

Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), the pen name of Zhou Shuren, was a figure of Chinese May Fourth movement and literature reform, belonged to League of Left-Wing Writers. He was born in a declining family in Shaoxing, Zhejiang province; in his childhood he lived in affluence and received classical Chinese education, but with the deteriorated situation of his family, he prematurely experienced the hypocritical and ruthless treatment from the society. In 1902, Lu Xun was awarded a government scholarship then studied Western medicine in Japan due to his father's death of illness and mistrust to Chinese traditional medicine. In this period, he was inspired by natural science, western novels, philosophy and history, which raised him an ambition to obtain the career of a Western doctor and saved Chinese people from the suffering of physically pain<sup>1</sup>. However, during the Russo-Japanese war in 1906, Lu Xun was disturbed by a documentary slide of picture after the class. The scene was a Japanese soldier executing a Chinese spy who was appointed by the Czarist army, surrounded by emotionless Chinese people, seemed the execution had no relevance to them (Mr. Fujino 藤野先生, 1926). Thus, Lu Xun recognized the problem was not the physically weakness, it was spiritual repression.

The people of a weak and backward country, however strong and healthy they may be, can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles; and it doesn't really matter how many of them die of illness. The most important thing, therefore, was to change their spirit<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, Lu Xun believed literature and art could awaken human spirits that was oppressed by the feudal society which lasted two thousand years. He was furious toward the far-reaching influence of the moral ethic that precipitated people to become apathetic to tribulation, even persecuted women, suffered from superstition or uneducated ideology, meanwhile the obedience to hierarchy<sup>3</sup>. Relating to his fictions, he uncovered this phenomenon used ironic tone to criticized people's numbness, unconcerned attitudes toward other's suffering, or sarcasm in social situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Tang Tao, *History of Modern Chinese Literature* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1993), 83

<sup>2</sup> Lu Xun, 鲁迅, *Call to Arms 呐喊*, 1918

<sup>3</sup> Helmut Martin, *Modern Chinese Writers Self-portrayals* (1972), 272.

During the development of the New Culture Movement, Lu Xun felt disappointed by the cruel reality, which was the situation of ordinary people, their living conditions were not improved; Peasants were increasingly impoverished because of the unstable politics and control of warlords. Moreover, the feudal ethic was continuing oppressed them, for instance, the patriarchal concept was the spiritual shackles for women, especially in rural region. Thence, Xianglin's wife 祥林嫂 in "New Year Sacrifice" (Zhufu 祝福, 1924) represented the constitution of oppressed rural women, to expressed Lu Xun's dismay. The protagonist Xianglin's Wife was a widow who worked as a servant in Luzhen, to escape from her mother-in-law by trafficking her to Ho village. However, she was still dragged home and forced to marry again. After a few years, she came back to Luzhen because of the death of her second husband and son, but the villagers were indifferent to her sufferings, even used that experience to insult her. For example, she always elaborated how her son was eaten by wolf, the villagers showed sympathy initially, but changed their attitudes into ridicule because they felt loathe to the details. Then they ridiculed and interrupted to her tale afterwards. Meanwhile, Liu Ma said that "If you had held out longer or knocked yourself to death, it would have been better." then she explained the superstitious and horrifying result that Xianglin's Wife would face after death: She would be cut in two and divided because she had two marriages. After that Liu Ma persuaded her to buy a threshold in the temple as a symbol for "atonement". When Xianglin's Wife completed her atonement, she was still not allowed to touch the tools used for ancestral sacrifice because her master believed she was misfortune and unforgiveable. Therefore, Xianglin's Wife was led into hopeless and endless persecution spiritually. In the end, she became a beggar and dead in New Year. According to her torment, she was compelled to death<sup>4</sup> because she was actually innocent, but humiliated by everyone; the surroundings were apathetic to her experiences and considered she is "guilty" and "ominous" because of the second marriage and death of her son. The responses of the surroundings identified feudal moralities engraved conservative and merciless ideologies in their spirits. In the same

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<sup>4</sup> Tang Tao, History of Modern Chinese Literature (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1993), 100.

way, that emphasized contemporary women had no human rights to rebel against others, even their destinies, also expressed women were innocent victims that were oppressed ruthlessly. Moreover, Liu Ma was in the same situation as Xianglin's Wife, they were both rural female servants, but her indifferent to Xianglin's Wife demonstrated that even women had no empathy to each other, which reflected peasants were still prisoned in the feudal ethics<sup>5</sup>.

The short story "Medicine" (Yao 药, 1919) reflected the lower class society during the historical period around Xinhai Revolution 辛亥革命 (1911) and the early stage of the May Fourth Movement. It praised the martyrs who dedicated themselves to the revolution while exposed and rebuked the evil and darkness of feudal moralities, as well as criticized the shortcomings of the revolutionaries, which was the neglect of masses that they were still imprisoned in ignorance. The story explained a superstitious method to heal tuberculosis, which was eating human blood bread (Renxiemantou 人血馒头). The protagonist Old Shuan 华老栓 spent exorbitant price to buy a bread from executioner that dipped with blood from a prisoner who was just executed. The purpose was to save his son Little Shuan 华小栓 because Little Shuan suffered in tuberculosis and nearly died. Since poverty and social class resulted to lack of education and unable to receive medical treatment, they could only adopt a foolish and superstitious approach for cure. In the story, Old Shuan showed dread to the bread but soon became joyful because "This is a guaranteed cure!". His customers also congratulated him that "So you've had a great stroke of luck for your Little Shuan!" Thereby that circumstance represented lower people suffered in distress and became indifferent to cruel occurrences. They even felt joyous to the sacrifice, similar to build personal benefit on others' agonies. Their belief of human blood bread was a symbol of numbness, with this type of "medicine", Chinese people would never be healed spiritually. In the end, tuberculosis still took Little Shuan's life after he ate the blood bread and that represented Lu Xun's disappointment to the desolate situation where peasants still struggled<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, Xia's (Xia Yu 夏瑜)

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Merle Goldman, *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era* (Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 230.

vivid image heralded the hope of the revolution<sup>7</sup>; Instead of asked for mercy, he had been resisted in the prison. He “started chatting with Red-eye. He said the great Ching empire belongs to us.” And after he was beaten by Red-eye, “He even said how sorry he was”, his action praised the enthusiasm of the revolutionary and the bravery to face sacrifice. Furthermore, people ridiculed Xia emphasized the backward areas were generally ignorant because of feudal ethic; they were commonly fearful to revolution and unwilling to change. That reflected the awakening and importance of the urgent needed for revolutionary consciousness, and profoundly revealed the dark reality under the feudal system.

According to “My Old Home,” (Guxiang 故乡,1921) Lu Xun reflected the gap between people caused by social class contradictions. Through the returning of the protagonist to his old hometown, the perspective focused on the contrasts of the characters over the past few years, which reflected the reality of the rural bankruptcy and the peasant's painful life around Xinhai Revolution. At the same time, Lu Xun profoundly pointed out that due to the influence of the traditional concepts, the spirit of the lower class people was confined in the bondage. The hierarchy caused the distortion of pure humanity, as well as made them became insensitive to the feudal system. The story expressed Lu Xun’s strong dissatisfaction with reality and the expectation to transform the old society, as well as raised hope to the next generation. In addition, the protagonist created cheerful memories with Runtu 闰土 (son of a part-time labor.) in childhood, so he looked forward to meet Runtu again. However, when they finally meet each other, the appearance of Runtu changed dramatically into weakness and affliction, which represented peasants lived in poverty commonly. Then, Runtu called the protagonist “master” respectfully that made a clear distinction between them. Thus, the protagonist shivered to his call, he was utterly helpless about his friendship with Runtu because “lamentably thick wall” estranged them. Runtu’s unsatisfactory experiences brought him servility to upper class, even his childhood friend<sup>8</sup>. When the mother was curious about Runtu’s polite attitude, Runtu responded

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>8</sup> Tang Tao, History of Modern Chinese Literature (Beijing: Foreign Language press, 1993), 87.

“What bad manners that would be. I was a child then and didn't understand.” Therefore, the “manner” was precisely the hierarchical concept from the ancestors, also was the embodiment of the Confucian mainstream culture of the feudal patriarchal system. Then, Runtu commanded his son to bow to the protagonist, which made the next generation to inherit the hierarchical conception. In the end, the protagonist recognized the desolation of reality, but he realized his nephew Hung-erh 宏儿 and Runtu’s son Shui-sheng 水生 built friendship same as he was. Only the child’s innocent era has no hierarchical concept to estrange them. As the result, he pinned his hope on the children and had expectations for the next generation of China, “They should have a new life, a life we have never experienced.” He wished they could break the bondage of hierarchy to people. That also expressed Lu Xun’s hope.

In conclusion, Lu Xun initially studied medicine in Japan but changed his attitude to create literature. He was disappointed to the influence of feudal society that engraved apathy and numbness in Chinese spirits. So the importance was to awaken people’s oppressed spirits instead of cured their physically pain. He pointed that the feudal ethics oppression toward people impacted them to become indifferent unconsciously and survived painfully. When this transform completed, they started persecuted others, especially women. The feudal moral deprived human rights and freedom from female, the destinies of women were controlled by the patriarchal society. Meanwhile, ordinary people were imprisoned in superstition and uneducated circumstance, they still suffered in poverty and the revolution did not bring improvement to their life. As the result, they could only adopt superstitious and cruel approach to treat diseases. Moreover, hierarchy alienated people from each other and they inherited this concept unconsciously, they would take the initiative to alienate people from different social status. Overall, when the ideology of apathy becomes stubborn, ordinary people become emotionless as “puppets<sup>9</sup>” and lost awareness of resistance. Therefore, the feudal society was “eating” people (A Madman’s diary 狂人日记, 1918), which the ironies represented in Lu Xun's fictions were accusing these conflicts. However, he concealed his expression about reform with metaphor in his

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 84.

stories that he expected the next generation could break the adverse regulations.

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