As in our established format, I will give an introduction just to set up the discussions. I thought as a conclusion to the first part of our seminar I would go back to *Ye Cao* (Wild Grass) to use one or two pieces we haven’t discussed either as a warm-up or as a sort of transition to today’s discussion, with reference to all these theoretical readings included in the packet.

Let’s take a look at the piece “After Death,” *Si hou*, on page 94. It’s short enough, maybe I will ask Julian to read it for us.

[Julian reads “After Death.”]

*Zhang.*— The reason why I picked this one, for a sort of periodical conclusion and also a new departure in our seminar, is this: the piece nicely captures a number of central issues we’d like to look at in *Wild Grass*. It deals with death and what happens after death; all the main, central images and dilemmas are present here. From the most existential ontological issues to the finest details, these ironical sort of realistic images including the gossip, onlookers, passersby, insects and bugs, and ancient texts, and so and so forth, in a way nicely capture the social cultural situation which the living Lu Xun faces. His real, daily situation. And yet the dramatized scene is life after death. There is the persistence of life. Or, dialectically, it is also the persistence of death. In a way it’s the unhappy thought that one will not have peace even after death. The bad dream persists. This is what stops Hamlet from killing himself. What if there are bad dreams after death? What is important here is the sort of unending persistent agony or struggle
of life that transcends death; and in a way, this particular way, death becomes part of life. There’s no transcendence of this struggle called life. It penetrates death and turns it into part of this ongoing struggle, or unhappy consciousness. So this dead yet conscious state of being is really frightening. You’re just lying there by the roadside, it’s accidental, you’re absolutely helpless, basically watching what happens to you. Cannot react, engage in any action, your life becomes, is rendered completely passive; but everything can still be registered in consciousness. I just want to draw your attention to this sort of life or death comes to a standstill, at which point time is frozen, history is petrified, all the temporal issues are spatialized, where this state of being is perpetuated, there’s no redemption, no transcendence, no progress. It’s interesting to note that this piece is strategically placed right before “Such a Fighter.” Where it goes, there will be such a fighter. There is a list of all these things, the line of nothingness, the most merciless—But he raises the javelin. This gesture of persistence, this uncompromising stubborn willingness to remain in the fight seems to be something shared by these two pieces, although it’s also symmetrically opposed to each other, one passive, the other persistent. But nonetheless the persistence, the perpetuated state of getting stuck runs throughout these two pieces, and we should find a way to address the connections between these two. The ending of “Si hou” is also very dramatic, abrupt. When the protagonist feels completely totally trapped inside the coffin, 6 walls plus 2 nails, there’s no way out, total defeat, all of a sudden he sits up. This is a rather dramatic ending. The dead walking, the absolute defiance, the willingness to engage in this fight, all this leads to the next piece, “Such a Fighter.” The opposite, the enemy is also portrayed in great detail in life after death, it’s the common theme in Lu Xun: the onlookers, the spectators, the crowd gathered around the dead body with consciousness. It’s a scene, a panoramic view only available to the dead, but it’s the dead equipped with consciousness. This absolute alienation, absolute allegorical perspective is quite interesting especially when it’s juxtaposed with this sort of truly Nietzschean image of the fighter, this uncompromising image. So if we could use this piece to bring us back to the literary mode of Lu Xun, and prose poetry probably is a privi-
leged genre in this regard, we now face two questions or dimensions of reading Lu Xun. One has to do with the literary, because we have to continue to ask ourselves the question: what is literature? The other is more historical or political or moral: what is modernity? Or what is Oriental modernity? In terms of a review of what we have already covered I want to say a few things about the first dimension, that is the literary, what is literature. And then we will go into the second question, what is modernity, via Takeuchi. These two halves will come together very nicely in Lu Xun’s thesis.

To the question “what is literature” we started with the question of modernism, what does it mean for a late-19th-century/early-20th-century man of letters to engage in a modern literature with its well established genres, styles, institutions, short stories, poetry, institutions, we discussed this phenomenon, that is in Lu Xun all these established categories or domains or institutions break down. Lu Xun’s mode of writing always find a way to either negotiate between these genres, styles, or simply operate above and beyond it, or beneath it depending on your perspective. Here the only category that remains useful is that of writing. Lu Xun’s writing constantly falls back to the state of writing in defiance of these more elevated, more reified or ossified styles or practices. And the mode of writing, the image of the writer that emerges from this writing is that of a moralist, a satirist, an allegorist, an intellectual, rather than that of a novelist, or a poet or even an essayist. And we discussed the relationship between this mode of writing and that of modernism, that is, whether this indicates a failure vis-à-vis a modernism, or Chinese modernism—whether it’s going to be achieved, or it’s precisely an expression of modern Chinese literature, that is, to flood all these genres styles or categories with the same kind of intensity, so much so that all these established domains can no longer hold, they are eliminated in other words by the more force, the energy or the intensity that comes from elsewhere. We started with the assumption or this observation that Lu Xun’s objective, his goal, his mission, is never purely literary. It started with this moral imperative of saving China. In other words, it’s always first and foremost something extrinsic to literature, not something that can be contained by literature or the
literary, so this is the dilemma we’re facing. Is this a more promising or productive mode of modernistic writing, even though it doesn’t look like high modernism, with all these well-established instances in European literature or Japanese literature, their more developed forms of literary modernism. *Wild Grass* can probably be regarded as the focal point of all these questions; it is by far the most modernist piece in Lu Xun’s corpus, and at the same time we see also an index of all Lu Xun’s writings in biographical terms in political, moral terms, in allegorical terms of Lu Xun’s other concerns. What is amazing about *Wild Grass* is it has this purity of form; in a more mechanical way we can begin with counting the images, right? There are relatively few: in terms of images or figures, the narrative structure everything is very simple, it’s minimalist; yet it opens up the literary space that is identical in Lu Xun’s other writings. So this is the question of modernism that we started with.

Now today before we jump to the social/historical dimension with readings of Takeuchi, I want to bring your attention to this concept of minor literature, as something internal to the question of modernism yet that offers, not exactly a way out, but a new possibility for understanding modernism as a unique or singular mode of writing. And this is of course the piece by Deleuze. I want to open up the discussion. In what ways, I want to ask, does Lu Xun’s writing in *Wild Grass* as well as in his short stories and early essays, can they be regarded as an example of the practice of minor literature, or to what extent the Deleuzian concept of minor literature can shed some new light on our understanding of Lu Xun’s mode of writing? The pretext, the premise of all that is we seem to share this observation that in Lu Xun the desire for a major form is absent. Lu Xun seemed to be content with writing all these short pieces in these “underdeveloped” forms; and yet, the literary intention and expressivity do not seem to diminish. So in a way we are forced to search for a new concept of the literary to justify or to explain this mode of writing. It is revolutionary, it is extremely productive, it is highly literary, and yet it has not achieved the major forms such as the conventional mainly bourgeois understanding of the novel, drama, poetry, short story, etc. Any thoughts on reading this particular piece by Deleuze? It’s on Kafka
and in a very neat way it’s a piece of literary commentary or criticism. Any thoughts on this overlap between Lu Xun’s literary practice and Deleuze’s theorization of a particular kind of literary practice? What can we derive from this short, very dense piece by Deleuze, “What Is a Minor Literature?”

**Julian.**— Well, it looks like Lu Xun could fit very well, and Lu Xun could be the Kafka in the Chinese language. The difference is what is Lu Xun’s position about language. Of course Kafka was the Czech Jew writing in German, and Lu Xun, I don’t know how you’d sum up *Wild Grass*, what kind of Chinese that is, but that’s a different relationship to a kind of revolutionary relationship. That needs to be thought about or understood to make some kind of difference there.

**Zhang.**— Absolutely. What do you make of the difference? Is the Chinese language Lu Xun used a minor language, or could it be a minor language? If it is, what is the major language against which it defines itself? So you refer to literary Chinese or classical Chinese, the language of Tang poetry or even Ming Qing fiction, Lu Xun’s language is a new modern invention, pretty precarious. Lu Xun is such a stylist, as a writer he was born already fully formed, so in a way it’s hard for modern readers of Lu Xun to appreciate the precariousness of this language. But if we read Hu Shi’s vernacular poetry, we think this is pretty infantile, weak, compared to this splendid tradition of classical poetry. So in a way the vernacular revolution to which Lu Xun belongs is a struggle, from a sort of minorian position, but that’s only one way to look at it. Was vernacular Chinese the lingua franca of literary production in Lu Xun’s time?

**Julian.**— Well, those terms alone are confusing, was vernacular the lingua franca…

**Zhang.**— Chinese, regardless classical or literary. What could constitute the German for the Chinese at that time?

**Pu.**— But the question here is not entirely linguistic. In the poem we just read, “After Death,” the return of the haunting dream of the ancient classics is not a dominant literary language but also a dominant ideological discourse, and I think in this sense we can talk about what is minor in Lu Xun, because Lu Xun’s writing and literary language is pressed on the one hand by Chinese ancient discourses and
on the other hand by the dominant Western influence which Lu Xun himself subscribed to. So I think in this sense you can have some non-linguistic layers of what is minor literature, this kind of minor literature in a non-Western context. And the same is true for Kafka as well. It’s also about his very peculiar position or identity which actually helped at that historical moment, and just as Deleuze says, we are all writing in a language that is not our own.

Chris.— I was just thinking of, on page 23, those four levels of language. And a lot of it is a question of what kind of horizon we give to it. I don’t know if it’s a question of what kind of horizon it gives, the minor here is not exactly what position you have in a hierarchy of power, but what kind of movements you can have in those layers. What can that mean for transnational literature, and that’s the problem even for Lu Xun, because he’s trying to do something with the vernacular.

Zhang.— I agree, although I gather from Julian’s initial response, it will be less productive if we just try to fit Lu Xun very neatly into this box of minor literature. That’s not our agenda, I mean, that’s too mechanical. Minor or minorian for me is both a matter of language and extra-linguistic in the sense which Chris referred to. For instance, When Lu Xun started his literary career, he started as a translator, with some notion of world literature in mind; but the actual authors or texts he picked were those from Eastern Europe or Scandinavian, the so called small and weak nations on the verge of extinction. So there was always a sort of moral-political alliance. In this political map, Chinese literature was of course in a minorian position.

Chris.— In Deleuze’s frame, national literature is not an issue, right? There is no national basis for fortifying the minor.

Zhang.— But the national question will come back when we go to Jameson’s piece. But here for Deleuze the primary concern is not about the national. Even thinking of Kafka, for him Jewishness is by no means a minorian position. Is Hebrew a minor language? Probably not; it’s the language of the Bible, of God, of the Old Testament, and so forth. So in this sense minor-major is always—I think what Deleuze tries to convey is this extremely intricate, convoluted relationship, entanglement; whereas literary subjectivity or literary
subject can never operate within an imagined or real protected space, space of absolute security, with clear borders and territories. It’s the matter of deterritorialization: you always have to negotiate or mediate back and forth, between different positions, in the process of which you realize there’s no such thing called the language as such; every language is a stolen language, every language is a borrowed language, there’s always an outer horizon, there’s always a larger context, always a predominant institutional power or symbolic order, in which you operate as part of a whole or on the margin, and so on. The particular language that Deleuze used is highly interesting here on page 16 in the middle of the paragraph. “But the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization.” It’s really this deterritorialization of language that is the issue. Minor-major, of course they are always relative and contingent. But this high coefficient of deterritorialization is something we should keep in mind. And vernacular Chinese as the literary medium in Lu Xun is probably an even more extreme form of this language of the high coefficient of deterritorialization. To what extent it’s Europeanized. The concept of the vernacular, of modern literature, it begins with this Europeanization, Latinization or Romanization of Chinese language. At its very birth it’s to a great extent already un-Chinese. That’s the kind of break Takeuchi eventually talks about in his piece. Oriental modernity begins with some kind of rejection of the self. Without this recognition of the European intrusion or European coercion or European impact, there’s no such thing as oriental modernity to begin with. So this kind of deterritorialization is something we have to keep in mind. Also minor, since we already brought up Takeuchi, minor also refers to this position of defeat, of marginalization, of retreat, of struggle, of resistance. So these are some of the general features of the minorian position. Because the major position is at the center, is plainly in a dominant position, is in advance, in Takeuchi’s language. Minor-major in this way can be more dynamic when we look at this issue in the East Asian context.

Chris.— Just one question. I’m not really familiar of this piece of Deleuze, but he often opposes the molecular to the modern. And the
modern seems to fall in the same kind of divide.

Zhang. — Right, the major is something like the trunk of the tree whereas minor is something like all these roots, what is the word, the rhizome. All these assemblages, networks. These subterranean networks of branches, and entanglement and weeds, wild grasses, the subterranean flower, all these things are minor. Whereas the major is always represented by something far more monumental and established and secure like realism, the realist novel, or romanticism, poetry as such, individualism, autonomy, art for art’s own sake. This is the sort of basic situation, and Deleuze captures this first by means of language, this language issue. And even, for instance, I could give you a perfect or perverse example of this relativity of minor and major: there’s nothing more central than an English department at an Anglo-American university. But when you talk to English professors they always complain or resent the fact that they’re on the margin, and you know why? Well, because everyone is into French theory or German philosophy or discourse on cultural studies, to the extent that a properly literary English professor nowadays, he or she will often feel in the margin, in the minority, whereas the playground is completely dominated by some more universal things, such as high theory or globalization, or transnationalism, and so on. So if you look at different institutional settings, you have a sort of perpetual paranoia about the minor. But that, again, is just a perverse example. What about the second characteristic of minor literature? It’s very simple, on page 17. “The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political.” Very simple. Of course everything in Lu Xun is political. But what do we make of this very cursory observation? “Minor literature is completely different; its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it.” So the political is defined vis-à-vis the private, the properly individual, the autonomous. Whereas you could tell a coherent, whole story about nothing other than the self—in psychoanalytical terms, in terms of daydreams, in terms of stream of consciousness, in terms of romance or love affairs and so on; whereas
in minor literature the minute you start trying to tell a story about
the private individual, you are already beginning to tell the story
about your family or neighborhood or country or nation or class;
because there is a whole other story vibrating within it. Basically the
political is in this sense the collective, which goes right into—I’ve yet
to capture the fine distinction between the political and the collective
here in Deleuze, which is of course picked up by Jameson in his own
piece. But in Jameson’s piece on national allegory, the political and
the collective seem to be identical. That’s my reading of these two
pieces. But Deleuze seems to have finer distinctions between the two.
So let’s finish the features of minor literature. The third one, on page
18, second paragraph: “The three characteristics of minor literature
are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individ-
ual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of
enunciation.” So everything you say is already collective in nature. It
simply will not remain or stay in the private domain, as a private lan-
guage. The collective, political nature very quickly dissolves the
autonomy of form and turns that into an allegory, turns it as an index
or indicator into other things. So this is very generally the mode of
movement of minor literature. So just to sum up: the minor literature
is characterized by its politicality, its collectivity, and especially by its
language. And its language—there’s always fracture, it’s always already
fractured; it’s multiple, it’s characterized by self-doubt, but also at the
same time by resonance with other forms, modes of being or experi-
ence. There’s always a translation mechanism built into this minorian
language. Because it is a language by means of translating other lan-
guages. In other words, while expressing something, it’s not a form of
representation; it always tries to go beyond representation, to become
something more immediate, more direct. Because if you have some-
thing like a moral or political imperative that is so urgent, then
representation seems to be an unbearable burden. If you have a mes-
gage to deliver, you don’t want to create characters or worry about
plot or form or parallel narrative or lengthy description of details, etc;
these turn out to be unnecessary burdens. You want to cut to the
chase, achieve a certain immediacy. But is that still literature? Does
that still fulfill a certain kind of literary ambition defined by modern-
ism or by modernity? This is the question.

The language is subversive, is revolutionary; it’s characterized by the three impossibilities in Kafka: impossible to write in German, impossible not to write in German, impossible to write, etc. We are familiar with this Kafkaesque dilemma. It always registers a new intensity, a new speed, simply moves faster than other more established, more major modes of expression. Simply because there is another story or sometimes several stories vibrating within it. And in this particular way minor literature in terms of its language always registers a new complexity, always points toward a new literary ontology. So we are no longer dealing with form here, but looking at a literary ontology that lays bare the social ontology which seizes literature as a vehicle, as a mode of expression. But by means of this being seized by a social ontology as its own expression it stops being Literature with a capitalized L. Deleuze’s understanding of minor literature is interesting to me because it offers a strong concept of the literary by means of its subversion. Its subversion does not go beyond the literary, but reinforces it. The concluding thoughts of Deleuze is—On page 23: “Language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits.” In other words, it pushes the envelope, it reaches the extreme, it constitutes the revolutionary conditions for literature, not only this minor condition but all others. It achieves a new translatability. That is a kind of literary mode Deleuze opens up for non-Western modes of writing. “Each function of a language divides up in turn and carries with it multiple centers of power.” So the multiple centers of power, each offers new possibilities. It does not constitute a system, but rather makes it possible for different centers or subsystems to emerge. I think Deleuze makes it possible for us to take a second look at Jameson’s piece, which is probably more popular or famous or influential in American academia. But in what ways does Jameson develop, or take in a different direction, Deleuze’s work? How do you find the theoretical implications derived from this reading under the rubric of nationality?

Wang Pu.— In previous readings of this piece there is a tendency to focus merely on the question of the national. What is more important is the question of allegory. Jameson opens up the possibility of an
extremely political allegorical reading. Only in writers like Lu Xun can you find the national energy that has disappeared in other, apolitical “pure” literature. That is why here you can establish a connection between Jameson’s allegorical reading that retains the potential of the political and the collective. In Deleuze’s theorization of minor literature, there is a question of emergency and in Benjamin’s reading there is also a sense of Kafka’s cry for help… So in this sense the emergency resides in those minor languages or minor writers, and eventually points toward political allegories… For Lu Xun it is not only national. The most intriguing part of Jameson’s reading is his observation of this allegorical energy, different layers and political emergences in the same short piece.

Zhang.— But Jameson begins with a simple observation. For a Western reader reading non-Western literature you are always bugged by two things: this is not James Joyce, Doestoevsky, Joseph Conrad. We are reading something less or lesser, something not as great. This is a sort of note of self-criticism. But the second thing that is bugging an imagined, normative Western reader—he or she is also bothered by this unhappy thought “I don’t get it, but it must look interesting to others.” Someone else, a Chinese, Japanese—that is, “I don’t get it, it looks so plain or uninteresting to me. But it must look very interesting to others.” For example, a Chinese or Japanese, or someone from Latin America, or someone from Eastern Europe, while reading their own literature, their understanding is far more interesting, intense and politically engaged, than my own. I don’t get it. The Western reader is always separated by a mechanism of interpretation which is always segregated, embedded in the social-political context, in the national situation. It is through these two impossibilities of reading, this very Eurocentric position of looking down at non-Western literature that Jameson introduces this issue of national situation. For me, this is both more interesting and more problematic, these so-called different degrees of penetration via globalization. Jameson being a Marxist, part of his agenda—allegory of course is one of his central interests, but at the same time he is also trying to reorganize the global map of literary reading, which conforms to a Marxist reading of modes of production. I wonder whether, ultimately, Jameson’s
suggestion is that national allegory comes [down] to this understanding of different degrees of the development of capitalism. Non-Western societies are “stuck.” “Stuck” is not Jameson’s language, but in a Marxist way he’s sharing this world-historical reading of the general, universal spread of capital. Different national situations represent different stages of capitalist development, and this, ultimately, is what he means by allegory—these are just different allegories of capital. The national is just the literary or aesthetic effect, or the sentimental elements of different stages of the development of capital. We probably will have to address that in the conference in terms of comparison and comparability—That brings the whole discussion back into the question of universal narrative, the grand narrative of world history in which there is a topology of your positions within the system of global capital. This is a departure from Deleuze’s engagement with the literary, with language. This is my main problem with the piece, though we should defend it against more crude readings, but nonetheless the piece seems to come with its own problems, falling back into too general an understanding of non-Western literature in terms of the universal history of capital.

That is not Takeuchi’s reading. Takeuchi’s reading of oriental modernity, his position is the polar opposite of Jameson’s, it’s fair to say. Because the central concern, probably we can make the transition here, is not the universal history of capital, but rather—resistance—or, in other words, the desire to be oneself. Self-preservation. That is rather different from Jameson’s reading. It is also, like Jameson, based on a reading of Lu Xun. It’s touching, the repetitive lines, when he says, “This is when I encountered Lu Xun, this is how I encountered Lu Xun, this is why Lu Xun was so important to me, I would be ashamed if I had not run into Lu Xun,” and so on; it also contains a whole range of self-observation, situational analysis. But the whole problematic is framed in a very very different way. This piece is explosive because it is a reflection on the issue of oriental modernity from the very historical experience of oriental modernity. It’s not a perspective from the West or the universal; it’s a particularist perspective. And yet it touches on this universal question with such irreducible force. It’s a very rich and, in a way, personal piece. For the purpose of dis-
discussion, I wonder whether we have to “tame” this piece. It’s such an unruly piece. Are there ways for us to break it down into more manageable arguments, or steps, themes, positions, statements that we could argue with or against, or rearrange in a way that was more linear or logical. Can you tame Takeuchi [a writer-intellectual into a theorist]?

At this point, I would like to invite our colleagues from Tokyo to share their thoughts with us.

Wang Pu.— Can we talk about resistance? Takeuchi’s understanding of the term resistance is a little difficult to understand.

Zhang.— Resistance is a central notion, of course, but Takeuchi arrives at this concept of resistance through a particular path. His intervention comes from a peculiar direction; and once you grasp this concept, you realize retroactively that there’s nothing peculiar. It’s almost conventional. It’s a very straightforward way of thinking.

I break this article into 9 parts. I think there are 9 interrelated arguments, but we can identify 9 movements, a sort of succession. At the very beginning, on page 53. Very plain observation: “Oriental modernity is the result of European coercion.” Do we agree or do we not agree? I think it’s a historical fact. I think it’s a historical fact, beyond dispute. At this point I find I’m kind of impatient with all the various revisionist discourses. I think it’s a plain historical point of departure that should be accepted as a common point of departure. In other words, modern Asia—its very identity or self-understanding is premised upon its rejection of its own past. Otherwise we do not have any problems. All the problems come with this fact that oriental modernity is the result of European coercion. But then, the peculiarity of Takeuchi’s argument is this: instead of delving into explaining what is oriental modernity he turns around and starts talking about European modernity, in a peculiar way. I think it’s a very important observation, which is shared by Lu Xun. The two do share this recognition. Middle of page 54: “Modernity is the self-recognition of Europe as seen within history, that regarding of itself as distinct from the feudalistic, which Europe gained in the process of liberating itself from the feudal (a process that involved the emergence of free capital in the realm of production and the formation of personality qua
autonomous and equal individuals with respect to human beings). Therefore, it can be said that Europe is first possible only in this history, and that history itself is possible only in this Europe. History is not an empty form of time [this is very Benjaminian]. It includes an infinite number of instants in which one struggles against obstacles so that the self may be itself, without which both the self and history would be lost.”

The upshot of this observation, of course is that Europe is Europe because it invents its modern history through a life and death struggle for a kind of self-identity or self-recognition. In other words, it’s the tension, contradiction, and self-negation that give Europe its own identity in terms of both historical rupture and, more importantly, self-preservation. Europe put up a very intense fight to remain itself; and in comparison, the Orient faces a dilemma of either giving up its own identity in order to move on or sticking with its tradition and perish. In other words, this healthy or even normal history or historicity, which Europe enjoyed in its painful, heroic, tragic struggle of self-negation and self-preservation, is something not available to the Orient. It’s denied to the Orient. This is the beginning of all the questions, of all the problems. From this observation he quickly moves to this issue of resistance.

On page 56: “Oriental resistance was merely the essential element that made world history all the more complete.” So from now on, resistance defines oriental modernity, and not the lack of resistance. Because if you do not resist you cannot possibly share what historically made Europe Europe. So this is still an argument for becoming European of the Orient. And yet the Orients becoming European will have to follow, strictly speaking, the European path—that is, the perpetual struggle of self-negating and self-preserving. Anything less reduces the oriental modernity to something ontologically less. In terms of a copy or in terms of slavery. In a very tragic way this is the problem that is laid out.

The third argument is on page 55, about permanence. It comes from the constant effort of making oneself permanent. This is the European effort, right—it’s the instinct for self-preservation. The strong sentence here is, “What is implicit in European modernity is
this desire to be itself.” For the Orient, the fundamental requirement of modernity seems to try to become the other. It desires to be the other; whereas, if you look at Europe, what defines its modern experience is the desire to be itself. This is the sort of dilemma. After this setting up of the problematic, the central part of Takeuchi’s piece is this very very interesting almost battleground-like analysis of European advance and Oriental retreat. And in this advance and retreat, understanding of advance and understanding of retreat—in other words, in this consciousness or recognition of one’s defeat, lies a morality or a politics of the modern that makes all the difference. So here we have to be very careful to make a distinction between what is Takeuchi’s reading of Japan, and what is Takeuchi’s reading of Lu Xun. Of course they inform each other. Sometimes you do have a feeling that Lu Xun is mobilized for a sort of self-critique of Japan, and sometimes the Japanese national situation is mobilized in order to understand Lu Xun as a sort of literary example. If resistance is placed at the center stage, as the defining experience or quality for oriental modernity, then the rest is a matter of slave mentality, which is marked by this lack of subjectivity or more positively we can say that subjectivity lies in the consciousness of one’s own retreat, as part of the universal advance through resisting it, the contradictory dilemma—That is the contradictory dilemma of modernity. At some point Takeuchi seems to suggest that the intellectual challenge (or, it’s also a moral challenge) for East Asian, for oriental modernists is how to understand this necessary retreat vis-à-vis this advance of reason or rationality, of science, of democracy, and all these European things. To understand this retreat not as progress but as the condition for something that could even negate progress in the narrow historicist humanist sense. In other words, to see the particular defeat in light of a universal creation or renewal. This is the most intricate part of Takeuchi’s argument, this time around when I read it. Remember this observation at the bottom of page 62 on Japan: “In the course of retreat, the two substantial concepts of advance and retreat coexist without mediation, and hence without contradiction and its consequent unification. Here lies the source of that slave sentiment which lacks subjectivity in the sense of the coexistence of a superiority and
inferiority complex.” Then he moves on. “In this sense, Japan is the most Oriental of the nations in the Orient. In another sense, of course, Japan is the least Oriental of these [all East Asian] nations.” Why? In what sense is Japan the most oriental of the Orient? Because Japan experiences this advance and retreat most intensely—or most sufficiently, we should say. The Japanese retreat is the most sufficient, and in the Japanese theater, the European advance is the most sufficient, in terms of modernization, in terms of nation-state, in terms of rationalization, all these tangible gains and losses. Japan has covered the longest distance. So it’s the quintessential example of oriental modernity. It’s the fullest, most fully developed version of East Asian modernity. And in the second—this is probably easy to understand: in what sense is Japan the least oriental of the East Asian nations? And Lu Xun’s image is about [to] leap out of this observation. He establishes this contrast between imagined China and imagined Japan. In what sense is Japan the least oriental? Of course he’s not referring to this very stereotypical, superficial observation that Japan looks most westernized—it’s modern, therefore it’s the least oriental. That’s not it. In a more philosophical sense.

*Hirakura.*— The difference between “tenko and conversion”?

*Zhang.*— Exactly. But in this particular context, more concretely, more specifically. What makes Japan the least oriental nation?

*Wenjin.*— There’s no sense of resistance.

*Zhang.*— Exactly. Where’s the resistance? If you’re a true “oriental,” you’re supposed to put up a fight! To [the] death. How come this retreat or progress has been so successful, has been so thorough and smooth? The movement is too smooth, the distance has been too complete. The travel has been too easy. Whereas one would expect oriental modernity to be defined by something far more sluggish, resistant, problematic, heterogeneous, muddy, rugged—it shouldn’t be this easy.

And here comes Lu Xun—or, here comes Takeuchi’s very personal encounter with Lu Xun. This is the argument number 6. It’s truly shocking, the observation here. Just to push his observation to the extreme, he says on page 64, the bottom of the second paragraph: “For there is here no resistance, that is to say, there is no wish to pre-
serve the self (the self itself does not exist). The absence of resistance means that Japan is not Oriental, but at the same time the absence of the wish for self-preservation (the absence of the self) means that Japan is not European.” There’s no instinct for self-preservation. This insistence on being itself. This desire for itself. “That is to say, Japan is nothing.” It’s neither here nor there. This is the most damning self-critique of Japan I’ve ever encountered. But my understanding is that, in a narrative sense, is only his way of staging Lu Xun as a figure of resistance and a figure of self-preservation. This combination as the embodiment of a dialectic of self-negation and self-preservation.

On pages 71, here is the most striking appearance of Lu Xun in Takeuchi Yoshimi. After this observation that Lu Xun is not a humanist, he goes on: “In other words, having ‘no path to follow’ means that one is awakened from a dream, whereas the presence of such a path is proof that one is still dreaming. The ‘most painful thing in life,’ awakening from a dream, occurs when the slave rejects his status as slave while at the same time rejecting the fantasy of liberation, so that he becomes a slave who he realizes that he is a slave. This is the state in which one must follow a path even though there is no path to follow; or rather, one must follow a path precisely because there is no path to follow.” And this is Lu Xun, his understanding of Lu Xun. Whereas Japan found a path, therefore its success is its failure. China never found a path. And yet this not having a path as path defines this Chinese modernity in its own right. Such a slave rejects being himself at the same time that he rejects being anything else. This is Lu Xun, this is Takeuchi’s image of Lu Xun. He rejects himself and rejects being anything else. It’s a logical impossibility, a theoretical impossibility; but the entire world of Lu Xun’s writing emerges from this impossibility. Self-negation without identification with anything else. What is that?

“This is the meaning of despair found in Lu Xun; it is what makes Lu Xun possible. Despair emerges in the resistance of following a path when there is no path, while resistance emerges as the activation of despair. As a state this can be seen as despair, whereas as a movement it is resistance.”

Zhang.— From this point on it goes very very quickly into a more
sociological understanding. What makes Lu Xun possible is precisely the backwardness of Chinese society, the weight of backwardness, the weight of darkness, the reality in which all hopes have been shattered. You’ve no choice but to remain in this fight, in the name of hopelessness. It is out of hopelessness that the fierce resistance comes about; and this resistance in contrast to Japan’s modernization, the Chinese situation in Lu Xun—this is the other most striking observation made by Takeuchi—another logical impossibility made possible by Lu Xun’s literary practice. This is on the top of page 74, when he talks about old and new. “Such people are found when all paths toward progress are closed and the hope of becoming new is broken.” Russians, Chinese—they have the lowest of living conditions, in which old things do not become new, but rather, are new while being old. Old things cannot become new. And they just “be.” Their state of being, they are old, and yet they are new. Or put it differently, they are new while being old. What does that mean?

Chris.— That it’s a modern state of things?

Zhang.— I don’t think he’s talking about the general dilemma of modernity—the old is new, the new is old, the eternal is ephemeral, the ephemeral is eternal, etc.—it’s not that.

Chris.— What I mean is, seeing some things as “old” being a modern condition of things.

Zhang.— That’s right. Old now constitutes the condition for the new. Maybe if we shifted our perspective a little bit here. He’s really talking about identity. In other words, the new in your new identity—say, modern China as opposed to traditional China. Or modern Japan as opposed to traditional Japan. Cannot be so new or thoroughly new to the extent there is no continuity between the new and the old. It must be the old, the original identity negating itself and then negating the negative. It’s the negative of the negative that turns into something positive. Not necessarily in the Hegelian sense of this teleological linear progress, but in a more Nietzschean way of eternal return. Round and round, something becomes modern without losing selfhood as Japanese or Chinese. But then in this language it becomes very problematic. Are you talking about national or cultural essence? Takeuchi says very clearly: no, I don’t think there is such sub-
stance in national or cultural form. It’s all about this struggle, this tension.

_{Chris._}— But then when he speaks of Japan, he says that Japan is more pure form, more European in that sense.

_{Zhang._}— That’s toward the end of the article, yes. Again, I think he uses Japan as a negative example in order to show the utopian potential in Lu Xun’s writing. But here when he talks about this possibility of being new—his language is so difficult to repeat, so singularly Takeuchi, you simply cannot find a different way of putting it: “They have the lowest of living conditions in which old things do not become new.” The accent lies in “become.” It’s a rejection of becoming. But rather are new while being old. Is he saying that the Orient should not become, but merely be; while being old it’s already new. It can only be a new thing while remaining old; if it tries to become something new, it’s not even new, it’s nothing. Because the continuity of self-preservation, the desire to be itself, and so on, this sort of eternal return of the same is lost. You enter the vacuous homogeneous logic of historicism, of humanism, of becoming. So here what Takeuchi and Lu Xun share is this Nietzschean ontology of being against the teleology of becoming. I wonder if we have a better or different way of elaborating on Takeuchi’s intuition of the old and new. We are new while being old. It’s so defiant and so against the grain of all the discourses of modernity, history, progress, cultural comparison. In many ways I see where this would meet with strong opposition as something essentialist or traditionalist or egocentric or, what, exceptionalist. You can label it with all these bad names; and somehow, out of intuition you feel he is capturing something that is so fundamentally right and touching. What is that?

_{Hirakura._}— We are in a difficulty, because in Japan the concept of “oldness” is different than in the U.S. For Japanese the oldness is kind of faint, we don’t have the sense of being old, fundamentally. So it’s difficult to—

_{Zhang._}— It’s not necessarily am empirical, positivistic “old” that can be substantiated in terms of traditional institutions, political system, ancient civilization, texts or classics, but rather a new ontology, a new morality; the old is the radically new.
Kobayashi. — Not morality. I think there is no morality. It’s a matter of residue, of residual being. In all these texts what is the problem is the rest of our being. Because modernization, modernity always reconstructs meaning, sense; so it is a matter of narratives and literature. Literature is a central part of modernity because it is a transition from the meaningless sphere to the sphere where all things begin to have meaning; that is modernity. I think Takeuchi—I don’t know if he is right when he says that there is no resistance—I’m a little dubious—but in comparison with Lu Xun, Takeuchi tries to place Lu Xun in the position of the preservation of old being—Why old? Meaningless. Why does the being resist the whole institution of meaning? This is modernity. All things begin to all of a sudden have meaning. But there’s something in meaning that is not reducible to this meaning, to this operation of meaning and I think that literature is a part. Minor literature touches on what is not reducible to meaning, by way of meaning. Why minor? It is trying to touch on what is, as very old, not present, and meaningless. It’s absolutely tragic because it’s a kind of substance, something like dirt, dust, or meaningless dust like human beings. Lu Xun likes indicators of this residual being, meaningless yet being [nonetheless]. Takeuchi is trying to think about some kind of oriental subject. The old as oriental—always older than occident—but that is meaningless. It’s not morality. If you say morality, you enter the realm of meaning once again. But resistance from the depths of being—just being—that is not from the present; it is from a timeless being.

Sunyi. — The concept of resistance—resistance becomes meaningless. I was thinking why the tension between modernism and postmodernism, why is this idea so popular in Japan or Japanese culture? Is this because of the abandonment of the meaning of resistance, a speedy way of entry into modernism, postmodernism?

Kobayashi. — We should not think that European modernity is completely different from oriental modernity. Modernity always acts in the same way. We are looking at the whole scale of occidental modernity. In each nationalities the same things happen. But you cannot globalize, putting French, German, American literature into the same sack. There is no one occidental modernity. Modernity is
different for every nationality, every literature. You cannot put it in the same range. Chinese modernity is different from Japanese modernity. That’s the problem. So in a context like that we easily compare—but we must be very careful toward the diversity of the appearance, the phenomenon of modernities, must make these comparisons on between all nations.

Ellen.— I like your comment, but I have problem with your explanation. When you say being is a residue of the old, that it means something meaningless, resistance, you are subscribing to a system of meaning. You gave us some examples, dirt, dust. But as far as we know, dust is something meaningful. It is significant in Christianity, to their meaning system that is the origin of modernity. So back to the question of the oriental, the problem is still there. The Orient, the residue of the old, has a system of meaning. My other question is how can the oriental—or I prefer the non-Western, the African, the other for example—how can they make sense of the new system of meaning? And when you say the residue is totally meaningless, then it cannot be subscribed, there is no dialectical issue, no dialectical relation between the old and new.

Kobayashi.— We are old, always old, you are old, even if you are very young, you are old—and new. Yes, at the same time. Because you are being determined in your tradition, in your history. History is like dust. Maybe in another time, in history, it had some meaning. But this meaning was lost, and our being is something like that, historical but nothing meaningful.

Zhang.— I would like to interject here. Some historical specificity should be kept in sight. When I used the word morality, of course I do not mean some kind of moral system or philosophy, but rather it’s the last two arguments Takeuchi made in this article, that is—the new people, the new humanity. The old, when he talks about this conversion in tenko, and reorientation, Takeuchi’s image of Lu Xun ultimately arrives at a concept or image or hope for new people. Revolution, revolutionary masses, social renewal, political renewal. It’s the productivity of a culture, of a society. National renewal, but not in a conventional sense, but in a utopian, productive sense. That’s when he talks about Japan. Again, I think it’s an imagined Japan, conceptu-
ally opposed to this imaginary China. China is a culture or society which is capable of breaking from the past. It’s through this fundamental, radical historical rupture that China negates itself and, through this self-negation, renews itself. Therefore China is old—really, it’s always new; whereas new is always old, because it’s the restoration of the old, the revolutionized reinvention of the old; it’s life after death. Chinese history is marked by all kinds of discontinuities and therefore also by all kinds of renewals whereas Japan never changed—eventually that’s his conclusion. Japan remains the same, the Japanese people are old, in the nihilistic sense, whereas the Chinese people are also old but in terms of renewal. I don’t know whether this contrast has any empirical basis, but it’s how he constructs this concept of renewal. That’s one follow-up to your comment on morality. I truly do not mean moral philosophy or codes or conduct, but rather this expectation for this people or culture’s ability to renew itself through radical self-negation.

Kobayashi. — Do you think Lu Xun has the same hope?

Zhang. — Of course. Lu Xun’s rejection of Chinese tradition is total and damning. He never hesitated to put an end to history. This is the end. No more. The entire Chinese civilization is tantamount to two characters: chi ren, eat people. At the gate of darkness, let children move into the world of brightness, and so on.

Kobayashi. — After “end.” After death, after “end.”

Zhang. — Hope is always there.

Kobayashi. — For me, something remains, the rest remains, after death. Especially in this first essay, “After Death,” he is describing this “rest,” “myself” as the “rest.”

Zhang. — On the other note, regarding national modernities, culture, modernity filtered through national cultures, Takeuchi’s question is conditioned in a very fundamental way by Europe as an embodiment of capitalism, even though Takeuchi rarely talks about capitalism, but rather he focuses on culture, self-preservation, identity, renewal, negation, discontinuity. At the very beginning of this article, the whole framing of the problem has everything to do with capitalism. On page 54, second paragraph: “When Europe brought over to the Orient its modes of production…” Modes of production. This is
the impact. It’s not the French brought along French literature or the
Germans their German Romanticism or the English came with the
eighteenth-century novel, which Julian loves—but rather, collectively,
in abstraction. Europe means a particular mode of production. And
he says social institutions. Doesn’t matter it’s German or French. It’s
modern, it’s new. It’s something the Orient has never seen before and
could not resist. And the human consciousness, that’s also European.
When you talk at this level of generalization it doesn’t matter whether
it’s French or German or English or even Russian. It’s the human con-
sciousness that accompanies these new things that were born in the
Orient that had never previously existed. We had never had them
before. The Europeans for the first time in history brought along
these new things. Although Europe did not bring these things to the
Orient in order to give birth to those new things—this is the critical
part in Takeuchi—(today of course the situation is different) that of
course is the result. Oriental modernity is the result of these histori-
cally new things that Europeans brought to the Orient. I do not
know if the European invasion of the Orient was based upon the will
of capital, the speculative spirit of adventure, the puritan spirit of pio-
neering, or yet another instinct for self-expansion. I don’t know,
maybe it’s a combination of all these things. But the result is this. So
here, at a level of generality, Takeuchi is talking about something very
specific, we tend to reduce that to capitalism but it’s more than capi-
talism. It’s the historically new that the Orient never had:
individualism, democracy, political institutions, social institutions,
modes of production. In that sense, it’s still possible for Takeuchi to
talk about Europe and the Orient as two blocks.

Kobayashi.— All these things are based on the key concept of the
self, I think. For Takeuchi, the European impact is the force of the
self. What does it mean for Takeuchi, “self”? It’s very strange. The
“Self” in the context of Takeuchi’s writing, is it the individual self or
the cultural self? What is it?

Zhang.— I believe it is a historical category, a European invention.
It’s invented by Europeans in their own struggle. To overcome the
trauma of modernity. Because Europeans also experience this rupture,
also experience this self-alienation, this very profound homelessness,
loss of culture or identity; and yet the Europeans, by being at the forefront of this in terms of their struggle to maintain a certain sense or awareness or consciousness of self-preservation, a modern identity is invented, and that is called a self. Afterwards everyone else, all the other nations, will have to respond to this much stronger, much more productive, more agonized mode of being, compared to which all the other, traditional ways of being are simply too weak, too unreflexive, wishy-washy, because they have never gone through the stages of self-negation and self-renewal. They have never encountered such profound rupture as Europeans encountered. I don't think self here is a cultural category at all. In Takeuchi’s reading of Lu Xun, he teases out all of these historical political visions and experiences. For example, on page 75, the last paragraph: “As types, I believe that Japanese culture is based on tenko, whereas Chinese culture is based on conversion.” Tenko is like turning, right? Turning, changing the direction, changing the force; whereas conversion means revolving around the same center or orbit, over and over again. “Japanese culture never underwent the historical discontinuity of revolution; it never experienced new birth and the revival of the old by severing itself from the past.” So too much continuity; whereas the Chinese history is marked by discontinuity. “In other words, its history was never rewritten.” It’s the same history. The same text. Whereas China as a text has been rewritten over and over again. And Lu Xun’s texts are considered another layer of rewriting of Chinese history, of Chinese culture. “Thus there are no new people. In Japanese culture, new things always become old without old things becoming new. This culture is structurally unproductive; it proceeds from life to death, never from death to rebirth.” That’s what Chris referred to as this kind of structurally, formalistic—is that what you—yes, this is the paragraph.

And when he talks about Chinese literature, he is really talking about the Chinese literary revolution, the vernacular revolution, this breaking from tradition, this reinventing of the new, new language, a new form, a new style, and a new subjectivity. And he goes on: “Lu Xun's principle is not suitable for Japan, as can be understood by comparing Futabatei Shimei’s genbun itchi movement with the Chi-
nese “Literary Revolution” of 1917. It is commonly said the “Literary Revolution” began with Hu Shi’s vernacular movement, the introduction of modern European literature, and the destruction of Chinese tradition. This is correct.” This is correct, as we know. “But the driving force behind this was more fundamental.” That more fundamental driving force beneath the surface of self-negation via the detour of Europeanization, vernacularization, or popularization is what Zhou Zuoren in his *Sources of Modern Chinese Literature* refers to as this tendency toward restoration. It’s the same sort of conversion over and over again, rupture, self-reinvention, the sort of back and forth, this rhythm of the original, claiming new phenomena, new materials to continue this stream or source of literary tradition. So I think this is a sort of footnote to the old. What is old is the radically new as a negation and reinvention of the past. But through revolution, through break, through rupture. “For it negated the movement from within.” This “movement” refers to the new literary movement, the vernacular revolution; but there is a negation of the new from within. And that is the old. The old, in other words, is newer than the new. Lu Xun was at the center of this. So within a particular literary history, that’s how Takeuchi situates Lu Xun. I think that’s a very clear explanation of what he means by old and new.

*Chris.*— Is he really talking about China?

*Zhang.*— I agree that probably this is an idealized image of Lu Xun, or idealized image of China; to that extent it is fundamentally a piece of self-critique by a critical Japanese intellectual about Japanese modernity. But I still think this piece bears keen observations and critical insights on Lu Xun, on modern Chinese literature. It was written in 1948, the post-war period, on the eve of the founding of the People’s Republic. Obviously part of the context was Chinese revolution, this last revolution, collective struggle or collective choice that is very very different from post-war Japan’s becoming absorbed into American orbit, the Cold War world order. China just broke away in terms of this unknown, exciting, but also terrifying collective experiment called revolution. Probably also Takeuchi’s hope for collective practice that would create a new road. That is another central image of Lu Xun: there is no road on earth, but if a lot of people go
down the same route a road is made. This is the sort of utopian longing for something new. The new not in the sense of modernity, revolution, every revolution is a restoration, every historical break brings about the new and yet also subverts the new in this historicist sense. And it forms a constellation between past and present, in other words. In Benjamin’s language. Every revolution reactivates the past and reconfigures the sky, just like stars—a new star coming into being subtly and yet dramatically changes the circumference of the sky.

_Nakajima._— Probably 15 years later, Takeuchi admitted that even Japan had a chance to resist against the Occident, that it failed the peace agreement between the Japanese and American governments. It was renewed and all of a sudden the student movement occurred, Takeuchi saw this movement as a resistance which had to occur in 1945. That’s a very curious spectacle for this movement. That is why Takeuchi was criticized by the new young generation, like Yoshimoto Ryumei or Kaiko Ken, but I think this Japanese movement of resistance was quite important because at that time Takeuchi thought the most essential theme in this anti-peace agreement between the two was the problem of China. China is the center, the key of Japanese resistance. If we see China as a problem for Japanese resistance, we can treat the sense of Japanese modernity. Especially in this paper, written in 1948. Ironically speaking, what Takeuchi forgot was the fact of China. As you may imagine, Japanese modernity faced European modernity and China as the past. So when Takeuchi said Japan is nothingness, that means Japan is more occidental than the occident, or less oriental than the Orient. That depends on the negation of China in the history of Japanese modernity. As for Lu Xun, he can translate Chinese into Chinese. This kind of project of self-translation included a set of negation, resistance, such literary Hegelian subversion. But as for Japan there is no such self-translation, self-negation. Negation of China, very odd task for Japanese intellectuals, they put China in the shadow of Japanese modernity. That’s why Japanese modernity never preserved its past as past, because that past is China itself. So just abandoned, just forgotten, just put it away. That is the task for Japanese intellectuals at the time. If we think of China as a problem, it still remains in the center problematic of Japanese moder-
nity or literature, then yeah, I think this paper is very ironic. Even Takeuchi, who is very famous in Japan, he ignores such as problematic more than Japanese history.

**Zhang.**— So he also separates Japan from China by idealizing China as the sort of opposite of Japan.

**Nakajima.**— That is a very familiar way of Japanese modernity. Very similar to Kyoto school, or Tokyo school. Takeuchi never escaped from such modern Japanese discourses in this paper.

**Zhang.**— This is not to save Takeuchi from what you say about him, but he does say something which I thought could lead to a more historical or inclusive understanding of its own past. That is the image of the trope of pain. Bodily pain. Another truly striking thing he said: Japan never received things from outside as pain. Supposed to be European impact, in China it’s felt as pain because my body is being violated, we have to absorb this bodily intrusion of an alien object, and how to absorb it, how to resist it, how to reject it. The whole thing, if we follow his trope, if the Chinese cultural tradition can be imagined as a body, then pain probably is a central question or phenomenon of Chinese modernity. How to deal with this, the other, the external, which is now part of the internal? You cannot separate it anymore, you have to resolve this, you have to reconcile. And with Japan, as you just said, if it’s pain, then what caused this pain might be our past, the backwardness—but that’s China. If we separate it, the rest is pleasure, the rest is healthiness. Another stereotypical caricature of Japan. But this pain dialectically also is something that unifies oriental modernity. This vibration, this resonance of pain, we could have sympathy pains if we see the Chinese pain as Japanese pain or vice-versa—all this started, literally, when Lu Xun’s brother translating world literature. It’s translation of pain from other smaller nations, from all these nations destroyed, all these cultures threatened, with this consciousness of feeling other people’s pain, or projecting your own pain. Experiencing things from outside as pain actually opens possibilities, even for people like Takeuchi to engage in more intimate dialogue with different experiences. It has never received them in its resistance to them. So pain and resistance seem to be linked to one another in this experience of modernity.
Nakajima.— Certainly. Japan never escaped from such pain at all. Because to put pain in China, such a strategy has never succeeded. So the Japanese pain is always doubled and Takeuchi found the possibility of resistance in Japanese postmodern history. The first time to think about China as pain and that time he once again reintroduces the notion of modernity to support such amitié, or inter-relationship, through the pain. So Takeuchi is not a simplified guy, we have to analyze his discourses very subtly but different discourses in one problematic. We can explain the meaning of Takeuchi’s intention more clearly.

Zhang.— Absolutely. There is a sense of a deep anxiety and longing as Japan turned into the so-called post-war world order, joining the Americanized world. We could see that. But I think his specific reading of Lu Xun is also very incisive and instructive at least to me in that he really captures this impossibility very nicely, this ability for Lu Xun to remain at the heart of the impossible, self-negation without becoming anything else. What kind of position is that, becoming new while being old, not finding an easy way out, engaging in a literary revolution while running against it, all these things speak to at least my personal experience of Lu Xun, in Takeuchi. I haven’t read anything in Chinese about Lu Xun that captures this paradox, tragedy and productivity of his writing so precisely and so dramatically. Regardless of his own allegory, national allegory on Japan, this reading of Lu Xun shows his profound sympathy and intimate understanding that was very useful to me.

Nakajima.— As you say, Ye Cao, it is the most wonderful masterpiece of Lu Xun’s works.

Zhang.— But we found it extremely hard nut to crack. The pieces seem to resist analysis or interpretation.

Kobayashi.— Is there someone who comments on the writing after death? What does it mean? Writing or after death? Not after death, but writing. It’s not reality, it’s something like a dream, a nightmare, but it never happened, so it’s only through the writing that you can make an analogy after the end. My question is, what’s the function of this writing?

Zhang.— Of course we mustn’t forget the first sentence: “I
dreamed I had died by the roadside.” This is a traveler, someone with a destiny, but he dies on the way, by the roadside. So there is a sense of unfinished, suspended journey.

Kobayashi. — Do you think it is possible to dream of your death? After dying? Is it possible to dream of yourself after your own death? I think it is not possible. I don’t know, is it?

Zhang. — Is it humanly possible.

Kobayashi. — We can ask Freud.

Julian. — You can’t distance yourself from the points of talking about life after death, but it’s an idea within society to concede that.

Zhang. — I wouldn’t think it’s impossible. We can dream about anything.

Kobayashi. — What’s the central matter of this writing? Why does he write this essay “After Death”?

Chris. — But I’m wondering what is that death. He portrays a specific kind of death here. A death split between the body and the mind, but the body is still here. I guess it’s a matter of what kind of death is seen here, a kind of death that has no outside, more excruciating.

Kobayashi. — But obviously he is not dead because he has consciousness.

Zhang. — He can feel, sensations.

Kobayashi. — His consciousness is of his body and all the sensations of body.

Zhang. — He’s surrounded by all these unpleasant things. Attacked by others. This sense of defenselessness: I cannot do anything about it but I can see, can feel. In a way this is a nightmare, do you agree? This is not a happy dream. It’s the worst scenario in that sense. Lu Xun always fights back, he never forgives, and he always pursues his enemy. But what if he lies there completely debilitated, cannot fight back any more, so he’s reduced to sheer awareness.

Kobayashi. — But he is in a box, a coffin. What is a coffin?

Nakajima. — A coffin of writing. Because I had a chance to writing something about this years ago, at that time I pointed out the essence of this is the nightmare of reading a book even after death, there is no hope, no outside, of writing or écriture, that would be the
most desperate. The walls are writing, every wall you see is written in ancient language or foreign language, I’m not sure, but we are surrounded by such ecritures, languages, writings.

_Zhang._— Yes he’s like to describe this box, this closed box.

_Nakajima._— Yes so the question is arising how can we escape?

_Zhang._— But there are only two nails. So there is still some of possibility for breathing. So there is a little chance left. Supposedly there are many more nails. But it’s incomplete. Even this burial, this ceremony is incomplete. In another piece, the Mum u jiewen [?] epitaph, The tomb is wide open, the protagonist could literally walk to the back of the tomb and look inside, at the body with the organs; but here what is most stressful, if I could put myself in this nightmare, what makes me most uncomfortable is the incompleteness of death.

_Nakajima._— It prolongs the pain.


_Zhang._— Again structurally it is significant that this precedes “Such a Fighter.” In “Such a Fighter” it’s the fighting. But in this it’s the allegory terms of the anxiety and pain; but nonetheless they talk about the same thing, this perpetual suffering or struggle of life. Nothing could bring it to an end, even death doesn’t change anything. I like this image of writing. You are really trapped in this symbolic order of text, or this or that. But this encounter with the crowd, with gossip, with passersby, mundane noises, spectators. This sense of the street, it’s still wide open. There’s a sense of suffocation, of course, but the suffocation is still situated in the social context. You have all the usual characters of Lu Xun’s writing, they are still bothering the dead. No break from life.

_Kobayashi._— Besides being old, suffering, being old is suffering, pain, meaningless pain.

_Nakajima._— If my memory is correct, the fighter finally appears Lu Xun does not assert, this fighter will be able to save the people or disrupt this world, his hesitation remains at the end of this, right?

_Zhang._— It ends with “At last he grows old… ” So the fighter dies. Not a fighter after all. “In such a place, no battle cry is heard.” So finally there is peace… but he raises his javelin. No peace. So you
see the symmetricality of these pieces. One is death cannot be achieved, in the other peace cannot be achieved. The fighter even after his death will be in a fight. In a more soldierly, heroic mode of being. Whereas the previous piece is in this more tragic, passive state of being. But they are really talking about the same thing.

Pu.— The death is an incomplete one, and I think this is a guiding theme in the collection. Because death is always incomplete, insufficient, always leads us back to the Foreword in which the eruption of subterranean fire will consume all, leaving nothing to decay. So the death and decay of wild grass are themselves incomplete, just like the death of the fighter. Then you have the haunting dreams histories memories returning after death and decay. But Lu Xun also points to another death, the death of death, in a sense, which completes this death and makes this after-death life impossible.

Zhuo.— Death in Lu Xun’s text … [inaudible]

Zhang.— We probably have to wrap up. But a word on the image of wild grass at least in the Foreword which calls for swift death. Wild grass is a state of being which longs for its swift death, because in its death, its eternity is guaranteed. Death brings about its renewal.

Nakajima.— In the same line the swift death is needed to make proof of existence.

Zhang.— So this idealism, romanticism, in the Foreword is negated in the text. A long painful endless death which never ends. Death is turned into an eternity. So this is kind of a nihilism against nihilism that is stronger than nihilism, which is also sort of a Nietszchean observation.