

## Research Report

# Learning to Read Lu Xun, 1918–1923: The Emergence of a Readership\*

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**ABSTRACT** As the first and still the most prominent writer in modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun (1881–1936) had been the object of extensive attention since well before his death. Little noticed, however, is the anomaly that almost nothing was written about Lu Xun in the first five years of his writing career – only eleven items date from the years 1918–23. This article proposes that the five-year lag shows that time was required to learn to read his fiction, a task that necessitated interpretation by insiders, and that further time was required for the creation of a literary world that would respond in the form of published comments. Such an account of the development of his standing has larger applicability to issues relating to the emergence of a modern readership for the New Literature of the May Fourth generation, and it draws attention to the earliest years of that literature. Lu Xun’s case represents the earliest instance of a fast-evolving relationship being created between writers and their society in those years.

In 1918, Lu Xun’s “Kuangren riji” (“Diary of a madman”) was published in the magazine *Xin qingnian* (*New Youth*).<sup>1</sup> In this story, through the delusions of a madman who thought people were plotting to devour other people, the reader is brought to see the metaphorical cannibalism that governed Chinese society and tradition. It was a startling piece of writing, unprecedented in many respects: its use of the vernacular, its unbroken first person narration, its consistent fiction of madness, and, of course, its damning thesis. For some time preceding its publication, calls for a new literature, new culture, new thought – a total renewal – had resounded in the pages of *New Youth*. Then “Diary” appeared. In the next years, other amazing stories followed from Lu Xun, equally charged in message and new in style. Thus it is hardly surprising that “Diary of a madman” is commonly used as a marker for the beginning of modern Chinese literature or, as its advocates called it, “New Literature” (*xin wenxue*).

This characterization of “Diary” reinforces the claims of sweeping iconoclasm that were made by activists of the new culture. Yet, sources can be, and have been, traced for the literature, revolutionary though it was. In the formation of “Diary,” sources identified include the model of Gogol’s story, an actual madmen Lu Xun had known, and Zhang Taiyan’s lectures a decade earlier in Japan.<sup>2</sup> Another approach has located

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1. This and the other stories discussed here are collected in *Nahan* (*Call to Arms*), *Lu Xun quanji* (*Collected Works of Lu Xun*, hereafter *LXQJ*), 16 vols. (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981), Vol. 1, pp. 411–564.

2. Gogol and Nietzsche are named by Lu Xun in his 1935 “*Zhongguo xin wenxue daxi xiaoshuo erji xu*” (“Preface to the second fiction collection of *A Comprehensive Anthology*”).

the literature's prototype in the new "treaty port" publishing of late Qing and early Republic periods, while recently its continuity with Qing dynasty literary trends has been suggested.<sup>3</sup>

This article proposes a further reason to view modern Chinese literature as gradually inaugurated, the reason being that recognition of its importance was far from immediate. In the case of Lu Xun's stories, several years elapsed before the fiction was widely recognized as the significant landmark it is today. In terms of the written record, it took five years before Lu's writings began to be much noticed. Between the first story in 1918 and the stories' collection into *Nahan* (*Call to Arms*) in 1923, only eleven items were published about Lu Xun (see Appendix for list). Of these, only three are of any great length (5, 9, 10), while the others make only passing mention of him (6 and 8), or are brief and often cryptic (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11). Although the New Literature – and Lu Xun – were soon to constitute the dominant narrative of modern Chinese literature, this was not the case in 1918. Indeed, as Lu Xun later observed, this was a "lonely" period for the "fighters."<sup>4</sup>

The sparse harvest of 1918–23 may be compared to the steady stream of words that characterized the second half of the 1920s, the veritable industry of articles that accompanied Lu Xun's last decade, and the thousands that marked his death in 1936. Despite the wealth of Lu Xun scholarship, however, these early items have not been studied nor has their paucity been investigated. Indeed, bibliographies, otherwise vigilant, have only spottily listed them.<sup>5</sup> While many studies focus on his earliest writings – after all, they include most of the stories which secured his formidable reputation – in discussing contemporary views, they mostly use quotations from 1923 or 1924. But of course these are not contemporary: Lu Xun had been publishing for five to six years by that time.

The anomalous nature of these five years is the stimulus for this article. It is proposed here that the five-year lag shows that time was required to learn to read Lu Xun, that this was a task which necessitated interpretation by insiders, and that further time was required for the creation of a literary world that could respond in written form. This article is not a history of early Lu Xun criticism, nor a record of his contemporaries' views. Rather, it seeks to show how the understanding of Lu Xun and the emergence of a readership grew in interdependent ways while the

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*footnote continued*

of *New Chinese Literature*"; hereafter "Preface," *LXQJ*, Vol. 6, p. 239. For a mentally disturbed man whom Lu Xun had looked after two years earlier, see Zhou Zuoren, *Lu Xun xiaoshuo li de renwu* (*The People in Lu Xun's Stories*) (Shanghai: Shanghai chubangongsi, 1954), pp. 10–12. For Zhang Taiyan, see Chen Shuyu, *Lu Xun shishi qiuzhen lu* (*Establishing Facts Relating to Lu Xun*) (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1987), pp. 203–204.

3. Leo Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 4–7; David Wang, *Fin de Siècle Splendor: Repressed Modernities of Late Qing Fiction, 1848–1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 8.

4. Preface, *Call to Arms*, *LXQJ*, Vol. 1, p. 418.

5. Most complete is Yuan Liangjun, *Lu Xun yanjiu shi* (*History of Lu Xun Studies*), 2 vols. (Shaanxi: Renmin chubanshe, 1986), Vol. 1, pp. 2–12. Item 4 is a discovery of Chen Shuyu's (*Establishing Facts*, pp. 204–05).

growth in his influence paralleled and consolidated the steady institutionalization of the new literature in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus the history to be sketched has a significance that is not limited to Lu Xun alone. It emphasizes the earliest years of the New Literature as a period during which the actors and mechanisms of a modern literary scene were gradually set in place<sup>6</sup> rather than, as commonly presented, a period defined by the ascendancy of the May Fourth activists and by their conflict with other ideological and literary positions.<sup>7</sup> Lu Xun's case represents the earliest instance, by two or three years, of a new type of relationship that was fast being created between writers and their society in those years.

The silent period ended in 1923 with the publication of *Call to Arms*, which collected the 15 stories written up till then. The first words that heralded its arrival were a foretaste of the waves of attention that were soon to sweep over Lu Xun and his works. From a Shanghai paper, they constitute the first published evidence that his fiction was eagerly awaited:

The short story collection has been published for which we must rewrite the history of Chinese literature, with this volume as its "epochal demarkation." We in Shanghai have already seen it, we have seen that cover of vermilion red and those four characters: "Nahan" and "Lu Xun."<sup>8</sup>

The cover – its colour, its design – seemed to have become instantly iconic. It remains so today, and in modern reprints the original is often integrated into the cover's design.

Reviews of *Call to Arms* appeared in steadily mounting numbers, along with other indicators of fame: interviews, analyses, gossip, controversies, adulation. By 1925, it was possible for someone to write in the following highly allusive way about Lu Xun and feel assured of being understood:

Among us, he sees the dog of the Zhao family, ... he sees the thievery of Kong Yiji; he sees Old Shuan buying a red roll to cure Little Shuan. He sees Red-nosed Old Gong and Blue-skinned Ah Wu<sup>9</sup>

The dog of the Zhao family looked at the Madman in the same menacing manner as did his master and other humans; Kong Yiji was crippled from beatings by fellow gentry for stealing; Old Shuan hoped that a roll soaked in human blood would save his son's life; Old Gong and Ah Wu were

6. In Pierre Bourdieu's analysis, these actors are termed "agents" whose "practices," based on internalized values (here, values that are still being formed), together add up to a "literary field." The present article ultimately stems from a conference on Bourdieu's ideas convened by Michel Hockx, whose work has drawn attention effectively to the usefulness of Bourdieu's model for modern Chinese literature. See his "Playing the field: aspects of Chinese literary life in the 1920s," in Michel Hockx (ed.), *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1999), pp. 61–78.

7. An early and influential account of this type is by Hu Shi, who was of course a prominent player in the New Literature. See his *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo zhi wenxue* (1924; rpt, Shanghai: Xinminguo shuju, 1929), pp. 67–109.

8. *Juewu* (Awakening), 31 August 1923.

9. Zhang Dinghuang, "Lu Xun xiansheng," collected in Tai Jingnong (ed.), *Guanyu Lu Xun ji qi zhuzuo* (On Lu Xun and His Works) (Peking: Weiming she, 1926), pp. 21–22.

shiftless village louts who took casual advantage of a widow. The author of this passage could be confident that the names, attitudes and actions of these and others of Lu Xun's characters had entered the common vocabulary of his readers, and that his premise, that the characters of Lu Xun's China were ourselves ("among us he sees ..."), was also accepted.

So the quiet phase ended forever. Lu Xun had become the most prominent writer of his time, a standing he retained for the remainder of his life as well as posthumously, with some official boosting by Mao Zedong and 50 years of state sponsorship. With its ending, the quietness of the first five years fell out of view. The many reviews of *Call to Arms* naturally also analysed the stories in the anthology, and these retroactive comments on the first stories came to be treated as early Lu Xun criticism. Literary history – our knowledge of Lu Xun – lost sight of the fact that the growth of this acclaim was slow and that it occurred almost without documentation.

The eleven comments fall into three groups over the five years. The earliest consists of five items about "Diary of a madman"; after a gap in time, come two items about a number of other stories; in a third group are three items on "Ah Q" plus a fourth one that consists of some remarks by Hu Shi. Nothing else appeared until the 1923 publication of all the stories in *Call to Arms*.

In approaching these comments, it is useful to view fame in Lu Xun's case as a two-step process, in which first he is known in his circle, then he becomes known to the larger world. It is then evident that the comments, especially the early ones, are addressed by the insiders to the outsiders. (Such a view contrasts with accounts that line up these comments as specimens in a history of Lu Xun criticism.) These readers constitute what Stanley Fish has called an interpretive community.<sup>10</sup> In Lu Xun's case, their "literary competence" to explain him to others stemmed from long acquaintance and similarity of outlook. On the inside were men who were themselves in the vanguard of the intellectual ferment. They already knew Lu Xun as Zhou Shuren and already had a high opinion of him. They knew him at least from the six years he had lived in Peking and in some cases from even earlier, from Shaoxing (1909–12) or Japan before that (1902–09). He and his brother Zhou Zuoren formed a team (*Zhoushi xiongdi*, the Zhou brothers) whose intellects and abilities were already admired and consulted by their peers. It was such insiders who prevailed upon Lu Xun to write in the first place. (Qian Xuantong, who did the asking, first met Lu Xun in 1908 in Japan.) Connections with Peking University and with Lu Xun's brother are two prime indicators of insider status. The insider has some understanding of Lu Xun's thinking that is based on personal contact and that prepares him to read this revolutionary fiction. By contrast, very few comments are by outsiders in the initial years, and they tended to be, as shown below, wide of the mark.

10. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 48.

On the outside are both the intellectuals whose circles do not overlap with Lu Xun and the regular readers, who were being developed by the magazines and writers of the new culture movement. It has been estimated that by 1917, about 10 million of China's population had received a modern education<sup>11</sup> and were a potential audience. To gain followers and fame, the regular readers are the ones who had to be won over. In a sense, all the writers whom Lu Xun knew had the same advantages as he did, for they all moved in the same circles. But he ended up with the larger outer circle of admirers needed to attain an extraordinary level of fame.

*The Comments on "Diary of a Madman"*

The five items on "Diary of a madman" all date from 1919. The story was published in the 15 May 1918 issue of *New Youth* under the pseudonym Lu Xun. It ran with no explanatory material, its only context its publication in a magazine of known iconoclastic views. The Preface published five years later with *Call to Arms* has provided now-essential knowledge about the circumstances of the story's composition that its first readers did not have. There Lu Xun described the sense of despair which he felt at the time and he told of the mixed feelings with which he agreed to write the first story. At the time, however, only a few people close to Lu Xun would have known of this frame of mind or of the years of wide reading and deep study of foreign literatures that lay behind the story. To read "Diary" on its first publication, therefore, was to read without hindsight knowledge of the author's experiences and disposition and without knowledge of his interest in and access to foreign techniques and styles.

Mao Dun's 1923 description of his encounter with "Diary" can set the stage.<sup>12</sup> Reviewing *Call to Arms*, Mao Dun recalled that "Diary" arrived silently, "made no ripple in the 'literary world,'" and even failed to anger any "national essence" types (*guocui*) with its "unprecedented" nature. The reason, he said, was that the strange story – "with the look of a story but extremely bizarre in its topic, style, tone and thought" – blended completely into a magazine which to most people was already so outlandish in style and ideology that this story did not seem any stranger. Everything that later came to be thought of as epochal or revolutionary was simply seen as weird. It did not even meet with vituperation – that

11. This figure, from Bonnie MacDougall and Kam Louie, *The Literature of China in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 19, is nation-wide and probably includes all levels above the elementary grades. The smallest and most elite count would be of enrolled students in colleges and universities in Peking, and for them, Chow Tse-tung gives a figure of 6,111 for the year 1919 (*The May Fourth Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 386). For 1934, Wen-hsin Yeh gives a figure of 27,755 in accredited colleges and universities across the nation (*The Alienated Academy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 282–84).

12. "Du Nahan" ("On reading *Call to Arms*"), in Tai Jingnong, *On Lu Xun and His Works*, pp. 53–61.

was to come later – only with incomprehension. It flew in under the radar, so to speak.

At the time he read “Diary,” Mao Dun (born 1896) was 22 and, as he represented himself in this review, he could stand as an exemplary model of the outsider reader (outsider to Lu Xun, not to the literary world). He had received a modern education at Peking University’s preparatory college, was concerned about greater issues of literature and society, and as one of the progressive staff members at Commercial Press in Shanghai, was already an admirer and emulator of *New Youth*.<sup>13</sup> In three more years, he was to help found the Literary Research Association and to take charge of reorganizing *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (*Short Story Monthly*) as its unofficial voice, from which position he worked with Lu Xun on an ambitious translation programme.

Mao Dun’s retrospective description of himself may be said to reveal the stages that even an ideal (uninitiated) reader must pass through at that time. To begin with, his reaction to a story now seen as the revolutionary inauguration of modern fiction was quite vague and took place on the level of instinct, for “at that time I did not have a particularly clear response to it.” Something indescribable, rather than specific understanding, kept him interested. In a succession of metaphors, he tried to convey his feelings at the time. He said that he felt a sense of invigorating stimulus, of emerging into light after long darkness, of an indescribable sad kind of happiness. He resembled someone, he said, who liked to eat peppers and felt that the hotter they were, the more bracing. His words show how vague or instinctual were the responses of even a receptive reader on the story’s first appearance. Mao Dun did not mention any issue of technique or theme – the device of the madman who speaks the truth, the view of Chinese history as one of cannibalism, or the plea to save the children – even though these are among the first things anyone would mention about “Diary” today. In subsequent months, he wrote, as he came across more writing by Lu Xun,<sup>14</sup> he always kept in mind this story, thinking, “ah, it is the author of ‘Diary of a madman’.”

With Mao Dun’s information as background, it can be seen that the five items about “Diary” have the role of helping readers take note of the story and appreciate it as epochal rather than view it as strange.

Of the five items, the three published in *Xinchao* (*New Tide*) form a group. Both the venue and the author immediately signal insider status. *New Tide* was founded in January 1919 by Peking University students, just as *New Youth* in those years was edited by mostly Peking University faculty. The author of the second and third items was Fu Sinian (born 1896 and aged 22 at this time). The unsigned first comment appeared in a regular column; if Fu did not write it, it is from someone like him

13. *Wo zouguo de daolu* (*Roads I Have Travelled*) (Beijing: Renmin wenzue she, 1981), Vol. 1, pp. 125–28.

14. The name Lu Xun appeared with two *suiganlu* in 1918 and with five essays and four stories in 1919.

in outlook and position.<sup>15</sup> As a student at Peking University and frequent contributor to *New Youth*, now a founder of *New Tide*, and soon to be a prominent student leader in the May Fourth demonstrations (as was each of the other founders of the magazine), Fu had all the connections to be an insider. At the time of the first item, in February, he did not yet know Lu Xun but he was known to him. We know this because in writing to his old friend Xu Shoushang, Lu Xun mentioned that Fu's was the best writing in *New Tide's* inaugural issue.<sup>16</sup> By April, Fu had taken steps to become known to Lu Xun. In this month, he wrote to him<sup>17</sup> and the letter which Lu Xun wrote in reply the next day<sup>18</sup> was published in the May issue of *New Tide*, in which also appeared the final comment on "Diary." His long letter primarily gives advice about various aspects of *New Tide* so far (four issues). It mentions "Diary," but gives no interpretive help, only describing it as "very immature, really too forced." It seems that Fu's approach yielded further results, for in October, the magazine published "Mingtian" ("Tomorrow"). (Fu's insider position may be contrasted with the outsider status of other Peking University students even a year later. One later described how in December 1920, when it was announced that Zhou Shuren was engaged to lecture on the history of Chinese fiction, "many students" did not know that this was Lu Xun, and initially only some ten students signed up. Enrolment increased after the identification was made.<sup>19</sup>)

The three comments together provide guidance on similar points (the story's style and technique) using similar methods (appeal to higher, European authority). The story's style – elliptical, abrupt, repetitive, traits that are ostensibly present because its narrator is mad – was a major obstacle. Mao Dun said that the story's natural enemies would have had to read it five or six times to figure out its subversiveness. The sympathetic reader would probably also have had to read it many times. *New Tide* makes the stylistic difficulties admirable and worth the struggle by an appeal to Western aesthetics by introducing English words and concepts. "Symbolism" is highlighted in the February item, while the May item introduces and explains two terms, "expressionism" and "impressionism," and says that what is seen in "Diary" is "impressionism." What Fu Sinian meant by these newfangled words is less important than that they give the story's unusual style a context of

15. The unsigned first item and Fu's third one make similar slips indicating the writer knows Lu Xun is Tang Si is Zhou Shuren, as Fu would have known from his multiple connections.

16. 16 January 1919, *Xin (Letters)*, *LXQJ*, Vol. 11, p. 361. The same month, his "Random thoughts No. 39" begins with a reference to an essay by Fu (*LXQJ*, Vol. 1, pp. 317, 319).

17. A letter, not extant, forwarded by Liu Bannong, professor at Peking University; *Riji (Diary)*, *LXQJ*, Vol. 14, p. 344.

18. *Diary*, *LXQJ*, Vol. 14, p. 344. Letter in *LXQJ*, Vol. 7, pp. 219–220.

19. Chang Hui, "Lu Xun xiansheng zai Beida jiangshou Zhongguo xiaoshuoshi de huiyi" ("Recollections of Mr Lu Xun's lectures at Beida on the history of Chinese fiction"), *Lu Xun yanjiu luncong* (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1980), pp. 89. I am grateful to Raoul Findeisen for bringing this reference to my attention.

English (and world) literary authority.<sup>20</sup> In the event, as Mao Dun recollected, it was the newness of the story's (Western) style, rather than its message, that had the greatest initial influence on "young people."<sup>21</sup> A later comment by Lu Xun implies a similar assessment:<sup>22</sup>

Because [his first three stories] were thought to have "deep meaning and unusual form," they stimulated some young readers. But this excitement was in fact owing to the lack of literature introduced from Europe.

Technique is dealt with in the April item, which explains the story's unusual (to Chinese readers) use of an extended first-person narrator who moreover is a madman. Entitled "Some wild talk," Fu explains that mad people speak a truth that we cannot perceive. It seems readers needed to be told that Lu Xun's story was not really about a crazy person. Again, international authority is invoked by introducing Western reference points for the madman-protagonist. "Hah! Madman! Madman! Jesus and Socrates in ancient times, Tolstoy and Nietzsche in recent times – did people not call them madmen too?" What the parallels might be with these rather diverse figures is not the issue. Rather, it is the context of world literature and world thought that validates. In the same spirit, the editors of *New Youth* and *New Tide* had given European titles to their publications (*La Jeunesse* and *Renaissance*, respectively).

Finally, the *New Tide* items also state unequivocally that this is a great writer and a great story ("the best piece of literature recently," "a penetrating understanding of the world," the author is "a stalwart of *New Youth*"). Such assertions must have been important for keeping the story alive. Evidently Mao Dun had supplied this impetus for himself until he gradually came to understand the story. For many, however, "Diary of a madman" had appeared in a magazine where everything was unusual. A year later, it was still an oddity. *New Tide* justified readers' continued efforts.

Whereas the *New Tide* comments explain style and technique, the fourth and fifth items on "Diary" provide help on the theme. Both essays focus on its lesson of cannibalism, as opposed to the technical device of the madman-narrator. They both explain that "eating people" is a metaphor and that in truth Chinese history is cannibalism disguised as humanity and righteousness. Also for the first time, attention is directed to passages in the story that have since become key to its reading. In these respects, interpretation of the story advances another step. (Note that the "save the children" theme has not yet emerged as a reference point.) The fourth item appeared in *Guomin gongbao* in a regular column named "Dagger" and the fifth in *New Youth* in November 1919. The insider status of both can be traced.

20. Led by Fu Sinian, New Tide Society ostentatiously valued Western ideas and social structures above traditional Chinese ones; see Wang Fan-sen, *Fu Ssu-nien: A Life in Chinese History and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 27, 33.

21. "On reading *Call to Arms*," pp. 55–56.

22. "Preface," *LXQJ*, Vol. 6, p. 239. Lu Xun writes of himself in the third person.



*Guomin gongbao*, the newspaper of the Yanjiu xi (Research Society),<sup>23</sup> had a brief insider status at exactly the time of this comment. The connection was Lu Xun's former student from Shaoxing, Sun Fuyuan, who became its editor shortly after the May Fourth demonstrations of 1919.<sup>24</sup> He had graduated from Peking University in 1919, where he too had been a member of the New Tide Society. *Guomin gongbao* marked the beginning of his intimate association with Lu Xun (his later solicitations resulted in, among others, "The true story of Ah Q"), and here he published nine instalments of a translation by Lu Xun in August and September before the paper was closed down by authorities. Also in these months, Lu Xun wrote seven miscellaneous pieces under the overall title of "Talking to myself,"<sup>25</sup> several of which appeared in the same section, Dagger, where the comment about "Diary" appeared. Thus, whoever the author of the September item (Sun Fuyuan? Lu Xun?), it appeared during the brief time when Lu Xun was known at the paper.

In this item, the writer uses himself as an example of gradual growth in understanding. He used to think, he writes, that it was a bit extreme of "Mr Lu" to depict Chinese society as cannibalistic. Then he chanced upon an article in which someone said he wished to bite the hated young people of the May Fourth Movement the way he was now biting into a dish of crabs. Reading this, he saw the truth of Lu Xun's thesis that cannibalism was the rule of our world and realized that it was not just literary licence. He implies that the reader too will come to understand the reality of a seemingly extreme metaphor.

The final item on "Diary" is by far the longest. *New Youth* was of course a Lu Xun bailiwick: his connections with it were multiple and overlapping, and he published almost exclusively there until 1921. As for the author, Wu Yu (1872–1949) was a person of outstanding interest and represented an unusual case of insider status. Living and reading in isolation in Sichuan, with a brief period of study in Japan, he arrived at his own iconoclastic conclusion that, among other things, "inequality and rule by force had been the principles governing the state and society of China for 2,000 years."<sup>26</sup> By the time he sent some essays to *New Youth* in 1917 – essays that could not be published in Chengdu<sup>27</sup> – he had already been writing in that vein for nearly ten years, a longer period than Lu Xun. This 1919 essay was also sent from Chengdu. Later the same year, he came to Peking to teach at Peking University (he returned to

23. Chen Shuyu, *Lu Xun zai Beijing (Lu Xun in Peking)* (Tianjin: Renmin chubanshe, 1978), pp. 46–47.

24. Sun Fuyuan, *Lu Xun xiansheng ersan shi (Two or Three Things Concerning Mr Lu Xun)* (Shanghai: Zuojiashushi, 1949), pp. 2–4. Hu Shi notes, without comment, that in 1919 *Guomin gongbao* was one of few papers that published vernacular essays (*Wushi nian lai*, p. 98).

25. Shanghai Lu Xun Museum (ed.), *Lu Xun zhuyi xinian mulu (Chronological Bibliography of Lu Xun's Writings and Translations)* (Shanghai: Wenyi chubanshe, 1981), pp. 39–40 for August and September 1919.

26. Howard Boorman (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967–70), pp. 462–65. Quotation on p. 463.

27. *New Youth* published them in five issues, March to July, 1917.

Sichuan in 1925). In 1921, he collected 14 of his essays in *Wu Yu wenlu* including this one, and gave a copy to Lu Xun.<sup>28</sup>

With Wu Yu, “Diary of a madman” truly fell on prepared soil. Nearly ten years older than Lu Xun, both were learned in traditional subjects and essentially self-educated in their anti-Confucian spirit. The story must have crystallized something for Wu. His biographer notes that his “attack on the falseness of the traditional social system and its moral values reached its peak in intensity” in this essay.<sup>29</sup> Although Wu Yu did not know Lu Xun at this time, in his empathy, he is best compared with another insider, Lu Xun’s lifelong friend Xu Shoushang, whose friendship dated from their first year in Japan (1902). In 1916, they were separated for the first time when Xu Shoushang left Peking for Nanchang. It was there that Xu read “Diary” and, as he recorded later, he was deeply moved by two passages in particular. Though he did not recognize the pseudonym Lu Xun, he exclaimed to himself that there could not be two people who wrote like Zhou Shuren. A query to Lu Xun brought confirmation that he was right.<sup>30</sup>

The Wu Yu article, though very long, comes right to the point in its title, “Eating People and Ritual Propriety.” The congruence made there between eating people and traditional values is restated in its first paragraph:

The most amazing thing about us Chinese is that we will be eating people and at the very same moment we will talk about the teachings of ritual propriety (*lijiao*). Eating people and ritual propriety – these should be contradictory actions yet they appear together – and are inseparable – in history.

Wu then draws attention to what has since become one of its most quoted passages, when the madman discovered that the history he was consulting contained only the words “humanity and principles” repeated throughout, while the words “eating people” hid in the spaces between.

The body of Wu Yu’s long essay is devoted to showing the literal truth of Lu Xun’s metaphor. As the madman does in the story, Wu cites many historical instances of leaders who were literally eating human body parts even while they were being honoured. This method of literary appreciation may seem to dessicate with scholarship the shocking insight that history consists of people eating people. However, by showing that historically cannibalism occurred frequently and calculatedly, Wu Yu forces us to recognize that cannibalism is not simply a metaphor. It is a sign of the two men’s similarity that one of Lu Xun’s sources too was history. As he wrote to Xu Shoushang in 1918, “When I was reading [the

28. *Diary, LXQJ*, Vol. 14, p. 419.

29. *Biographical Dictionary*, p 464. Entries are unsigned. The author situates the essay in the context of Wu Yu’s thinking rather than of Lu Xun criticism.

30. *Wang you Lu Xun yinxiangji (Impressions of My Late Friend Lu Xun)* (1947; rpt, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1953), pp. 49–50. On some level Xu was prepared to come across his friend’s writing, for Lu Xun had written that the fifth number of *New Youth* was soon to appear and would include some things by him (*LXQJ*, Vol. 11, p. 353), and then he wrote that the issue had been mailed (*ibid.* p. 354).

history] *Zizhi tongjian*, I suddenly realized that the Chinese are a race of cannibals.”<sup>31</sup>

The final paragraph of Wu’s essay returns to the rousing rhetoric of the opening:

Today we must awaken! We were not born for the sake of the rulers! We were not born for the sake of the sages! Nor were we born for the iron rules of ritual propriety! ... It should be clear to us from now on: those who eat people are those who talk of ritual propriety! those who talk of ritual propriety are those who eat people!

Wu’s enthusiasm upon encountering Lu Xun’s plain speaking sounds vividly even today. This essay probably received wide circulation for when it was republished in *Wu Yu wen lu*, Hu Shi wrote a preface in which he repeatedly used Wu’s phrase *chiren de lijiao* (cannibalistic ritual propriety). By 1927, the collection had reached a fifth edition.

With Wu Yu and the *Guomin gongbao* item, the metaphor “eating people” entered the public vocabulary. As an element of insider language, however, it had required no explanation. Writing to Qian Xuantong shortly after the story’s publication, Lu Xun used the term casually, writing of the “national essence” group (*guocui*), “it’s just that they still want to eat people.”<sup>32</sup> In the same way, he was later frequently to use the language of “Ah Q” both privately and in published essays.

The initial difficulty in understanding “Diary of a madman” might have made it easier for Lu Xun’s damning view of Chinese society to find acceptance. Understanding came slowly and even then it turned out that the story attacked Chinese traditions and its hypocritical social structures and self-serving pieties. These targets were easy ones for readers of magazines defiantly named *New Youth* and *New Tide* to accept. As David Pollard remarked of the prose pieces of the time, “politically these pieces are not much more sophisticated than Lu Xun’s student essays. The bold individual carries the sword for mankind... Youth is exhorted. The enemy is ‘the Chinese’.”<sup>33</sup> So far, it was the *guocui* types – as Mao Dun put it, the “grey-faced” people – who needed to take alarm. General realization that the guilty also included the enlightened readers of Lu Xun awaited “The true story of Ah Q.”

To conclude this section, some remarks are necessary about the slow start in the evidence, for it highlights some important characteristics of modern fiction in these earliest years. The first of the comments (February 1919) did not come until nearly a year after the May 1918 publication of “Diary,” while the last was published in November 1919. Thus it took a year and a half for the story – its style, its metaphor and its message – to be discussed in print. This slow pace continued, for a further year and a half elapsed before anything else was written about Lu Xun (the two items discussed in the next section.) This is the case even though he is

31. *Letters, ibid.* p. 356.

32. *Letters, ibid.* p. 355.

33. “Lu Xun’s *zawen*,” in *Lu Xun and His Legacy* p. 60.

described as having many admirers by late 1920, for example, among the students at Peking University.<sup>34</sup>

One reason for the slow start was emphasized above, that the story was outside the usual range of readers' experience. A second factor is revealing about the author, for Lu Xun's writing pace was slow. His second story, "Kong Yiji," was not published until nearly a year later, on 15 April 1919. (He had completed it in the winter of 1918, but that is still an eight-month gap from "Diary.") During this year, he published instead about two dozen essays, many under the heading of "Random thoughts." Five of these used the name of Lu Xun, and as Mao Dun commented, seeing his name kept that first story in his mind.

There is a third element that contributed to the slow start in understanding Lu Xun. This lay in the literary world itself. The ferment of the late 1910s only gradually coalesced around the founding of literary societies and their related magazines, while the magazines in turn were needed to find and train a readership in the new literature. The complex of interacting players – publishers, critics, other writers, educators, booksellers and readers, many of them in overlapping roles – who would constitute and support the new literature, was still nascent. A preliminary form of this nexus existed in the commercial publications popularizing ideas of modernity that had been initiated before the turn of the century, but the particular institutions that produced and responded to the new literature were still undefined. Into this situation, as Leo Lee notes, the concept of literature as "socially prestigious" is the contribution made by the May Fourth writers that brought the literary scene to its next stage.<sup>35</sup> In the space of time between this stage and the energetic period of 1922–25, when more than 100 literary societies with "youthful and dynamic names" were founded in the major cities,<sup>36</sup> lies the growth in readers' understanding of Lu Xun.

The magazines important in the formation of the literary scene are well known, but it is worth reviewing their dates in relation to "Diary," for they show that the literary world evolved rather later than the story's publication. *New Youth* came early, in 1915, but despite its calls for a new literature it was, as Lu Xun noted, primarily a forum for the discussion of issues and was not really intended to nurture fiction writers.<sup>37</sup> Lu Xun implied that *New Tide* was the first to fill that need directly.<sup>38</sup> This magazine, however, was founded only in January 1919, a fairly large gap in time after "Diary." Now, however, the pace did begin to accelerate, with many magazines and societies contributing to the multi-faceted changes collectively called the May Fourth Movement. Some of the other magazines where Lu Xun was to publish and to be reviewed were founded about this time, a year or more after the publication of "Diary." *Chenbao fukan* (*Morning Post Supplement*) (publisher of "Ah Q") began

34. Chang Hui, "Recollections," pp. 89–90.

35. *Romantic Generation*, p. 31.

36. *Ibid.* p. 9.

37. "Preface," *LXQJ*, Vol. 6, pp. 239–40.

38. *Ibid.* p. 240.

publication in February 1919, and *Awakening* in June 1919.<sup>39</sup> The most influential society of these years, *Wenxue yanjiu hui* (Literary Research Association), was founded in January 1921,<sup>40</sup> and in the same month *Short Story Monthly* began publication as its unofficial house organ. *Wenxue yuekan*, also identified with the Literary Research Association, began publication in this year too.<sup>41</sup> Voices on the literary scene became noticeably diversified with the founding of *Chuangzao hui* (Creation Society) in summer, 1921, while its quarterly, founded in 1922, soon added its singular attitude to the mix. Literary writers began to separate out from journalists as a distinct profession.<sup>42</sup> Mao Dun began to use the phrase “the creative writing scene” (*chuangzuotan*), although he still had to add a parenthetical explanation, “those who write for a career.”<sup>43</sup> It was only with the founding of these societies and magazines that “Diary” could benefit from the Association’s stated goals of promoting a literature which, as Leo Lee described it, “ought to be regarded as a serious, independent, and honorable vocation.”<sup>44</sup> “Diary” predated the literary world that would ratify its value, which could not write about Lu Xun until it existed.

### *The Comments on Other Stories*

The two items here, both published in *Short Story Monthly*, discuss the literary scene, in the course of which their authors single out Lu Xun’s short stories for praise. They mention five stories, all written after “Diary” and before “Ah Q.” With one exception (“My old home”), the stories are simply commended, with no further discussion.

Mao Dun, author of the first item, was part of the same larger literary establishment as Lu Xun, but the development of his insider status in relation to Lu Xun only came with his editorship of the Shanghai-based *Short Story Monthly*. It has already been mentioned how as a staffer at Commercial Press in Shanghai, Mao Dun read “Diary of a madman” and kept it in mind until he could understand it better. Three years later, when *Short Story Monthly* became a progressive vehicle, the two began to communicate and soon established a long-distance working relationship. Sun Fuyuan was probably the intermediary.<sup>45</sup> In the magazine’s first year,

39. Chow Tse-tsung, *Research Guide to the May Fourth Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), items 601, 604.

40. Michel Hockx, “The Literary Association (*Wenxue yanjiu hui*, 1920–1947) and the literary field of early Republican China,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 153 (March 1998), pp. 49–81.

41. Chow Tse-tsung, *Research Guide*, item 390.

42. The professionalization of newspapers and journalists beginning in the 1920s had the consequence of separating journalists from writers. See Xiaoqun Xu, *Chinese Professionals and the Republican State: The Rise of Professional Associations in Shanghai 1912–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 161–189.

43. Item 6. The term is also in the title, *Chuangzuotan mantan*.

44. *Romantic Generation*, pp. 12–13.

45. On 11 April 1921, Lu Xun received a letter from Sun, who enclosed letters from Shen Yanbing (Mao Dun) and Zheng Zhenduo, secretary of the Literary Research Association. The next day Lu Xun wrote to Mao Dun. *Diary, LXQJ*, Vol. 14, p. 402.

Lu Xun contributed numerous translations to its ambitious world literature programme. They did not meet in person, however, until 1927, when Mao Dun was briefly in Shanghai.<sup>46</sup> Later they lived in the same terrace apartments in Shanghai.

Mao Dun's contribution, the second in a planned quarterly review of new fiction, represents his first published remarks on Lu Xun, about whom he was to write several important articles.<sup>47</sup> It surveyed more than 120 short stories published the past three months (up from 80 the previous quarter), but mentioned only six authors (and eight works) by name. In one category, "peasants and villages," Mao went outside his time frame to cite Lu Xun's "Fengbo" ("Storm in a teacup") as an excellent example of this type. He then named "My old home" as the story published that quarter that he most respected. In an analysis which has continued to influence criticism, he discussed the concept of a "distance" (*gemo*) between people which, he said, originated in "a class concept passed down by history." He quoted two passages that have since proved important with many critics: "People were born with the same breath, it is later that distance (*geli*) shows itself" and "That image of the young hero with the silver neckchain standing in the watermelon patch had always been very clear to me, but now it suddenly became murky."

The second item, by Wang Jingxi (1897–1968), is an opinion piece written from Baltimore. Wang had graduated from Peking University's economics department and had contributed a short story to each of *New Tide's* first two issues. In commending Lu Xun's stories, he must have known that their author was Zhou Shuren. Nearly 15 years later, Lu Xun included Wang in the anthology he edited of modern fiction, and in a preface he evaluated Wang's works, as he did all the 50 or so authors he included.<sup>48</sup>

Wang's essay, dated 5 January 1922, was placed by Mao Dun in the Letters department in the March issue of *Short Story Monthly*, presumably soon after its receipt. It is interesting to see that the small community of readers remained intact across national borders. Its title issued a challenge: "Why hasn't any good literature appeared in China?" meaning, Wang said, the four or five years since the "literary revolution" began. He named as exceptions only three stories by Lu Xun ("Yao" ["Medicine"], "Mingtian" and "Yijian xiaoshi" ["A small incident"]) and one story by Bing Xin. He said no more about the stories, but instead discussed why literature had made such a poor showing. (He felt authors were shackled by an over-reliance on isms.)

In the two items of this section, insider status did not produce special insights. The two authors' acquaintance with Lu Xun chiefly served to single out his work from the rapidly growing literary output. Nevertheless, they yield some points of interest. First, only two of the stories

46. "Jinian Lu Xun xiansheng" ("In memory of Mr Lu Xun"), in Mao Dun *et al.* (eds) *Yi Lu Xun (Remembering Lu Xun)* (Beijing: Renmin, 1956), p. 62.

47. Collected in *Mao Dun lun Lu Xun (Mao Dun on Lu Xun)* (Shandong: Renmin chubanshe, 1982).

48. "Preface," *LXQJ*, Vol. 6, pp. 240–41.

written after “Diary” and before “Ah Q” remain unmentioned, “Kong Yiji” and “Toufa de gushi” (“A story about hair”). Given the newness of the literary enterprise, this is a remarkably complete record. The omission of “Kong Yiji” is especially intriguing in view of its subsequent importance and the later information that this was Lu Xun’s favourite story.<sup>49</sup> A second point is that the stories are only mentioned and their high quality asserted. Except for “My old home,” no discussion is offered. One reason may be that the stories between “Diary” and “Ah Q” are straightforward in their technique. But it seems more likely that the practice of criticism, as opposed to explanation, was not yet common. Thus Mao Dun’s analysis may be added to the many areas in which he can be regarded as a pioneer. As we shall see, with the publication of *Call to Arms*, many fine analyses of individual stories came out quickly, implying that understanding had developed earlier than the practice of criticism.

*The Comments on “The True Story of Ah Q”*

“Ah Q” was serialized over a period of ten weeks (4 December 1921 to 12 February 1922), at approximately weekly intervals in *Morning Post Supplement*. Lu Xun used the pen name “Baren” (“A fellow from Sichuan”) to show, he said later, that he was an uncouth person.<sup>50</sup> Adopting a new pen name increased the opportunities for misreading by creating many outsiders who knew Lu Xun was Zhou Shuren but not that Baren was also Zhou Shuren. The change seemed to have been made lightly, but the instalment publication of an pseudonymous social satire turned out to create much excitement.

There are three items to consider, plus a general comment by Hu Shi that includes “Ah Q.” I begin, however, with a description from 1926 which provides a picture of the commotion generated by its serial publication. This account is by Gao Yihan, a political science professor at Peking University, a founding member of and frequent contributor to *New Youth*, and an activist in the May Fourth demonstrations.<sup>51</sup> He appears only once in Lu Xun’s *Diary*, but seemed to have been an intimate at that time, for this entry noted that Lu Xun was having Zhou Zuoren take to him the manuscript of “Kong Yiji.”<sup>52</sup> Writing in 1926, Gao told of an acquaintance who was sure he was being satirized in one of the instalments, was convinced the author was so-and-so, who was the only one who could have known about a particular episode, and went around telling anyone who would listen etc. etc. To our essayist’s sardonic pleasure, the person eventually discovered that the author was Lu Xun, “whom he did not know at all” so he could not have been the

49. Sun Fuyuan, *Two or Three Things*, p. 24.

50. “‘A Q zhengzhuan’ de chengyin” (“The writing of ‘The true story of Ah Q’”), *LXQJ*, Vol. 3, p. 379.

51. Mao Dun notes that Gao and Chen Duxiu together distributed the anti-Duan Qirui pamphlets that ended in Chen’s famous three months’ imprisonment (*Roads I Have Travelled*, p. 169).

52. *Diary*, *LXQJ*, Vol. 14, p. 341, 10 March 1919.

one skewered in print. Nor was this person alone in his fear. According to Gao, many others feared that they would be the next to appear in “Ah Q,” only thinly disguised.<sup>53</sup>

One interesting point about Gao Yihan’s story is that Baren’s identity was not an open secret. In addition, it seems that many experienced readers did not recognize Lu Xun’s writing style. Even after the serialization’s conclusion, Zhou Zuoren would write coyly that “because I know the author of ‘Ah Q,’ perhaps I cannot write objectively” (item 10). Finally, although Gao’s acquaintance proved not have been a target, it was certainly not beyond Lu Xun to have had both an immediate and a metaphorical target. He himself never really refuted the suspicions of topical satire. He only said that he continued to be plagued by people who asked him whom he had in mind as targets.<sup>54</sup> The potential of misunderstanding by outsiders, which seems well realized in this instance, causes the three items contemporary to the publication of “Ah Q” to be all the more interesting. Two are by insiders – Mao Dun, Zhou Zuoren – and one by an outsider.

The outsider is a reader named Tan Guotang, not otherwise known, whose letter to *Short Story Monthly* Mao Dun published and then immediately rebutted. Tan’s letter illustrates one type of misapprehension the general reader might have had. Like Wang Jingxi, Tan Guotang was concerned not about Lu Xun but the overall literary scene. He too found this scene disappointing: “The creative world is just so impoverished!” he lamented. First he criticized Yu Dafu’s short story collection *Chenlun* (*Sinking*, published that October), then he said “Ah Q” was another disappointment. He had just finished the fourth instalment (Ah Q has just been fined and banished from the Zhao family for propositioning Amah Wu) and although he recognized that the story was satire, he thought it it was carried to an unbelievable length and “harmed reality.” He seemed to have read it as an overdone satire of a specific shiftless individual rather than of a larger target represented by him. Perhaps it was to fortify himself against such charges of overly broad humour that Lu Xun chose a pen name that indicated “uncouth” origins.

As editor, Mao Dun used his office to rebut this correspondent immediately. (Apparently Tan irritated Zhou Zuoren too. At the end of Zhou’s long essay, he took the trouble to quote and reject Tan’s assessment of “unrealistic.”) Among the things Mao Dun had to say are the following:

- So far we have only reached part four, but in my view it is truly an outstanding work.
- It is true that if you were to look for a person like Ah Q in society today, you would not find him. But as I was reading this story, I kept feeling that Ah Q was

53. *Xiandai pinglun (Modern Criticism)*, Vol. 4, No. 49 (21 August 1926). Gao was criticizing the practice of attacking people through fiction and used “Ah Q” as an example. Lu Xun gave this paragraph wide circulation by quoting it in “The true story of Ah Q,” *LXQJ*, Vol. 3, p. 379.

54. *Ibid.* pp. 379–380.



somewhat familiar, and then, ah yes, I saw that he was the crystallization of the Chinese character!

Here, not quite half-way through the story's serialization, interpretive guidelines were already clearly established: a formulation of Ah Q, not as a particular individual, but as "the crystallization of the Chinese character." Mao Dun also commented that Ah Q reminded him of Oblomov, although he did not say how. Perhaps the same dynamic as with "Diary" was at work here, to bring in validating European comparisons.

A mere month after the final instalment, Zhou Zuoren published a long essay on "Ah Q," also in the *Morning Post Supplement*, using his regular column, "My own garden." The essay points to the closeness between the brothers who were to become estranged for life a year and a half later. In it, only a month after the story's completion, many of the points which we still consider central to "Ah Q" have been laid out. Today these views are widely accepted but are not always traced back to Zhou Zuoren or to his intimate connection with his brother. Here are some excerpts:

- Ah Q is the essence of all the "scripts" (*pu*) of things Chinese.
- He does not exist in today's society and yet he is everywhere.
- Ah Q is a type (*leixing*) for a nation's people.... We see written out the great fundamental illness of the Chinese people.
- In fact he is a collective photograph of the Chinese character.
- Although a work of satire has a kind of loathing at its core, yet this loathing is a type of love. Although a satiric work is on the surface the opposite of a utopian fiction, its spirit is the same.
- The author writes especially piercingly of how the Chinese people lack the will to survive and do not have a respect for life because, I believe, these are the major sources of the illness of the Chinese people.
- This is like bitter medicine for Chinese society.

In Zhou Zuoren's interpretation of Ah Q, there is no compromise. There may be room for argument, but there is no avoiding his basic point: Ah Q is what it means to be Chinese. The heritage of thousands of years of self-preening Chinese history has come down to this village layabout, a figure depicted with "a kind of loathing [that] ... is a type of love." If you have read Zhou Zuoren, you know "Ah Q" is not a simple story. This must have been the situation in 1922.

If Zhou Zuoren established a certain base level of sophistication in the reading of "Ah Q," then Hu Shi's remarks on Lu Xun, written in the same month, extended it with a high evaluation of all of his fictional works. His is the final one of the eleven early items. It is, alone among them, part of a much longer work. His remarks occur at the very end of a history of Chinese literature of the past 50 years that was commissioned by Shanghai's *Shenbao* on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. The tenth and final section of the history concerns developments in the five years since Hu's 1917 call for a "literary revolution." In the final page and a half, he turns to the literature produced in these eventful years. Summarizing the situation in five genres of the new literature, he distinguishes only two writers by name, Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren. Zhou Zuoren is simply

mentioned as the strongest advocate for the literary essay, *xiaopin sanwen*. By contrast, his praise of Lu Xun is direct and specific:

[In fiction] there are quite a few good stories but the greatest achievement belongs to one who goes by the name of “Lu Xun.” His short stories are not many in number, but from “Diary of a madman” of four years ago to the recent “True story of Ah Q,” they are almost without exception excellent.

Only two sentences, but enough: the high praise is applied to the whole of Lu Xun’s fictional output and it is even more impressive given the context of a comprehensive evaluation of the new literature and, on a more personal note, in view of Lu Xun’s satiric reference to its author in the first section of “Ah Q.”

Hu Shi certainly had been on the lookout for worthwhile fiction. Two months before the publication of “Diary,” he gave a lecture at Peking University in which he explained how concise and eloquent a genre the short story was (using Daudet and Maupassant as examples) and demonstrated that it did not yet exist in China.<sup>55</sup> Although he made no public comment on “Diary” when it appeared, in 1921 he wrote the preface for *Wu Yu wen lu*, where, as mentioned earlier, he repeatedly used Wu’s phrase “cannibalistic ritual propriety.”<sup>56</sup>

Hu’s appraisal shows the high valuation of Lu Xun from someone with a vested interest in New Literature. Lu Xun must have seen these comments when, as a fellow pioneer in the study of vernacular fiction, he read the history in manuscript. He made no mention of it, however, and on returning the manuscript, only wrote: “I have finished reading your manuscript – it is truly a groundclearing work, a great encouragement to read. I hope that will soon be published, for the presentation of historical information is worth more than a lot of empty theorizing.”<sup>57</sup> When the book was published in 1924, Hu Shi sent him a copy.<sup>58</sup>

Hu Shi, of course, was the ultimate insider. In their different ways, the influence of both men was felt from the beginning at *New Youth*, although only Hu Shi’s role was in the public eye. By late 1920, serious differences had arisen among the original cohort, expressed in conflicts over the editorial direction of *New Youth*, but the interaction of the two men,<sup>59</sup> though always limited and formal, shows that in early 1922 the insider circle remained intact in some important respects. We may interpret Hu Shi’s remarks as reflecting the consensus of influential

55. “Lun duanpian xiaoshuo,” *Hu Shi zuopin ji*, 37 vols. (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1986), Vol. 3, pp. 139–53.

56. Hu had earlier mentioned Zhou Shuren, but using Lu Xun was new. Also in March 1922, he wrote of “Lu Xun” (using quotation marks) but in connection with New Poetry (“*Chang shi shi siban zixu*” (“Preface to the fourth edition of *Chang shi shi*”), *Hu Shi zuopin ji*, Vol. 27, p. 48).

57. *Letters, LXQJ*, Vol. 11, p. 414.

58. *Diary, LXQJ*, Vol. 14, p. 483.

59. The two men lent each other books and corresponded about textual and bibliographical questions relating to late Qing novels. Surviving letters in *LXQJ*, Vol. 11, pp. 412, 414, 423, 425. See also Huang Airen, *Hu Shi yu zhuming zuojia (Hu Shi and Famous Writers)* (Anhui: Anhui daxue chuban, 1998), pp. 1–17; and Zhou Zhiping, *Hu Shi yu Lu Xun* (Taipei: Shibao chubanshe, 1988), especially pp. 11–48.

insiders, just after the final instalment of “Ah Q.” Back in 1918, Lu Xun was already highly esteemed by activists in the new culture movement, but in soliciting him to write what became “Diary of a madman,” Qian Xuantong had no more to go on than longstanding respect for the Zhou brothers and the view that since Zhou Zuoren had been writing a lot for *New Youth*, was it not about time Zhou Shuren did something too?<sup>60</sup> Now with the completion of “Ah Q,” one may speculate that the original insiders had watched the evolving literary scene with some shared knowledge and standards despite developing schisms.

While we may suppose that at this time, Lu Xun has vaulted to the front of what has become a crowd of writers, the actual evidence remains contradictory. Retrospective comments tell us that “Ah Q” caused a great stir and that his following among young people leapt with its publication, but although he wrote six more pieces that were collected in *Call to Arms*, they did not attract any published comments. Nor was there any more on “Ah Q” itself. Thus, between March 1922, and August 1923, when *Call to Arms* was hailed exultantly, another year and a half went by devoid of any written criticism. “Ah Q” took Lu Xun to a different level of fame, but this is not reflected in the written material until *Call to Arms* was published.

Instead, a number of writers were attracting written attention. In *Short Story Monthly*, where readers’ views were actively solicited in a variety of departments beginning in August 1922, the next half year garnered five pieces from readers on Bing Xin, three on Ye Shaojun, and two each on Zhu Ziqing, Gu Yiqiao and Sun Langgong. Many of these opinions were quite lengthy, one on the hugely popular Bing Xin, for example, running to six large and closely printed pages. At this stage, before the publication of *Call to Arms*, it was still possible for other writers to outweigh Lu Xun in public notice. Indeed, as late as 1925, Sun Fuxi, the younger brother of Sun Fuyuan, could complain, “Abroad, magazines have long been full of essays discussing Lu Xun’s works and his life, but in China, although we love to read his works, we still seldom see any comments on it.”<sup>61</sup>

This time, however, we are sure that the absence of published evidence does not indicate lack of understanding or interest. Reviewers of *Call to Arms* told of reading the stories over the past few years: “Every story in the collection has been published before in various periodicals and naturally many people have read them already”; “I read them all once and sometimes twice as they came out”; “Many I had read before.” Another writer notes that *Call to Arms* will please those who “frequently say of themselves, ‘I love to read Lu Xun most of all’.”<sup>62</sup> Even the mock-fearful words of Cheng Fangwu show this. He prefaces a thorough pan of *Call to Arms* with the arch claim that he is afraid to criticize Lu Xun because

60. Qian’s account after Lu Xun’s death; quoted in Chen Shuyu, *Establishing Facts*, pp. 61–62. The two men, once close colleagues, had been estranged since at least 1929.

61. “Wo suo jian you ‘Shizhong’ zhe” (“My views of ‘a public example’”), in Tai Jingnong, *On Lu Xun and His Works*, p. 112.

62. Y. Sheng, “Du Nahan”; Feng Wenbing, “Nahan”; Cheng Fangwu, “Nahan de pinglun,” all in *ibid.* pp. 69, 86, 83. *Juewu*, 31 March 1922.

“the author is known throughout the world, his disciples and fans are everywhere” and “the author is adulated by tens of thousands of people.”<sup>63</sup>

“Ah Q” seems the key, for it marked a quantum leap in the public’s understanding. That its lessons were understood was vividly conveyed by Mao Dun:

Today there is no young person who loves literature who has not spoken the two words “Ah Q.” ... In every corner of society, we are continuously meeting people who show “Ah Q-ism” (*A Q xiang*) and indeed if we reflect upon ourselves, we cannot help but suspect that in our own selves we are carrying an element of “Ah Q-ism.”<sup>64</sup>

The coinage of “Ah Q-ism” and its frequent use reveal an important new element in reading Lu Xun: the recognition by readers that Lu Xun’s indictment encompassed themselves. The acknowledgement by readers that Lu Xun had shown them themselves and not merely exposed others was an important new understanding that is first stated at this time, although it was already present in the Madman’s suspicion that he too might have unknowingly eaten human flesh.

### *Call to Arms Ends the Silence*

The publication of *Call to Arms* inaugurated Lu Xun criticism as we know it, in both quantity and variety. The readers, critics and magazine editors who created, interpreted and legitimated the hierarchy of literary values in the new era began to play their roles in appreciable numbers. Their viewpoints, tone and mode of expression increased in variety as well. In the beginning, the numbers were still small: three reviews were published in 1923 and a dozen or so in 1924. But thereafter responses came in steadily increasing numbers, with no gaps in time, in a widening number of magazines and newspapers and an increasing variety of genres. A number of these newly numerous items were collected, with Lu Xun’s co-operation and advice, in the 1926 volume *Guanyu Lu Xun ji qi zhuzuo* (see note 9), whose contents illustrate the variety of responses stimulated by *Call to Arms*: reviews, analyses of individual stories, biographical speculations, highly personalized reveries, my-meeting-with-Lu-Xun accounts. A brief overview of this new material will underscore its difference from the first five years and bring this article to a conclusion.

The growth was notable in every category of participants, whether critics, other writers, readers or editors. Quantity and variety occurred concurrently with the enlargement of the literary community, while the increased number of those who could operate under the new rules began to be purposefully fostered. In *Short Story Monthly*, for example, several new features opened the magazine to outsiders: a letters column in

63. “*Nahan de pinglun*,” pp. 72, 82.

64. “*Du Nahan*,” p. 56.

August 1921, a criticism section in August 1922 and a readers' response section in April 1923. These opportunities were immediately used. The pieces on Bing Xin and others were mentioned earlier. Zhu Xiang (1904–33), who was to write a review of *Call to Arms* in 1924 and to become a notable poet, was an early entrant, for he was still 18 and not yet in Qinghua University when his note to the letters column (not on Lu Xun) was published in January 1922. And, as mentioned above, Tan Guotang's comments on "Ah Q" appeared next in February 1922, and Wang Jingxi's communication from Baltimore in March 1922. A high school newspaper joined in with an account by a student of meeting Lu Xun at her home. Indeed, just talking created one's membership in the literary field: "in restaurants, in bakeries – everywhere I hear praise of *Call to Arms*," one writer notes.<sup>65</sup>

In such an expanded literary community, where knowledge of Lu Xun's themes and methods was well diffused, the distinction between insiders and outsiders lessened. Skill in reading seemed to be distributed on an individual basis rather than by insider status. Zhu Xiang, for instance, seemed on internal evidence not to have known Lu Xun (although he was a protégé of Zhou Zuoren's), but he analysed the ending of "My old home" with great sensitivity, making many astute connections to *zagan* essays and, somewhat unexpectedly, to Zhou Zuoren's style.<sup>66</sup> Insiders may still have special information: for example, Sun Fuyuan, under the pseudonym Zeng Qiushi, said that "Kong Yiji" was Lu Xun's favourite story.<sup>67</sup> But even this information, said to be from Lu Xun, did not have the same force: subsequent reviewers each picked his own.

The variety in attitude and tone is also notable. The early comments had all been in praise of Lu Xun, but at this time, the tone of praise escalated while detractors appeared who were vociferously negative. On the adulatory side, his elevation occurred immediately upon the publication of *Call to Arms*, another hint that the period of silence following "Ah Q" obscured much in the way of build-up in fame. "There is the desert, then there is Lu Xun," wrote one reviewer. Another averred, "Many stories are published, but they are only for casual reading.... Lu Xun's *Call to Arms*, however, I could read and read again and would want to read it still one more time."<sup>68</sup> On the other side, highly critical articles also appeared, including *ad hominem* attacks, which Lu Xun returned with an equal degree of vituperation. Cheng Fangwu adopted a sweeping, and one could say perverse, tone, condemning every story in

65. Ma Jue, "Chuci jian Lu Xun xiansheng" ("My first meeting with Mr Lu Xun"), in Tai Jingnong, *On Lu Xun and His Works*, pp. 47–51; Feng Wenbing, "Nahan," p. 87.

66. "Nahan," in Tai Jingnong, *On Lu Xun and His Works*, pp. 96–99, under the pseudonym Tianyong.

67. "Guanyu Lu Xun xiansheng," *Morning Post Supplement*, 12 January 1924. This information he later gave under his own name, see n. 49. Yuan Liangjun, *History of Lu Xun Studies*, p. 17, does not identify Zeng as a pseudonym.

68. Y Sheng, "Du Nahan," p. 63; Yu Lang, "Lu Xun de Nahan," in Tai Jingnong, *On Lu Xun and His Works*, p. 89.

*Call to Arms* except “Buzhoushan,”<sup>69</sup> the only piece that was later removed from the collection.

The extremes of adulators and detractors, the intemperate tones on both sides, plus incendiary contributions by Lu Xun – all add up to indications of a literary scene, *wentan*, now in full gear. The literary world had caught up with and absorbed Lu Xun’s output. The search for a context in which to comprehend his advanced style and his definition of the issues – this was a project of the past. Now everyone was an authority, and there were many self-declared disciples.

The gradual developments traced in these pages shed some light on Lu Xun’s pre-eminent standing in modern Chinese literature from the viewpoint of timing. Among reasons for his high stature, “The true story of Ah Q” has justly occupied a central position. Now we see that in its time it also served to consolidate the standing that Lu Xun had been slowly acquiring with each story he published. Only *Call to Arms* was its equal in effect. Although both the story and the collection fully merit their acclaim, the developments traced here lead to the conclusion that timing, too, was important. The early arrival of both works on the literary scene meant that Lu Xun had few contemporary rivals. Other men of his generation and education founded the magazines of the new culture movement and encouraged and solicited literature, but most did not write fiction. Over his fiction contemporaries he had a head start of two to three years: “Ah Q” began serialization at the end of *Short Story Monthly*’s first year, and *Call to Arms* appeared near the beginning of the great growth in the literary scene in 1921 to 1925. Since the total number of his stories, including those in *Panghuang*, remained small and no subsequent story of Lu Xun’s outweighed “Ah Q” in significance or complexity, little alteration was subsequently needed in the reader’s already high evaluation of Lu Xun. The situation as it was fixed in 1923 continued its upward trajectory and gave us the pre-eminent Lu Xun we know today.

In the years reviewed here, the increase in published comments on Lu Xun proceeded apace with the increased size and complexity of the literary world. Formerly, the differing views that propelled the new culture movement were manifested only behind the scenes – in splits over the editorial direction of magazines, in changes of editorial boards – and were given verbal expression only in private writings such as diary entries and letters among the insiders. By the end of these five years, new actors, new forces and new venues meant that these differences had moved out on to the pages of numerous magazines and did so in a wide variety of genres. Conflicts on other matters were often manifested in writings about Lu Xun, a major figure who was early on the scene and who did not hesitate to participate in verbal warfare. This is the public arena of the pen in which, for the next decade and a half, Lu Xun was to be the most prominent of the men who were to fight and be fought over.

69. “*Nahan de pinglun*,” pp. 76–81.

Appendix: **Comments on Lu Xun, 1918–1923**

- I. On “Diary of a madman,” published May 1918.
1. February 1919. *Xinchao*. Signed “Reporter.”
  2. April 1919. *Xinchao*. Signed “Meng Zhen” (Fu Sinian).
  3. May 1919. *Xinchao*. Fu Sinian.
  4. September 1919. *Guomin gongbao*. Signed “Madman.”
  5. November 1919. *Xin qingnian*. Wu Yu.
- II. On stories published between “Diary” and “Ah Q.”
6. August 1921. *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. Signed “Lang Juan” (Mao Dun).
  7. March 1922. *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. Wang Jingxi.
- III. On “The true story of Ah Q.”
8. January 1922. *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. Tan Guotang
  9. January 1922. *Xiaoshuo yuebao*. Mao Dun.
  10. March 1922. *Chenbao fukan*. Zhou Zuoren.
  11. Hu Shi, *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo zhi wenxue*. Text dated 3 March 1922; preface dated 7 March 1923; published 1924.