Narrative Modes in Lu Xun's Short Stories

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Citation for published version (APA):
Tan, J. (2001). Narrative Modes in Lu Xun's Short Stories.

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CHAPTER TWO

Internal Focalization in Lu Xun’s Short Stories
The First-Person Focalization

2.1 The Narrative Modes Used by Lu Xun

In May 1918, Lu Xun’s first short story in vernacular Chinese, “A Madman’s Diary,” was published in New Youth. Its publication opened up a new chapter in the history of Chinese fiction and laid the foundation for all modern Chinese literature. Lu Xun said that once he started he “could not give up but would write some sort of short story from time to time” (LXQJ 1:419; Works 1:38).

Lu Xun’s short stories are limited in number but have a crucial position in the history of Chinese fiction and Chinese literature. They differed from traditional Chinese fiction in several respects. They had a different content, included embedded meaning, and they exhibited new forms and an innovative style. For this, he drew nourishment from foreign fiction, and, under the influence of turn-of-the-century “New Fiction” in China, he assimilated useful elements from traditional Chinese fiction.

Literary research in China was for a long time dominated by Lenin’s theory of reflection. In research on Lu Xun’s short stories, scant attention was given to his new form and style. But literary forms have special significance. They are by no means a superficial aspect, but one that shows laws of cohesion in the development of literature and its contemporary society and culture. In this sense, my stress on Lu Xun’s stylistic and formal innovations will hopefully stimulate further work.

Mao Dun, an important figure in modern Chinese literature, was most conspicuous among the first scholars who gave attention to Lu Xun’s new forms. In August of 1923, Lu Xun published his Call to Arms. In October of the same year, Mao Dun wrote:

In the new literature of China, Lu Xun is often a pioneer, creating new writing styles and forms. There are more than ten short stories in his Call to Arms, and almost every one has a different style and form. These new styles and forms must influence young writers, and most of them must begin to follow in Lu Xun’s footsteps (Reading, 1:36).

Among the new forms employed by Lu Xun, narrative mode is the most important. Patrick Hanan thinks that more than with other writers, each story of Lu Xun’s is a venture in technique, a fresh try at the perfect matching of subject and form. Hanan discusses “technique” in its widest meaning, that is everything outside the “lump of experience.” “Within this meaning, it is the large, governing elements, such as rhetoric, narrative method, and fictional mode, ‘gross technique’ as they might be called” (53). Precisely these new narrative modes make Lu Xun’s short stories different not only from traditional Chinese fiction, but also from the “New Fiction” forms and styles under the late Qing.

Lu Xun is the first writer in the history of modern Chinese fiction to use all three narrative modes. His use of these modes is skilled, creative and successful. As we know, writers in the late Qing had already tried to introduce innovations in narrative modes. Among them, Wu Jianren is the only writer who tried to use all three modes. In addition to traditional narrative with zero focalization, he also tried internal focalization (Strange Events of the Last Twenty Years) and external focalization (Checking the Class, 1907). But Wu Jianren’s use of internally and externally focalized narratives is not yet ripe and masterful; it often still remains inarticulate. For example, the narrator in the first-person
Strange Events of the Last Twenty Years, Jiusi-Yisheng, is more an onlooker and recorder than a narrator-agent. The author had not paid enough attention to this special narrative mode. As I shall now show by analyzing the twenty-five short stories that Lu Xun wrote between 1918 and 1925 and collected in Call to Arms and Wandering, his use of the three modes is much more skilled than that of his forerunners.

As mentioned, a specific focalization need not be held consistently through an entire narrative, even a brief short story. It can be limited to a particular section, which can be very short. Furthermore, the distinction between different points of view is not always as clear as it is when we consider the modes in abstraction (Genette, Discourse 189-94). Yet, we can find a certain dominant focalization within a given work and we can discern different dominant narrative modes in Lu Xun’s short stories.

First there are the stories with zero focalization, to be found in the following seven of the twenty-five short stories in Call to Arms and Wandering: “The True Story of Ah Q,” “The White Light,” “Storm in a Teacup,” “Tomorrow,” “Soap,” “The Double Fifth Festival,” and “Brothers.” As mentioned, zero focalization is traditional in Chinese fiction, and Lu Xun’s frequent use of it is indicative of his assimilation of the Chinese tradition. But he introduced many innovations into this tradition.

The majority of Lu Xun’s stories use fully or partially internal focalization. They are to be found in “A Madman’s Diary,” “Kong Yiji,” “Medicine,” “A Small Incident,” “The Story of Hair,” “My Old Home,” “The Rabbits and the Cat,” “The Comedy of the Ducks,” “Village Opera” in Call to Arms and “The New-Year Sacrifice,” “In the Tavern,” “A Happy Family,” “Master Gao,” “The Misanthrope,” “Regret for the Past” and “The Divorce” in Wandering. Narratives with internal focalization, especially of the kind in which a narrator participates in and appears as a character in the story, are very rare in traditional Chinese fiction. Lu Xun uses this kind of focalization in some of his most famous short stories. It is the use and perfection of this narrative mode that constituted his outstanding contribution to modern Chinese fiction.

There are two short stories that use external focalization: “The Lamp That Was Kept Alight” and “A Public Example.” Although small in number, their significance is considerable. External focalization had already been used in traditional Chinese fiction. One of the characteristics of traditional Chinese fiction was to use a method called baimiao, which made the character’s statements, actions, nature, and feeling show clearly, but left the narrator uninvolved. Some critics in the late Qing had already taken notice of this. As Man (Anonymous) wrote already in 1907:

The depiction of characters in fiction should be like reflections in a mirror. Let the beholder himself note their beauty or ugliness. Above all, the author must avoid mixing his comments in. It is something like a character in a play who appears on stage and insists on including a speech about how good so-and-so will be and how bad so-and-so will be, but the actions of those figures do not necessarily fit his descriptions. Even if there should be no contradiction, people would still think it clumsy, with nothing left to thought. Therefore, although fiction has nothing serious to teach, its use of a personal view is impermissible. For instance, the descriptions of chivalry in Water Margin, of sex in Golden Lotus, of beauty in Dream of the Red Chamber, and of various social types in The Scholars, are all without preceding commentaries; but the characters’ nature, status and whether they are good or bad, is clear even to women and children, just as in facing a mirror nothing is invisible. And a mirror has no personal bias (1: 258-59; Doleželová-Velingerová’s translation, Chinese Novel 62).
We might say that the method here described is to a certain extent related to external focalization. Genette says that external focalization was certainly not invented by writers of American novels between two world wars: "They broke new ground only by maintaining external focalization throughout the entire length of a narrative, generally a brief one" (*Revisited* 67-68). This too is the case with Lu Xun's use of external focalization: he appears to draw on some strong points in Western fiction and also to inherit some achievements from traditional Chinese fiction. Of course, since intrusion by an omniscient narrator was very common in traditional Chinese fiction, external focalization almost never was dominant in a narrative, only in a part or episode of it. Creating a hybrid between traditional Chinese and foreign fiction, Lu Xun produced a few marvelous examples of this kind of narrative mode.

2.2 The First-Person Focalization

The motivation for modernizing Chinese fiction in the late Qing came from the demand for social reform. This situation continued into the May Fourth Era. As an anti-feudalist revolution, the May Fourth Movement actively introduced science and democracy to China as a challenge to tradition and autocracy. It raised the clarion call: "Down with the Confucian shop!" and assaulted everything that was incompatible with rationalism and democracy. Lu Xun, who was sharply opposed to the old autocratic tradition, subtly delineated the vicious machinations of power, exposing its ruthlessness.

As for narrative modes, the traditional zero focalization, in which everything is controlled by the author through an omniscient narrator, obviously did not conform to the trend towards greater democratization and scientific rationality. Xia Mianzun wanted to do away with "the author's autocratic position with respect to the reader" (101), and this reflected the spirit of the era. In revolting against the feudal tradition and autocracy and striving for democracy and science, literature itself played an important role and had an active influence. The modernization of the narrative modes and of Chinese fiction in general was achieved finally by the authors of the May Fourth Era.

We cannot judge an author, whether traditional or modern, by looking only at the narrative mode of his fiction. However, it is by no means accidental that sixteen of the twenty-five pieces in Lu Xun's *Call to Arms* and *Wandering* use internal focalization. One of the most important reasons for its use was related to the era's tendencies and spirit.

Genette points out that internal focalization is rarely applied in a totally rigorous way. Strictly speaking, the principle of this narrative mode implies that the focalizing character can never be described or even referred to from the outside, and that his thoughts or perceptions are never analyzed by the narrator. Internal focalization in this strictest sense is realized only in "interior monologues," or, Genette suggests, in a borderline case like Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (*Discourse* 192-93). Remembering this when analyzing Lu Xun's narratives will allow us not to demand rigid consistency.

Among the sixteen short stories with internal focalization, twelve are in the first-person, completely told by a narrator-agent who is a character and participates in the events. When talking about his fiction, Lu Xun wrote:

> The happenings I described generally arose from something I had seen or heard, but I never relied entirely on facts. I just took one occurrence and modified or expanded it till it expressed what I had in mind. The same was true of the models for characters--I did not pick on specific individuals. My characters were often a mixture of a mouth from Zhejiang, a face from Beijing and clothes from Shanxi. Those people who said such-and-such a story was aimed at so-and-so were talking nonsense (*LXQJ* 4: 513; *Works* 3: 264).
One should add that "the happenings" and "the models for characters" are also taken from Lu Xun's personal experiences. Of course we should consider and analyze the role of personal experiences. The Russian Sinologist Semanov thinks that the narrators of Lu Xun's fiction are in most cases surely Lu Xun himself, or, at least, a person whose view was similar to that of the author (144). But identifying the narrators with Lu Xun is problematic. In Chinese literary criticism there are also controversies over the question to what extent the author's own experiences were embodied in his short stories. For example, when discussing Lu Xun's "Regret for the Past," Li Changzhi argues that Juansheng is just the author himself, and he thinks that the story "took in the name of Juansheng, who is the author himself, because his individual characteristics, clearly, are Lu Xun's" (1: 1303). In the 1920s and 30s, it was fashionable to consider "Regret for the Past" as autobiographical. As early as December 29, 1926, Lu Xun wrote in a letter to Wei Suyuan: "I heard people say that 'Regret for the Past' was my own affair, because it is impossible to write this sort of story without having personally experienced it. It is becoming more and more difficult to be an upright person" (LXQJ 11: 520).

Naturally, in Chinese as well as foreign fiction, authors often express their own experiences in their work. Goethe, Rousseau, Gorky, and others all did this. In the May Fourth Era, along with the demands for science and democracy came an awakening of self and individual consciousness. As a result, more and more fiction was written in the first-person, and this meant that the author's figure appeared in it more frequently. Lu Xun wrote: "Literature and art nowadays describe our own society, and even ourselves. We may find society, as well as ourselves in the fiction" (LXQJ 7: 118). Lu Xun not only set an example for writing fiction with internal focalization in the first-person, he also included his experiences in his short stories.

I do not intend to discuss here in detail the question, how truthfully Lu Xun portrayed his individual experiences. I will approach things from another point of view. The issue that Booth follows in The Rhetoric of Fiction is the relationship between the author, the narrator, the character and the reader. It is not at all surprising that the author intervenes in his or her fiction. However, the intervention is usually not direct, it is done in another way: "an author who intrudes must somehow be interesting; he must live as a character" (219), and he should interest the reader in a certain way. In this kind of intervention, the interest is in the narrator as a character. Accordingly, Booth distinguishes "reliable" and "unreliable" narrators:

I shall call a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not. [...] We should reserve the term unreliable for those narrators who are presented as if they spoke throughout for the norms of the book and who do not in fact do so (Distance 100-01).

Rimmon-Kenan describes these two narrators from another angle:

A reliable narrator is one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth. An unreliable narrator, on the other hand, is one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect (100).

When Lu Xun uses first-person internal focalization, the focalizer as an observer and the narrator as a character coincide. In such stories, especially in "A Small Incident," "My Old Home," "The Rabbits and the Cats," "The Comedy of the Ducks," and "Village
Opera" in *Call to Arms* and in "In the Tavern" and "The Misanthrope" from *Wandering*, the narrator retells some of the author's individual experiences and is generally reliable. The narrator's norms are more or less similar to those of the implied author and, probably, reflect the author's thoughts and norms.

"A Small Incident," probably the shortest of Lu Xun's fiction, contains less than thousand Chinese characters. The narrator recounts that when he went to S-Gate with a rickshaw an early morning in the winter of 1917, a grey-haired woman in ragged clothes stepped out abruptly from the roadside. Her tattered padded waistcoat, unbuttoned and billowing in the wind, got caught on the shaft and she fell to the ground. The rickshaw man stopped, but the narrator who thought that the old woman was unhurt and that no one saw the accident, thought stopping unnecessary and liable to land the rickshaw man in trouble. When he told him to go on, the rickshaw man paid no attention. He took the old woman's arm, gently helped her up, and went with her to a police station. The rickshaw man's action shocked the narrator, and he felt that he gradually exerted a pressure on him which threatened to overpower the small self hidden under his fur-lined gown. This story seems to display the author's thoughts, but the narrator-agent is an artistic image, and cannot be equated with the author himself, even if "A Small Incident" incorporates more of the author's "shadow" than many others.

"A Small Incident" is written from a first-person perspective, but one may distinguish between the writing and the experiencing "I." The point of the story is precisely to distance the past self from the present narrator. The opening and the conclusion of the story are clearly focalized from the present:

> Six years have slipped by since I came from the country to the capital. During that time the number of so-called affairs of state I have witnessed or heard about is far from small, but none of them made much impression. [...] One small incident, however, which struck me as significant and jolted me out of my irritability, remains fixed even now in my memory. [...] Even now, this incident keeps coming back to me. It keeps distressing me and makes me try to think about myself. The politics and the fighting of those years have slipped my mind as completely as the classics I read as a child. Yet this small incident keeps coming back to me, often more vivid than in actual life, teaching me shame, spurring me on to reform, and imbuing me with fresh courage and fresh hope (*LXQJ* 1: 458-60; *Works* 1: 76-78).

In the narrator's eyes, the small incident is so important that he keeps it in his mind for a long time, the incident acquiring a great influence in his life. The present self cannot forget the past. Thus, he cannot help but go back to the time when that small incident happened: "It was the winter of 1917, a strong north wind was blustering" (*LXQJ* 1: 458; *Works* 1: 76). From here onward, the present self gives way to the past self, who now tells his story. The story reveals that the narrator-character experienced a shift of attitude. First he was prejudiced against the rickshaw man, but the latter's action makes him recognize his pettiness and he becomes ashamed. It is a small incident, but we can see that both the present and the past self take a self-critical attitude to it. A character may represent an ideological position through his way of seeing the world or his behavior in it, but also through explicit discussion of his ideology. Similarly, the norms of a narrator-character may be implicit in the orientation he gives to the story, but they can also be formulated explicitly (Rimmon-Kenan 82). The narrator-character of "A Small Incident" shows more explicitly his ideological position than the narrators of Lu Xun's other stories. The ethics shown in the contact between the narrator-character and the rickshaw man is in
accordance with Lu Xun’s principle: “I really dissect other people from time to time; however, I dissect myself much more often and much more savagely” (LXQJ 1: 284).

“My Old Home” and “Village Opera” also rely on the author’s individual experiences. The former, written at the beginning of 1921, goes back to the beginning of December 1919, when Lu Xun returned from Beijing to his hometown Shaoxing. After selling the family residence and staying a short time with relatives he went back to Beijing with his mother, his wife, and his younger brother Zhou Jianren. “Village Opera,” published in December 1922, is a recollection of a childhood experience.

Since the events told in these stories resemble experiences that left a deep impression on the author, both stories are emotionally colored. This coloring is revealed in the narrator’s contact with other characters, the narrator’s narrative tone and judgment, and his description of the surroundings. In contrast to “A Small Incident,” whose narrator self-critically and rationally dissects his own ethics, the emotional coloring of “My Old Home” and “Village Opera” contains less ideologically rigorous self-examinations. The narrator imbues both the events and the scenery with strong nostalgic tones, giving them a lyrical flavor different from the traditionally plot-driven Chinese fiction. It is not surprising that some people consider these stories to be poetic fiction. This coloring affects the reader, making the reader emotionally more open to perceive the narrator’s thoughts and norms.

In “My Old Home,” the narrator-agent leaves his hometown for a long time. His feeling is revealed when he returns to his old home and meets a series of people and hears stories. The narrator’s tone seems smooth, slow and somber; the story’s key mood is cool and depressed. We hear this keynote in the very opening:

> It was late winter. As we drew near my former home the day became overcast and a cold wind blew into the cabin of our boat, while all one could see through the chinks in our bamboo awning were a few desolate villages, void of any sign of life, scattered far and near under the somber yellow sky. I could not help feeling depressed (LXQJ 1: 476; Works 1: 90).

This cool and depressed coloring gradually darkens further when the narrator meets more glum people and encounters more gloomy events. As a child, he used to know a Mrs. Yang who sat nearly all day long in the beancurd shop across the road. Now she asks the narrator to let her take his old pieces of furniture. When the narrator replies that he must sell these in order to buy other things, she insists that the narrator had been made the intendant of a circuit, has three concubines and has grown rich. The narrator is left speechless. When he meets his childhood pal Runtu, who was like his blood brother in days past, he is so delighted that he does not know what to say. However, Runtu has no problem and addresses him clearly: “Master!” The narrator shivers, for he recognizes what a “lamentably thick wall” has grown up between them. Yet he could not say anything (LXQJ 1: 482; Works 1: 97). When Runtu leaves, the narrator and his mother shake their heads over his hard life: many children, famines, taxes, soldiers, bandits, officials and landed gentry, all had squeezed him as dry as a mummy.

The story does have a few joyous moments. At times the narrator recollects his childhood pals and life with deep feeling. For instance, when the mother tells him that Runtu wants very much to see him and may be coming any time, his response is intense:

> At this point a strange picture suddenly flashed into my mind: a golden moon suspended in a deep blue sky and beneath it the seashore, planted as far as the eye could see with jade-green watermelons, while in their midst a boy of eleven or twelve, wearing a silver necklace and grasping a steel pitchfork in his hand, was thrusting with
all his might at a zha which dodged the blow and escaped through his legs (LXQJ 1: 477; Works 1: 91-2).

It is a colorful “strange picture.” Gold, deep blue, jade-green and silver all color the scene with intense emotion and happiness. Subsequently, the narrator tells movingly of his first acquaintance and friendship with Runtu, and their parting. This childhood recollection injects pleasure into the narrator’s return to his beautiful old home. Yet the old home in his memory is a mirage, to which he cannot return. The joyful tune of childhood memory sours when he experiences Runtu’s new deference towards him, and this deepens the misery and despair of the scene.

At the end of the story, a magic picture similar to the one above reappears, followed by a statement that clearly reflects the implied author:

As I dozed, a stretch of jade-green seashore spread itself before my eyes, and above a round golden moon hung from a deep blue sky. I thought: hope cannot be said to exist, nor can it be said not to exist. It is just like roads across the earth. For actually the earth had no roads to begin with, but when many men pass one way, a road is made (LXQJ 1: 485; Works 1: 101).

From “as I dozed,” we may see that this is obviously the narrator’s subjective fancy with coloring. Still, some more cheerful notes are heard, even if they cannot conceal the keynotes of depression. As for the last words about “hope,” they have a specific meaning. They come, of course, from the adult narrator, not from his former self as a boy. Although they show “hope,” they reaffirm the difficulty of establishing hope where none seems to exist. In the course of reading, the reader is strongly infected by the cool and depressed atmosphere created by the narrator. The reader is left brooding over Mrs. Yang’s disgruntled behavior, Runtu’s tragic lot, and the separations and dislocations that have occurred over time.

“Village Opera” is another story with strong emotional coloring. The narrator recalls that he has seen Peking opera only twice in the past twenty years and that both events ended with disappointment. In contrast, he unwittingly remembers seeing a really good opera in the countryside when he was not much older than eleven or twelve. In the main part of the story the narrator goes back to the unforgettable childhood scene when he visited and saw the village opera with his pals in Zhaozhuang.

In first-person internal narrative focalization, information is provided by the narrator as the focal character. Everything is passed through this narrator, and the reader almost never leaves his perspective. The first-person narrator in “Village Opera,” like the one in “Remembering Past Times,” includes an adult and a boy narrator. As we can see from the beginning and the end of the story, the narrative frame is constructed by the adult narrator:

In the past twenty years only twice have I been to see Chinese opera. During the first ten years I saw none, lacking both the wish and the opportunity. The two occasions on which I went were in the last ten years, but each time I left without seeing anything in it (LXQJ 1: 559; Works 1: 155).

It is a fact, right up till now, I have never eaten such good beans or seen such a good opera as I did that night (LXQJ 1: 570; Works 1: 167).

This kind of narrative frame is used very often in Lu Xun’s short stories; for instance, also in “A Small Incident,” “My Old Home” and “Kong Yiji.” Lyell thinks that one of Lu Xun’s characteristic structural devices is the “use of envelopes,” a special instance of repetition in which the repeated elements serve as the opening and final curtains of the
entire story or of scenes within it (Reality 263). Such is the case with “Village Opera.”
The narrator mentions “opera” twice, at the opening and at the end.

However, in this narrative frame both the adult and the boy narrate and focalize, and they act differently, each according to his status. In relation to other characters of the story, their action and response are also proper. The impressions of the opera on the adult and the boy narrator are totally different. The adult saw opera twice; the experience was so disappointing that he turned away from Chinese opera. On the contrary, in the boy narrator’s eyes, village opera is so beautiful that he longs for it for a long time. He looks forward to Zhaozhuang and seeing the opera, but when this long-awaited day comes, there is no boat for hire. The boy is nearly in tears from chagrin. But when his pal, Shuangxi, suggests to use Eighth Granduncle’s ferry-boat, his heart leaps. The opera that he sees that night is not very interesting because he waits in vain for what he wanted to see: a snake spirit swathed in white, its two hands clasping above it a wandlike snake’s head, next to a leaping tiger dressed in yellow. However, his long-cherished wish, going to Zhaozhuang to see opera, has come true, and this makes the boy wild with joy. Thus, in eyes of the boy, the lantern-lit stage is hazy as a fair pavilion, and the flutes sound melodiously in his ears.

At the same time, the reader can see through his eyes, his action and words the village scenery and the simple and honest character of his pals who go with him to Zhaozhuang to see the opera. Most of them cannot read and write, but they are friendly, unselfish, and find it a pleasure to help others. They treat him like their family member. For the arrival of a visitor from such a distance they even got leave from their parents to do less work in order to play with him. This contrasts sharply with the unconcerned fat gentleman in the crowded theater in the city, who looks down upon the adult narrator since the latter does not know the well-known actor performing on stage.

The adult and boy narrators’ coexistence in the text offers a double focalization and double vision. As in some of Lu Xun’s other stories, we can distinguish between the writing and the experiencing “I” and find their focalizations different. Sometimes, narration and focalization differ. Rimmon-Kenan suggests that in principle, focalization and narration are distinct activities, even in first-person retrospective narratives (73). Bal draws two conclusions from narrative focalization. First it appears that various focalization levels can be distinguished; secondly, concerning the focalization level, there is no fundamental difference between “first-person narrative” and “third-person narratives.” In “first-person narratives” external focalizers, usually the “I” grown older, give their vision of a fabula in which they participated earlier as an actor. At some moments they can present the vision of their younger alter ego, so that a character-bound focalizer is focalizing on the second level (Narratology 111-12). In “Village Opera,” the writing ‘I’ and the experiencing “I” focalize on different levels. In the first half of the story, the narrator and the focalizer basically coincide in the writing “I,” and the story is focalized on the first level by the adult narrator-focalizer. The second half is focalized basically from the boy, and the focalized object is also a boy’s world. Most of the objects are focalized in the second level by the boy focalizer. There is a transitional paragraph, in which still the adult narrates, but the focalization shifts from the first to the second level, that is, from the adult to the boy. We can see here the intellectual and psychological distance between the adult and the boy:

[1] As to when I saw that good opera, it was really “long, long ago,” when I could not have been much more than eleven or twelve. [2] It was the custom in Luzhen where we lived for married women not yet in charge of the household to go back to their parents’ home for the summer. Although my father’s mother was then still quite strong, my mother had quite a few domestic duties which made it impossible for her to spend many days at her old home during the summer. All she could spare was a
few days after visiting the ancestral graves, and at such times I always went with her
to stay in her parents’ house. That was in Pingqiao Village not far from the sea, a very
remote little village on a river with less than thirty households of peasants and
fishermen, and just one tiny grocery. [3] To me, however, it was heaven, for not only
was I treated as a guest of honour but here I could skip reading the Book of Songs
(LXQJ 1: 561-62; Works 1: 158).

The first part is the adult narrator’s retrospection. The second part is basically still
focalized by the adult narrator. Judging from the content, the words and the tone, the third
part is a transition from the first to the second level because we look into the boy’s psyche
and find the words “here I could skip...” The boy is, as a character-bound focalizer,
focalizing his world. Just as expected, the following paragraph opens with the sentence:
“There were many children for me to play with.” This is also from the boy’s focalization.
And the boy recounts that he spent his joyful time with his pals in Pingqiao Village,
especially when he went to see opera in Zhaozhuang.

The second half of the story is basically focalized through the boy. However,
embedded focalization can be inserted, because the narrative may return to the first level
at any moment (Bal, Narratology 112). This appears to be the case, for instance, when a
supplemental information is needed. Something needs to be stressed; an information
recognized later but not at that moment. There is an embedded focalization that returns
the narration to the first level, related by the adult narrator as external focalizer:

What I looked forward to most was going to Zhaozhuang to see the opera.
Zhaozhuang was a slightly larger village five li away. Since Pingqiao was too small
to afford to put on operas, every year it chipped in towards a performance at
Zhaozhuang. At the time, it never occurred to me to wonder why they should put on
operas every year. Thinking back to it now, I dare say it may have been a ritual drama
for the late spring festival (LXQJ 1: 562; Works 1: 159).

We may conclude from the phrases “Thinking back to it now, I dare to say” that the
narrative returned to the first level.

In the second half of the story, the narration is more complex. The adult narrator still
acts as the focalizer occasionally, but much of the focalization comes from the
experiencing boy. Thus the story is sometimes focalized by the experiencing boy, and
sometimes by the adult narrator. Narration and focalization occasionally coincide, but the
adult narrator sometimes has the boy as the focalizer. For instance, the adult narrator tells
his past in the village:

We spent most of our days digging up earthworms, putting them on little hooks made
of copper wire, and lying on the river bank to catch prawns.[...] Another thing we did
was to graze buffaloes together. But, maybe because they are animals of higher order,
oxen and buffaloes are hostile to strangers, and they treated me with such contempt
that I never dared get too close. I could only follow at a distance and stand there. At
such times my small friends, no longer impressed by my ability to recite classical
poetry, would all start hooting with laughter (LXQJ 1: 562; Works 1: 159).

Although this is a record of things as the boy sees, feels and understands them, words like
“animals of higher order” are not in the boy’s vocabulary. Here the adult narrator focalizes
through the boy.

An internal narrator can be a primary character, a secondary character, or just an
onlooker. The first-person narrator in “In the Tavern” is a secondary character, but his
importance in organizing the story cannot be ignored. It is this narrator that introduces the primary character Lu Weifu. At the same time, as a character, the narrator has his own special function. These two characters are interdependent and they form a unity of opposites. The nature of each is shown in narration and communication. Unlike the “I” in “Village Opera,” which is both an adult and a boy but is internally consistent, the two characters of “In the Tavern” have some opposite traits. The “I” embodies norms and thoughts of the implied author, he is surprised that Lu Weifu has changed so much. The norms and thoughts of the implied author are shown not only by the narrator, but also by the primary character Lu Weifu. Actually, all these norms and thoughts are related to some of the thoughts, feelings and moral odium of the author. It may be said that the communication between the narrator and Lu Weifu is an internal dialogue of the author (I will come back to this topic in Chapter Four).

The narrator in “The Misanthrope” is a secondary character, who introduces the primary character Wei Lianshu already at the opening: “My friendship with Wei Lianshu, now that I come to think of it, was certainly a strange one. It began and ended with a funeral” (LXQJ 2: 86; Works 1:225). Unlike in “In the Tavern,” the presentation of Wei Lianshu is not only through direct communication with the narrator, but from different channels. This story reveals mainly grief, indignation, and despair, and is the most serious of its kind among Lu Xun’s short stories. Xu Qinwen, Lu Xun’s good friend, recalls: “Lu Xun was writing ‘The Misanthrope,’ after he had been illegally removed from his office, and he felt that he had no way out” (Li Yukun 376). Ouyang Fanhai directly relates “The Misanthrope” to Lu Xun’s experience and state of mind at that time:

The grief and indignation in “The Misanthrope” are strong. Clearly Lu Xun’s own grief and indignation at that time went into it. Here, the feeling and dispositions of the first-person author and third-person Wei Lianshu are so fully merged together that they are difficult to distinguish from each other. [...] It may be said that “The Misanthrope” is a crystallization of the author’s indignation (3: 988).

It is reasonable to link the grief and indignation in the story to Lu Xun’s own, however it is unreasonable to equate the first-person narrator with the author and think that the character Wei Lianshu and the author’s feeling and dispositions are “fully merged together.”

Unlike the narrator of “In the Tavern,” the narrator of “The Misanthrope” does not show his surprise at the protagonist’s regression in thought and action. When the narrator receives Wei Lianshu’s letter, in which he writes that he had become adviser to General Du, and he thinks that he was really a failure, the narrator feels uneasy, but at the same time, he also feels relieved because Wei Lianshu’s livelihood is now secure, and he need not worry any more. The narrator is more concerned with Wei Lianshu’s livelihood than with morality and justness.

Like Lu Weifu, Wei Lianshu is also a person who had received a new education and had new thoughts and knowledge. This is why he is mistrusted by people around him. In their eyes he is a freak; his distant relatives, who understand him even less, regard him as a foreigner. He is so incompatible with the society of his native area that he wraps himself up like a cocoon. Since he occasionally expresses his opinions in magazine articles and the citizens of S dislike nothing more than fearless argument, anonymous attacks on him appear in the local papers. Finally, the school authorities ask him to resign. He has to come to the narrator late at night, when the latter is about to leave for Shanyang. After hesitating for some time, he stutters:
"Would there be anything for me there? Even copying work, at twenty to thirty dollars a month, would do. I...."

I was surprised. I had not thought he would consider anything so low, and did not know how to answer.

"I...I have to live a little longer" (LXQJ 2: 99; Works 1: 239).

Society leaves the protagonist no way out. Yet his tragedy is still ahead of him. Having virtually become a beggar, Wei Lianshu casts all his past ideals aside and becomes adviser to General Du. He enters the corrupt upper classes of society with sad awareness: "I am now doing what I formerly detested and opposed. I am now giving up all I formerly believed in and upheld. I have really failed—but I have won" (LXQJ 2: 101; Works 1: 241).

Wei Lianshu is now in agony, he even feels he does not deserve to live. He belittles himself. Outwardly, he is joyful: he engages practically every day in drinking games, talking, laughing, singing, poetry writing and mahjong games with his friends. He is merely covering his pain and despair in his heart of hearts with outward display of happiness.

Unlike Lu Weifu, Wei Lianshu's change occurs suddenly, radically and definitely, which surprises and perplexes the reader. Wei Lianshu's action is a response to heavy pressure from society. He was subdued by the society he lives in. However, we also should see his involvement in old traditions and thoughts, which offers some clues for his big change. For example, sometimes his actions are not in keeping with what he says. His close relatives and members of his grandmother's family decide that he must accept three conditions at the funeral, which means everything will have to be done in the traditional manner. However, they are totally surprised because his answer to their requirement is simply "All right." Later, Wei Lianshu is less and less inclined to differentiate between good and evil in a clear-headed state of mind. Everything is "all right" to him. In his letter to the narrator he says, "How should I address you? I am leaving a blank for you to fill in as you please. It will be all the same to me." Further, "What will you think of me? You decide; it is the same to me" (LXQJ 2: 100; Works 1: 240-41). He does not want to destroy himself, but he already destroyed himself in spirit, and he will do the same physically at the end.

Zhou Zuoren says that Wei Lianshu resembles one of Lu Xun's friends, Fan Aining, but his experiences are not those of Fan's. They are mixed up with the specific experiences of the author. For example, the death of Wei Lianshu's grandmother was taken from the author's own life (Character 118). Although we cannot say that the author and Wei Lianshu are fully merged in feelings and disposition, it seems possible that in creating his Wei Lianshu, the author combined some experiences, thoughts and temperaments of Fan and of his own. "The Misanthrope" and "In the Tavern" are intellectually related, and the differences between them are just in degree. Compared to the narrator of "In the Tavern," the narrator of "The Misanthrope" is less explicit about his feelings, and his attitude to the protagonist shows less surprise. It may be said that the author not only reflects his grief and indignation through his characters, including the narrator-character, but also looks closely at his own mind and spirit. Lyell notices that, like Lu Weifu, Lu Xun was extremely disappointed with the results of the Republican Revolution; unlike him, he did not sell out to the old establishment and end up teaching the Confucian classics. Like Wei Lianshu, he felt "different," isolated, perhaps even persecuted; unlike Wei, he did not suddenly join the oppressors. Lyell finds self-dissection in "In the Tavern" and "The Misanthrope." In both stories he hears a man in conversation with himself, a man trying to understand his own subjective motivations. Lu Xun takes a close look at himself through these characters, and perhaps exorcises evil spirits lurking just below the surface of his consciousness (Reality 188).
“The Rabbits and the Cat” and “The Comedy of the Ducks” are both stories about small animals told by first-person narrators who recall some of Lu Xun’s personal experiences. The former, for example, shows the scene of beating cats when Lu Xun lived with his brother in the Shaoxing guild hall, Beijing 1918 (Zhou Xiaoshou, Character 82-83; Memories 310-11); the latter is related to Lu Xun’s association with the blind Russian poet Vasily Eroshenko (Character 84). In both stories, the narrators appear as onlookers and hardly participate in the events. Except for the ending, the narrator of “The Rabbits and the Cat” does not participate at all. He relates as an onlooker how the Third Mistress in his back courtyard bought a pair of white rabbits, how she tried hard to forestall the danger from the cat, and how the rabbit family prospered and declined. A sympathy for the weaker runs through the story. Although the narrator seldom participates in the events, he does comment on and reflect about them.

Discussing the functions of the narrator, Genette talks about the narrator’s orientation toward himself:

It may take the form simply of an attestation, as when the narrator indicates the source of his information, or the degree of precision of his own memories, or the feelings which one or another episode awakens in him. We have here something which could be called testimonial function, or function of attestation. But the narrator’s interventions, direct or indirect, with regard to the story can also take the more didactic form of an authorized commentary on the action. This is an assertion of what could be called the narrator’s ideological function (Discourse 256).

In “The Rabbits and the Cat,” the narrator performs testimonial function when he watches the Third Mistress’ actions and the life of the rabbit family. When some events are not seen by the narrator himself and he cannot judge the accuracy of his information, he often uses words like “we were told,” “there was no knowing whether,” “most likely,” “it is said,” etc. For example, when mentioning that the rabbits of Third Mistress were kept most of the time in a small courtyard behind the back window, he explains: “We were told this was because they were too fond of tearing the wall-paper and chewing the legs of furniture” (LXQJ 1:549; Call to Arms 129). Since he is an onlooker, the narrator has to show the accuracy of his information by frequently referring to his sources: “the children eagerly told me that,” “Third Mistress told me that,” and “my mother remarked to me.” Sometimes he indicates that he watched with his own eyes:

One warm, sunny day, when there was no wind and not a leaf stirred on the trees, I heard a sudden chorus of laughter. Tracking down the sound, I discovered quite a crowd leaning out of Third Mistress’ back window to watch: a baby rabbit was frisking in the yard. He was much smaller than his parents had been when purchased. But already he could take off from the ground on his hind-legs and jump (LXQJ 1:550; Call to Arms 130-31).

The narrator’s ideological function in the story is especially noticeable in his commentaries on the actions. After stating that the rabbit family was more and more flourishing and everybody was happy again, he should also be happy, but he keeps feeling “disconsolate,” because he thinks of those two little lives which had been lost, unnoticed by men or spirits, leaving no trace in the history of living creatures. Furthermore, this brings back his old memories of his stay in his provincial hostel:

Getting up early one day I saw beneath the big locust tree some scattered pigeon feathers, obviously let fall by a hawk. In the morning the attendant came to sweep up,
and nothing was left of them. Who would have known that a life had been cut off here? Another time, passing the Xisi Archway, I saw a puppy dying, run over by a horse-cart. On my return it had gone, someone had removed it, and which of the passers-by would have known that a life had been cut off here? On summer night, outside the window, I often heard the long-drawn-out drone of flies which must have been caught by a spider, but I never paid any attention, and other people did not even hear. (LXQJ 1: 552; Call to Arms 132-33).

These old memories of the narrator reveal his values and his ideological norms; they display his sympathy for the smaller and weaker. He repeatedly mentions in a sad tone that a life had been cut off here, although it was only a pigeon, a puppy, or a fly. Recounted with deep feeling, these old memories embody the narrator’s explanation of the events and win the readers’ sympathy. The story could end here, but it does not. The narrator takes another turn with a new emotional sigh: “If it is possible to blame the Creator, then I think he really creates life too much at random, and destroys it too much at random” (LXQJ 1: 552-53; Call to Arms 133). Readers can understand the comments from the preceding events: two little rabbits of the seven were very puny, so whenever Third Mistress had time, she would catch the mother rabbit and put the babies one by one on her belly to drink milk, no matter how long this took her. She is worried that unequal suckling would starve those who are deprived of milk. To raise rabbits like this shows the Third Mistress’ affection, but it does not accord with nature’s principle of survival of the fittest.

According to Genette, the ideological is the only extranarrative function that is not limited to the narrator. Some great ideological novelist like Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Mann, or Malraux transferred unto some of their characters the task of commentary and didactic discourse—going so far as to transform such scenes from The Possessed, The Magic Mountain, or Man’s Hope into veritable colloquia of speculation (Discourse 257-58). In “The Rabbit and the Cat,” the narrator-character seldom gets directly involved in the events, while his commentary and didactic discourse are extremely strong. Like Tolstoy, he also transfers some of his didactic principles to his character. In the creation of fiction, Lu Xun says, “there are two ways that the author uses people as a model: one is using a particular person, leaving the speeches and actions, even minute propensities, the style of clothing unchanged.[...] Another is to take characteristics from a variety of people and combine them into a single character.” He claims that he consistently uses the latter way (LXQJ 6: 518-19). “The Comedy of the Ducks,” in which the blind Russian poet Eroshenko is a model, could be the only story used the former way. Like “The Rabbits and the Cat,” this story also has a loose construction. The character in the story, Eroshenko, resembles the blind Russian poet in name, appearance, actions, and speech, while the narrator is related to the author. The aesthetic distance between the narrator, the implied author and the character is minimal here; the story is colored by the narrator’s feelings. Eroshenko recalls that in Burma, where he traveled, there is music all over on summer nights, made by insects and other animals. Beijing, he claims, has no such music, it doesn’t even have frogs. The narrator protests and mentions that Eroshenko bought tadpoles and kept ducklings. Eroshenko’s kindhearted and childlike innocence is shown through his love for the small animals. In the second half of the story, the narrator witnesses some events, and uses direct discourse for dialogue, which looks true and vivid. The following dialogue takes place after the tadpoles had been eaten by ducklings:

“They’ve all gone, Mr. Aihou-shenko-shen, The frog babies.” The smallest child made haste to announce this as soon as he came back that evening.

“Eh? The frogs?”
Mrs. Zhong Mi came out too, to report how the ducklings had eaten all the tadpoles.

“Oh, no!” he said (LXQI 1: 555-58; Call to Arms 136, slightly modified).

The quoted dialogue gives a lively picture of the childishness in the boy’s manner of speaking (he cannot name the foreigner exactly and he uses “the frog babies” instead of tadpoles) and of Eroshenko’s pity for the small animals.

The relationship between narrator and author in these stories merits further attention because they contain more experiences of the author. The narrator is neither Lu Xun himself, nor totally alien to Lu Xun. In some stories, some of the narrator’s experiences are not only similar to those of the author, but when the narrator reports dialogues in direct discourse, he uses his own name. In discussing the relationship between Proust and the narrator in his Remembrance of Things Past, Genette says:

[It is] as if Proust first had had to conquer a certain adhesion to himself, had to detach himself from himself, in order to win the right to say “I,” or more precisely the right to have this hero who is neither completely himself nor completely someone else say “I.” So the conquest of the I here is not a return to and attendance on himself, not a settling into the comfort of “subjectivity,” but perhaps exactly the opposite: the difficult experience of relation to oneself with (slight) distance and off-centering—a relationship wonderfully symbolized by that barely suggested, seemingly accidental semihomonymy of the narrator-hero and the signatory (Discourse 249).

To be sure, the situation in Proust’s novel and in Lu Xun’s stories differs. Proust’s case is unique and very subtle, and a voluminous novel cannot easily be replicated in short stories. Nevertheless, I believe that the relationship between the author and his first-person narrator in Lu Xun’s -mentioned stories shows some similarities to that in Proust. Lu Xun likes to use materials he is familiar with, including his own experiences. Of course, his purpose is not to show himself. The narrator is often a definite person in his first-person narratives, who includes some of Lu Xun’s experiences and is “neither completely himself nor completely someone else” in many cases. Lyell notices that the majority of Lu Xun’s important male protagonists belong to the world of the in-between intellectual, and these characters often appear as narrators, or as intimates of the narrator. This is the group that Lu Xun knows best and to which he belongs. Since he had first-hand knowledge of the mentality of the in-between intellectuals, he often takes his readers on explorations of their minds (Reality 262). Sometimes he unconsciously shows himself and some of his own thoughts, norms, and ideas through his narrators. At the same time, as the definite persons, the eyes of these first-person narrators are limited in focalization. This choice enables the author to concentrate his description on something he is familiar with, and it can, as Průšek says, enable him to select a limited number from the multitude of individual phenomena at his disposal. He selects those that are most characteristic of what he wishes to describe while, at the same time, most heavily charged with emotion (Basic Problem 383).

In “The New-Year Sacrifice,” the first story in Wandering, we find another “envelope,” which consists of the rumble of crackers bidding farewell to the Hearth God in the opening, and the noisy explosion of crackers at the end. The narrator tells the tragic life of Xianglin’s Wife in this joyful atmosphere of rumbling fire crackers. The narrator is here not only a witness of the miserable life of Xianglin’s Wife, but also a participant in part of it. At the end of the year, the narrator returns to Luzhen, his home town. As he had not been living there, he puts up at the house of a certain Fourth Mr. Lu, addressed as Fourth Uncle. The latter is a licentiate of the Imperial Academy who makes violent attacks on the reformists. The narrator feels that their conversation is so difficult that he
soon returns to his study. He feels like an outsider when all families are busily preparing for the New-year sacrifice. In his eyes, a flurry of snowflakes merge with the smoke and the bustling atmosphere to make the small town a welter of confusion. On the third day, he decides he must leave the next day. Xianglin’s Wife, whom he encountered the day before, upsets him. Five years had passed since he last saw her, and he is shocked by the change:

Of all the people I had seen during this visit to Luzhen, none had changed so much as she had. Her hair, streaked with grey five years before, was now completely white, making her appear much older than one around forty. Her sallow, dark-tinged face that looked as if it had been carved out of wood was fearfully wasted and had lost the grief-stricken expression it had borne before. The only sign of life about her was the occasional flicker of her eyes. In one hand she had a bamboo basket containing a chipped, empty bowl; in the other, a bamboo pole, taller than herself, that was split at the bottom. She had clearly become a beggar pure and simple (LXQJ 2: 6; Works 1: 170).

When meeting the narrator, this beggar, who is heading for her doom, suddenly becomes hopeful. A sudden gleam lights up her lackluster eyes and she asks whether dead people turn into ghosts. The unexpected question shocks the narrator; he feels prickles down his back. Knowing that people in his home town believe in spirits, he gives the answer she wants: quite possibly. However, from this answer she unexpectedly concludes that hell, a place where all the members of a family meet again after death, also exists. As the tempo of her questions increases, the narrator starts to talk ambiguously and shrugs her off with the vague answer “I’m not sure” Taking advantage of a lull in her persistent questioning, he leaves:

To avoid being pressed by any further questions I walked off, then beat a hasty retreat to my uncle’s house, feeling thoroughly disconcerted. I may have given her a dangerous answer, I was thinking. [...] Then I laughed at myself for brooding so much over a chance meeting when it could have no serious significance. No wonder certain educationists called me neurotic. Besides, I had distinctly declared, “I’m not sure,” contradicting the whole of my answer. This meant that even if something did happen, it would have nothing at all to do with me (LXQJ 2: 7-8; Works 1: 171-72).

In eyes of Xianglin’s Wife, the narrator is a scholar who has traveled and seen the world. Full of hope, she asks him some serious questions, but his answers are ambiguous and irresponsible. And he avoids her as if eluding a pestilence. He knows that his answer perhaps holds some danger for her, but he immediately exonerates himself from his responsibility by saying “I’m not sure.” Then he adds, “‘I’m not sure’ is a most useful phrase” (LXQJ 2: 8; Works 1: 172). The next evening, when he learns that Xianglin’s Wife had died, his heart constricts into a tight knot and feels as though it would jump out of his body. However, his agitation is only short-lived. He feels that what was bound to happen had already come and gone. His heart is growing lighter: “Only from time to time did I still feel a little guilty” (LXQJ 2: 9; Works 1: 173). By nightfall, even this slight guilt is gone:

Seated alone in the amber light of the vegetable-oil lamp I reflected that this wretched and forlorn woman, abandoned in the dust like a worn-out toy of which its owners have tired, had once left her own imprint in the dust, and those who enjoyed life must have wondered at her for wishing to live on; but now at last she had been swept away.
by death. Whether spirits existed or not I did not know; but in this world of ours the end of a futile existence, the removal of someone whom others are tired of seeing, was just as well both for them and for the individual concerned. Occupied with these reflections, I listened quietly to the hissing of the snow outside, until little by little I felt more relaxed (LXQJ 2: 10; Works 1: 174).

From the narrator’s point of view, the death of Xianglin’s Wife seems an act of her going to a better place. It seems that the disappearance of this petty and low woman from the world is an unavoidable fact. Both she and the world accept this. By speeding up her approaching death, the narrator, in fact, plays an objective role in pushing her with his “dangerous” words. However, he accepts fate. Her death does not make him uneasy, and he begins to relax.

At the same time, the narrator passes in review the entire unhappy life of Xianglin’s Wife. At this moment, he is more a witness, and he shows the life he sees and hears with calm and sympathy. Meanwhile, he portrays the ignorant, backward, superstitious and cruel village life, as well as people’s coldness and ruthlessness. When he finishes reviewing the life of Xianglin’s Wife, he ends the whole story in a relaxed and light-hearted tone:

Listening drowsily I heard vaguely the ceaseless explosion of crackers in the distance. It seemed to me that the whole town was enveloped by the dense cloud of noise in the sky, mingling with the whirling snowflakes. Enveloped in this medley of sound I relaxed; the doubt which had preyed on my mind from dawn till night was swept clean away by the festive atmosphere, and I felt only that the saints of heaven and earth had accepted the sacrifice and incense and were reeling with intoxication in the sky, preparing to give Luzhen’s people boundless good fortune (LXQJ 2: 21; Works 1: 187-88).

I shall not discuss here in detail the significance of the narrator as a character in “The New-Year Sacrifice.” The narrator undoubtedly has a special function in organizing the story. His detached feeling and view and his complex morality make him keep a certain distance from the protagonist of the story. He can relate therefore a miserable story in a calm tone. He participates in some events but is also an outsider to the story of Xianglin’s Wife, even if he sympathizes with her. He unintentionally hurts her and does not think he has a responsibility towards her. He is a good-natured, self-critical scholar, as well as a person who, facing brutal reality and the tragic lot of Xianglin’s Wife, resigns himself to her fate. All these make the story attractive and the tragic lot of Xianglin’s Wife more touching.

“Regret for the Past” is the only love story among Lu Xun’s short stories. It is presented in the form of notes written by the narrator, Juansheng, who is a young government clerk. Relating his love affair with Zijun he feels sorrow and remorse. Their love happened during the high tide of the May Fourth movement. He speaks to Zijun of the despotism of the family system, of destroying old customs, of the equality of the sex, of Ibsen and other masters that are important to him. He awakens Zijun’s love and eventually they decide to live together. However, their love is short lived. Later, when he has is dismissed by his bureau chief and their life becomes more and more difficult, he forsakes Zijun, who finally dies in the cold atmosphere of her father’s home.

Lu Xun categorically denied that he wrote about himself in “Regret for the Past.” At the same time, we notice that the story does relate in some sense to the author’s personal love. It was written in October 1925, just after Lu Xun’s and Xu Guangping’s frequent correspondence during March - July. They exchanged their views and ideas, and this
gradually developed into love. Finally, they left Beijing together in August 26, 1926. The protagonists’ intense love and their disregard for conventions reflect the author’s love. As to the direct reason for the protagonists’ tragedy, the loss of their source of income, Lu Xun had a clear-headed understanding of such matters.10

“Regret for the Past” also distinguishes between the writing “I,” the narrator, and the experiencing “I,” Juansheng. We can see this at the very opening: “I want, if I can, to record my remorse and grief, for Zijun’s sake as well for my own” (LXQJ2: 110; Works 1: 249). The narrator then recollects that their love ended in a tragedy. He regrets the past action that caused Zijun’s death, but the experiencing “I” did not sense any wrongdoing. The narrator and the experiencing “I,” Juansheng, have different attitudes to Zijun.

When Zijun first enters Juansheng’s life, he, as an intellectual influenced by Western freedom, equality, and literature, gradually stimulates new thoughts and ideas in her. Although the uncle with whom Zijun lives strongly disapproves of her love for Juansheng from the very beginning, six months after their first meeting she announces: “I’m my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me” (LXQJ2: 112; Works 1: 251). She has completely broken with the old tradition concerning love and marriage. When Zijun begins to live with Juansheng disregarding convention, readers expect that Juansheng will love Zijun and treasure their relationship highly. However, things work out differently. Although the first days are idyllic, Juansheng loses step by step his passionate love. Then the blow comes:

Juansheng is discharged, much to his surprise, Zijun seems unusually disheartened by it. Juansheng makes every effort and tries to make a living, but, it is difficult. Meanwhile, Zijun gradually loses her courage and she fears that she has lost Juansheng’s love. It is true that he becomes more and more indifferent to her and she is put in a tight spot. At last Juansheng compares Zijun to persons who “cling to someone else’s clothing,[...]and bring ruin on both” (LXQJ2: 123; Works 1: 263).

Instead of facing difficulties together, Juansheng contemplates parting: “I felt that our only hope lay in parting. She ought to make a clean break.[...]Whether or not we could make a fresh start depended on this” (LXQJ2: 123; Works 1: 263). Juansheng openly announces his decision and thinks that his decision is correct even for Zijun, while readers fully realize that the consequences of Juansheng’s action will be disastrous:

“Besides, you can go boldly ahead now without any scruples. You asked me for the truth. You’re right: we shouldn’t be hypocritical. Well, the truth is it’s because I don’t love you any more. Actually, this makes it much better for you, because it’ll be easier for you to go ahead without any regret....” (LXQJ2: 123-24; Works 1: 264).

Knowing that Zijun will be in trouble after parting, perhaps even more seriously in danger of her life than before, he still says that she “can go boldly ahead now without any scruples.” He conceals his hypocrisy by suggesting that he speaks “the truth,” even though he believes that “people shouldn’t be hypocritical.”

The narrator’s later remorse and repentance makes Zijun’s tragedy more painful. She is forsaken not only by Juansheng but by all of society. Zijun, who bravely followed her love against tradition, is not accepted by society, and is finally destroyed by tradition. Among that society is Juansheng, who used to urge her to cast off tradition and boldly seek a new life. This is a double tragedy. Zijun’s feeling and attitude to Juansheng make her tragedy sorrowful and moving. Readers become more sympathetic for Zijun while they censure the narrator. Forsaken by Juansheng, Zijun, who cannot rely on anybody except for Juansheng, still has courage in her deep pain. When she is taken away by her
father and leaves the room in which they were living together, she just asks the landlady without words of blame to tell Juansheng that she is leaving. She places salt, dried chili flour, and half a cabbage together, with a few dozen coppers at the side. In her despair, she still hopes Juansheng will use them to go on living as long as he can. Her actions form a sharp contrast to that of Juansheng’s.

Ball says that focalization is the relationship between an agent’s “vision” and what is seen. The focalizer is the point from which the elements are viewed (Narratology 104). The narrator-character, Juansheng, is in this story the focalizer. As a primary character of the story, Zijun is actually the focalized object. Her characteristics are presented through the Juansheng’s vision. Since the love tragedy is told by the narrator-character who participates in it, Zijun’s image appears to the readers through the narrator’s description. At the same time, Zijun also shows something about the focalizer, Juansheng, including his change of attitude to Zijun.

The first-person narrator in “The Story of Hair” mainly serves as a witness. He tears the previous day’s page from the calendar on Sunday morning and finds that this day is a Double Tenth Festival. At that moment, Mr. N, a man of the next generation, just drops in for a chat. The narrator introduces him as a “rather irascible” person: “He often loses his temper for no reason and makes tactless remarks. At such times, I generally let him talk to himself, without putting in a word. After he has finished his monologue, that’s that” (LXQJ 1: 461; Call to Arms 39). The narrator then notes Mr. N’s speech, which is largely a monologue. He interrupts him only with occasional remarks.

If the narrator, who introduces and presents Mr. N., can be regarded as the first narrator, then, Mr. N is the second one, as well as the protagonist. This second narrator relates in an ironic tone the importance of hair for Chinese from ancient times to his own, and a variety of unhappy things caused by hair, including some of Lu Xun’s own experiences. For example, that he had to cut off his queue while he studying abroad, that he bought an artificial queue when he came back to China. That male students cut their queues was, according to Zhou Zuoren, essentially Lu Xun’s own experience. As to women cutting off their hair, this was the event that made Lu Xun write this story. The ideas of the second narrator reflect some of Lu Xun’s thoughts. In the narrator’s view, people had forgotten the anniversary because the 1911 Revolution did not change China much. He mentions one benefit brought by the revolution: “What pleased me most was the fact that, after the first Double Tenth, people stopped laughing at me or cursing me in the street” because of not having a queue (LXQJ 1: 462; Call to Arms 40). However, it is sad that almost ten years after the 1911 Revolution girls still are not allowed to cut their hair off. The story shows the narrator’s discontent, his anger that the society allows him no alternatives. He expresses also Lu Xun’s view:

According to Booth, the most important differences in narrative effect depend perhaps “on whether the narrator is dramatized in his own right and on whether his beliefs and characteristics are shared by the author” (Rhetoric 151). Accordingly, he differentiates between dramatized and undramatized narrators. Dramatized narrators are characterized in more or less detail as an “I.” Though they can be relatively effaced, they are more often provided with numerous physical, mental, and/or moral attributes. In fact, they are frequently represented in first-person as mere observers or witnesses, minor participants in the action, relatively important participants, or protagonists (Prince 24).

The ten short stories in internal focalization we discussed, as well as another two, “A Madman’s Diary” and “Kong Yiji,” that we will discuss in Chapter Four, are all told by first-person narrators who are dramatic narrators participating to varying degree in the events. At the same time, as characters in the stories they all communicate with other characters or become protagonists of the stories. There are observers or witnesses like the narrator in the introductory part of “A Madman’s Diary” and the first narrator in “The
Story of Hair”; minor participants in the action like the narrators in “In the Tavern,” “The Misanthrope,” “The Rabbits and the Cat,” “The Comedy of the Ducks,” “Kong Yiji” and “The New-Year Sacrifice”; and relatively important participants like the narrators in “A Small Incident,” “My Old Home,” “Village Opera” and Juansheng, in “Regret for the Past”; finally there are protagonists like the madman narrator, in “A Madman’s Diary” and the second narrator in “The Story of Hair.” All these not only tell the story, also have a variety of relations with other characters. By means of internal focalization, they all treat and observe other characters from a special and limited view, describe them through their own eyes, and give the reader further information on the events and characters through comments. By means of these special narrators with limited vision Lu Xun could concentrate his descriptions on characters and events he was familiar with, including ones that were autobiographical and left a deep impression on him. This is one reason why so many of his characters, including the narrator-characters, are unforgettable.

2.3 Focalization through a Character

In stories with internal focalization the focalizer and the first-person narrator usually coincide. In some, however, such as “A Happy Family” and “Master Gao,” the focalizer coincides with a character instead of the narrator. In the former, the focalizer is the protagonist working on the plot of his story, while the latter is focalized through a protagonist, Master Gao, who is not narrating. In these stories, as Bal says, “the agent that sees must be given a status other than that of the agent that narrates” (Narratology 101).

In “A Happy Family,” the protagonist focalizes on his writing of a story and the events that happen around it. The ideas about the story that constantly emerge in his head are his private thoughts and monologues, which he does not communicate to his wife and the other characters. In this respect, as Bal says:

It is important to keep sight of the difference between spoken and unspoken words of the characters. Spoken words are audible to others and are thus perceptible when the focalization lies with someone else. Unspoken words—thoughts, internal monologues—no matter how extensive, are not perceptible to other characters. [...] Readers are given elaborate information about the thoughts of a character, which the other characters do not hear (Narratology 110).

Talking to himself, the character works out the dream-like scenes in his story of a happy family, which readers know about but other characters, like his wife, know nothing of. His thoughts and monologues, his own wishful thinking, contrast totally with the real situation, which is also focalized by him. The real life differs greatly from the imaginary happy family, and frequently interrupts his train of thought. For instance, a happy family would have a good environment, but there seems to be no suitable place for it in his world, which is full of fighting, kidnapping, and high rent. So he has to designate the good place with A. In the happy family, the couple is refined, glamorous, and devoted to the arts, while in real life, his wife fastens her “two gloomy eyes” on his face and tells him: “the firewood is all used up, so today I have bought some more” (LXQJ 2: 37; Works 1: 205). She had to bargain with the seller. The happy family would eat upper-class dishes like “Dragon and Tiger,” but he becomes aware of a hollow feeling in his stomach while writing and he sees only a mound of cabbage in the room. There are people coming and going, he hears that his wife gives a slap to his child, who starts sobbing. There is no the master’s study room like in the happy family. In the end he angrily snatches up the draft paper bearing the title of his story, crumples it several times, uses it to wipe his daughter’s eyes and nose, and then throws the ball of paper into the waste-paper basket.
In this story, the relation of the focalizer to the focalized objects is largely constant. The focalizer has two types of focalized objects: the happy imagined couple in his mind, and his unhappy real life. They form two threads of the story: the first one consists of the protagonist’s spoken words and the real life, the other of his thoughts and inner monologues. These two threads establish an ironic contrast between the reality of his environment and the hollow unreality of his castles in the air. They alternate and become the motive force for the story’s development. The reader sees with the eyes of the character-focalizer. The narrator makes no comments, and he portrays nothing that the focalizer does not see or think. If the character-focalizer does not see something, it may be registered by its sound. For example, when he hears a slapping sound, he knows from experience that this is his wife’s hand striking their three-year-old daughter’s head.

The character-focalizer in “Master Gao” is the title figure. The focalized objects of the story are all seen through Master Gao or shown through his communication with other characters. We learn about him through what he sees and through the tension between his views and actions and the reader’s values. Gao’s hypocrisy is shown without narratorial comment, step by step through his own vision.

Whether the first-person character-focalizer coincides with the narrator or not, the discussed internally focalized stories basically belong to Genette’s category of fixed internal focalization. They constitute the dominant part in Lu Xun’s fiction. There are, however, a few stories with variable internal focalization, in which several characters are used as character-focalizers. This is the way in “Medicine” and “The Divorce.” In “Medicine,” Old Shuan and his wife try to use a blood-soaked roll to cure their son, Little Shuan, of tuberculosis. A revolutionary, Xia Yu, is executed on the eve of the Republican Revolution; Old Shuan gets the blood-soaked roll through Uncle Kang, the executioner, and lets his son eat it. However, the blood-soaked roll does not cure Little Shuan’s disease. Several months later, Little Shuan’s mother and Xia’s mother meet each other when they visit their sons’ graves.

The four parts of this story are differently focalized: the first and the second by Old Shuan; the third, partly by Uncle Kang and partly by an omniscient narrator, and the last one by a narrator who is outside the events. The title of the story, “Medicine,” is undoubtedly the focus of the reader’s interest. However, the medicine is nothing other than a blood-soaked roll. It is the item that Old Shuan tries to get in the first part; we see it through his eyes and actions. Although the blood-soaked roll appears at the end of this part, readers remain in suspense about it because they see it through Old Shuan’s eyes. For instance, before Old Shuan leaves, his wife fumbles around under the pillow and produces a packet of silver dollars that she hands over. Old Shuan pockets it with trembling hands. In the dark, he pats his pocket and knows that the hard packet is still there. A man clad entirely in black tells Old Shuan: “Hey! Give me the cash, and I’ll give you the goods!” (LXQJ 1: 441; Works 1: 60). Only then do readers finally see the roll dripping with blood: the man thrusts out one huge extended hand, while in the other he holds a roll of steamed bread, from which crimson drops are dripping to the ground. Until then, the reader does not know what he will do using this blood-soaked roll. The character-focalizer, Old Shuan, is vague:

“Whose sickness is this for?” Old Shuan seemed to hear someone ask; but he made no reply. His whole mind was on the package, which he carried as carefully as if it were the sole heir to an ancient house. Nothing else mattered now. He was about to transplant this new life to his own home, and reap much happiness (LXQJ 1: 442; Works 1: 60).

The character-focalizer in the second part is still Old Shuan. Following him, the reader
sees his sick son Little Shuan at his home: “Only his son was sitting at a table by the wall, eating. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, his lined jacket was sticking to his spine, and his shoulder blades stuck out so sharply, an inverted V seemed stamped there” (LXQJ 1: 442; Works 1: 60-61). It is also shown through his eyes when his wife’s inquiries about the “medicine” in a hurry, then, Old Shuan and his wife ask their son to eat the “medicine”: it is just “a round black object on a plate” (LXQJ 1: 443; Works 1: 61). They do not mention any word about the blood-soaked roll. The reader does not know where this blood-soaked roll came from, whose blood was it was, and whether the person was executed. The answer to this riddle is given by the character-focalizer of the third part, Uncle Kang, the executioner.

Uncle Kang, who is immensely proud of himself, comes into Old Shuan’s teashop and boasts of how lucky Old Shuan was. He is respected by all the people present, including the patrons, Old Shuan, and wife. His loud and self-important words give the impression that the medicine that he helped Old Shuan to get will be a guaranteed cure for Little Shuan’s sickness: “A roll dipped in human blood like this can cure any consumption!” (LXQJ 1: 444; Works 1: 63). The executed one is the son of Widow Xia. Through his focalization the reader sees not only that the young revolutionary remained faithful and unyielding (he even tried to incite the jailer to revolt), but also that his relative, Third Uncle Xia, is cold-blooded, for in order to save himself, he had turned the kid in. The patrons are unconcerned and applaud the jailer for giving Xia Yu a couple of slaps and thinking he is a good boxer. In their view, one need not be sorry about beating a wretch like the revolutionary Xia Yu.

The fourth part is focalized by an external narrator. About six months later in the Qing Ming Festival that year, two mothers meet by chance at the graveyard. The narrator remarks before their meeting:

Originally, the land adjacent to the city wall outside the West Gate had been public land. The zigzag path slanting across it, trod out by passers-by seeking a short cut, had become a natural boundary line. Left of the path, executed criminals or those who had died of neglect in prison were buried. Right of the path were paupers’ graves. The serried ranks of grave mounds on both sides looked like the rolls laid out for a rich man’s birthday (LXQJ 1; 446-47; Works 1: 65, slightly modified).

This narrator leaves several unsolved riddles to the reader. For example, there is a wreath of red and white flowers on Xia’s mound, which shows that people admire him and cherish his memory. However, who put there? As Xia’s mother says, “They have no roots and can’t have grown here. Who could have been here? Children don’t come here. What could have happened?” (LXQJ 1: 448; Works 1: 66, slightly modified). The narrator does not solve this riddle for the reader. In her grief, Xia’s mother looks around but sees only a crow perched on a leafless tree. She says to her dead son: “I know they’ve murdered you. But a day of reckoning will come, Heaven will see to it. Close your eyes in peace.... If you are really here, and can hear me, make that crow fly on to your grave as a sign” (LXQJ 1: 448; Works 1: 67, slightly modified). At the end of the story, when the mothers leave the graveyard, the narrator leaves another riddle: “They had not gone thirty paces when they heard a loud caw behind them. Startled, they looked round and saw the crow stretch its wings, brace itself to take off, then fly like an arrow towards the far horizon” (LXQJ 1: 449; Works 1: 67). Neither the reader nor the character can answer the first question about the flowers at the top of Xia’s mound. And the image at the end is actually symbolic. The significance of the symbolism has raised many arguments for a long time. This fact itself shows that the reader can interpret an image different ways and can know more than the character. In my view, the image in the end is only to strengthen the tragic atmosphere in
the story. It leaves a deep impression on the reader. The tragic atmosphere in the story, including the sober end, tallies with Lu Xun’s motivation in writing this story. According to Sun Fuyuan, Lu Xun had told him what motivated him to write it:

“Medicine” describes the ignorance of the masses and the sorrow of the revolutionaries caused by the ignorance of the masses. To put it in a more direct way, revolutionaries sacrificed their lives in the struggle for the ignorant masses, but the latter did not even know for whom it was that the former had sacrificed their lives (14; Huang Sun-K’ang’s translation, 38).

The information of “Medicine” is given to the reader step by step. Some hints and information, given by different focalizers in the course of development, spur the reader to inquire. The use of different focalizers suits the needs of this construction. The characters-focalizers Old Shuan and Uncle Kang are respectively the participants and witnesses of two central events, and their focalizations are believable, as well as authoritative. Their focalization and narration make two different threads that connect together. In the fourth part, the narrator-focalizer puts the double tragedies before the eyes of the reader. Three narrators-focalizers are linked with one another and lead the story to a tragic climax.

“The Divorce” tells the story of Aigu’s divorce, focalized respectively by Aigu and a narrator-focalizer outside the story. Aigu’s focalization is the main one. Since her husband, Mr. Shi, took up with a young widow, she has to return to her father and brothers. Aigu and her father refuse several times Mr. Wei’s mediation, “who says nothing but: ‘Separate, better separate’” (LXQJ2: 145; Works 1: 273). Now she only hopes to find justice for herself. In the last mediation in the Wei house, the opposite side asks Seventh Master, who has exchanged cards with the local magistrate, to act as peacemaker. Aigu argues strongly on just grounds, but it seems that Seventh Master has power over everybody. Finally, she has to accept his decision.

The first part, on a boat, is mostly dialogue and hence unfocalized. As the story opens, Zhuang Musan and his daughter Aigu get into a boat for an appointment with Mr. Wei in his house. The dialogue, mostly in direct quotes, reveals the central affair, the divorce. Readers understand the different attitudes that people have towards the affair. For example, Aigu is uncompromising, Basan is trying to persuade, Wang Degui has praise for Musan’s act. Readers learn through the dialogues the origin and the background of the divorce affair. After the arrival at Mr. Wei’s house, the focalization occurs mainly through Aigu. When they enter the drawing room, we see with her:

The room was so crammed with things, but she could not have time to look at all it contained. There were many guests as well, but she saw only their short jackets of red and blue satin were shimmering all around her. And in the midst of them, her eyes quickly found a man who she knew at once must be Seventh Master (LXQJ2: 148; Works 1: 276, slightly modified).

All the things and people, as well as the events that happen and the dialogue between people are viewed through Aigu’s eyes. They talk about the anus stopper, but she does not understand what they say, nor is she much interested. However, when she looks round the room, she finds “Old Beast and Young Beast” (her husband and his father): “She saw at a glance that they looked older than when she had met them by chance half a year ago” (LXQJ2: 148; Works 1: 277). Aigu used to think that scholars who know the truth will always stick up for justice, so she must tell Seventh Master the whole story. But when she finds that Seventh Master agreed with Wei’s proposal, and Aigu feels that things are
about to take a bad turn. She is surprised that her father, of whom this coastal region stands in awe, does not say a word on her behalf. At this moment, her courage swells and she speaks in her own defense. She says that she has been a model daughter-in-law ever since she married into Shi’s family, she bowed her head as she went in and out, and she followed all marital duties. Aigu states that her husband cannot easily get rid of her because she married him with all the proper ceremonies: “I don’t mind going to court. If it can’t be settled at the district court, we’ll go to the prefecture.” She will stake her life if need be, “even if it ruins both families!” (LXQJ 2: 153; Works 1: 279) However, because of the interference of Seventh Master, things become more and more disadvantageous to her. Aigu feels completely isolated. Her father does not stand up for her; her brothers didn’t dare to come. Yet she is determined to take a last stand. She loses again. It seems that the tables are turned, as though she had lost her footing and fallen into water. She has no choice but to accept Seventh Master’s proposal according to the fixed procedure.

The ending of the matter is presented by the external narrator. Zhuang Musan receives ninety dollars: “With some difficulty Zhuang Musan finished counting the money, and both sides put away the red and green certificates. Then they all seemed to draw themselves up, and tense expressions relaxed. Complete harmony prevailed” (LXQJ 2: 153; Works 1: 282). From words like “both sides,” “they all” and “complete harmony prevailed,” the reader can conclude that this focalization is not through Aigu’s eyes, but an external narrator. Neither Aigu nor her father would be satisfied with the final result. They were compelled to accept this final result because they had no alternative. The narrator-focalizer takes an external focalization, just presents the characters’ action and speech, but does not go into their hearts. The reader can imagine their resentment and dissatisfaction at the surface of their polite formula and their having no choice. And the closed hearts of Aigu and Zhuang Musan leave something more to ponder for the reader.

1 Call to Arms, Lu Xun’s first collection of short stories, included fifteen short stories in the first addition (August 1923). However, in January of 1930, when the book was in its thirteenth printing, the author removed “Buzhou shan” (“Buzhou Mountain”). Later, Lu Xun changed the title from “Buzhou Mountain” to “Bu tian” (“Mend the Sky”) and published in his Newly Edited Old Stories in 1935.
2 Baimiao is a term used often in both traditional Chinese painting and writing. In painting, it refers to a kind of line drawing in traditional ink and brush style. In fiction, it refers to a simple, straightforward, and unadorned style of writing.
3 Implied author is a term used by Booth in his The Rhetoric of Fiction. According to Booth, the implied author is “the second self” (71) of the author as reconstructed from the text; the implicit image of an author in the text, taken to be standing behind the scenes and to be responsible for its design and for the values and cultural norms it adheres to. The implied author of a text must be distinguished from its real author (Prince 42).
4 Tianyong claims that “My Old Home” is the best story in Call to Arms. But he is dissatisfied with the last three paragraphs, “which are more than are needed. A novelist needs to explain life, but needs not explain his own opinion about life. If the author supposes that the reader cannot see the meaning, he can write another article to explain it without being superfluous” (1: 75). Obviously, here Tianyong equates the narrator with the author.
5 Rimmon-Kenan discusses the situation of Pip in Dickens’s Great Expectations (73, 138), the situation in “Village Opera” is similar to it.
6 Eroshenko is the blind Russian poet. He had studied music. Later he traveled to Japan, Thailand, Burma and India. He wrote children’s stories in Japanese and Esperanto, some of which were translated into Chinese by Lu Xun. Upon deportation from Japan for taking part in a May Day parade in 1921 he went to Shanghai. In the following year he was invited by the chancellor to teach Esperanto at Beijing University. On July 3, 1922, he left to travel through Russia to attend the 14th International Conference on Esperanto and returned on November 4.
7 For instance, in “My Old Home,” Mrs. Yang calls the narrator “Master Xun”; and the narrator’s mother asks Runtu “You had better still call him Brother Xun as before” when Runtu meets the narrator and calls him “Master”; in “Village Opera,” Shuangxi and Old Liu Yi calls the narrator “Brother Xun”; and in “The Rabbits and the Cat,” the narrator’s mother calls him “Xun.”
8 For some of Lu Xun’s first-person narrators, Chinese scholars have paid attention to the relationship
between the narrator and the author. For instance, when discussing the narrator in “A Small Incident,” Li Helin thinks that “I was Lu Xun, but not completely Lu Xun” (Li Yukun 340).

9 Xu Guangping entered The Chinese Department of Beijing Women’s Normal College in 1923 and became Lu Xun’s student. She looked to Lu Xun as a revered teacher and became his common-law wife. Their only son Haiying was born in 1929. In Beijing, Xu Guangping wrote her first letter to Lu Xun dated in March 11, 1925, and Lu Xun received and responded to her letter at the same day. From then on to the end of July, they exchanged more than fifty letters between them (See LXQJ 11:3-316). Lu Xun’s first marriage took place twenty years earlier, in the autumn of 1906, when he came from Japan and married Zhu An. This marriage was arranged by his mother. In fact, Lu Xun never really regarded her as his wife. In conversation with an old friend, Xu Shoushang, Lu Xun said with a melancholy sigh, “She is a gift that my mother gave to me, and the only thing I can do is to take care of her” (Lin Chen 84).

10 Xu Guangping mentioned that Lu Xun had discussed such matters with her: “We promise that we will each independently hard work for two years, firstly, for people; secondly, for that we can persist ourselves and not lose spirit” (Gratified 61). She also wrote: “When we were going to separate in Beijing from each other, we had discussed that each of us would work hard for society for a couple of years. First, for a good cause; second, we could also save some money for ourselves” (Lu Xun’s Life 10).

11 The Double Tenth Festival (October 10, the tenth day of the tenth month) marks the anniversary of the 1911 Revolution, which occurred at Wuchang and became the National Day of the Republic of China.

12 This story was written before the Double Tenth Festival in October 1920. At that time, one of Lu Xun’s good friends, Xu Qingwen’s younger sister, came to Beijing and took the entrance examination for Beijing Women’s College and lived at Lu Xun’s home. Since she cut her hair short, she was not accepted by the college. Lu Xun tried but failed to mediate several times. (LXQJ 1:245).