DISTINCTIVE FEATURES AND MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS OF LU XUN RECEPTION IN SOUTH KOREA IN THE 2010S

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Abstract: Since the 2010s, the completion of the Korean-language Complete Works of Lu Xun (20 vols.) and the continued publication of diverse Korean translations have marked a new phase in the dissemination and reception of Lu Xun in South Korea. Korean Lu Xun studies in this decade exhibit several notable developments, including the diversification of textual translation and circulation, the deepening of reception-history research, renewed interpretations of Lu Xun as a practical intellectual resource, the rewriting of Lu Xun biographies from localized perspectives, close readings of canonical texts, and the systematic introduction of overseas scholarship through translation. Taking the 2010s as its historical frame, this article surveys key research and publishing trends and analyzes the broader shift in research orientation and theoretical perspective. It further argues for the scholarly significance of these transformations within the dual frameworks of localized Korean experience and East Asian comparative inquiry.

I. Introduction: Research Questions and Positioning

The dissemination and reception of Lu Xun 鲁迅 in South Korea constitutes not only a major strand in the history of Sino–Korean literary exchange but also a critical vantage point for examining the circulation of ideas and the formation of modern experiences in East Asia. The completion of the Korean-language *Complete Works of Lu Xun* (20 volumes) on May 25, 2018, signaled a milestone in both translation and scholarship. Yet beyond the symbolic importance of this publishing achievement, the more consequential development lies in the 2010s transformation of Korean Lu Xun reception in terms of research agendas, problem consciousness, and theoretical frameworks—changes that still call for systematic scholarly synthesis. Within the temporal framework of the 2010s, this article examines new trends in Korean Lu Xun reception across six interrelated domains: (1) textual translation and mediation; (2) reception-history research; (3) contemporary interpretations of Lu Xun's practical intellectual significance; (4) biographical writing; (5) close reading of canonical texts; and (6) the introduction of overseas scholarship and the formation of transnational dialogue. By bringing Korean local experience into conversation with an East Asian comparative perspective, the article seeks to illuminate an internal logic behind the shift from "translation and understanding" toward "reflection and re-interpretation," and to consider its implications for the international configuration of Lu Xun studies.

II. The Diversified Boom in Korean Translations of Lu Xun

The 2010s are first characterized by a conspicuous diversification and sustained expansion of Korean translations of Lu Xun. Since Ryu Su-in (柳树人) introduced "A Madman's Diary" (*Kuangren riji*) in August 1927, the Korean peninsula has witnessed nearly a century of translating and publishing Lu Xun's writings. To date, major works such as "The True Story of Ah Q" and "A Madman's Diary" alone have generated more than fifty Korean versions.

In the 2010s in particular, Lu Xun's fiction, prose poetry, essays, and verse were republished in numerous editions and anthological configurations, producing a substantial and socially visible wave of translation-mediated circulation. This boom not only broadened Lu

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Xun's cultural presence in Korea but also provided a stable, multilayered textual infrastructure for academic inquiry—one of the most crucial preconditions for the deepening of Korean Lu Xun reception during this decade.

Even in the Korean conceptual framework, miscellaneous essays are not considered pure literature, but Lu Xun's essays were translated and introduced to Korea around 1987. More importantly, the realism and critical nature of Lu Xun's essays had a positive impact on South Korea's democratization movement. Mr. Lee Yong-hee (李泳禧), a progressive intellectual and social activist of that era, later known as "the Lu Xun of Korea," used Lu Xun's essays to expose and critique the various contradictions in South Korea's politics and society at the time. Through Lee Yong-hee's significant influence, Lu Xun was genuinely embraced by a wide range of intellectuals and students in South Korea, with his influence continuing to expand. We know that China has modern essay anthologies, but such classifications do not exist in South Korea, which is a notable gap in Korean academia. Nevertheless, a considerable number of scholars have continued to study Lu Xun's essays, thereby expanding the research.

III. Deepening Reception-History Research and Theoretical Construction

In the field of reception history, Korean scholarship in the 2010s made marked progress in excavating, organizing, and systematizing historical materials, thereby advancing broader historical narratives and theoretical constructions grounded in Korean local experience while also attentive to East Asian contexts. Representative achievements include Hong Seok-pyo's (洪昔杓) *Lu Xun and Modern Korea: Imagining East Asian Coexistence* (2017) and Choi Jin-ho's (崔珍豪) *The Imagined Lu Xun and Modern China* (2019). In addition, I previously edited the three-volume *A Reception History of Modern Chinese Literature under Japanese Imperial Rule* (2007), which also compiled Lu Xun-related materials in a relatively systematic manner and provided a documentary basis for subsequent research.

Hong expands the scope of inquiry by investigating relevant historical sites and figures in China and by assembling materials from multiple East Asian locales. From a perspective attentive to East Asia's historical structures, he conducts in-depth research on nine Korean intellectuals who engaged with Lu Xun—whether through personal connections, sustained attention, or translation work—including Oh Sang-sun (吴相淳), Ryu Su-in (柳树人), Yang Baek-hua (梁白华), Jeong Lae-dong (丁来东), Kim Tae-jun (金台俊), Shin Eon-jun (申彦俊), Yi Yuk-sa (李陆史), Kim Gwang-ju (金光州), and Yi Myeong-seon (李明善), yielding a range of new findings. Choi, working within a framework that combines Korean situatedness with East Asian modernity, proposes new arguments in both overarching historical narration and theoretical construction. He divides the century-long reception of Lu Xun into three phases—colonial/liberation, Cold War, and post–Cold War—and develops a cross-cutting analysis that carefully incorporates each period's historical conditions. His approach, characterized by methodological caution and interpretive balance, exemplifies an increased level of theoretical self-awareness in Korean reception-history scholarship.

IV. Lu Xun as a Practical Intellectual Resource: Contemporary Interpretations

A salient feature of Korean Lu Xun reception in the 2010s is the reconfiguration of Lu Xun as a practical intellectual resource endowed with critical force and a capacity for real-world intervention. During the period of Japanese imperial rule and later under U.S. military governance and authoritarian regimes, Korean intellectuals often turned to Lu Xun for ideological resources to critique oppression, resist injustice, or energize democratic reform

movements. In the twenty-first century—especially under conditions of cultural consumerism—the question of how to inherit and reactivate the "practicality" of Lu Xun's thought has emerged as a renewed problem of consciousness. In response, Korean scholarship produced several representative works, including Lee Uk-yeon's (李旭渊) *Nights of Reading Lu Xun—Reading My Time* (2020), Seong Won's (成媛; transliteration) *With Lu Xun* (2020), and Lee Hee-kyung's (李希卿; transliteration) *Lu Xun and the Family: Struggles around Kinship* (2020). These studies connect Lu Xun's reading to contemporary social experience and individual existential sensibility, foregrounding the reflective and practical potential of Lu Xun's thought in everyday life.

Personally, I believe that scholars in some East Asian countries, such as South Korea and Japan, have maintained enthusiasm for Lu Xun studies, but there has indeed been a change to date. Entering the 21st century, during this phase, we have moved past the fervent identification with Lu Xun and begun to sit quietly at our desks to conduct research. The most important achievement over these more than 20 years is the complete publication of the 20-volume Korean translation of 'Complete Works of Lu Xun.' This is the second overseas edition of 'Complete Works of Lu Xun,' which has had a positive impact on the popularization and dissemination of Lu Xun in South Korea. In addition, the publication of the 10-volume Korean edition of 'Selected Works of Chinese Lu Xun Studies Masters' has become a reference for Lu Xun studies in South Korea. As I mentioned earlier, Lu Xun studies in South Korea today are different from those during the Japanese imperialist period and the military government rule period. Although there has been some diminishment, Lu Xun's critical spirit still holds real significance. Lu Xun's criticism is not only directed at society and others, but also at oneself and one's nation, which is very important.

V. Rewriting Lu Xun Biographies from Localized Perspectives

In the 2010s, Korean humanities scholars increasingly undertook the task of rewriting Lu Xun's biography from explicitly localized perspectives. Prior to this development, Korean translations of major Lu Xun biographies—by Chinese scholars such as Wang Shijing (王士菁), Zhu Zheng (朱正), Lin Xianzhi (林贤治), and Wang Xirong (王锡荣), as well as Japanese scholars such as Takeuchi Yoshimi (竹内好) and Fujii Shōzō (藤井省三)—had already exerted considerable influence in Korea. Stimulated by these works, Korean Lu Xun specialists and progressive humanists began to compose biographies grounded in Korean intellectual positions. Examples include Park Hong-gyu's (朴洪奎) *Go Bravely, Child!* (2016), the collaboratively authored *Lu Xun, the Earth without Roads* (2017) led by Ko Mi-suk (高美淑) and five co-authors, and Cho Gwan-hee's (赵宽熙) *Lu Xun: A Stairway for Youth* (2017). Among these, *Lu Xun, the Earth without Roads* is especially notable: by tracing Lu Xun's life route through field visits and integrating spatial investigation with textual narration, it produces a biographical account of strong on-site presence and structural coherence, expanding both the methods and expressive forms of Lu Xun studies in Korea.

VI. Close Reading of Canonical Texts

Close reading of individual canonical texts—or single-work monographs—also became a prominent orientation in Korean Lu Xun studies during the 2010s. The field produced a substantial number of theme-based monographs, while articles on Lu Xun published in Korean core journals remained at roughly ten per year. Many of these studies continue to explore major works and key issues from multiple angles and with diverse methods. Particularly noteworthy, however, are works that concentrate on intensive rereading of canonical texts, such as Ko Jeom-bok's (高点福) *Reading Lu Xun's "The True Story of Ah Q"* (2014) and Lee Ju-ru's (李珠鲁) *Lu Xun's "A Madman's Diary": Cannibalism and Madness* (2019). The latter explicitly

proposes a rereading of "A Madman's Diary" for the twenty-first century by "breaking away from authoritative and habitual modes of reading," thereby crystallizing its methodological ambition and underscoring a broader trend toward interpretive innovation.

VII. Translating Overseas Scholarship and Expanding Scholarly Dialogue

In the 2010s, the systematic Korean translation of overseas Lu Xun scholarship reached a new scale, significantly expanding the academic resources available to Korean researchers. Translations of major works such as Wang Hui's Resisting Despair (2014) and Fujii Shōzō's Lu Xun (2014) appeared in Korean. Most consequential, however, is the Korean translation of ten volumes of *Selected Works by Leading Chinese Lu Xun Scholars*, edited by Ge Tao (葛涛), for which I served as the chief editor of the Korean edition (2017/2021). This series presents representative scholarship by ten leading Chinese Lu Xun researchers—Wang Furen (王富仁), Sun Yu (孙郁), Zhang Mengyang (张梦阳), Sun Yushi (孙玉石), Yang Yi (杨义), Zhang Fugui (张福贵), Gao Xudong (高旭东), Yang Jianlong (杨剑龙), Huang Jian (黄健), and Qian Liqun (钱理群). For Korean Lu Xun studies, the series provides a systematic and authoritative comparative reference and establishes a more robust foundation for scholarly dialogue between Korean and Chinese research communities.

Conclusion

A review of Korean Lu Xun reception in the 2010s indicates that the field has moved beyond earlier phases characterized primarily by translation quantity or ideology-driven interpretation. Instead, it now displays a more systematized configuration marked by stronger problem consciousness and increasing theoretical self-reflexivity. In Korea, Lu Xun is no longer merely a "literary object to be studied" but is progressively reactivated as a practical intellectual resource with the capacity for contemporary intervention.

From the standpoint of research history, Korean scholarship in the 2010s has advanced reception-history reconstruction, localized biographical rewriting, and renewed close readings of canonical texts, thereby addressing earlier limitations such as fragmentation and repetitiveness. This shift not only signals the maturation of Korean Lu Xun studies but also offers important implications for repositioning Lu Xun within broader East Asian comparative frameworks and within the evolving architecture of world literature.

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