

From Luzhen to Sendai: Locality and Metonym in Lu Xun's Pseudonyms

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Lu Xun often used this signet for his own collection of books as well as his own writings that he sent to his friends. See *Lu Xun yi yin* 《鲁迅遗印》 [Signets handed down by Lu Xun] (*Beijing guji chubanshe*, 2001), p. 26.

Lu Xun (1881–1936) is generally regarded as the greatest Chinese writer of the twentieth century, and one of the most influential writers China has ever produced. One notable feature of his work is the use of numerous pseudonyms. This paper examines why and how pseudonyms were used by Lu Xun, advancing the hypothesis that the reasons for his adoption of pennames went beyond their immediate political connotation. These pseudonyms reveal a life trajectory of Lu Xun: from his hometown in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province to Sendai, Japan; from Confucian and Daoist classics that he started reading as a child to Western science and philosophy such as works by Darwin, Huxley and Nietzsche; from classical Chinese literary pieces to his own modern *zawen* that reflect the turbulent eras of China from late Qing to early Republic. Indeed, Lu Xun's work may be seen as a vortex of modernity in which Chinese tradition, Western influence and historical contingency interact. Behind the pseudonyms a figure emerges from a provincial town to an international arena, infused with the ambience of the “Three-Flavour Studio” (a traditional

private school Lu Xun attended in Shaoxing, where memorising classics was the mainstay) but keen to seek rejuvenation in Western learning

The use of pseudonyms or *noms de plume*, has long been a recognized literary device; its adoption by writers dates back to the earliest historic times in both Western and Eastern cultures. *A Dictionary of Literary Pseudonyms in the English Language*¹ lists pseudonyms of writers from the early 17th century to the present day – albeit with strong emphasis on British authors and historians. Hawk’s *Authors’ Pseudonyms*,² a work more international in scope, includes over 61,000 author pseudonym attributions. Among non-Western cultures, the Chinese have a long tradition of pseudonymous writing. Shu’s *Modern Chinese Writers, a list of pseudonyms*³ lists 2,000 pseudonyms used by modern Chinese authors who lived and published in the twentieth century. Zhu’s *Ershi shiji Zhongguo zuojia biming lu*. 《二十世紀中國作家筆名錄》 [Twentieth-century Chinese Writers and Their Pen Names]⁴ contains 7,429 pennames for 2,524 writers, including authors of both literary works and other writings such as philosophy.

Famous writers who are known by their pseudonyms include George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), Lewis Carroll (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson), O. Henry (William Sydney Porter), George Sand (Amandine Aurore Lucie Dupin, Baronne Dudevant) , Voltaire (Francois-Marie Arouet), Lu Xun (Zhou Shuren), to name only a few. In terms of number of

¹ It lists nearly 17,000 pseudonyms of more than 10,500 authors (Nicknames or diminutive forms of names are also included.). See Carty (Routledge, 2nd ed. 2000).

² Sea Hawk (Hawk’s Enterprises, 3rd ed. 1999).

³ Shu. Available on microfiche, (Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Asian Studies Center, 1969).

⁴ Zhu (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1977).

pennames adopted by any given writer, Lu Xun is at the top of the list - even surpassing his French counterpart Voltaire, who used 137 pseudonyms.⁵

Altogether, Lu Xun used more than 140 pseudonyms,⁶ among which about sixteen are one-character names, such as Fei “飞”、Zhi “直”、Sun “隼”; more than 100 are two-character names, such as: Suoshi “索士”、Tangsi “唐俟”、Huayu “华圉”; about 35 are three-character names, such as: Sui luowen “隋洛文”、Feng zhiyu “丰之余”、Jia jiansheng “戛剑生”. There are also four-character ones, such as Yanzhi aozhe “宴之敖者”、Chuguan bingshou “楮冠病寿”, five-character ones, such as: Benliushe tongren “奔流社同人”, Zhuxia huaihuangshe “诸夏怀霜社”, and even a six-character name: *Shanghai Sanxian shuwu* “上海三闲书屋”, as well as English letters/initials , such as “L”、 “EL”, “H. M” were also adopted by Lu Xun. Indeed, there is no writer who can match Lu Xun in the number and variety of his pseudonyms.

Why did Lu Xun use so many pseudonyms?

The usual reasons for an author adopting a pseudonym include: the desire to remain anonymous, to mask gender or to conceal proliferation. In Victorian Britain, for example, women were not supposed to take up writing, so it was common for women writers to adopt masculine pen-names: the Bronte sisters published their first poetry collection under Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; Mary Anne Evans enjoyed immortality with her pseudonym of George Eliot. On the other hand, a man writing romance may choose to use a typical female penname, since readers generally expect the

⁵ See Joseph “A Choice of Pseudonyms” in *Library Review*, (Emerald Backfiles, 2007) p. 204.

⁶ See *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 16, 1995, pp. 614-618, and *Lu Xun nianpu*, vol. 4, 1984, pp. 464-465.

author to be female. Tom Huff, for instance, wrote romances under pennames such as Jennifer Wilde.⁷ The editors or publishers also facilitate – to some degree - the use of pseudonyms. Their preference to have novel names or to disguise multiple authorship of articles in the same magazine could be another factor.⁸ Lu Xun mentioned, for instance, that the editor of *Xin Qingnian* 《新青年》 [New Youth] preferred him to use different and unusual names.⁹

Of course, another important reason is political. Famous satirists and critics of the government often wrote under false names to avoid harassment and criticism. Lu Xun is a case in point. Kuomintang authorities made life very difficult for him; for a period of time, he had to flee and find a refuge to avoid being arrested. It is thus a common belief that Lu Xun frequently changed his pseudonyms as a strategy to avoid trouble in the years of the White Terror- using pseudonyms to escape the Kuomintang’s net of censorship¹⁰.

The White Terror was undeniably one of the main reasons for Lu Xun hiding his true identity, and accounts for why he used such a great variety of pennames (more than 70) during 1933 and 1934, when the White Terror and cultural suppression were at their worst. Nevertheless, many of the articles – especially his polemical essays, or *zawen* – written with various pennames during this period were soon included in collections published under the name of Lu Xun, so his

⁷ See Britton [2007].

⁸ For more information on the reasons for pseudonyms, see Zaharoff Howard G. “A Rose by Any Other Name: Pros and Cons of Pseudonyms” in *Writer's Digest*, June 2003, as well as Halkell’s Preface to the *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English*, repr. 1971.

⁹ See “A Q zhengzhuan de chengyin ” 《阿 Q 正传》 的成因 [How did *Ah Q* come into being] “in *Lu Xun zizhuan* 《鲁迅自传》 [Autobiography of Lu Xun]. (Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1997), p. 339.

¹⁰ For example, Lu Xun’s *Er xin ji* 《二心集》 [Two hearts], a collection of 37 *zawen* written between 1930-1931, plus a translation piece, was banned soon after its publication in 1932, and 16 of the *zawen* were taken out of the collection by the Kuomintang censorship. Later, when Hezhong shudian published the 16 *zawen* under the new name of *Shi ling ji* 《拾零集》 [The Titbits], it was again banned. See *Lu Xun Huazhuan* 《鲁迅画传》 [An Illustrated biography of Lu Xun] (Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001), pp. 140-141.

authorship was not really concealed for long. For example, *Wei ziyou shu* 《伪自由书》 [False liberty] (1933)¹¹ collects 43 *zawen* written in 1933; *Nanqiang beidiao ji* 《南腔北调集》 [Mixed accents] (1934)¹² includes 51 *zawen* written between 1932-1933; *Huabian wenxue* 《花边文学》 [Fringe literature] (1936)¹³ consists of 61 *zawen* written in 1934; *Ji wai ji* 《集外集》 [Addition to collections] (1935)¹⁴ contains poems and other pieces omitted from the collections published before 1933; and Ah Q in *Nahan* 《呐喊》 [Call to arms] published in 1923, comprises 14 stories written between 1918-1922.

We also know that Lu Xun did not pick his pennames randomly. As his spouse, Xu Guangping indicated:¹⁵ “Each time he finished writing an essay, he’d lean back in his rattan chair, pondering [a penname], and whenever he came up with a name he was happy with, he’d share it with people around him ... it is perhaps not without benefit to the future men of letters to study the author's particular and unspeakable difficulties that made him change his pseudonyms frequently in order to be heard.”¹⁶

What are the messages the author wanted to convey?

¹¹ Published by Beixin shuju.

¹² Published by Tongwen shudian.

¹³ Published by Lianhua shuju.

¹⁴ Published by Qunzhong tushugongsi.

¹⁵ Xu Guangpin (1898-1968) was one of Lu Xun’s students at Women’s Normal College (Later known as Beijing Normal University for Women), but eventually became Lu Xun’s companion for the last 10 years of his life, his common-law wife, and the mother of his only son.

¹⁶ See Xu Guangping, *Xinwei de jinian* 《欣慰的纪念》 [Honour the memory with gratification]. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1952).

An investigation of Lu Xun's pseudonyms show them to be as complex as his personality and writing: some of the simpler names were given to him earlier in his life; some are based on the names of his family or birthplace; some express his own aspirations; some are derived from classical literary texts; some are used for satire; and some for humour. Indeed, the diversity and multiplicity of Lu Xun's pseudonyms defy clear classification. What this paper attempts to do is to examine the major ways in which he used his pseudonyms, and how they shed light on the personality of the author, enrich the literary contexts of his writing, increase the effectiveness of his discourse, and most of all, how they contributed – albeit in a subtle way - to the ideological and emotional complexity, sophistication, and paradox of the author. None of the five aspects below is independent of the others; rather, they collectively create a rich and complex world in which tradition is interwoven with modernity, and where a solitary thinker and social critic wanders back and forth in search of light in the prevailing darkness.

I. Great Expectations



See *Lu Xun biming yinpu* 《鲁迅笔名印谱》 [A Collection of printed signets of Lu Xun's pseudonyms] (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 1976), p. 2

Some of Lu Xun's pseudonyms can be explained by his biography. Childhood names – including a Buddhist name and student names – later became pseudonyms, names such as: “Chang Geng” 长庚, “Yu Shan” 豫山, “Yu Cai” 豫才, and “Zhou Shuren” 周树人, or “Shu Ren” 树人. These names indicate departure points in the author's life journey; more importantly, they reveal the burgeoning conflict between traditional values, family expectations, and his own aspirations

on the one hand, and reality with all its uncertainty, adversity, and even hostility on the other - conflict which was to trouble the writer for the rest of his life.

Lu Xun's original name Zhou Zhangshou (周樟寿) came from a nickname given by his paternal grandfather Zhou Fuqing (周福清 1838-1904) – Ah Zhang (阿张), which is associated with a well-known figure in Chinese history – Zhang Zhidong (张之洞, 1837-1909). As story goes, on the day news of the birth of his first grandson reached Lu Xun's grandfather, a member of the Hanlin Academy in Beijing, Zhang Zhidong came for a visit so the grandfather called his newborn grandson “Ah Zhang”, hoping he would grow up to become as important as Zhang Zhidong. The name, then expressed the grandfather's great hopes for his grandson's career. The Zhou clan had enjoyed prosperity for generations until the time of Lu Xu's grandfather. However, when the grandfather fell from power due to his role in an exam scandal, the family's fortunes took a turn for the worse. Lu Xun's father Zhou Boyi, a *xiuca* (licentiate) was not successful in his career, and suffered poor health. The family situation became so bad that Lu Xun took the family valuables to a pawnshop to obtain the money to pay for his father's medicine. Hard as it was, Lu Xun felt the experience granted him a deeper insight into society and the motives of others.

According to the local custom, having a Buddhist as a master, one can be well protected from misfortune or any potential harm. Being the first grandson, Lu Xun was the apple of the eye of the whole Zhou family. To give him protection, he was taken to a temple when still an infant to

“take refuge” with a monk, who gave him the Buddhist name: Chang Geng “长庚”,¹⁷ a name indicating a prayer for a good health and longevity.

At the age of seven, he entered the clan private school, followed by formal education for about six years at the Three-Flavours Studio, a clan-funded school in his hometown Shaoxing. He used Yushan “豫山” and later Yucai “豫才” as his student names during this time. Lu Xun’s later success owed a great deal to the solid foundation established during these years, when he read widely in the classics, history and philosophy, including the Four Books and Five Classics. But his education was not confined to the Analects and other Confucian texts; it was also during this period that he developed his life-long interest in graphic art.

By 1898 Lu Xun had witnessed the tragic incidents of his grandfather’s downfall, and his father’s demise. Driven by family misfortune, Lu Xu entered the tuition-free Jiangnan (South China) Naval Academy, where a clan relative was in charge of boarding. However, this senior relative, still holding strong traditional values, deemed it a dishonour on his family clan to join the armed forces¹⁸, hence inappropriate to use Zhou Zhangshou “周樟寿”, the formal name in the genealogy, for registration at the Academy. As a result, he gave the boy a new name Zhou Shuren “周树人”¹⁹. The name was taken from “十年树木，百年树人” (it takes ten years to grow a tree but a hundred years to grow a man), implying that self-cultivation is a life-long

¹⁷ See *Lu Xun zizhuan* 《鲁迅自传》 [Autobiography of Lu Xun]. (Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1997), pp. 1-2.

¹⁸ In the imperial era, excelling in civil service examination so as to enter officialdom was considered a proper career path, and only those who had no other choices would attend a technological or military school, options that were looked down upon by many people. See “关于《呐喊》” [On *Outcry*] in *Lu Xun zizhuan*. (Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1997), p. 333.

¹⁹ See *Li Lu Xun biming suo jie* 《鲁迅笔名索解》 [Seeking the meanings of Lu Xun’s Pseudonyms] (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), p. 12.

enterprise. This name echoes Lu Xun's grandfather's great expectations for him, and became one of Lu Xun's earliest pennames. Apart from “周树人”, Lu Xun also used other deviations such as Shu ren “树人”, Shu “树”, Zi Shu “自树” and Zhou Shu “周树” .

Many of his pseudonyms indicate the Southern origin of his family; names such as Yue Ke “越客”, Yue Ding “越丁”, and Yue Qiao “越乔”. Lu Xun was born in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, which belonged to the State of Yue (越国) in ancient times. In terms of family ties and origin, no name is more effective than the name of Lu Xun “鲁迅”, which was apparently also the author's most favourite and frequently used pseudonym. This name is believed to be taken from his mother's maiden name. Her own mother, Lu Rui (鲁瑞), was from a rural gentry family; most of the people in her village bore the same surname, Lu (鲁), hence the recurrence of the archetypical, semi-fictitious Town of Lu (鲁镇 *Luzhen*) in Lu Xun's writing.



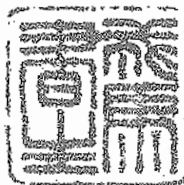
According to Lu Xun's diary, this is the signet Xu Guangping sent to Lu Xun along with a woolen sweater in 1926. (See *Lu Xun yi yin* 《鲁迅遗印》 (Beijing guji chubanshe, 2001), p. 2.

Lu Xun was first used as a pen-name by the author in 1918 when he published his *Kuangren riji* 《狂人日记》 [A Madman's Diary] on *Xin Qingnian* 《新青年》 [New Youth]. Subsequently this penname was used so often (more than 500 pieces were published under it) that it almost replaced his real name Zhou Shuren. Several other pseudonyms were also phonetically derived from this favoured name, for example: Xun “迅”、“L.S”、“L”、L ǔ Sun “旅隼”, Xun Ji “荀继”、Ni Su'er “倪朔尔”、Chong Xun “崇巽”.

Why did the author so favour this pseudonym?

According to Xu Shoushang 许寿裳 (1883-1948), one of Lu Xun's closest friends, Lu Xun gave two more reasons (apart from the fact that it was his mother's family name): "1) Zhou and Lu are the two names of the same origin in the ancient State of Lu 鲁国;²⁰ 2) the word Lu (鲁) also implies slow-wittedness while Xun (迅) suggests swiftness – taken together the two mean that being slow, he should take quick action."²¹ Self-mocking as it may be, this name also embraces a paradox which goes beyond the pseudonym. Indeed, Lu Xun lived in two intertwined worlds: the world he had come from and a world he was now living in, forming a complex world filled with ambiguity, ambivalence, contradiction and conflict.

II. A Literary Warrior



See *Lu Xun Yiyin* 《鲁迅遗印》
(Beijing guji chubanshe, 2001), p. 22.

There is another interpretation of the meaning of Xun in the name Lu Xun. According to the historian Hou Wailu 侯外庐, the word Xun can be used to refer to a fierce wolfcub.²² Thus the

²⁰ It refers to an ancient state of Lu, where the first monarchy was descended from the ancient Zhou imperial line. Zhou and Lu belonged to the same extended clan more than 2 thousand years ago.

²¹ See Xu "Wangyou Lu Xun yinxiang ji" "亡友鲁迅印象记" [Impressions of my departed friend Lu Xun] in *Zhiyou de huainian 挚友的怀念* [*The cherished memory of an intimate friend*], (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiayu chubanshe, 2000), p. 28.

²² See *Er Ya* 《尔雅·释兽》: The wolf-cub that is fierce is called *xun* (狼子绝有力者曰迅。).

name suggests the author's strong determination to fight against a system that "eats humans". This is a theme that runs through *A Madman's Diary*. Looking back at Lu Xun's life, it is clear that he never stopped fighting.

Bored by the courses offered at the Jiangnan Naval Academy, Lu Xun transferred to the new School of Mines and Railways, attached to the Jiangnan Military Academy. Here not only did he have his first contacts with Western learning, but he also had close contact with swords and horses, which fostered a "warrior spirit" in him. It is possible that he even thought about joining the proposed Chinese Volunteer Corps to resist the threat of Russian invasion. During that time, he had 3 seals carved for his pennames: Rongma Shusheng "戎马书生" (a soldier-scholar / a warrior-scholar), Jia Jiansheng "戛剑生" (referring to a sword and the sound it makes as it clears its sheath.), and Wenzhang Wuwo "文章误我" (Studies wasting my time). However, according to Zhou Zuoren, only the first of these three seals survived.²³ All these names reveal his moral courage and his enthusiasm to take up a sword to fight against the dark forces of the existing society in an attempt to cure the weakness in the national character.

The year 1902 marked another turning point in Lu Xun's life; at the age of 21, he went to study Japanese in Kobun Academy (Kobun Gakuin) in Tokyo. There, he cut off his long braids as a reaction against the Qing court, and a demonstration of desire for freedom.²⁴ It was there that he wrote a poem which contains the lines "I dedicate my blood for the survival of my country" (我

²³ Lu Xun Bowuguan 鲁迅博物馆 *Luxun yi yin* 《鲁迅遗印》 [Signets handed down by Lu Xun] (Beijing guji chubanshe, 2001).

²⁴ See Xu, (2000), pp. 2-3.

以我血荐轩辕)²⁵. This line meant so much to him that he copied it many times throughout his life; the last time in 1931 when he turned 51.²⁶ It was also in Japan that Lu Xun decided to abandon medicine for literature when he realized that treating the physical diseases of the Chinese people was not as important or as urgent as curing their minds.

By the time Lu Xun joined the Ministry of Education in Beijing in 1913, he had witnessed many political upheavals: the 1911 Revolution led by Dr. Sun Yatsen (1866-1925), Yuan Shikai's (1859-1916) 1912 usurpation, and his eventual self-proclamation as emperor in 1916, followed by the 1917 restoration movement led by the Qing-loyalist general Zhang Xun (1854-1923). All this political turmoil marred Lu Xun's time in the Ministry from 1912 to 1918, during which he often felt disappointed and lonely, as he later reminisced in his preface to *Nahan* 《呐喊》 [Call to arms]: "Perhaps it is because I have not forgotten the grief of my past loneliness that I call out to encourage the fighters fighting forth in loneliness".²⁷



According to Lu Xun's diary, this signet was given by his friend Zhen Zhenduo (郑振铎) as present in 1934. See *Luxun yiyin* 《鲁迅遗印》, (2001) p. 20.

Many other names also suggest the meaning of forging ahead; names such as Xun Xing “迅行”, Sun “隼”、Lǚ Sun ”旅隼”、Weng Sun ”翁隼” – a flying falcon. Falcons soar high and fly fast, and can attack their prey with speed and ferocity.

²⁵ Lu Xun wrote the poem on the back of a photo he sent to Xu Shoushang when he was studying at the meidal school in Japan. See Xu Shoushang's 许寿裳 (2000), p. 10.

²⁶ See Xu “Zi ti xiao xiang” “自题小像” [To my own small portrait] in *Ji wai ji shiyi* 《集外集拾遗》 [Supplementary amplifications of addition to collections] in *Complete Works (1981)*.

²⁷ Lu, *Nahan* 《呐喊》 [Call to arms] (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2000), p. 14.

After the May Fourth movement, the united front of the New Cultural Movement began to disintegrate: some men, such as Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), moved closer to the Northern Warlord government; others, such as Li Dazhao 李大钊 (1888-1927), were attracted by Marxist ideas and became involved in revolutionary activities. Lu Xun subsequently felt that he was left alone in the battlefield, “wandering back and forth with a halberd/spear on the shoulder” (荷戟独彷徨), as he described vividly in his poem “Ti *Panghuang*” “题《彷徨》” [On *Wandering*]. Although hesitant and uncertain, he did not lay down his weapon. Instead, he tried to find a way out. As time passed he became more adamant, and resolved to do away with hesitation.²⁸ His determination and fighting spirit are reflected in his pseudonyms, such as You Gang “尤刚”, meaning firm and unyielding, a true reflection of Lu Xun’s personality, or Ji Feng “及锋”, suggesting sharpness. Indeed his *zawen* were as powerful as sharp daggers. Influenced by the spirit of Nietzsche, Lu Xun brandished his “shield and battleaxe” to the end of his life.

Lu Xun was a keen observer of current affairs. Almost every controversy that arose attracted a comment from him. Consequently, he very often found himself in conflict with others, people such as the extreme leftists in the so-called Creation Society who campaigned for a more narrow and prescriptive “proletarian literature”²⁹. They accused him of being outdated, and having lost touch; they even called him “feudal dregs”. Some young people in the Sun Society also joined the attack against Lu Xun. In the face of many detractors, Lu Xun launched a counter-attack, denouncing them as wicked tricksters. His bitter verbal exchanges with his opponents are also

²⁸ See his letter no. 79, in *Letters of two places* 《两地书》 (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996, p. 360).

²⁹ Later in his life, though, Lu Xun became pro-proletarian literature, and was even upset when the League of Left-wing Writers had to be dissolved at the turn of 1935 and 1936 in the effort to build a united cultural front in order to resist against Japan.

reflected in his pseudonyms such as Bai Zaixuan “白在宣”, meaning openly declaring war against his opponents, and Jing Yizun “敬一尊”, suggesting retaliation.

Xiao Jiao “晓角” – a bugle, or clarion at dawn – was, according to Xu Guangping, the last penname Lu Xun used in 1936 in a fortnightly magazine called Zhongliu 《中流》 [Midstream]. Till the very end of his life, Lu Xun, the literary warrior, was still trying to awaken his people, urging them to fight the darkness before the dawn.

This symbolic association of darkness and light is also embodied in his pseudonyms; names such as You Guang “游光”, which means to listen and see in the dark. He used this penname for a series of *zawen*, including: *Yesong* 《夜颂》 [Ode to the night] (1933), *Tan bianfu* 《谈蝙蝠》 [Talking about bats], *Qiuye ji you* 《秋夜纪游》 [Travel log on an Autumn night], *Wen chuang qiu meng* 《文床秋梦》 [Autumn dreams on a literary bed], all of which were later included in the *zawen* collection entitled *Zhun feng yue tan* 《准风月谈》 [Not really talking about wind and the moon]³⁰ under the penname of Lǚ Sun “旅隼”.

One of the French uses of pseudonym derives from “nom de guerre” (“name of war”). “This originated from a time when a soldier, on enlisting under the flag, took a special surname which he retained for the length of his army service.”³¹ Lu Xun was such a soldier, who fought

³⁰ On May 25, 1933, the editor of *Shenbao ziyou tan* 《申报·自由谈》, under pressure, put up a notice on the paper “Calling on all the great writers to write about wind and moon”, meaning talking about romantic affairs rather than politics. So Lu Xun used that as the title for his collection, suggesting, by adding the word “zhun”, that what he had written might not really be about “wind” and “moon”. *Zhun feng yue tan* 《准风月谈》 was Published by lianhua shuju 联华书局, but in the name of xingzhong shuju 兴中书局 in 1934.

³¹ See Tony Joseph “A Choice of Pseudonyms” in *Library Review*, (Emerald Backfiles, 2007), pp. 204-206.

bravely in face of danger, just as he described in one of his letters: “Lately, the Chinese-style Fascist has become rampant: among my friends, one has disappeared, one has already been assassinated, and it is possible that more will be assassinated. However, I am still alive, and as long as I am alive, I will take up my pen to fight against their pistols.”³² Indeed, Lu Xun used numerous *noms de guerre* during his life-time battle: from the earlier “戎马书生”, “夏剑生” to “旅隼”, “锋”, and finally “晓角”. These pseudonyms reveal the long journey of a literary warrior during which the soldier must not only fight against the dark forces of society, but also engage in constant war with himself, as can be seen from the self-punishing and self-destructive visions reflected in his prose-poems of *Wild grass* (1927).

III. People’s Ox 孺子牛



This signet is taken from Li Yunjing’s 李允经 book *Lu Xun biming suojie* 《鲁迅笔名索解》 [Seeking meanings of Lu Xun’s Pseudonyms] (Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), p. 149

Lu Xun was not just a relentless fighter; he was also a man of tender emotions. His poem “Da ke qiao” 《答客诮》 [Responding to a blame] epitomizes this tender-heartedness hidden beneath an outwardly stern appearance. The poem, as the title suggests, was written in response to criticism of him spoiling his son Hai Ying. “A real hero doesn’t have to be unfeeling and indifferent / Why can’t a doting father be also a dignified man? / Don’t you know even a mighty roaring tiger, / won’t forget to look back and keep an eye on its cubs.” (“无情未必真豪杰，怜

³² See Shanghai Lu Xun jinianguan 上海鲁迅纪念馆. *Lu Xun Huazhuan* 《鲁迅画传》 [An Illustrated biography of Lu Xun] (Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2001), p.178.

子如何不丈夫。知否兴风狂啸者，回眸时看小於菟。”³³ This poem, conjuring up a vivid image of a fearless tiger showing instinctive care and love for its cubs, reminds us of another of Lu Xun’s pseudonyms: “孺牛” (a herd boy’s willing ox), a vivid reminder of his dedication to people. In one of his letters to Xu Guangping, Lu Xun wrote of himself as beings like a cow that only eats grass, but produces milk and blood.³⁴ Not only was Lu Xun a brave fighter against the “wolf” that eats people; he was also a dutiful son to his people and country, for whom he had strong feelings – albeit ambivalent at times.

On the one hand, he empathized with the unfortunate plight of his people. On the other, he could not help feeling disappointed, and even indignant at times, at their weakness, including their apathy towards the sufferings of others. The deeper the love, the higher the expectations and the stronger the disappointment, and so the keener the anxiety, and the sharper the criticism; Lu Xun made bitterly honest comments on virtually all aspects of Chinese institutions, culture, and customs, and he made impassioned pleas for reform. These were instrumental in guiding China's along the path toward progress and modernity.

Lu Xun’s choice of pseudonyms also reflects his concern and love for his people.

³³ Lu Xun Huazhuan 《鲁迅画传》 [An Illustrated biography of Lu Xun] , 2001, p. 190

³⁴ 鲁 and 许 Liangdi shu zhenji (yuanxin shougao) 《两地书真迹》 (原信手稿) [Letters of Two Places in the Original Handwriting], (Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), p. 124.

One of the earlier pseudonyms he used was Geng Chen “庚晨”, a legendary figure Lu Xun must have admired. *Gu yue du jing* 《古岳读经》)³⁵ gives an account of how Geng Chen, for the wellbeing of the people, helped Emperor Yu (大禹) control a rampant flood. Geng Chen, the people’s hero, thus became an inspiration for Lu Xun.

Out of love for his people, Lu Xun attacked the obscurantist policy of Kuomintang reactionaries. He adopted two pseudonyms: “虞明” and “余铭”, both loosely homophonous to Yu min “愚民”, which means keeping people in ignorance. Lu Xun was also very sympathetic and supportive towards progressive movements initiated by students. After the March 18th massacre in Beijing in 1926, he wrote his famous piece *Jinian Liu Hezhen jun* 《纪念刘和珍君》 [In Memory of Miss Liu Hezhen]. He was furious at the Kuomintang’s arrest and subsequent execution of Rou Shi 柔石 (1902-1931) in 1931 and then Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899-1935) in 1934. These tragic events committed Lu Xun irrevocably to war against the Kuomintang. In the last decade of his life, it is clear that he came to support the Chinese Communist Party against the Kuomintang. Lu Xun had a very high regard for the Chinese Communist Party, even sending a telegram to the Central Committee in Feb. 1936 on the successful completion of the Long March. The telegram ended with “On you rest the hopes of China and mankind.”³⁶

Lu Xun’s love and respect for those who shared the same beliefs and ideals are best embodied in his five-character pseudonym Zhuxia Huaishuangshe “诸夏怀霜社” – meaning that all the

³⁵ 《古岳读经》 is included in Lu Xun’s *Tang Song Chuanqi ji* 《唐宋传奇集》 [A Collection of Romances in Tang and Song Dynasties] (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1928).

³⁶ For more information about Lu Xun’s attitudes towards the red army led by Mao, see *Lu Xun Hua zhuan* 《鲁迅画传》 [An Illustrated biography of Lu Xun] (2001), pp. 171-2.

Chinese people cherish the memory of Qu Qiubai. This is based on Qu Qiuba's 瞿秋白 original name Shuang “霜”. Lu Xun always considered Qu his bosom friend and soulmate; he even copied a couplet by a Qing seal cutter and artist He Waqin (何瓦琴) and presented it to Qu:

“Life is complete with one bosom friend,
I'll always cherish him as another self.”³⁷

(人生得一知己足矣，/ 斯世当以同怀视之。)

Lu Xun's love for his people was also manifest in his concern and sympathy for those who were less fortunate: people at the bottom of society, women, and children. Indeed, most of his writings draw their materials from the broad masses of a morbid society, and attempt to expose the basic ailment, and so attract attention and treatment. Many of his pseudonyms carried just such messages.

Ba Ren “巴人”, for instance, is the penname for his *Ah Q zhengzhuan* 《阿 Q 正传》 [The Authentic Biography of Ah Q] originally published in the supplement to *Chen Bao* 《晨报》 [the Morning Herald] from Dec. 1921 to Feb. 1922. The term *ba ren* “巴人”, was used to people of a low social stratum. Its vulgar associations³⁸ therefore contribute to the comic effect of the work.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 168.

³⁸ Lu Xun explained this pseudonym taken from “下里巴人”，“并不高雅的意思”。See “阿 Q 正传的成因”，in *Lu Xun zizhuan* 《鲁迅自传》 [The autobiography of Lu Xun], (1997), p. 340.

Zhao Lingyi “赵令仪”, a typical female name³⁹, was adopted by Lu Xun for two of his *zawen*: *Nǚ ren weibi duo shuo huang* 《女人未必多说谎》 [Women do not necessarily tell more lies], and *Lun ren yan ke wei* 《论人言可畏》 [On Gossip being a fearful thing] in which Lu Xun spoke for women, attacking prejudices against them. The latter was about the untimely death of Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 (1910-1935), one of the most popular movie stars of the time, and suggested that media reports were responsible for the actress' suicide. The penname 赵令仪 was reminiscent of the tragic death of Zhao Zhaoyi 赵昭仪, a beautiful concubine of Emperor Cheng of Han (52BCE—7BCE). When her sister Zhao Feiyan 赵飞燕 became the favourite consort of the Emperor, Zhao Zhaoyi was also summoned to the palace. The emperor was so infatuated by her that he called her body the “land of warmth and tenderness” (温柔之乡). When the emperor died in her bed, she was blamed, and finally committed suicide. The female name, very appropriate for the content of these two *zawen*, reveals Lu Xun's sympathy for the plight of women, which is most effectively expressed in the portrait of the poor protagonist in his famous work *Xianlin Sao* 《祥林嫂》 [Well wishes].

Mi Zizhang “宓子章” – literally a silent child's writing – is a pseudonym Lu Xun used for a couple of his *zawen* on children. To Lu Xun, children represented the future; his concern for children was epitomized in the last sentence of *Kuangren riji* 《狂人日记》 [A Madman's Diary] – “save our children” (救救孩子).

³⁹ The use of female pseudonyms would merit separate discussion. Most of the writers in Lu Xun's time used pseudonyms to reflect their genders: men adopted pennames that were often associated with masculinity, while women writers chose names indicating femininity. Some women writers whose maiden names appear more masculine, or neutral, would pick a more typical feminine name as their pseudonym. For example, Ding Ling (1904-1986), one of Lu Xun's contemporaries, is a pseudonym; her original names include 蒋伟, 蒋炜, 蒋玮、丁冰之, but “丁玲” was by far her preferred name.

Children also featured in the collection of prints by German Artist Kae Thekollwitz 《凯绥·珂勒惠支版画集》 published in 1936 under the penname of *Shanghai san xian shuwu* “上海三闲书屋”.⁴⁰ This publication is due to a chance discovery of one of Thekollwitz’s print entitled *Xisheng* 《牺牲》 [Sacrifice], depicting the grief of a mother whose children died in the battlefield. Lu Xun loved it so much that he spent the next six years collecting other works of the artist whom he had never met. In the preface to the collection, he wrote: “With the depth and breadth of a loving mother, she (Thekollwitz) voiced the sorrow, protest, anger and struggle of all those who are insulted and harmed. Her work by and large draws its material from the difficulties and hardship of the people; their hunger, wandering life as war refugees, disease, and death; nonetheless it also calls for struggle, solidarity and forging ahead” (她以深广的慈母之爱，为一切被侮辱和损害者悲哀，抗议，愤怒，斗争；所取的题材大抵是困苦，饥饿，流离，疾病，死亡，然而也有呼号，挣扎，联合和奋起).

Lu Xun believed “No other power could stop art for mankind.”⁴¹ (为人类的艺术，别的力量是阻挡不住的). When the collection of prints was published, Lu Xun sent a copy to the artist in Germany via one of his Japanese friends. Thus, the book, fragrant with the fresh ink of Shanghai

⁴⁰ Lu Xun showed great interest in art, particularly woodcuts and prints; he even tried his own hand on drawing. However his greatest contribution lies in his introduction of foreign art to China, especially the woodcut artists from Russia, Germany and France, as well as Japan. In order to do so effectively, he self-funded this publishing house, and published a number of art works by foreign artists. He also selected some pieces by Chinese artists to be exhibited in France. Many young Chinese artists at the time benefited from Lu Xun’s generous support; he wrote introductions to the published works of woodcut, and even financed some of the publications, including the book entitled *Muke Licheng* 《木刻纪程》 [*The Voyage of the woodcut*], published in the early 1930s, which, as he hoped, was a milestone for Chinese Woodcut. For more information, see also Lu Xun’s 《近代木刻选集》小引, and 《近代木刻选集》附记, both written in 1929, and included in 《集外集拾遗》.

⁴¹ See Lu Xun 《写在深夜里》, 1936. This article was written for an English-language Journal published in Shanghai entitled [The Voice of China]. It was included in 《且介亭杂文末编》, see 《鲁迅全集》第6卷 (2005).

san xian shuwu, traveled across the continents, linking the hearts of two artists who shared the same concern, despite the distance between them.

Perhaps there is no better pseudonym than *Suo zi* “索子” or *Suo shi* “索士” that truly reflect what Lu Xun really was – a solitary scholar in quest. He started using these names when he was in Japan in 1902, where he was very disappointed with the behaviour of some Chinese expatriates. Unlike many of his compatriots who tried to stay in Tokyo to study medicine, Lu Xun went to Sendai Medical School, a provincial college, where he was the only Chinese student. His experience there, and especially the slides he saw in one of his classes about the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), which showed the lack of compassion of Chinese onlookers,⁴² played a crucial role in the decision which was to change his life forever. Instead of becoming a doctor, Lu Xun decided to become a writer.

“索子” and “索士” remind people of the two lines in Qu Yuan’s (屈原 340-278 BCE) *Lisao* 《离骚》 [*Lament on Encountering Sorrow*]: “Alas, long and winding is the road / I’ll keep seeking to and fro.” (路漫漫其修远兮，吾将上下而求索), which Lu Xun quoted in his forward to *Panghuang* 《彷徨》 [*Wandering*].⁴³ These two lines are a true depiction of Lu Xun’s long and often lonely journey – a spiritual quest, probing deep into the national character of the Chinese, and searching for ways to save the nation and people from their deplorable situation.

⁴² In “关于《呐喊》” Lu Xun recalled a scene he saw in class where a Chinese was executed, but all the crowd, instead of showing sympathy, seemed to be enjoying the sensation of seeing the man’s head cut off. See *Wode xiaoshuo* “我的小说” [My Fiction] in *Lu Xun zizhuan* 《鲁迅自传》 [The autobiography of Lu Xun (Jiansu wenyi chubanshe, 1997)], pp. 333-337. Also see Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji* [Complete works of Lu Xun]. 16 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 416-417; vol. 2, p. 306.

⁴³ Qu Yuan is one of Lu Xun’s favourite writers; Lu Xun even got a copy of *Lisao* 《离骚》 [*Lament on Encountering Sorrow*] printed in Japan. See Xu Shoushang’s 许寿裳 “Wangyou Lu Xun yinxiang ji” “亡友鲁迅印象记” [Impressions of my departed friend Lu Xun] in *Zhiyou de huainian* 挚友的怀念 (Shijiazhuang, 2000), pp. 4-5.

Lu Xun diagnosed three major weaknesses in the national character of the Chinese - shortsightedness, cowardliness and greed – in his letter to Xu Guangping in 1925.⁴⁴ Yet “what marked him out was his severe and unrelenting analysis of the dark side of the Chinese character, *not* – this is the crucial point – in a detached way, dissociating himself from this dark side, but just the opposite: painfully probing the recesses of his own psyche, as a Chinese himself”⁴⁵.

Indeed, self-consciousness, a dominant theme of May Fourth rhetoric, is also reflected in Lu Xun’s keen awareness of his own writing and the repercussions and controversy it would evoke, as he wrote in his autobiography: “I myself also knew that in China, my pen would be among the sharpest, and my words would sometimes also be relentless... [this was because] I was awake, so I could not help using them”⁴⁶ (我自己也知道，在中国，我的笔要算较为尖刻的，说话有时也不留情面。... 我觉悟了，所以要常用)。

Apart from the image of a devoted and hard-working cow, there is yet another image – the image of a snake conjured up by the penname “它音”. Lu Xun ingeniously created this name by dropping the insect radical of the word snake (蛇 *she*). The poignant image of the snake embodies Lu Xun’s strong and antithetical feeling, love for his nation and people on the one hand, and hatred for enemies on the other. He was born under the sign of the snake in the Chinese zodiac and seemed to have a special affinity for this reptile, admiring its qualities of tenacity and perseverance.

⁴⁴ See Lu Xun & Xu Guangping 鲁迅，许广平 *Liangdi shu zhenji* 《两地书真迹》（Beijing.. Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995），p. 54.

⁴⁵ David E. Pollard. *The True Story of Lu Xun*. (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002)，p. 204。

⁴⁶ See Chapter 10 (“my *zawen*”) of *Lu Xun zizhuan* [*Autobiography*], (Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1997), p. 356.

Lu Xun suggested that a strong love – whether for food, sex, or a nation and mankind – should be clinging, and tenacious like a snake. By the same token, one should also act like a venomous snake towards enemies, pestering, entangling, and never letting go (纠缠如毒蛇)⁴⁷.



This signet is taken from Li Yunjing (2006), p.29

Lu Xun's other pseudonyms, such as Lingfei “令飞” and its variations, were intended to spur people to “fly” high. He used this penname for his *Molo shi li shuo* 《摩罗诗力说》⁴⁸ [On the Demoniac Poets], in which he advocated the fighting spirit of Romantic Poets such as Byron and Shelley, and which showed his enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause against the corrupt *Qing* court.

The name also bears witness to his expectations and hope. While his keen awareness of the weaknesses of the national character often led to frustration and even anger, Lu Xun never lost hope in his country and people. Even in his most lonely and fragile years towards the end of his life, he still wrote “the world will not die with me, hope lies in the future” (世界决不和我同死，希望是在于将来的)⁴⁹. It was not surprising that when Lu Xun, the people's ox, passed away in Oct. 1936, he was lauded as “The Soul of the Nation” (民族魂).

⁴⁷It is followed by “执著如怨鬼”. See 鲁迅 《华盖集·杂感》，[Miscellaneous Thoughts] 1925. See *Complete Works* (1981).

⁴⁸ It was first published in instalments in 1908 in *Henan* 《河南》 in Tokyo, a patriotic magazine run by Chinese overseas students, and later included in the author's *zawen* collection *Fen* 《坟》 [Grave], (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1929), pp. 77-143.

⁴⁹See *Lu Xun zizhuan* 《鲁迅自传》 [The autobiography of Lu Xun], (Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1997), p. 427.

IV. Humour and other effects



See *Lu Xun biming yinpu* 《鲁迅笔名印谱》 (1976), p. 2

Lu Xun's pseudonyms also add colour and flavour to his writing through manipulation of words: sometimes by using special terms or person's names; sometimes by employing homophones, and sometimes by playing with words and tearing them apart. This not only contributed to the desired effects of his writing – whether light-hearted humour, mocking satire, or bitter irony – but also strengthened its meaning, often in subtle ways.

The penname *He Jiagan* “何家干” literally translates “who did it? Or “who wrote it?” Literary scholar Li Yunjing mentioned that Lu Xun used this penname for 24 of his *zawen*.⁵⁰ Most of these *zawen* were strong attacks against Kuomintang reactionaries, and Lu Xun could well imagine the reaction of those under attack when they read these *zawen* – they would stamp with fury: “who wrote it”? The ingenuity shown in coining this penname is reminiscent of another unusual penname adopted by the author of *The Green Eyed Monster: a Christmas lesson* – “whatishisname”.⁵¹

Another pseudonym *Xu Xia* “许遐” is a homophone to “许霞”, Xu Guangping's nickname. Xu Guangping was one of Lu Xun's students at the Women's Normal College, where Lu Xun was

⁵⁰See Li Yunjing 李允经 *Lu Xun biming suo jie* 《鲁迅笔名索解》 [Seeking the meanings of Lu Xun's Pseudonyms] (Fuzhou: Fujian jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), p. 134.

⁵¹ See Joseph, 2007, p. 206.

teaching the history of Chinese fiction. The teacher-student relationship soon developed into a love affair. Lu Xun would fondly call Xu Guangping “little imp”, and both of them used names of endearment in addressing each other in their correspondence.

In March 1925 Xu Guangping wrote her first letter to Lu Xun, marking the beginning of frequent correspondence between them over the next few years while they were working in different cities. All their letters from 1925 to 1929 were later collected in the *Liangdi shu* 《两地书》 [Letters of two places]. During their earlier correspondence, the name Lu Xun was used, but when their relationship became closer, Lu was dropped and Xun alone was used. Starting from 1929, Xu Guangping started calling herself: “Xiao Ciwei” (Little Hedgehog), and Lu Xun, “Xiao Bai Xiang” 小白象 (Little white elephant). So Lu Xun started to use “Your Xiao Bai Xiang” or “xiao Bai Xiang”, or EL (stands for English elephant) or ELEF (from *elefant* in German), or he would simply draw a small elephant.

The name “Xiao Bai Xiang” is allegedly taken from one of the articles by renowned intellectual Lin Yutang, in which he called Lu Xun “a genius” (*tiancai*), as rare as a white elephant. Lu Xun seemed to like the name, and even nicknamed their son Hai Ying “Little red elephant”.

Sui Luowen “隋洛文” was another frequently used pseudonym by Lu Xun and is an example of how he played with words. In 1930, he participated in underground activity for the Communist Party. Therefore he was attacked by the Kuomintang as “a degenerate literary man” (堕落文人 *duoluo wenren*), and was listed in a circular of wanted men. From this derogatory “title” Lu Xun cleverly turned “墮” *duo* into the common surname “隋” *sui*, and “落” *luo* into

the more bland “洛” *luo*. This was a wry response that neutered the Kuomintang’s attack, and from which other names were also derived: Luo Wen “洛文”, Le Wen “乐雯”, Luo “洛” Le Wen “乐文”, and Le (or Yue) Fen “乐贲”, and so on. The penname “乐贲” also alludes to the *Book of Changes* 《易经》, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section. Similarly, when Lu Xun was groundlessly accused as being the “dregs of feudalism” (封建余孽) in 1931 and 1932, he started using Feng Yu “封余” as his penname; the irony was obvious. Other variations include Feng Yu “丰瑜”, Tang Fengyu “唐丰瑜” and Feng Zhiyu “丰之瑜”。

Lu Xun used Gong Han “公汗” as his pseudonym for a dozen of his *zawen*, mostly written in 1934, when he was smeared as a “traitor” (汉奸) by those who tried to please his opponents. According to Xu Shiquan (徐诗荃), who was close to Lu Xun at the time, this penname was derived from “叭云汉奸” *bayun hanjian* which means a traitor named by sycophants. Indignant at being slandered as a traitor by his opponents, Lu Xun wrote to his friend “in less than a year or two, it will be altogether clear at one glance who the traitor is.”⁵² This name was formed by ideographically condensing four characters into two, leaving out one component of each character - thus “叭云” (sycophants) becomes “公” *gong* (public) and “汉奸” *hanjian* (traitor) turns into “汗” *han*.⁵³ The verb *han* “汗”, whose literal meaning is sweating, was also a true and vivid description of the circumstances under which Lu Xun wrote those *zawen* – Lu Xun kept writing despite being soaked with sweat in the mind-numbing hot summer of Shanghai.

⁵² See 《致曹聚仁》信 Letter [to Cao Juren] , June 2, 1934.

⁵³ See 据包子衍 《释“公汗”》 [An Explanation of the meaning of “gong han”] in 《新文学史料》 [The historical materials of new literature], Issue 4, 1979.

Such wisdom and humour can also be found in the titles Lu Xun gave to his *zawen* collections. Take 《且介亭杂文》 [*The Zawen written in Qiejie Studio*], for example. *Qiejie* “且介” was derived from the word “租界”, meaning “concession”. At that time Shanghai was carved up into a British-run and French-run municipal concessions. The place where Lu Xun resided bordered on the foreign-run precinct, and was known in Shanghai as a “half concession”. Lu Xun picked half of each of the characters in the word “租界” to form a name for his studio - “且介亭”, and further the title of his book: 《且介亭杂文》. This is a collection of *zawen* written between 1934 and 1936; it was published posthumously in 1937 by San xian shuwu.

Lu Xun also employed some Chinese translation of foreign names as his pseudonyms. Both “葛何德 and 董季荷”, for instance, are transliteration of Don Quixotes (堂·吉诃德). During the heated debate between Lu Xun and some of the members in the Creation League and the Sun League, one article entitled “ 请看我们中国的 Don Quixote 的乱舞“ (Please see the riotous revelry / wild dance of the Chinese Don Quixote) ridiculed Lu Xun as a Chinese Don Quixote. Tit for tat, Lu Xun also wrote a *zawen* entitled “中华民国的新 ‘唐·吉诃德’们” (The new Don Quixotes of the Republic of China), in which he commented that, while Don Quixote under Cervantes’s pen was funny and ludicrous, the Chinese Don Quixotes were more despicable.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See 李允经 Li Yunjing (2006), p. 88.

A similar approach was used in fabricating the following pseudonyms. Kang Bodu “康伯度” comes from the Portuguese word “comprador”, which is rendered “买办” in Chinese. In one of the articles on Da Wanbao 《大晚报》, it was insinuated that Lu Xun was a “买办”, so Lu Xun used “康伯度” as his penname in retaliation. Similarly, the penname *Ni Shuoer* “倪朔尔” comes from Nisul, Lu Xun’s English name – “Lusin” – spelled backwards, and then transliterated into Chinese.

“宴之敖者” (The one driven out by a Japanese woman at home) is another good example of how Lu Xun cunningly played with words to achieve a special effect. “敖者” refers to the one who walks away – or in this case is driven away; but by whom? Lu Xun separated the word “宴” into its three components: the top is a radical for house or home; the middle part stands for Japanese, and the last component is associated with female gender; together, the word refers to a Japanese woman at home. Other variations of this pseudonym include: “宴敖” and “敖者”.

There has been a lot of speculation as to what actually happened between Lu Xun and his younger brother’s (Zhou Zuoren - 1885-1967) Japanese wife. One thing is certain: the two brothers, who had been very close (Lu Xun had given his younger brother and his wife a lot of help) had a major falling out in 1924, after which Lu Xun moved out of the big compound shared by the three families of Zhou brothers. Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren were never to be in direct contact again.

This incident could not have happened at a worse time – it was in the wake of the New Cultural Movement, when Lu Xun was at the lowest point of his life. The feud with his brother threw him yet again into a dark abyss of loneliness and despair; and he found himself “trudging back and forth in the desert”⁵⁵(依然在沙漠中走来走去。). Coincidentally, Lu Xun’s Buddhist name, as mentioned before was Chang Geng“长庚”, while that of Zhou Zuoren was Qi Ming “启明” (Also known as Qi Meng “启孟”); both are names for Venus alignments. Whereas 长庚 alludes to Venus shimmering at dusk in the West, 启明 points to Venus twinkling at dawn in the East;⁵⁶ but the two stars are not to be seen together. That detachment, tragically, came to symbolise the two brothers.

V. Erudition in classical literature



According to Lu Xun’s diary, this seal was a presents from his friend (郑振铎) in 1934. See *Luxun yiyin* 《鲁迅遗印》(2001), p. 19.

An ardent advocate of new literature written in Baihua 白话 (vernacular language as opposed to classical Chinese), Lu Xun was, nonetheless an accomplished classical scholar. He was however opposed to “Lao diaozi”, the old tone that had little to do with [contemporary] society (“和社会没有关系的老调子”⁵⁷). Still, he was able to use the old tune to sing new songs. In 1925, a student questioned Lu Xun’s instruction to young people to read fewer classical Chinese texts,

⁵⁵ See his 《<自选集> 自序》 [Preface to Self-selected works], (Shanghai: Tianma shudian 1933).

⁵⁶ “There is the Qiming star in the east, and Changgen star in the west” (东有启明，西有长庚), see 《诗经小雅》 (“Xiaoya” in the *Book of Odes*).

⁵⁷ See “老调子已经唱完” [The old tune has come to an end] in 《集外集拾遗》.

but more Western books, although he himself was obviously well versed in classical literature. Responding to this challenge, Lu Xun used the metaphor of an excessive intake of wine being harmful, but a moderate amount being fine. Although he was mindful of overdosing on classical texts, he still enjoyed reading them.⁵⁸ Lu Xun did not dismiss the importance of the past; he believed that only by understanding the past can one draw correct inferences about the future, and expect new developments in literature.⁵⁹

This view stemmed from the author's historical outlook and general philosophy of life. Influenced by Darwin's Theory of Evolution, Lu Xun believed in social change and progress.⁶⁰ However, tradition, to Lu Xun, entailed continuity from past to present and into the future; that was why he suggested adopting the present, drawing on the past but establishing a new order. However, the new cannot be established without keeping pace with the outside world while still maintaining the blood and pulse of one's own body.⁶¹

Lu Xun's contribution to traditional Chinese literature is manifold: publications include poems in classical style, stories based on ancient myths and fairy tales, and works on the relationship between legends and historical facts – such as *Gushi xin bian* 《故事新编》 [Old Stories Retold] – as well as annotated classical literary texts, most of which were included in the four volumes of *Lu Xun Jilu guji congshu* 《鲁迅辑录古籍丛编》 [A Collected Works of Classical Literary

⁵⁸ “这是这么一个意思”, [This is what is meant], 《集外集拾遗》

⁵⁹ Lu Xun made this point in his speech “上海文艺之一瞥” [A glance at the Arts in Shanghai] he made at 社会科学研究会在 1931. This speech was collected in 《二心集》 in 1932, see 《鲁迅全集》第 4 卷, (Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1981.)

⁶⁰ See 《人之历史》 in Fen 《坟》 [Grave] (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1929) , pp. 7-28. Also see Lu Xun quanji 《鲁迅全集》, 第一卷 (Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1981).

⁶¹ See 《文化偏至论》 in Fen 《坟》 [Grave], (1929) .

Texts Annotated by Lu Xun] . He also wrote books on the history of Chinese literature; such as *Zhongguo xiaoshuo shi lüe* 《中国小说史略》 [A Concise History of Chinese Fiction] ,Wei Jin liuchao xiaoshuo] 《魏晋六朝小说》 [Fiction during the Period of Wei, Ji and Six Dynasties], *Han wenxue shi gangyao* 《汉文学史纲要》 [An Outline of the Han Literature] and *Tang Song chuanqi ji* 《唐宋传奇集》 [A Collection of Tang and Song Romances].

As a result of his profound knowledge of the ancient writings, his own writings, even his most political *zawen*, are imbued with the flavour and resonance of classical literature. This is, as Jon Kowallis puts it, a “direct indication of how strong a grip the aesthetic criteria of the past still held on him” .⁶² The influence of the past is also very apparent in his pseudonyms. Many of his names are associated with or allude to the classics. Just as he adopted the highly stylized classical poetic forms – such as *jueju* 绝句 and *lushi* 律诗– to express his feelings and predicaments in modern society, many of his pseudonyms alluding to legends, imageries and allegories of ancient texts enhance their literary contexts through their connections with the past.

The following are some examples of Lu Xun’s pseudonyms which reveal the author’s erudition in a classical literature: Huang Ji “黄棘”, Tao Zhui “桃椎”, Yuan Gen “元艮”, Yue Fen “乐贲”, Tang Si “唐俟”, Du Deji “杜德机”, Hua Yu “华圉”.

“黄棘” literally refers to a kind of wood good for making horse whips. The word alludes to a poetic line from Qu Yuan’s “Jiu Zhang . Bei hui feng” 《九章•悲回风》：“借光景之往来兮，

⁶² See Von Kowallis *The Lyrical Lu Xun: A Study of His Classical-Style Verse*. 1996, p. 41.

施黄棘之枉策”。⁶³“黄棘” implies the meaning of using a strong whip to urge the horse to gallop faster. This was by no means the only reference Lu Xun made to Qu Yuan. Lu Xun had a very high regard for the poet, and praised his *Lisao* 《离骚》 as: “the greatest long-lasting work, surpassing all” (逸响伟辞，卓绝一世).⁶⁴

“桃椎” alludes to the story recorded in *the Book of Yellow Emperor* 《黄帝书》.⁶⁵ It is said that in ancient times there were two brothers who had special skills in catching devils. Knowing that devils were scared of peach trees, the two brothers would inspect devils under peach trees. Based on this legend, a custom arose whereby people hung two wooden boards made from the peach tree on their doors so as to rid themselves of evil. These boards were called “taochui” (桃椎)” or “taofu” (桃符). These pennames reveal Lu Xun’s desire to protect people from evil and harm. The pseudonym Wei Suo 苇索” is another example. According to the legend, 苇索 was used by the gods to catch devils. 苇索 can also be used to suggest firmness and tenaciousness.



According to Lu Xun’s diary, this signet was carved and sent to him as present by Chen Shizeng in 1916. *Lu xun yi yin*. (2001), p. 6

The word “si” (俟) appeared in a number of Lu Xun’s pennames: “俟”, Tang Si “唐俟”, and Si tang “俟堂”. “唐” refers to China while “俟” means to wait, so “唐俟” can be interpreted

⁶³ See 屈原《九章》之九, in 《屈原九章今译》. 上海: 古典文学出版社, 1957.

⁶⁴ 鲁迅《汉文学史纲要》第四篇“屈原及宋玉”, *Complete Works* (1981).

⁶⁵ 汉帛书《黄帝书》或称《黄帝四经》。它包括《经法》、《经》、《称》、《原道》等四篇。These Four Classics of the Yellow Emperor are very important documents for the research of the early history of Chinese philosophy, especially that of early Han Dynasty.

as China waiting for a brighter future. This seems to have been one of Lu Xun's favourite pennames, used by the author for as many as 25 of his works.

“俟” also means to wait for one's fate, as conveyed in *Zhongyong* 《中庸》：“君子居易以俟命，小人行险以侥幸” – a real *junzhi* knows his own limits, and accepts his fate with calmness and integrity, whereas a *xiaoren* – a petty person – not knowing himself, would take risks in order to get undeserved profits. Lu Xun used “俟堂” in 1924 to attack the corruption and nepotism of his work place. This was triggered by an incident of an official wanting to replace Lu Xun in the Department of Education with his own trusted follower. Lu Xun was suggesting that he would sit and wait in his office, and see what happened. Apparently Lu Xun used this penname to show his contempt for petty people (*xiaoren*). The few years when Lu Xun worked in Ministry of Education were marked by uncertainty, and even helplessness, which was later reflected in many of the writings published in *Panghuang* 《彷徨》 in 1926, and *Yecao* 《野草》 [Wild Grass] in 1927.

Yue Fen “乐贲” was a penname Lu Xun used for his two articles “Beyond ‘Japanese Studies’” (‘日本研究’之外) and “Introduction to the print exhibition of German writers” (介绍德国作家版画展). While “贲” can be used to refer to a warrior in classical Chinese, it is also the name for one of the 64 hexagrams in *Bagua* (the Eight Diagrams) in *Yijing*; it is related to pattern or decoration, and can be extended to arts and humanities in general. Finding pleasure in art is what is implied in “乐贲”, which accords with Lu Xun's life-long interest in graphic art, woodcuts and prints. When he was still a little boy, he was deeply attracted to the strange animals in the illustrated book of *Shanhai jing* 《山海经》 [*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*]. Lu Xun said

“the series of four volumes were his earliest and most cherished books”.⁶⁶ This interest was further developed during the few years at the Three-Flavours Studio.

Yuan gen “元艮” is also a name of one of the hexagram in *Bagua*. “元” is associated with greatness and broadness as in “元亨”. “元艮” means paying attention to the broad and whole message instead of the segments. This might suggest a criticism of some scholars, such as 施蛰存, who encouraged young people to look for specific words in the classics such as *Zhuangzi* and *Wenxuan* rather than trying to understand the general meaning of the texts. “艮” can also be used to refer to a simple and unadorned writing style. Lu Xun was suggesting that young people should not follow Shi’s suggestion to look for archaic and pretentious words.

Xu Shoutang 许寿棠 agreed with Guo Moruo’s comment made in his article “Zhuangzi yu Lu Xun “庄子与鲁迅” [Zhuangzi yu Lu Xun] that Lu Xun had an in-depth understanding of Zhuangzi.⁶⁷ The meaning of the pseudonym Du Deji “杜德机” is more complicated. It alludes to a story in *Zhuangzi* (《庄子·应帝王》).⁶⁸ The first character “du” (杜) means to deliberately block, or make inaccessible; “de” (德) means to give life to, or to have vitality. Together it means to block others from gaining access to your vitality. In other words, Zhuangzi was trying to articulate that the best way to be true to oneself is to be unpredictable so that others cannot know you.

⁶⁶ Lu Xun zizhuan, Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1997, p. 22

⁶⁷ See Xu’s “Wangyou Lu Xun yinxiang ji” “亡友鲁迅印象记” in *Zhiyou de huainian* 《挚友的怀念》(2000), p. 4.

⁶⁸ See *Zhuangzi neipian ying diwang diqi* 《庄子·应帝王》 Inner Chapter 7 of *Zhuangzi*.

Knowing *Zhuangzi* very well, Lu Xun made good use of it. The message embodied in “杜德机” – not allowing others to know your true self – was apparently very important for Lu Xun during the White Terror. Pseudonyms were one of the strategies used to disguise himself. Allusions to *Zhuangzi* can also be found in other pennames such as “齐物论”.

The pseudonym Hua Yu “华圉” is even more complex. The meaning of the character “圉” can also be traced back to *Zhuangzi* which says all things will come and go, and that their coming cannot be blocked and their going cannot be stopped. Those who lose themselves in their pursuit of transient things, and lose their true nature in seeking after what is vulgar are putting the cart before the horse (《庄子缮性》: 其來不可圉, 其去不可止。.... 故曰: 喪己於物, 失性於俗者, 謂之倒置之民。)

According to Xu Guangping, “华圉” also alluded to a chapter in *Mengzi*, 《孟子 万章 上》: “始舍之圉圉焉, 少則洋洋焉, 攸然而逝。” – A fish stranded, becomes still, and only comes to life again and swims away freely when released into water. Metaphorically, Lu Xun was also stranded in China under the White Terror. In addition, “圉” is also associated with the word *yu* “狱” (prison) as a homonym.

“华圉” is also a homophone for “华语”, the Chinese language. Lu Xun was very concerned about the problem posed by the Chinese script in the effort to modernize the nation. He brought this issue up many times; the most thorough discussion can be found in the article *An Outsider's*

Chats about Written Language (“门外文谈”)⁶⁹ published under the pseudonym “华圉”. A pun is apparently at work here. As mentioned above, “华圉” may vicariously imply “China's Prison,” as well as “China’s Language”. Lu Xun blamed the writing system for his nation’s backwardness, so much so that just before his death he even made the radical comment: “*Hanzi bu mie, Zhongguo bi wang*” 汉字不灭，中国必亡 (If Chinese characters are not eradicated, China will perish!)! ⁷⁰



This is the signet carved by Lu Xun himself, according to Xu Guangping. *Lu xun yi yin*. (2001), p. 1.

When Lu Xun used the past to disparage the present, it was articulated with more subtlety. For example, his pseudonyms Zhang Chenglu 张承禄 and Zhang Luru 张禄如 allude to Fan Sui 范雎 in *Shiji* 《史记》 [The Records of the Historian]. According to *Liezhuan* [biographies of important figures] on Fan Sui and Cai Ze 范雎蔡泽列传⁷¹, Fan Sui was originally a statesman of the State of Wei, where he was framed, severely persecuted and humiliated. When he finally managed to escape death, he concealed his true identity and changed his name to Zhang Lu, and fled to the State of Qin, where he became a minister. So Lu Xun used the name and its implications to attack the White Terror, under which he had to hide his identity. Lu Xun spoke

⁶⁹ *Menwai wentan* first appeared in the pages of the "Free Discussions" (*Ziyou tan*) supplement of the influential Shanghai newspaper *Shen bao*, from August 24 through September, 1934 under the pseudonym Hua Yu. See the whole article in *Lu Xun zawen xuan*, vol. 2 (1933-1936) eds. Fudan University and Shanghai Normal School, Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1973.

⁷⁰ For Lu Xun’s view on Chinese language - in particular Chinese characters – see Xu Shoushang’s 许寿裳 “Wangyou Lu Xun yinxiang ji” “亡友鲁迅印象记 in *Zhiyou de huainian* 《挚友的怀念》 (2000), pp. 51-52.

⁷¹ See 列传 十九, Sima Qian 司马迁 *Shiji* 《史记》 [Records of the Grand Historian]. Beijing: zhonghua shuju 1975.

very highly of *Shiji*, exalting it as “the best history book of all ages, and a kind of canonical *Lisao* in prose” (史家之绝唱，无韵之《离骚》).⁷²

Yet, Lu Xun was in favour of the vernacular language over the literary language, and in favour of Latinization. This stemmed from the view that it would be more accessible to the masses. However, that did not prevent him from using allusions, allegories, and imageries from classical texts, many of which are reflected in his pseudonyms. The pseudonyms, linking the present with the past and making the past relevant to the present, suggest – as Jon Van Kowallis put it – a “subtle revolution”.⁷³ The allusions to classical works enhance the literary contexts of his writings on current issues, and add layers of meaning to them.

Conclusion

Lu Xun is known for his prolific use of pseudonyms. Some of these names may seem less serious, others more subtle, but most of them are well-considered and carefully wrought. The cryptography of pseudonyms can indeed shed some new light to our understanding of Lu Xun, just as Lu Xun himself put it: “From the pennames chosen by a writer himself, one should be able to get a glimpse of the writer’s frame of mind.”⁷⁴

⁷²鲁迅《汉文学史纲要》第十篇 “司马相如与司马迁” in Complete Works (1981).

⁷³ The term is borrowed from the title of Dr. Jon Eugene von Kowallis’ latest book, in which the author argued that the poetry in the classical language during late Qing and early Republican China “could and did serve its writers and their intended readership as a vehicle to articulate a complex and sophisticated understanding of as well reaction to the entry of modernity”. See *The subtle revolution: poets of the "old schools" during late Qing and early Republican China*, Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, 2006.

⁷⁴ The original reads: “一个作者自取的别名，自然可以窥见他的思”。See Lu Xun’s *zawen* entitled “辱骂和恐吓决不是战斗——致《文学月报》编辑的一封信”，A Letter to the editor of *Literary Monthly* 《文学月报》第一卷第五、六号合刊（一九三二年十二月十五日）。The letter was addressed to 起应，即周扬，文艺理论家，“左联”领导成员之一，and then editor of the journal.

The array of pseudonyms craftily employed by Lu Xun reflects the memorising intensity of often conflicting emotions; these pennames exude an almost *fin-de-siècle* pessimism mingled with irrepressible hope. In *Wuti* 无题 [“Untitled”], a poem Lu Xun wrote in 1932, read “The vast frozen land ushers in Spring” (“寒凝大地发春华。”), echoing Shelley’s line “If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”.⁷⁵ According to Lu Xun, “absolute despair is not any more real than absolute hope.” (“绝望之为虚妄，正与希望相同”)⁷⁶. There is still hope in dire circumstances, and the light will shine through the darkness, if people are awakened and ready to fight.

This mettle and individual complexity explain why Lu Xun is still seen as the towering, Promethean godfather of Chinese modern literature not just in China but overseas too. Lu Xun’s pseudonyms, with their characteristic locality and metonymy, reflect his ideological and emotional complexity, as well as his personality, erudition and humour. But most of all, they reveal Lu Xun as the literary conscience of modern China. Through the fabric of Lu Xun’s pseudonyms, we see how traditional forces are at play in his reception of Western discourse of modernity, how different places are connected and different experiences interwoven to shape who he was both as a writer and as a man. As such, the pseudonyms he adopted should form an integral part of Lu Xun studies.

⁷⁵ “无题” [No title] in 《集外集拾遗》.

⁷⁶ This was quoted from Hungarian poet Petofi Sandor (1823-1849) 匈牙利诗人裴多菲在一八四七年七月十七日致友人弗里杰什·凯雷尼信中的话，See Lu Xun 《鲁迅自选集》自序，(Shanghai tianma shudian 1933). Lu Xun quoted it again in his 《野草·希望》.

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