A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE RESEARCH ON LU XUN BY LEO OU-FAN LEE AND LIU ZAIFU

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Abstract: The studies of Lu Xun conducted by Li Oufan and Liu Zaifu are well worth comparative examination, as both possess significant methodological and intellectual-historical value. Li Oufan approaches Lu Xun primarily from the perspectives of literary form and modernity, emphasizing the artistic autonomy and psychological dimensions of Lu Xun's works, and attempting to achieve "disenchantment" through "literature." Liu Zaifu, by contrast, focuses on ideological content and social critique. In his early work, he used Lu Xun's aesthetics to break through dogmatic constraints; in his later work, from a cross-cultural perspective, he probed more deeply into Lu Xun's spiritual structure and symbolic significance for the nation. Although their methods differ markedly, both scholars endeavor to transcend ideological interpretations, promote pluralistic and in-depth Lu Xun studies, and demonstrate the diverse possibilities and profound value of academic reflection.

Both Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu have made numerous achievements and significant contributions to modern Chinese literature and culture, with profound influence. Leo Ou-fan Lee's academic research began overseas, deeply influenced by overseas sinologists such as the Xia brothers, while inheriting the research paradigms of overseas sinology and pioneering his own research path. Liu Zaifu grew up on the Chinese mainland, and his research led the intellectual trends of the 1980s. Later, Liu Zaifu went abroad, further expanding his research scope to include Chinese classical literature such as "Dream of the Red Chamber," refining and deepening his research approach and theoretical level, and achieving new, more solid results.

It is worth noting that both have achieved remarkable accomplishments in Lu Xun studies. In fact, Liu Zaifu's academic journey began with studies of Lu Xun. In the 1970s and 1980s, Liu Zaifu successively published three books on Lu Xun studies: "Lu Xun and Natural Science" (1976, co-authored with Jin Qiupeng and Wang Zichun), "A Biography of Lu Xun" (1981, co-authored with Lin Fei), and "Essays on Lu Xun's Aesthetic Thoughts" (1981). At that time, these works not only exerted considerable influence in the field of Lu Xun studies but also, together with his "Three Essays." [1] and other discourses played an irreplaceable role in updating concepts in literary research and transforming research paradigms in academia. In the 30 years after leaving China, Lu Xun's studies remained a continuous source of interest for Liu Zaifu. Compared to earlier periods, during this time Liu Zaifu's research on Lu Xun demonstrated a broader perspective, a more comprehensive understanding, and a deeper reflection. Leo Ou-fan Lee's reflections on Lu Xun studies are concentrated in the book "The Wailing in the Iron House" (first published in English in 1987, first published in Chinese in 1999). After its publication on the Chinese mainland, the book sparked intense reactions and continues to offer much food for thought today. Having lived abroad for a long time, Leo Ou-fan Lee was rarely influenced by mainland ideology, which laid the foundation for his transcendent perspective in his study of Lu Xun. Due to the uniqueness and complexity of Lu Xun in contemporary times, Lu Xun studies have consequently acquired a certain special status. Comparing the research of Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu, who are the leaders of the academic circle, on Lu Xun can not only explore the similarities and differences between their research but also reveal their different ways of thinking, and clarify their academic approaches from

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[1] Refers to "Personality Combination Theory", "Literary Subject Theory", and "National Soul Reflection Theory". See Xia Zhongyi: "New Tide Study Cases", Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 1996, p. 1.

point to surface, which can provide useful enlightenment for the current research on Lu Xun.

I. The Distinction Between Thought and Art

In the history of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun's achievements and status are unparalleled. To this day, Lu Xun continues to influence people with his uniquely charming literary creations and spiritual personality. Looking back at history, Lu Xun suffered too much concealment, distortion, and even rewriting in contemporary China. It was not until the new era after the end of the "Cultural Revolution" that Lu Xun gradually shed the political halo through the efforts of many scholars. During this period, scholars cried out to "return to Lu Xun!" (Wang, 1986, p. 9) This also ushered in a new era of Lu Xun studies.

In fact, the articulation of such a slogan inevitably required a considerable period of accumulated knowledge and theoretical groundwork. To a large extent, Liu Zaifu's research on Lu Xun can be seen as a precursor to the "return to Lu Xun" movement. Liu primarily approached Lu Xun through the lens of aesthetic thought, arguing that although Lu Xun did not possess a specialized aesthetic treatise or a systematic theoretical framework, "supported by his vast knowledge system and practical experience, he demonstrated profound aesthetic sensibility and the ability to discern ugliness that ordinary aesthetic theorists often struggle to achieve." Moreover, he "absorbed the strengths of Liang Qichao's focus on political and artistic social utility, while also incorporating Wang Guowei's emphasis on artistic characteristics and aesthetic value, thereby transcending the limitations of these two extremes to form his own aesthetic philosophy." Thus, he is regarded as "the true pioneer of China's new aesthetics." This affirmation of Lu Xun's aesthetic contributions stems from Liu's belief that "the 'truth-good-beauty' principle should serve as the aesthetic standard for art criticism, boldly advancing toward this ideal, and the era of bourgeois slogans advocating 'truth-good-beauty' should come to an end." Lu Xun's aesthetic thought represents the perfect unity of "truth-good-beauty": "The integration of truth, goodness, and beauty became the soul of Lu Xun's aesthetic philosophy and the aesthetic ideal he relentlessly pursued in the realm of art." In reality, Liu Zaifu was striving to discard preconceived political notions and engage with Lu Xun's creative practice. The deepening exploration and systematic construction of Lu Xun's "truth-good-beauty" aesthetic thought marked a solid step forward in his academic journey.

Overall, Liu Zaifu's literary studies in the 1980s emphasized literary subjectivity, attempting to continue the May Fourth Movement's tradition of affirming individual value and advocating enlightenment rationality. This was largely a passionate humanistic outcry. Lu Xun stood as the perfect gateway for his discourse. For Liu at that time, Lu Xun's works held self-evident authority and advancement, particularly evident in his "Essays on Lu Xun's Aesthetic Thought." Ultimately, although Liu sought to dispel the "sage" aura politically imposed on Lu Xun in his essays and return to Lu Xun's concrete creations, the constraints of the broader environment inevitably led him to revere Lu Xun as another idol. He later reflected: "In my study of Lu Xun, I consistently treated him as an idol, regarding his ideas as unquestionable cultural principles and premises." Consequently, in Liu's 1980s perspective, Lu Xun's works became nearly perfect artistic creations, and the aesthetic ideas they embodied became absolute benchmarks: "The fundamental laws of artistic beauty revealed by Lu Xun should become the artistic principles followed by Chinese writers and artists, and the basic value concepts of socialist literature and art in China." Under the overarching principle of "truth, goodness, and beauty," Liu Zaifu emphasized Lu Xun's rejection of the "absolute good-good, absolute bad-bad" dichotomy in character evaluation. He highlighted that "the depth and complexity of characters in Lu Xun's novels represent another artistic pinnacle achieved after *Dream of the Red Chamber*." His portrayal of Ah Q, he noted, "most thoroughly transcends character

uniformity, embodying profound authenticity" and stands as "the finest globally representative archetype." Liu further developed this concept, proposing the influential "theory of character combination."

In fact, Lu Xun studies for Liu Zaifu can be seen as an indicator of the changes in his academic progress. At different stages of his life, Liu Zaifu's understanding of Lu Xun's works was not consistent. Especially after leaving the country in 1989, in his "second life" (Liu & Wu, 2011, p. 13), Liu Zaifu's research on Lu Xun underwent significant changes compared to before. On one hand, Liu Zaifu still affirmed Lu Xun and his works at a high level, believing that Lu Xun "admitted in Diary of a Madman that he was a conspirator of cannibals" and "that is the essence of Lu Xun's great spirit" (Liu & Lin, 2011, p. 225). On the other hand, Liu Zaifu exhibited new qualities, identifying that Lu Xun's "life as a whole is a huge contradiction, and his life field is a huge tension field," not only enlightening but also "transcending enlightenment," becoming "the only modernist among China's modern writers with a modern sense and the only avant-garde questioning the meaning of existence" (Liu, 2011, p. 28). He believed that Lu Xun, with his genius intuition, resonated with Western modernism, and the "Ah Q image" in his writings, with its cultural content, especially its absurdity, could rival any classic work in the Western modernist movement (Ibid., p. 97).

Turning our attention to Leo Ou-fan Lee, it is not difficult to find that his understanding of Lu Xun's works is similar to Liu Zaifu's, yet quite different. Similarly, Leo Ou-fan Lee also highly praised Lu Xun's novel writing, albeit from an artistic perspective: "Compared with most of the overly romantic and loosely structured works of the early' May Fourth 'period, Lu Xun's novels with their rigorous structure and erudite irony were entirely 'atypical' for that era." (Lee, 2000, 45) "He could remarkably skillfully express his original ideas and ingeniously transform his thoughts or experiences into creative art." (Lee, 2000, p. 52) "He achieved the true accomplishments of 'fictional novels.' (Ibid., p. 55) He was the first in the history of Chinese literature to consciously develop the complex art of the novel narrator."

In his critical analysis of specific literary works, Leo Ou-fan Lee's study of *Wild Grass* stands out as particularly noteworthy. Lee describes the novel as "a literary crystallization of the subconscious surreal world formed by Lu Xun's somber emotions and suffering sentiments," describing it as "a fusion of Lu Xun's dual impulses for formal experimentation and psychological analysis," which "became a monumental achievement in Symbolist art." (Ibid., p. 82) On the artistic level, Lee also highly praised "The Sword Casting," noting that Lu Xun "created a powerful, symbol-rich original vision" while remaining faithful to the original source material (*The Chronicles of Exiles* from *Taiping Yulan*) (Ibid., p. 31). He considered it "the most technically sophisticated and evocative chapter in *New Tales of Old Stories*." Liu Zaifu also argued that "most of Lu Xun's short stories in *New Tales of Old Stories* cannot be considered his masterpieces, with *The Sword Casting* being the sole exception." (Liu, 2011, p. 61) However, unlike Lee, Liu Zaifu focused on Lu Xun's ideology, emphasizing his revenge complex. He asserted that "the black knight Yan Zhi'ao, who dares to use swords and fire for vengeance, embodies Lu Xun's idealized personality." (Ibid., p. 63)

What also caught our attention is that both Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu highly praised Lu Xun's essays. Liu Zaifu said that Lu Xun's essays "are not only an encyclopedic spiritual entity formed by the convergence of China's social history, China's social psychology, and various other knowledge, but also a genius artistic creation," and in general, they are "a great epic in the history of modern Chinese literature—a profound reflection of the social, psychological, and combative journey of the Chinese nation," (Liu, 1988, p. 267) and also "an unparalleled achievement in modern Chinese literature." (Li & Liu, 2011) Liu Zaifu's affirmation of Lu Xun's essays is closely related to his emphasis on the utilitarian value of literature, which is reasonable and inevitable. Surprisingly, Leo Ou-fan Lee, deviating from his usual stance, refuted the views of Xia Ji 'an and others who denied Lu Xun's essays, arguing that "if we want to measure the originality of Lu Xun as a modern writer against the backdrop of China's literary tradition, essays should precisely be a very important aspect" (Lee, 2000, p. 105). In fact, in his book *The Call from the Iron House*, Leo Ou-fan Lee dedicated a chapter to

studying Lu Xun's essays, thereby granting them considerable status. Of course, Leo Ou-fan Lee still emphasized Lu Xun's outstanding skill in controlling and expressing himself in his essay writing. From this perspective, Leo Ou-fan Lee believed that the "best" in Lu Xun's essays were the following two types: "one is the expression of personal strong emotions under artistic restraint, and the other is the occasional flights of imagination and metaphor amidst lengthy satire and criticism." (Lee, 2000, p. 122)

II. Different Research Perspectives and Theoretical Systems

The reason why Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu have different views on Lu Xun and his works is that, firstly, Lu Xun and his works are complex and rich, which makes the researcher "view them from different angles, they are different"; secondly, different researchers have different research perspectives and theoretical systems.

Li Oufan's research on Lu Xun was profoundly influenced by the Xia brothers, particularly Xia Ji' an. Li once remarked that the chapters "The Dark Power in Lu Xun's Novels" and "Lu Xun and the Dissolution of the Leftist Writers' League" in Xia Ji'an's book *The Dark Gate* "provided an exceptionally vivid portrayal of Lu Xun's image," which "has remained a persistent shadow over my entire study of Lu Xun," becoming "an anxiety of influence." (Lee, 2009, p. 182) It could even be said that his *The Cry in the Iron House* emerged from Xia Ji' an's research on Lu Xun. Li wrote *The Cry in the Iron House* because, after reviewing the vast body of existing research and translations on Lu Xun, he became convinced that "despite Lu Xun's (editor's note: referring to Lu Xun himself) profound humility and self-restraint, certain aspects of his legacy were distorted and misunderstood during the process of deification, necessitating reinterpretation." (Lee, 2000, p. 1) Here, Leo Ou-fan Lee more explicitly identified the "魅化" (a Chinese term for cultural mystification) phenomenon in Lu Xun studies compared to his contemporary Liu Zaifu (1980s), largely because Li, being overseas, could perceive the dense "fog" surrounding Lu Xun. However, the complexity of Lu Xun's works "often makes their original meanings elude researchers 'understanding rather than directly revealing themselves. In this sense, no study can fully exhaust or conclusively determine all aspects." (Ibid., p. 2) Thus, Li Oufan's research on Lu Xun is by no means comprehensive or capable of fully revealing the "true face of Mount Lu," but rather selective and focused, akin to discovering pearls through winding paths. Before writing *The Outcry in the Iron House*, Leo Ou-fan Lee's understanding of Lu Xun underwent a "protracted process." Initially, he "interpreted the great writer through psychological lenses, but after repeated contemplation, he concluded that the significance of Lu Xun's works lies more in artistic than psychological dimensions" (Ibid., pp. 2–3). Unlike Liu Zaifu, who explored Lu Xun's aesthetic philosophy, literary significance, and historical value, Leo Ou-fan Lee, while tracing the psychological evolution of Lu Xun's transformation into a writer, "focused primarily on Lu Xun's artistic achievements" (Ibid., p. 3).

Essentially, Leo Ou-fan Lee's enthusiastic exploration of Lu Xun's creative characteristics and artistic concepts was determined by his "modernity" perspective. In "The Outcry in the Iron House," Leo Ou-fan Lee focused on investigating why Lu Xun became a "modern" writer of China (rather than Western modernity). Therefore, he "emphasized seeking Lu Xun's' modernity 'through the roots of Chinese tradition, even disregarding its Western origins, based on his personal experiences" (Ibid., p. 46). Here, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of Leo Ou-fan Lee's "modernity." In Leo Ou-fan Lee's view, in contrast to Chinese tradition, "modernity" means "essentially a rebellion and defiance against this tradition, as well as a pursuit of new solutions through knowledge" (Lee, 2010, p. 174), which is in line with Western Enlightenment thought and encompasses concepts such as rationalism, humanism, and

progressive ideas. However, a closer examination of modern China's "modernity" reveals not only the modernity of the Enlightenment and rationalism's "linear historical view" as described by Carinescu, but also the "artistic modernity gradually evolved through late Romanticism, which can also be called modernism" (Lee, 2010, p. 145). In comparison, Leo Ou-fan Lee paid more attention to the latter. However, unlike Carinescu, Leo Ou-fan Lee did not confine modernism's "modernity" to Western late Romanticism. Instead, he noted the complexity and turbulence of modern China's social environment, as well as the differences in how Chinese people understand modernity. Therefore, when he discusses Lu Xun's artistic creation from the perspective of "modernity", he not only focuses on analyzing the influence of Western literature on Lu Xun but also emphasizes the nourishment of China's traditional thoughts and literature on Lu Xun, fully highlighting the complexity, richness, and multidimensionality of Lu Xun.

From the perspective of modernity, Leo Ou-fan Lee began with Lu Xun's creative works to examine the development of Lu Xun's thoughts during his studies in Japan and to explore the psychological motivations behind his decision to abandon medicine for literature. He argued that the slide incident "by itself was not enough to prompt Lu Xun to abandon medicine and pursue literature," but rather served as "a trigger for the frustration accumulated over two years" (Lee, 2000, p. 15). The "dramatic power" of the slide incident stemmed from the fact that "literature became a method for Lu Xun to discover and understand his compatriots" (Ibid., p. 16). Furthermore, Lee delved into the evolution and formation of Lu Xun's artistic forms, particularly highlighting the profound connection between Lu Xun's artistic creation and the tradition of China. Thus, Leo Ou-fan Lee sought to reveal the formation process of Lu Xun as a writer as a "modern" individual.

Of course, tradition is only one aspect of Lu Xun's "modernity," especially in "Wild Grass," which "showed a certain affinity with Western literature" (Ibid., p. 46), where the flavor of tradition has long been absent. Therefore, when commenting on "Wild Grass," Leo Ou-fan Lee argued that "in these lyrical poems, the depiction of natural scenery seems to be permeated with fantastical and metaphorical imagery. This not only imbues Lu Xun's prose with poetic quality but also, by boldly departing from the use of natural imagery in China's ancient poetry, determines the' modernity 'of Lu Xun's prose poetry." Here, the poor translation does not affect our understanding. In other words, Leo Ou-fan Lee's expression means that the use of metaphorical and symbolic natural imagery in Lu Xun's "Wild Grass" distinguishes his prose poetry from China's ancient poetry, endowing it with "modernity."

Li Oufan stated that his research on Lu Xun "took a step away from deifying Lu Xun from a non-religious perspective, relying on acknowledging his inherent paradoxes and contradictions, and doing his utmost to restore the original appearance of his writing art, proving it as literature rather than political ideology" (Ibid., p. 183). Therefore, regarding Lu Xun's novels, Li Oufan focused on "studying the structural relationships often found in Lu Xun's novels, composed of certain metaphors or abstract themes" (Ibid., p. 64). His dedicated two-chapter analysis of Lu Xun's "modernization techniques" in *The Call from the Iron House* reveals his preference and fascination with the artistic (rather than ideological) "modernity" of Lu Xun. He pointed out, "Lu Xun's use of techniques was extremely conscious, seemingly intended to conceal true intentions. As a result, due to artistic or psychological reasons, he achieved the true accomplishment of 'fictional novels'" (Ibid., p. 55).

Furthermore, Leo Ou-fan Lee, drawing on the research of Hannah Arendt and Max Horkmacher, noted that "Lu Xun was not merely a 'national writer' within the conventional realist tradition." He emphasized that "in his literary sensibility, realism and naturalism were less prominent than symbolism and 'symbolic realism.'" (Ibid., p. 56) Consequently, "Lu Xun seemed to transcend the common sensibilities of his generation and step into the realm of Western modernist literature." (Lee, 2010, p. 233)

Liu Zaifu's research on Lu Xun clearly reflects the shifts in academic trends on the Chinese mainland. In the mid-1980s, Wang Furen's doctoral dissertation on Lu Xun caused a sensation in the literary research community and was regarded as a representative achievement in Lu Xun studies at the time. In his dissertation, Wang Furen broke away from the political discourse on

Lu Xun during the Mao Zedong era, striving to establish a new research framework grounded in Lu Xun's essence, focusing on his ideological pursuits and artistic expression. He summarized his understanding of Lu Xun's "Call to Arms" and "Wandering" with the phrase "a mirror reflecting the anti-feudal ideological revolution in China." Notably, as early as 1981, Liu Zaifu remarked: "Lu Xun's works can be said to be a mirror reflecting the semi-colonial and semi-feudal old China." (Liu, 1981, p. 227) This at least indicates that Liu Zaifu's Lu Xun studies in the 1980s paid more attention to the ideological connotations and social value of Lu Xun's literature. In the eyes of critics, Liu Zaifu's research on Lu Xun's aesthetic thought "for the first time comprehensively and systematically explained the characteristics, connotations, and historical status of Lu Xun's aesthetic thought from the perspective of the development history of modern Chinese aesthetic thought. Most importantly, it used Lu Xun's aesthetic thought as a weapon to forcefully break through and deeply criticize the' leftist' dogmatic literary ideology that had dominated the Chinese literary scene for decades." (Zhang, 2005, p. 562) However, such research itself represents another form of using Lu Xun, which inevitably affects how Lu Xun is understood. After leaving the country, Liu Zaifu reflected on his research and believed that "although some new insights were proposed, the overall thinking structure was still relatively flat. Some of my aesthetic concepts had not been fully developed, and some concepts had to accommodate prevailing views." (Liu, 1988, p. 3) What truly catapulted Liu Zaifu to prominence was his "Theory of Character Compositions" and discourse on literary subjectivity, developed from his study of Lu Xun's aesthetic philosophy. "It was precisely because he deeply felt that the extreme' leftist 'ideological trends treated people as mere objects, resulting in the stereotyping of literary characters, that he devoted himself to the' Theory of Character Compositions 'to revitalize the vitality of human life." (Xia, 1996, p. 7) Fundamentally, Liu Zaifu's literary research, particularly his studies on Lu Xun, was driven by strong practical imperatives. Thus, unlike Leo Ou-fan Lee, Liu Zaifu placed greater emphasis on Lu Xun's ideological significance. Even in his 1989 overseas "second life," Lu Xun's thought remained the central focus of his research.

But there is no doubt that Liu Zaifu, who began his "second life," had undergone many changes in his approach to studying Lu Xun. In terms of his way of thinking, Liu Zaifu discussed the shift in his "philosophical approach" to studying Lu Xun as follows: when writing "A Study of Lu Xun's Aesthetic Thoughts," he adopted a "general-to-specific" method, first establishing universal and general principles, such as confirming the truth of Plekhanov's aesthetic thoughts, the truth of Qu Qiubai's dualist theory of Lu Xun's thoughts, and the truth that realism is the best creative method, before delving into Lu Xun's own literary and aesthetic thoughts. After leaving the country, he "discovered that all geniuses move from the specific to the general, and in fact, Lu Xun himself also moved from the specific to the general. The madman and Ah Q are specific, but once these images stand, they reveal the universal connotations of China's culture." (Liu & Wu, 2011, p. 52) In terms of research methods, Liu Zaifu no longer focused on constructing an aesthetic system but instead "emphasized the use of intuitive verification methods, while not abandoning argumentative methods, striving to combine intuition with logic," aiming to "unearth new treasures and new ideas from the basic materials and books that are universally known." (Ibid., pp. 51–52)

During this period, Liu Zaifu's research on Lu Xun exhibited two defining characteristics. First, he adopted a broader historical perspective to explore the origins and manifestations of the historical sins borne by Lu Xun. He characterized Lu Xun's creative motivation as a "confessional consciousness": "Lu Xun not only acknowledged the grave sins of ancestral and paternal cultures, but also recognized the guilt of inheriting their cultural legacy." (Ibid., p. 221) Second, he focused on the individual psychological structure underlying Lu Xun's intense emotional experiences and passionate literary expressions. For instance, when evaluating *The*

Sword Casting, he observed that the work embodies "a sublime grandeur that perishes with darkness," revealing "a startling death consciousness of' perishing with you 'and a black force of' you die, I die.'" (Ibid., p. 35) Through a more comprehensive analysis of Lu Xun's works, Liu Zaifu concluded that "Lu Xun is the overarching symbol of the Chinese nation's anguish." (Ibid., p. 42)

Lu Xun is regarded as "the overarching symbol of the Chinese nation's anguish" because he embodies the tension between "realism" and "modernism." Liu Zaifu observes, "Describing Lu Xun through the lens of this modern-ritual tension reveals how his modernist philosophy transcends realism while maintaining profound social consciousness." (Ibid., p. 98) He further notes, "Lu Xun is not a Western-style individualist or modernist in the strict sense, but rather a dynamic fusion of individualism and humanism, where modernism and realism intertwine." (Ibid., p. 98) This perspective prompts us to examine the relationship between Lu Xun's "individualism" and "humanism" —a theme both Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu have explored in their analyses.

The issue originated from a letter Lu Xun wrote to Xu Guangping on May 30, 1925: "In fact, my original stance was also not easily clear at the time, as it contained many contradictions. Perhaps it reflects the waxing and waning of two ideologies—humanism and individualism." (Lu, 2005, p. 81) Regarding Lu Xun's self-reflection, Leo Ou-fan Lee observed that "individualism and humanism can be seen as two aspects of his life: private and public." He noted, "He was almost existentialist in his own sphere, while being humanistic and altruistic in serving others," with the crucial distinction that "these two aspects were placed at irreconcilable extremes." (Lee, 2000, p. 98) This means that "the exceptional individual" and "the ordinary masses" were fundamentally opposed in Lu Xun's psyche, intensifying the tension in his creative work and shaping his profound contradictions. In his essay "Lu Xun and Modern Artistic Consciousness," Lee delved deeper into Lu Xun's dual nature, contrasting the socially significant paintings in his living room with the nude female portraits in his bedroom. He argued that "Lu Xun exhibited significant differences and contradictions between public and private spheres, society and individuality throughout his life." While he gradually transitioned from enlightenment-style advocacy to left-wing literature and revolutionary movements in his public endeavors, his personal inner world—even his artistic preferences—often remained less active, less engaged, and occasionally tinged with pessimism and decadence. (Ibid., p. 191) Liu Zaifu observed that "as an enlightener, Lu Xun was a great humanist," yet "when addressing the masses, he often turned inward, embracing the individual and questioning the meaning of life." (Liu, 2011, p. 55) He further noted that "even when he (editor's note: referring to Lu Xun) was highly' personal, 'he remained profoundly' humanistic '; even when he was deeply' metaphysical, 'he stayed firmly' physical, 'with his contemplations on life's meaning always intertwined with compassion for society." (Ibid., pp. 56–57) In Liu's view, "humanism was the fundamental stance of Lu Xun." (Ibid., p. 56) Unlike Leo Ou-fan Lee, who equated "individualism" and "humanism" with Lu Xun's opposition between "public" and "private," Liu Zaifu maintained that no matter how "individualistic" Lu Xun's works might appear, "humanism" always remained his essential characteristic, holding an absolute priority.

The differences in Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu's perspectives and theories when studying Lu Xun ultimately stem from their divergent literary concepts, as evidenced by their markedly different evaluations of Eileen Chang. Li Oufan inherited Xia Zhiqing's high praise for Eileen Chang, believing that Xia Zhiqing's recognition of Eileen Chang as the most outstanding writer of modern China "is entirely fair and demonstrates astonishing foresight" (Lee, 2009, p. 189). In contrast, Liu Zaifu argued in his article "Eileen Chang's Novels and Xia Zhiqing's History of Modern Novels" that "after rapidly elevating her own creative work to its peak, Eileen Chang also swiftly abandoned her aesthetic characteristics, resulting in a tragedy" (Liu, 2011, p. 65). In later interviews, Liu Zaifu stated, "In terms of the total quantity and quality of spiritual creation, Lu Xun not only surpasses Eileen Chang but also other writers of his era, especially in terms of profound ideological depth, where Eileen Chang cannot compare with Lu Xun" (Leo Ou-fan Lee, p. 38).

In summary, Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu's studies of Lu Xun differ in their emphases: Lee focuses on Lu Xun's literary and artistic aspects, while Liu emphasizes his ideological and social dimensions. Lee delves into Lu Xun's personal psychological structure and inner journey, whereas Liu deliberately highlights his realistic concern with social evils and historical consciousness. Although Lee acknowledges Lu Xun's "leftward shift" and his acceptance of Marxist aesthetics, he tends to view Lu Xun's works as modernist. Later, Liu did point out the contradiction between "realism" and "modernism" in Lu Xun's work, but his recognition of Lu Xun as a realist never wavered.

III. Reflection and Promotion at Different Levels

It is well known that after Lu Xun's death in 1936, he was revered as the "Soul of the Nation." Under Mao Zedong's ideological guidance, his legacy was continuously emphasized, promoted, and magnified. During the Cultural Revolution, he was increasingly deified and sanctified, becoming a tool for political struggles. Lu Xun's studies also served ideological purposes to the extent that they could be considered state-sponsored. As Liu Zaifu observed, "Behind the deification and sanctification lay the puppetization of Lu Xun—his transformation into a historical puppet and a political pawn" (Liu, 2011, p. 42). Leo Ou-fan Lee similarly noted, "It was precisely this large-scale idolization that led to the exaggerated portrayal of certain aspects of Lu Xun's life" (Lee, 2000, p. 3). Recognizing this critical flaw in Lu Xun studies, Lee's research began with exploring the authentic psychological evolution of Lu Xun: "I sought to reconstruct his intellectual journey from his early life, tracing how he ultimately became a new literary figure" (Ibid., p. 3). Lee emphasized, "Contrary to the deified view, Lu Xun was never a natural-born revolutionary mentor who steadfastly pursued predetermined goals from childhood. Instead, his literary mission was achieved through numerous trials and errors. His mental growth was essentially a series of psychological crises marked by confusion, setbacks, failures, and repeated soul-searching" (Ibid., p. 3), effectively restoring Lu Xun to his role as a real individual.

Compared with the mainland academic trend of "returning to Lu Xun" during the same period, Leo Ou-fan Lee's "outsider" identity and his modernist perspective on modernity endowed him with a transboundary perspective in Lu Xun studies. This allowed him to avoid the influence of revolutionary China's political dominance over literature, while also transcending Western notions. He could highlight the role of China's traditional literature in Lu Xun's work and delve deeply into Lu Xun's literary creations, tracing their origins from an artistic perspective. In fact, when exploring Lu Xun's own modernity, Leo Ou-fan Lee placed significant emphasis on his study of China's traditional literature, arguing that it was precisely Lu Xun's prolonged contemplation and accumulation of China's traditional literature that provided him with sufficient local resources for his new literary creations. Leo Ou-fan Lee also paid special attention to Lu Xun's classical poetry, emphasizing that "although mostly written in his later years, it holds equal importance to his studies of ancient novels in some respects, both serving as intellectual nourishment and artistic supplements to form 'another aspect' of his creative work." He noted, "Lu Xun attempted to use this universally acknowledged classical form to express a series of new personal conflicts and tensions." Such understanding was, at the time, far more profound than that of mainland scholars.

In fact, Leo Ou-fan Lee's interpretation of Lu Xun's "Wild Grass" was even more startling. Before the publication of Qian Liqun's "The Quest for the Soul" in 1988, "Wild Grass" had long been neglected, starting from Wang Yao's "A New Literary History of China" in the early 1950s. For 66 years, "Wild Grass" had not received the attention and evaluation it deserved. In the 1980s, Leo Ou-fan Lee, across the ocean, had a keen eye and discovered the unique status

of "Wild Grass" in Lu Xun's works. Leo Ou-fan Lee believed that Lu Xun's prose poetry interwove three levels: "the summoned, the imagistic, and the metaphorical" (Lee, 2000, p. 85), "absolutely belonging to the structure of symbolism, combined with many techniques of fiction and drama, seemingly telling a fictional 'story' within the realm of dreams or fables" (Ibid., p. 89). On a deeper level, "Wild Grass" portrays how the "unique individual" rebels against and battles the "common people," only to find his inner self trapped in an inescapable contradiction—a dead end. Lu Xun realized that "at the end of his long quest, there was no supreme purpose, only death" (Ibid., p. 101), so he struggled endlessly between hope and disappointment, and "revenge" was his only way out of this predicament. In 1987, in the English edition of "The Call from the Iron House," Leo Ou-fan Lee truly saw the darkness and despair in Lu Xun's soul.

In contrast, Liu Zaifu's research on Lu Xun in the 1980s was distinctly marked by its era-specific characteristics. Behind his "avant-garde" discourse stance lay traces of outdated historical remnants. As early as 1988, Wang Hui, while acknowledging Liu Zaifu's contributions, argued that his "Essays on Lu Xun's Aesthetic Thoughts" "contained critical reflections on the rigid literary ideology of the authoritarian era, yet the outcome still reduced Lu Xun's aesthetic thoughts to an all-encompassing system," and "was essentially a borrowing or even a direct transplantation of pre-existing propositions, formulas, and conceptual frameworks, using then-popular perspectives as templates to fragment Lu Xun's organic literary worldview, reducing his aesthetic thoughts to explanatory materials for Marxist-Leninist literary theories." (Wang, 1988) Such criticism undoubtedly held considerable validity. In the 1990s, "modernity" garnered widespread attention in China's literary research circles. Xia Zhongyi, within the theoretical framework of "modernity," pointed out that the new era's literary scene had begun to pay attention to Lu Xun's modernity, yet "Liu Zaifu still employed the modern subject scale to encompass the modern essence of Lu Xun, which was inevitably outdated. For the subject scale could at best summarize only half of Lu Xun's thought (modernity), while the other half (modernism), though touched upon by Liu Zaifu, remained biased due to the lack of corresponding modern reference points." (Xia, 1996, p. 58) This also reveals that with the changing temporal context, the transformation of "paradigms" in Lu Xun studies had become the norm.

In fact, Liu Zaifu, in the 1980s, closely aligned his theoretical discourse and literary criticism with the pulse of the times, demonstrating both historical and contemporary relevance, making him a force to be reckoned with in mainland studies of modern Chinese literature. By the 1990s, after leaving the country, although he still devoted his life to writing, the world had changed, and his research no longer caused a sensation. However, in his "second life," he had gently set aside the worldly fluctuations and turned his gaze toward the broader river of history, grounding himself in life and returning to classical traditions, contemplating and exploring more profound and eternal philosophies of life and culture. Liu Zaifu once mentioned the changes in his research after moving to the United States: "For nearly 20 years in America, my main focus remained on Chinese literature and Chinese culture. The difference was that I developed a sense of distance, both geographically and psychologically. This sense of distance made me calmer and more objective." With this sense of distance, Liu Zaifu's literary research began to take on a different appearance. From this perspective, Liu Zaifu's self-criticism in the field of Lu Xun studies in 1991 was also a renaissance of his literary research.

In 1991, Liu Zaifu delivered a keynote speech titled "Self-Critique in Lu Xun Studies" at the University of Tokyo's academic conference "Lu Xun and Intercultural Contact," marking a pivotal milestone in his scholarly journey. In this seminal work, Liu critically examined his earlier interpretations of Lu Xun, advocating dismantling the idolized image of the literary giant and rejecting Lu Xun's ideas as an absolute value standard. He challenged the "dichotomy" framework proposed by Qu Qiubai, urging scholars to confront Lu Xun's "intrinsic paradoxes" and comprehend his multifaceted nature. Furthermore, Liu called for restoring Lu Xun's identity as a "literary figure," diminishing or eliminating the conceptual labels of "revolutionary" and "thinker" within the "Three Masters" tradition, thereby revealing the richness and

complexity of his literary and philosophical legacy. (Liu, 2011, pp. 4–13) These insights remain profoundly relevant to contemporary scholars.

Unlike his earlier work, after leaving China, Liu Zaifu expanded his academic focus to broader fields without prioritizing Lu Xun studies. Yet as Liu himself noted, "my contemplation of Lu Xun never ceased—a thought that would permeate my entire life" (Liu, 2011, p. 27), for "Lu Xun was not merely an academic subject; he became an integral part of my spiritual DNA" (Ibid.). Thus, Liu Zaifu's literary scholarship remains deeply influenced by Lu Xun. Though shifting from systematic research to "insight-based" scholarship, Liu delved deeper into Lu Xun's despairing resentment, his "counter-proposition" philosophy, and the abstract principles behind certain radical ideas—each revealing his renewed understanding of Lu Xun (Ibid., pp. 14–15).

Lu Xun's contemplation of "national character" is undoubtedly unavoidable when studying his thoughts. After leaving the country, Liu Zaifu paid particular attention to Lu Xun's discoveries and evaluations of "national character," believing that in this regard, Lu Xun was far more profound than Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and others, as he "analyzed 'national character' as a cultural psychological structure of the nation" (Xia, 1996, p. 48). Lu Xun's grasp of national character was an intuitive one, "with the genius insight and sensitivity, penetrating the superficial phenomena of national character to delve into the deep structure of China's cultural psychology, directly addressing the 'roots' and the crux; then, with genius, he depicted the 'soul imagery' of China's sick soul (such as Ah Q) and the form of numb souls (' spiritual victory method')" (Liu, 2011, p. 106). He further pointed out, "Although Lu Xun was a great doctor treating China, he was only a pathologist, not a physiologist, and he did not prescribe any remedies for the growth and development of China." (Ibid., p. 36) At this point, Liu Zaifu no longer regarded Lu Xun as an authority but was attempting to engage in dialogue with him. In his conversation with Li Zehou, Liu Zaifu believed that compared to Hu Shi's constructive approach advocating reform, "Although Lu Xun had depth and was actually engaged in construction, his overly transparent view of the bad aspects of China's tradition and reality led to a highly revolutionary idea of' no destruction, no new construction. '... Lu Xun's approach of breaking down before building up is questionable." (Ibid., p. 109) Moreover, in Liu Zaifu's view, "Lu Xun's revenge complex is an irrational emotion. Once he enters society, even elevated to a universal rational principle, it can have significant negative impacts." (Ibid., p. 108)

Regarding Liu Zaifu's literary studies, Xia Zhongyi once clearly stated that Liu Zaifu's construction of humanistic aesthetics in the 1980s was rooted in modern humanism rather than in modern world culture. (Xia, 1996, p. 61)[2] In fact, the Liu Zaifu of "The Second Life" was quite different from the previous one, with significant changes in his vision, concepts, and research methods. At this time, his understanding of Lu Xun deepened and became more complex, leading him to acknowledge and affirm the "existence" dimension of Lu Xun. In "Crime and Literature," Liu Zaifu argued that compared to Dostoevsky, "although Lu Xun remarkably recognized himself as a subject of sin, the sin he bore was still a historical sin, not an existential one." (Liu & Lin, 2011, p. 234) Moreover, although his works like "Wild Grass," which expressed inner thoughts, "even delved into the depth of questioning the meaning of existence," "Lu Xun's fundamental focus in his anti-traditional enlightenment and redemption

[2] Xia Zhongyi observed, "The modern realist sensibility in literature, the modern idealist fervor in philosophy, and the modern global context in cultural history found such harmonious fusion in Liu Zaifu's mind that it stood in stark contrast to his detachment from modernist literature, existentialist philosophy, and the overarching trends of contemporary world culture." See Xia Zhongyi: *New Tide Studies*, Shanghai Sanlian Bookstore, 1996, p. 61.

was still on society, not on the soul." (Ibid., p. 240) In other words, Liu Zaifu at this time still continued the idea from his book "Essays on Lu Xun's Aesthetic Thoughts," using "goodness" —i.e., the standard of literary utilitarianism—to evaluate Lu Xun's works, though his thinking was more profound and his discourse broader. In a 2008 interview with Jiang Yixin, he directly confirmed the "modernist" nature of Lu Xun's works: "Now reading Lu Xun's' Wild Grass, 'I feel it is like the Eastern' The Waste Land '(Eliot); reading' The True Story of Ah Q, 'I feel it is like China's 'The Metamorphosis' (Kafka)—both can be regarded as brilliant modernist absurd works." (Liu, 2011, p. 97)

However, "modernism" would remain merely a theoretical tool in Liu Zaifu's interpretation of Lu Xun, never assuming a central position in his research. As previously noted, Liu prioritized Lu Xun's utilitarian value and ideological significance, maintaining an innate reverence for the writer. While acknowledging Lu Xun's "dark side," Liu characterized him as: "While passionately embracing the' here 'of personal transcendence, he simultaneously embraced the' there 'of social morality; in moments of personal solitude and sorrow, he retained the spirit of a' rebel warrior, 'persistently protesting against societal evils." (Liu, 2011, p. 57) Reflecting on Liu's 1989 experience in mainland China and his self-recognition— "At the age of 48, my life underwent a pivotal transformation," (Ibid., p. 13) it becomes clear how uniquely Liu's emotional connection to Lu Xun was shaped by that specific moment.

Overall, Leo Ou-fan Lee adopted "modernity" as his research framework, grounded in Lu Xun's literary and artistic legacy. He delved into the profound essence and unique value of his artistic forms, proposing groundbreaking insights that advanced Lu Xun studies at the artistic level. Liu Zaifu's approach to Lu Xun research, however, represents a dynamic evolution. From reconstructing the aesthetic thought system of Lu Xun to critiquing historical perspectives in Lu Xun studies, and further to examining the "modernist" aspects of Lu Xun's work, his research demonstrates both historical reflection and contemporary relevance. From the audience's perspective, Leo Ou-fan Lee's work reveals the beauty of art and form, while Liu Zaifu's research resonates with the warmth of thought and emotion. Indeed, to continue exploring the treasure trove of Lu Xun today, we must not overlook the milestones set by Leo Ou-fan Lee and Liu Zaifu—only then can we return without empty hands.

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