10:338.

20. Thanks to the efforts of scholars from Japan, China, and elsewhere, there is rich scholarship on Lu Xun's reliance on the Japanese sources. Recently, scholarship has also begun to focus on his German influence. See Cui Wendong, "Qingnian Lu Xun yu deyu 'shijie wenxue'"; Xiong Ying, "Lu Xun dewen cangshu zhong de 'shijie wenxue' kongjian"; Zhang Huiwen, "Lu Xun contra Georg Brandes."

21. Julia Lovell, "Introduction," xxi.

22. Haiyan Xie, "'Grabbism' and Untranslatability," 126.

23. Lu Xun, "Wenhua pian zhi lun," 1:57.

24. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* 4.

25. Wang Xirong, "Lu Xun de 'shijieren' gainian he shijie de 'ren' gainian."

titles such as “Takeuchi’s Lu Xun” and “Maruyama’s Lu Xun,” highlighting the diversity of scholars interpreting his oeuvre.

It is worth noting that Lu Xun hoped his works would “perish soon” (*suxiu* 速朽),<sup>26</sup> and he resisted recognition from outside China. He declined a nomination for the Nobel Prize for literature, on the grounds that he did not consider the quality of his work to match the standards of the prize, nor did he want the publicity of being recognized as a Chinese or Asian Nobel Prize winner: “If I want to win this prize, I need to make a bigger effort.”<sup>27</sup> Even though the Nobel Prize is, accordingly to Pascale Casanova, “one of the few truly international literary consecrations” that represented “the designation and definition of what is universal in literature,”<sup>28</sup> canonization and consecration were not Lu Xun’s goal. He refused to defer to “the politics of recognition,” a phenomenon observed by Shu-mei Shih when criticizing what she perceives to be the Western puffery of Gao Xingjian.<sup>29</sup> Instead, given his “obsession with China”—which C. T. Hsia has argued was a common feature of Chinese intellectuals of his time<sup>30</sup>—Lu Xun used his literature to tackle specific national crises.

Nonetheless, the transience and perishability that Lu Xun aimed to achieve in his works became part of their charm: The temporal tension contributes a sense of intensity for digesting and consuming Lu Xun’s works, which can be integrated into the geopolitical and transnational frictions that helped shape Lu Xun’s readership outside China. In regions where people can read Lu Xun’s works in the original, such as Sinophone Southeast Asia, Lu Xun has been celebrated as an embodiment of a revolutionary spirit, and he is particularly close to the heart of the leftists due to his political views. Many readers confronted their colonial experiences with his anti-imperialist spirit and even took inspiration from him in their resistance to political, social, and racial oppression. The Taiwanese poet Loa Ho 賴和 (1894–1943), for instance, was known as Taiwan’s Lu Xun for his appropriation of Lu Xun’s works in his depiction of the suffering and depression in colonial Taiwan. Authors in Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia reworked and parodied Lu Xun’s novellas and short stories to reflect on local issues. In this way, the issue of “national character” that fascinated Lu Xun was translated into the Sinophone world’s inquiry into Chineseness, a search for their national and ethnic identity.<sup>31</sup>

26. Lu Xun, “A Q zhengzhuan,” 1:512.

27. Lu Xun, “270925 Zhi Tai Jingnong,” 12:73.

28. Pascale Casanova, “Literature as a World,” 74.

29. Shu-Mei Shih, “Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition,” 25.

30. C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 533–54.

31. Ma Feng, “Lu Xun zai Yinni de chuanbo yu yingxiang”; Zhang Songjian, *Wenxin de yitong*, 3–53; Zhuang Huaxing, “Lu Xun zai lengzhan qianqi de Malaiya yu Xinjiapo.”

Beyond the Sinophone world, foreign readers' acquaintance with Lu Xun can be dated back to 1909 when the journal *Japan and Japanese People* (*Nihon oyobi nihonjin* 日本及日本人) published an article on Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren, introducing their *Anthology of Fiction from beyond the Border*.<sup>32</sup> Zhou Zuoren was the first to translate Lu Xun's work into another language, having published his Japanese translation of "Kong Yiji" in *Beijing Weekly* (*Beijing zhoubao* 北京週報) in 1922, five years earlier than Japanese translators published their own translations.<sup>33</sup> Many of the other early translators of Lu Xun—including Soviet sinologist Boris Vasil'ev (1899–1937), Czech sinologist Jaroslav Průšek (1906–1980), and Japanese scholar Masuda Wataru 増田渉 (1903–1977)—either met Lu Xun in person or exchanged letters with him.

There are two more groups who contributed to the initial dissemination of Lu Xun's works. The first included exchange students and immigrants with Chinese backgrounds. For instance, the first translator of Lu Xun's work into English, George Kin Leung 梁社乾 (1899–1977), was a Chinese American who grew up in Atlantic City, New Jersey, before returning to China in the early 1920s, and translated "The True Story of Ah Q" in 1926.<sup>34</sup> In France, Jean Baptiste Yn-Yu Kyn 敬隱漁 (1901–1931) and Sung-nien Hsu 徐仲年 (also known as Xu Songnian 徐頌年, 1904–1981) contributed to the initial dissemination of Lu Xun's works.<sup>35</sup> Kyn enrolled in the Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon (IFCL) in 1925 and is best known for connecting the two great literary figures of France and China: Romain Rolland (1866–1944) and Lu Xun.<sup>36</sup> He was the first to translate Lu Xun's story *The True Story of Ah Q* into French in 1926, followed by "Kong Yiji" and "My Old Hometown" in 1929. Sung-nien Hsu enrolled in the IFCL under a work-study program in 1921 and joined the Université de Lyon in 1926. In 1931, he published his introduction to a collection of Lu Xun's short stories, *Outcry*, in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (The new French review), and his 1933 *Anthologie de la Littérature Chinoise des origines à nos jours* (Anthology of Chinese literature from the origins to the present) also included his translation of Lu Xun's "Kong Yiji."<sup>37</sup>

The second group that contributed to Lu Xun's global dissemination were missionaries. In *Histoire de la Littérature Chinoise Modern* (History of modern Chinese literature), Henri van Boven (1911–2003) of the Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae devoted a chapter on Lu Xun's literary contribution and his pro-Communist

32. Fujii Shōzō, "Lu Xun yu Riben ji shijie wenxue," 006.

33. Fujii, "Lu Xun yu Riben ji shijie wenxue," 006.

34. Baorong Wang, "George Kin Leung's English Translation of Lu Xun's *A Q Zhengzhuàn*."

35. Paolo Magagnin, "Agents of May Fourth."

36. Paul B. Foster, "The Ironic Inflation of Chinese National Character."

37. Liang Haijun, "Lu Xun zai Fayu shijie de chuanbo yu yanjiu," 30–31.

# Postface

Carlos Rojas

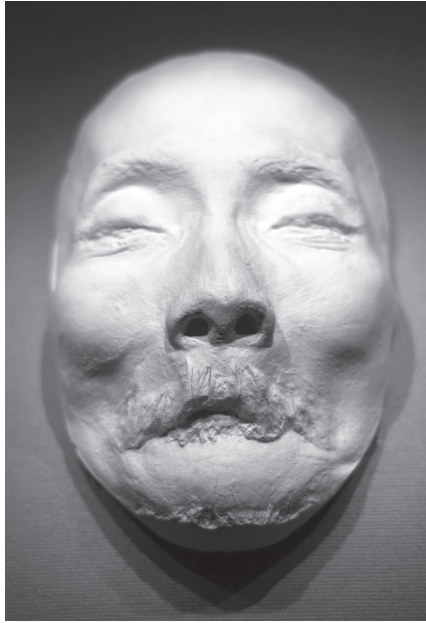
When Xiao Nan, the protagonist of Ng Kim Chew's 2015 short story "Benediction," enters the elaborate replica of a Lu Xun memorial museum that her stepfather, Ah Fu, has created in his home in Malaysia, the first thing she notices is the Chinese author's portrait: "On the wall was hanging Lu Xun's postmortem portrait (the one with whiskers)."<sup>1</sup> A wide array of postmortem images of Lu Xun entered public circulation after his death, including numerous photographs, sketches, and woodblock prints, but the story's parenthetical specification that the portrait Xiao Nan sees is "the one with whiskers" clarifies that the image in question is actually the plaster death mask created by Okuda Kyōka, which is currently on display at the Lu Xun Memorial Museum in Shanghai (Figure 15.1).<sup>2</sup>

Ng's story comments on the various sorts of vestigial literary and cultural connections that may link ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia to their putative Chinese homeland, but the story's emphasis on the replica of Lu Xun's death mask underscores a more specific dimension of the author's work and its multiple afterlives. Unlike most of the other images that were produced of Lu Xun after his death, the death mask Okuda produced is one of the few such portraits that not only bears a visual resemblance to Lu Xun but also contains material traces of his bodily presence—in the form of the handful of mustache and eyebrow hairs that got stuck in the plaster mold when it was removed from his face. Whereas most of the other postmortem images are—to use the influential "icon-index-symbol" semiotic taxonomy proposed by Samuel Peirce—primarily "iconic" in nature, meaning that they are linked to their referent by their visual resemblance, the death mask produced by Okuda is a signifier that is not only iconic but also indexical, meaning that its relationship to its referent is defined by a direct causal relationship (in this case,

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1. Ng Kim Chew, "Zhufu," 25.

2. For an overview of Lu Xun's postmortem images, including the death mask, see Yiwen Liu, "Witnessing Death."



**Figure 15.1:** Death mask of Lu Xun, cast in plaster by Okuda Koka

the process of making a physical mold of Lu Xun's face).<sup>3</sup> The version of the death mask that is described in Ng's story, however, is not the original artifact that was produced on the day of Lu Xun's death, but rather it is a reproduction—meaning that it is an iconic signifier of an earlier signifier that had a simultaneously iconic and indexical relationship to its referent. Moreover, technically speaking, what appears in Ng's story is not even Ah Fu's reproduction of Okuda's original death mask, but rather it is Ng's textual description of Ah Fu's reproduction of the original death mask—meaning that Ng's reference to the mask is, in Peirce's terms, a “symbolic” signifier that is linked to the physical mask by the completely arbitrary and unmotivated sign system that is human language. What appears in Ng's story, in other words, is a symbol signifying an icon signifying a hybrid icon-index signifying Lu Xun's face—which, in turn, functions as a symbol of the author himself.

In the opening allusion to the death mask in Ng Kim Chew's story, we find a succinct allusion to a complex set of overlapping semiotic processes by which Lu Xun's life and work have entered global circulation following his death. From an almost fetishistic fascination with material relics linked directly to the author, to

3. Peirce developed his theory of semiotics over a span of many volumes. For an overview, see Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs*.

a wide array of distant and highly mediated reimaginings of his works, Lu Xun's postmortem legacy is as eclectic as the author's literary oeuvre itself. If we regard Lu Xun's literary oeuvre as his public face, accordingly, then we may take inspiration from Ng's description of the Malaysian re-creation of Lu Xun's death mask and describe the postmortem global circulation of Lu Xun's legacy as his "post-face." Far from a singular and unitary phenomenon, however, the author's post-face is the result of multiple overlapping, and often divergent, processes of reproduction and transformation, as text-based, theme-based, image-based, and ideology-based lines of filiation intersect with one another in complex and unpredictable ways.

Lu Xun's son, Zhou Haiying, who was just seven at the time of his father's death, has described how when he first noticed his father's hairs stuck to the plaster mold that Okuda had made, he "felt very uncomfortable, as though the hairs had been plucked from my own body."<sup>4</sup> This description of the son's discomfort underscores the sort of vicarious identification that Lu Xun's legacy was capable of inspiring, not only among those who were close to him, like his son, but also putative strangers. At the same time, Zhou's description of feeling as though the hairs had been "plucked from [his] own body" recalls one of the trademark powers of Sun Wukong, the supernatural simian protagonist of the classic Ming dynasty novel *Journey to the West*, who was able to pluck hairs from his body and transform them into clones of himself or "whatever shape or substance he desired."<sup>5</sup> Known as his "body beyond the body technique" (身外身法), this practice refers to Sun Wukong's ability to project his identity beyond himself—with these projections ranging from exact replicas to unrecognizable transformations. Lu Xun, meanwhile, could be viewed as a modern-day Sun Wukong, with his texts being the equivalent of the monkey's hairs, and as Lu Xun's texts circulate to distant regions and future eras, they have similarly undergone a nearly endless process of translation and transformation.

Just as Sun Wukong's nominal function in *Journey to the West* is to accompany his master Tang Sanzang—who is a fictionalized version of the historical seventh-century Chinese monk Xuanzang—on his quest to the "Western Regions" (South and Central Asia) to retrieve Buddhist sutras from and bring them back to China, Lu Xun similarly remained deeply committed throughout his career to the process of introducing foreign literature into China. Conversely, just as Sun Wukong has subsequently become one of the Chinese fictional characters who has been most enthusiastically embraced in cultural productions from around world, Lu Xun is similarly one of twentieth-century China's most globally influential authors. At the same time, Sun Wukong and Lu Xun both embody a crucial paradox wherein their very identity has come to be defined by their powers of transformation, and whereas Sun

4. Zhou Haiying, "Chonghui Shanghai yi tongnian," 1271.

5. *Journey to the West*, trans. Anthony Yu, 1:128.

Wukong's identity is grounded on his powers of self-transformation, a key element of Lu Xun's postmortem popularity similarly lies in his ability to signify different things for different readers. The primary continuity in the countless filiations—or postfaces—that Lu Xun's work has spawned, accordingly, lies in their insistent and inexorable process of transformation and reinvention.

# Index

Page numbers in *italics* refer to figures and tables.

- absolute, the, 223–25. *See also* universality  
in world literature
- Adorno, Theodor, 2, 181
- aesthetic irony, 213, 214
- “Ah Chang and the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*,” 206–8
- Ah Fu, 167–70, 171, 239
- Aho, Juhani, 3, 47
- “Alexander Blok,” 29–30
- allegory, recuperating subaltern occlusions, 149–55
- “Amateur Talk on Literature” (Lu Xun), 65–66
- Anderson, Benedict, 156
- Anderson, Marston, 151, 158, 196
- Andreev, Leonid, 54–58, 63
- Angela Yiu, 140–42
- animal training, essay on, 232–33
- animality in Lu Xun’s works, 16, 221;  
“child’s ox,” 235–37; critique of  
domination, 227–30; “Dogs, Cats,  
Mice,” 237; polemics between Lu Xun  
and Liang Shiqiu, 233–37; references  
to animals, 226–27, 237–38; as socio-  
political critique, 230–33
- Anthology of Fiction from beyond the Border*  
(Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren), 12–13;  
compilation approach, 34; deckle-  
edges, 89–91; dissemination in Japan,  
7; front cover, 40, 41 fig 2.2 and 2.3,  
89 fig 5.2; German works, 43, 44 table  
2.1; inspiration from “Red Flower”  
(Garshin), 58–59; modernity critique,  
87–91; origins, 38–40; works from  
minor languages, 43
- Aoki Masaru, 103
- Apter, Emily, 11
- Arts and Crafts Movement, 84, 85
- Asnyk, Adam, 3
- Aus fremden Zungen*, 34, 35–40, 41 fig 2.1,  
43
- authorship, 212
- autobiographical memoir, 198–200
- Badiou, Alain, 26, 27, 29
- Bassoe, Pedro, 91
- Bastman, Ida, 8
- Baudelaire, Charles, 24–25
- Beauvoir, Simone de, 9
- Beijing Lu Xun Museum, 43
- Belizón, Manuel Pavón, 127
- “Benediction” (Ng Kim Chew), 167,  
169–71, 174, 239
- “Ben-Tovit” (Andreev), 54–58
- “Bethink Yourselves” appeal (Tolstoy), 135
- Bildung*, 219
- Blanco Facal, Rosario, 125
- Blok, Alexander, 29–31
- body, philosophy of, 186–89
- Brandes, Georg, 20, 22
- Brehm, Alfred, 228
- Brière, Octave, 8

- British Arts and Crafts Movement, 85  
 Brooks, Peter, 133  
 Buch, Hans Christoph, 9, 10  
 Buck, Pearl, 120, 121  
 "Buyi" (Ng Kim Chew), 166  
 Byron, George Gordon (Lord Byron), 132
- Camus, Albert, 162  
 Caragiale, Luca Ion, 3  
 Casanova, Pascale, 21–22, 162  
 Catalan translations, 125, 126  
 causality in transnational interactions, 117, 129  
 Chang Kigün, 108  
 Cheah, Pheng, 11, 23–24, 161  
 Chekhov, Anton, 9, 124  
 Cheng, Anne, 112–13  
 Cheng, Eileen, 4, 74–75, 132  
*Chetyre* (Garshin), 58–59  
 Chiang Kai-shek, 108, 109  
 children's literature, 228  
 "child's ox," 235–37  
 China: 1911 revolution (first Chinese Revolution), 26; Cultural Revolution, 109–10, 122, 123, 153, 168; economic development and modernization, 179; Japanese colonial rule, 103–5; May Fourth era (loosely 1917–1925), 24–29, 69, 74–77; May Fourth Movement, 103, 163, 166  
 Chinese Communist Party (CCP), 229, 234, 235  
 Chinese exceptionalism, 179, 231–32  
 Chinese League of Leftist Writers, 141–42, 236  
 Chinese literature: government-sponsored translation, 10; interaction with world literature, 11–12  
 Chinese national character/Chineseness, 133; Confucian values, 153–54; post-imperial identity of China, 155–61  
 Chinese woodcut movement, 111  
 Chon Hyöngjun, 111
- Chow Mei-nan, 158  
 Chuanzong, Fang, 83–84, 93  
 circulation as a metaphor, 117–18  
 Cissarz, Johann Vincenz, 37  
 Clifford, James, 175  
 Cold War, 107–9, 112  
*Collected Short Stories of Lu Xun*, 105–6  
 confession, as theme as Lu Xun's writing, 132–33  
 Confucian values, 150–51, 152–54, 190–93  
 Conrad, Sebastian, 117, 129  
 cosmopolitanism, 39–40  
 Creation Society, 182, 188, 219, 222  
 Crescent School, 234  
 Cultural Revolution, 109–10, 122, 123, 153, 168
- Damrosch, David, 1–2, 5, 68, 115, 131  
*Daodejing*, 15  
 Daoism, 15, 180–82, 187–88, 191  
 Davies, Gloria, 1  
 Dazai Osamu, 14, 133, 137–41  
 de Staël, Germaine, 39  
 death: *Graves* (Lu Xun), 202–3; of Lu Xun, 104, 163, 225, 237; Lu Xun's death mask, 239–41, 240 fig. 15.1; portrayed in *Wild Grass*, 200–202  
 deckle-edged books: *Anthology of Fiction from beyond the Border*, 89–91; contention about in early twentieth-century China, 83–84; as modernity critique, 84–87; the paradox of revolution, 95–98; and social class, 95–96, 97–98
- Deleuze, Gilles, 115–16  
 democracy, 155–61  
 Derrida, Jacques, 172  
*Destino* magazine, 122–23  
 "Diary of a Madman" (Lu Xun): comparison to Garshin's "Red Flower," 62, 63; Dazai's work based on, 139; dehumanization in, 229; self-introspection, 198–99; translations, 123; use of

- techniques from Gogol's Diary, 51–54, 63; writing intention, 196
- distortions (*qubi*), 51, 52, 57, 58–59, 197
- "Dogs, Cats, Mice" (Lu Xun), 237
- Dole, Andrew, 191
- Doll's House*, A (Ibsen), 13, 68, 69, 77–81
- East Germany, 8–9
- Eastern European literature, 5, 34
- Eckermann, Johann Peter, 1
- economic development of China, 179
- Elements of the Philosophy of Right and his Aesthetics* (Hegel), 213
- English translations of Lu Xun's works, 7, 8, 56
- Enlightenment, 193
- Etherington, Ben, 11
- ethnic groups in China, 231–32
- European literature: Lu Xun's collection, 5, 43–47; naturalist school, 77; North–South divide, 39, 45
- European-Romantic poetic works, 21
- Ewald, Carl, 228
- exchange students, 7
- Fabre, Jean-Henri, 228
- Fadeyev, Alexander, 97–98
- "fair play," 215–16
- fairy tales, 228
- "family resemblances," 81–82
- Feng Naichao, 234
- filiation, 172–73
- "fin-de-siècle" style, 37
- Finnish literature: Päivrinta, 45–47; Runeberg, 46–47
- Finnish translations, 8, 9–10
- Foreign Languages Press, 10
- forgiveness, 143
- "French binding," 96. *See also* deckle-edged books
- French literature, 36–37, 39
- French translations, 7
- Freud, Sigmund, 184–85
- Gänger, Stefanie, 117–18
- Gao Xingjian, 125, 127
- Garshin, Vsevolod, 58–62, 63
- gender: female oppression, 205–6; feminist literature, 73; women's rights, 69–70, 74, 79–81
- German works: in *Anthology of Fiction*, 34–35, 43; Lu Xun's access to, 3–4
- German, as intermediary language, 4, 50
- Germany: *Anthology of Fiction from beyond the Border*, 38–40, 43; book series of world literature, 40–47; magazines of world literature, 35–40; politics in dissemination, 8–9; *Weltliteratur*, 1–2, 10–11, 33–35
- ghostwriting: recuperating subaltern occlusions in national allegory, 149–55; as term, 149
- Gjalski, Ksaver Šandor, 3
- "Glimpse at Shanghai Literature, A" (Lu Xun), 217–22
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 1–2, 35, 181
- Gogol, Nikolai, 51–54, 63
- Golden, Seán, 125
- Goyo, Hashiguchi, 86
- grabbism, 4–5, 49–50, 63, 183
- Graves (Lu Xun), 202–3, 202 fig 12.3
- Great East Asia Joint Manifesto* (Dazai), 138–39
- guangbian*, 93–94
- Guattari, Félix, 115–16
- guilt, as theme as Lu Xun's writing, 132–33
- Gunn, Janet Varner, 200
- Guo Moruo, 15, 179–94
- Hakuson, Kuriyagawa, 25
- Han Chinese, 231–32
- Han Sörya, 107
- Hanan, Patrick, 45
- hard translation approach, 4–5, 31
- Hashimoto, Satoru, 102, 115
- Hayot, Eric, 21
- Hegel, G. W. F., 212, 213–15, 220–21, 224

- Heidegger, Martin, 11  
 hermeneutics of suspicion, 180, 185  
 Hisashi, Inoue, 14, 133, 141–45  
 “Hometown” (Lu Xun), 104–5  
 Hong Hyomin, 106–7  
 Hong Sokp’yo, 113  
 “Hope” (Lu Xun), 24–29  
 Horkheimer, Max, 181  
 Hsia, C. T., 181  
 Hsu, Sung-nien (also known as Xu Songnian), 7  
 Hu Shi, 70–71, 103  
 Hughes, Glen, 193  
 Hungarian Revolution, 27–28  
 Hwang Sogyong, 111
- I Am a Cat* (Soseki), 86–88, 86 fig 5.1, 91, 96–97  
 Ibsen, Henrik, 13, 68, 69–81. See also *A Doll’s House*  
 Ichiyo, Higuchi, 71–81  
*The Illustrated Twenty-Four Exemplars* (Lu Xun), 199  
 Im Hönyöng, 111, 110  
 immigrants, role in circulating Lu Xun’s works, 7  
 “In the Wilderness” (Päivärinta), 46–47  
 “Inauspicious Star” (Lu Xun), 208  
 Inoue Hisashi, 14, 133, 141–45  
 intellectuals, relationship to the masses, 49  
 international circulation of Lu Xun’s works, 5–8. See also world literature  
 intertextual engagement: Russian literature, 49–50, 51, 54, 58, 63; subaltern alterity, 147–48  
 “Intra-Asian Reading; or, How Lu Xun Enters into a World Literature” (Hashimoto), 115  
 Italian translations, 124
- Japan: Japanese-style modernity, 139; Lu Xun’s career in, 3–4; physical form of the book, 87; Russo-Japanese War, 134–35; Sino-Japanese War, 134  
 Japanese: “Alexander Blok” translation, 29–30; high score of Lu Xun in Japanese exam, 133–34; as intermediary language, 4, 50  
 Japanese literature: feminist writers, 73; Lu Xun as part of, 133, 137–45  
 “Jige wenti” (Yu Dafu), 163  
 Jones, Andrew F., 233  
 kai system, 94–95  
 Kaminski, Joanness D., 181  
 Kelmscott Press, 85, 97  
 Kierkegaard, Søren, 212  
 Kim Chunyöp, 107  
 Kim Il Sung, 111–12  
 Kim Kwanggyun, 106  
 Kim Kwangju, 105–6, 108  
 Kim T’aejun, 104, 106  
 Kim Young Sam, 112  
 “Kong Yiji” (Lu Xun), 7, 148, 161–62  
 Korea: 1990s onwards, 112–16; Cold War rivalries, 107–9; first mention of Lu Xun, 103; liberation space, 105–7; perceptions about Japanese colonial rule of China, 103–5; reception and translation of Lu Xun’s works in, 13–14, 101–3, 113–16; social movements, 109–12  
 Korean War (1950–1953), 107  
 Kowallis, Jon Eugene von, 20  
*Krasnyi tzvetok* (Garshin), 58–62  
 Kürschner, Joseph, 37–38  
 Kyn, Jean Baptiste Yn-Yu, 7
- “Lamp of Eternity” (Lu Xun), 58, 59–62, 63  
 Laozi legend, 15, 179–84, 185–93  
 law: ethics of revolution, 217–22; “immodest jurisprudence,” 213; Lu Xun’s approach to, 210–11, 223–25  
*Le spleen de Paris* (Baudelaire), 24–25  
 League of Left-Wing Writers, 141–42, 236  
 leftism. See political left

- Lee, Leo Ou-fan, 136  
 “leisure,” 96  
 Leung, George Kin, 7  
 Leys, Simon, 128  
 Li Liewen, 231  
 Liang Shiqiu, 227, 233–37  
 Lichtensein, Gustav, 45–46  
*Lielaoshuan* (Wong Bik-wan), 14, 146–55  
 Lin Yutang, 215–16, 226–27  
 Ling Fei (pen name), 19  
 Liu Bannong, 56–57  
 Lizcano, Pablo, 124–25  
 Lloyd, Vincent, 213  
 Loa Ho, 6  
 loneliness, as literary theme, 25, 26  
 Lovell, Julia, 5  
 Lu Xun: canonization as father of modern Chinese literature, 197–200; circulation of works outside of China, 5–8; death, 104, 163, 225, 237; death mask, 239–41, 240 fig. 15.1; high score in Japanese exam, 133–34; last piece of published writing, 230–31; names and pen names, 243; Nobel Prize nomination, 6; ongoing popularity of, 5, 241–42; politics in dissemination, 8–10; publications list, 243–48; reading of and engagement with world literature, 3–5; son (Zhou Haiying), 172, 241; supporting younger writers/virtual children, 171–75; works as part of world literature, 1–2, 5–6, 10–12; writing intentions and trajectories, 195–97  
 “Lu Xun and I” (Yi Yonghui), 109  
 “Lu Xun fever,” 163–64  
 “Lu Xun” (Kim Kwanggyun), 106  
 Lunacharsky, Anatoly, 31–32  
 “Luxunology,” 2  
 “M de shizong” (Ng Kim Chew), 164–65  
 Ma, Xiaolu, 118  
 magazines of world literature, 35–40  
 Malraux, André, 120  
 Mani, Venkat, 35  
 Mao Zedong: cult of, 9; “On Lu Xun,” 197–98; “On New Democracy,” 107–8; Spanish interest in, 122; “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art,” 174–75; use of Mao’s poetry in Ng Kim Chew’s “Benediction,” 168; Yan’an talks, 174, 229; in Yi Yonghui’s writings, 109–10  
*maobian*: contention about in early twentieth-century China, 83–84, 93–94; as modernity critique, 84–87; the paradox of revolution, 95–98; and social class, 95–96, 97–98  
 Mara poetry, 19, 20–24, 38, 132–33  
 Marín-Lacarta, Maialen, 123–24  
 Marxism: mixing with Chinese thinking, 193–94; political and intellectual legacy, 172; relay translation, 31  
 Masako, Kitaoka, 20, 22, 28  
 May Fourth humanism, 229  
 May Fourth Movement, 103, 163, 166  
 May Fourth nationalism, 158, 161  
 May Fourth period, 24–29, 69, 74–77  
 “Medicine” (Lu Xun), 54–58, 63, 229  
 Meng Su, article in *Shanghai Daily*, 230–31  
 Mills, Harriet, 9  
 Mira, Joan Francesc, 124  
 “The Misanthrope” (Lu Xun), 226  
 missionaries, 7–8  
 Mo Yan, 127  
 modernity: critique in *Anthology of Fiction from beyond the Border*, 87–93; Japanese vs Western, 139; in Lu Xun’s works, 212–13; *maobian*, 84–87  
 Moretti, Franco, 21  
*Morning Blossoms* (Lu Xun), 15; aesthetic and philosophic direction, 197; autobiographical nature, 198–200; effacement, 197–208; front cover, 198 fig. 12.1; representation, 208–9; shared existence, 203–204

- “Morning Flowers Collected in the Evening: Collected Prose of Lu Xun” (Yi Ugyon), 112
- Morris, William, 85–87, 97
- multispecies approach to world literature, 16
- “My Old Hometown” (Lu Xun), 7, 170, 174
- Naedong, Chong, 104
- Nagahori Yuzo, 31
- Nanyang (South Seas) region, 163
- “nation of human beings,” 5, 132
- national allegory, 65–66, 149–55
- National Revolution (1925–1927), 24
- nationalism, 39–40
- Nationalist government, 234–35
- “native peoples,” 231–32
- native soil literature, 50–51
- naturalist school, 77
- New Culture Movement, 60, 163, 196–97
- “new voices from alien lands,” 4, 5, 31, 45
- “New Year’s Sacrifice” (Lu Xun), 168–69, 170
- Ng Kim Chew, 14–15, 164–66, 167, 169–72, 173, 239–41
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 132, 184–85
- nihilism, 180–81
- Noboru, Maruyama, 26
- Nolla, Fernando Perez-Barreiro, 125
- nonhuman animals, 16, 221. *See* animal-ity in Lu Xun’s works; “child’s ox,” 235–37; critique of domination, 227–30; “Dogs, Cats, Mice,” 237; polemics between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu, 233–37; references to animals, 226–27, 237–38; as sociopolitical critique, 230–33
- nonresistance theory, 138, 142
- norm: ethics of revolution, 217–22; Lu Xun’s approach to, 210–11, 223–25; “Why ‘Fair Play’ Should Be Deferred” (Lu Xun), 215–17
- normativity, 24
- Novelas escogidas* (Foreign Language Press), 121
- Ogai, Mori, 71–72
- Okuda Koka, 239, 240 fig. 15.1
- Old Tales Retold* (Lu Xun), 125–26
- Ollé, Manel, 126
- “On Lu Xun” (Mao Zedong), 197–98
- “On New Democracy” (Mao Zedong), 107–8
- Onjun, Sin, 104
- Outcry* (Lu Xun), 69–70, 136, 155, 195–96
- Paekhwah, Yang, 103–4
- page size, 94–95
- Päivärinta, Pietari, 45–47
- Pak Chaeu, 111, 114
- Pak Honggyu, 113
- Pak Hüngbyöng, 111
- Pak Kyöngni, 108–9
- Park Chung Hee, 109, 110
- Peirce, Samuel, 239
- periodization, 24–25, 26, 28–29
- Petőfi, Sandor, 19, 20, 22, 25, 27–29
- Philipp, Anton, 42
- phonocentrism, 155
- Pitol, Sergio, 123–24
- poetry, 12; Mara poetry, 19, 20–24, 38, 132–33; and revolution, 29–32
- polemics, between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu, 233–37
- political left, 6, 234; animality in Lu Xun’s works, 230–33, 237–38; empire, nation, and democracy, 155–61; Korea, 112; League of Left-Wing Writers, 141–42; Lu Xun as figure-head, 9–10, 234; Western suspicion, 9
- politics in dissemination, 8–10
- Porcel, Baltasar, 122–23, 128
- postimperial identity of China, 155–61
- postmodernism, 223–24
- Preciado, Iñaki, 124

- pre-Qin, 180–81  
 Presas, Marisa, 125  
 private property, 217  
 Prometheus myth, 31–32  
 property rights, 217  
 prose poems, 24–29  
 Pusey, James, 227
- Qi Shoushan, 228  
 Qian Lique, 229  
 Qian Xingcun, 104  
*qubi* (distortions), 51, 52, 57, 58–59, 197
- Ramírez, Laureano, 125–26  
 Reclam Verlag (Reclam Publisher), 40–42  
 “Red Flower” (Garshin), 58–62  
*Red Laugh* (Andreev), 57  
 “Regrets for the Past” (Lu Xun), 73–77  
*Regrettable Parting* (Osamu), 137, 138  
 rehabilitation, as theme as Lu Xun’s writing,  
     132–33  
 relationality, 203–6  
 relay translation, 29–32, 110–111, 124  
 repentance, as theme as Lu Xun’s writing,  
     132–33, 134  
 Republican Revolution, 23, 67, 103  
 resistance, nationalist mythology, 223  
 revolution: of 1911 (first Chinese  
     Revolution), 26; Cultural Revolution,  
     109–10, 122, 123, 153, 168; laws and  
     norms, 217–22; paradox of, 95–98;  
     poetry of Lu Xun, 23, 26, 29–32
- Ricoeur, Paul, 180, 183–84, 185  
 Riedl, Frederick, 27–28  
 Robins, Christopher, 142  
 Rolland, Romain, 131–32  
 Rose, Gillian, 211–15, 217–22, 223–24  
*Routes* (Clifford), 175  
 Runeberg, Johan Ludvig, 46–47  
 Russian literature, 13; *Aus fremden Zungen*,  
     36–37; “Ben-Toviv” (Andreev), 54–58;  
     *Krasnyi tzvetok* (Garshin), 58–62; Lu  
     Xun’s engagement with, 49–51, 62–64;
- Zapiski sumasshedshego* (Gogol),  
     51–54  
 Russo-Japanese War, 134–35
- Said, Edward, 175  
 Sala-Sanahuja, Joaquim, 128  
 Salvat Editores, 122, 123–24  
 Saryang, Kim, 102  
 “savage peoples,” 231–32  
 Sawade, Richard, 232–33  
 Schmid, Andre, 101  
 “scholar-hooligan,” 218–21  
 scientific literature, 227–28  
*Selected Works of Lu Xun* (Korean National  
     Press), 107  
 self-awakening, 197–200  
 self-transcendence, 180  
 Sendai Medical Academy, Japan, 133–34  
 “severe style,” 213–15  
 sexual violation dream, 173–74  
*Shanghai Daily*, 230–31, 232  
 “Shanghai Literature” (Lu Xun), 217–22  
 Shanghai, “Lu Xun fever,” 163–64  
*Shanghai Moon* (Hisashi), 141–42  
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 132  
 Shiao, Miguel, 124  
 Shih, Shu-mei, 6  
*Shiji* (Sima Qian), 181–82  
 Shinju, Oneki, 96  
 Shuixian (pen name), 94–95  
 “Si zai nanfang” (Ng Kim Chew), 165–66  
 “Silence” (Andreev), 56–57  
 Sima Qian, 181–82  
 Sin Chönggho, 111  
 Sinervo, Elvi, 9–10  
 singularity, 203–6  
 Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), 134  
 Sinocentrism, 114  
 Slaughter, Joseph, 210–11  
 slave mentality, 159  
 Slavic literature, 5  
 social class: “Lamp of Eternity” (Lu Xun),  
     61; *maobian* debate, 95–96, 97–98;

- polemics between Lu Xun and Liang Shiqiu, 234  
 Society of Jesus, 8  
 Soseki, Natsume, 85–87, 91, 92, 96–97  
 South Korean Liberation Front, 110  
 South Seas region, 163  
 Southeast Asia, Lu Xun's works transported to, 163, 164  
 space, temporality of reading, 93–95. *See also* physical form of the book  
 Spain: China in Spain before Lu Xun, 119–21; reception and translation of Lu Xun's works in, 14, 118, 121–27; Spanish language context, 118–19, 129–30; translation of Chinese literature in wider context, 127–30  
*Specters of Marx* (Derrida), 172  
 spectral filiation, 172–73  
 speculative experience, 212–13  
 Spitta, Sylvia, 102  
 Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 161  
 Sun Fuxi, 96–97  
 Sun Wukong, 241–42  
 Sun Yu, 138  
 “suspended temporality,” 180, 193–94  
 suspicion, spirit of, 182–85  
  
 “take-ism,” 223  
 Takeuchi Yoshimi, 110–11, 211  
 Talens, Jenaro, 124, 128  
 “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art” (Mao Zedong), 174–75, 229  
 temporality of reading, 93–95  
 “The Thirteenth Night” (Ichiyo), 77–81  
 Thornber, Karen, 102  
 Tolstoy, Leo, 134–37, 140, 142  
 Tolstoyan figure, Lu Xun as, 137–38  
 To Chongil, 112–13  
 transculturation: Lu Xun in Korea, 101–3, 105–9, 114–16; as term, 102  
 translations: *Anthology of Fiction from beyond the Border*, 12–13; enriching Chinese literature, 90; hard translation approach, 4–5, 31; Lu Xun's career in translation, 3–5; of Lu Xun's works, 65; relay translation, 29–32, 110–11, 124  
 translations of Lu Xun's works: into Catalan, 125, 126; Chinese government-sponsored translations, 10; into Czech, 65; into English, 7, 8, 56; into Esperanto, 65; into Finnish, 8; into French, 8, 65; into German, 10, 65; into Japanese, 7, 65; into Korean, 65, 101–2, 103–4, 105, 113–16; into more than seventy languages, 5–7, 118; into Russian, 65, 67–68; into Spanish, 118, 120, 121–27  
 Trotsky, Leon, 29–31  
 Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, 150–51  
 “The True Story of Ah Q” (Lu Xun): authorial design, 66–67; conception of world literature, 68; Confucian values, 150–51; estrangement, 66; illustrating China's society and culture, 128; in Korea, 103–4, 108–9; national allegory, 65–66; rereading through Wong Bik-wan's *Lielaozhuan*, 146–55, 160–61; in Spain, 122; status as literature, 67–68; worlding, 161–62  
 Tusquets, 123–24  
 “The Twelve” (Blok), 29–30  
  
 uncut books. *See* deckle-edged books  
 “The Unfinished Works of Lu Xun” (Yi Myongson), 106  
 Universal-Bibliothek, 40–43  
 universality in world literature, 15–16, 210–11, 217, 223–25  
 utilitarianism, 96  
  
 van Eeden, Frederik, 228  
 Vazov, Ivan, 3  
 Vinyes, Ramon, 120–21  
 “voice of the heart,” 5  
 “Voiceless China” (Lu Xun), 65–66

- Wang, Chi-chen, 9
- Wang, David Der-wei, 11–12, 51–52, 136–37
- Wang Hui, 23
- Wang Lan, 108
- “We Are All Lu Xun’s Children,” 171–75
- weixin*, 233
- Weltliteratur*, 1–2, 10–11, 33–35
- West Germany, 8–9
- Western modernity, 139
- What Is Global History?* (Conrad), 117
- “Why ‘Fair Play’ Should Be Deferred” (Lu Xun), 143, 215–17
- Wild Grass* (Lu Xun), 15, 200–202; aesthetic and philosophic direction, 197; effacement, 197–208; front cover, 201 fig 12.2; “Hope” included in, 24; relationality and singularity, 204–6; representation, 208–9; surrender to the other, 206–8
- Wilde, Oscar, 199
- Williams, Raymond, 130
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 68, 81–82
- “The Wizard” (Päivärinta), 46, 47
- women’s rights, 69–70, 74, 79–81
- Wong Bik-wan, 14, 146–49; ghostwriting, 149–55; rereading “The True Story of Ah Q” through Wong’s *Lielaozhuan*, 146–55, 160–61; reverse influence on Lu Xun, 148–49
- world literature: definition, 5, 10–11; era of (*Weltliteratur*), 1–2, 10–11; global flows, 117–18; Lu Xun’s reading of and engagement with, 3–5; Lu Xun’s works as part of, 5–6, 10–12, 68; Mara essay, 20–22. *See also* international circulation of Lu Xun’s works
- world making, 15
- world poetry, 12
- worlding: as concept, 11–12, 15; suspended temporality and the worlding of nontranscendence, 193–94; “The True Story of Ah Q” (Lu Xun), 161–62
- Xinsheng* (planned but never published journal), 38
- Xu Guangping, 227, 236–37
- Xu Songnian (also known as Sung-nien Hsu), 7
- Xu Su, 108
- Yang, Gladys, 10
- Yang Paekhwah, 103
- Yang Xianyi, 10
- Ye Lingfeng, 219
- Yeroshenko, Vasyi, 228
- Yi Kawōn, 108
- Yi Kwangsu, 101–2
- Yi Kyuhae, 111
- Yi Myōngsōn, 106, 108
- Yi Pyōngju, 109
- Yi Ugyon, 114, 115
- Yi Yonggyu, 105–6, 108
- Yi Yonghui, 109–10
- Yi Yuksa, 104–5, 115
- Yoshimi, Takeuchi, 135–36
- youth, as literary theme, 26–27
- Yu Dafu: compositions after disappearance, 164–67; “Lu Xun fever,” 163–64
- Yu Kisok, 103
- Zapiski sumasshedshego* (Gogol), 51–54
- Zhang Lihua, 56–57
- Zhang, Yingjin, 11
- Zhou Haiying (son of Lu Xun), 172, 241
- Zhou Yang, 236
- Zhou Zuoren: *Aus fremden Zungen*, 37–38; bibliographic revolution, 84; compiling the *Anthology of Fiction Beyond the Border*, 34; German works, 3–4; Japanese translation of “Kong Yiji,” 7; *maobian* debate, 95; Russian literature, 58–59; valorization of translation, 90; works from minor languages, 40–42. *See also* *Anthology of Fiction from beyond the Border*
- zhuan*, 66

- “Zhufu” [Benediction] (Ng Kim Chew),  
167, 169–71
- Zimble, Jarad, 11
- Zola, Émile, 37