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A New Persona of an Old Paragon: Youth-Driven Reinvention of Lu Xun's Visual Representation in Post-2010 Chinese Internet Art

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#### **Publication Date**

2024

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

A New Persona of an Old Paragon: Youth-Driven Reinvention of Lu Xun's Visual  
Representation in Post-2010 Chinese Internet Art

By

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THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Art History

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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2024



## **Abstract**

Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936), a prominent Chinese writer, holds a significant place in the annals of modern Chinese literature and pro-democracy movements due to his notable contributions. Consequently, his visual representations have been continuously reimagined by various groups for diverse purposes, making him a celebrated paragon in modern Chinese art. In the post-2010 era of Chinese social media, Lu Xun-themed memes created by Chinese youth gained popularity, leading to the emergence of Lu Xun-themed cultural creative commodities. These cultural creative commodities transitioned into tangible art pieces through traditional art institutions, indicating the Chinese youth's fascination with reimagining Lu Xun's visual representations on social media platforms and generating a cycle of virtual and physical depictions. Previous studies have primarily focused on textual exchanges among internet users, neglecting the widespread artistic representations of Lu Xun-themed on Chinese social media platforms and the reason behind their creation and appeal among young audiences. In this thesis, I argue the contemporary societal challenges faced by Chinese youth with Lu Xun's new visual representations as a powerful social commentary in the internet age.

**Keywords:** Lu Xun; Visual representation; Chinese internet art; Memes; Cultural creative commodities; Chinese youth; Social media; Post-2010 era; Youth culture

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## Introduction

Amidst the rapid expansion of the internet and smartphones in the twenty-first century, the release and widespread online circulation of images and items have markedly grown. It is precisely within this realm of emergent net art that memes and creative products inspired by Lu Xun have ascended as contemporary visual representations of this venerable figure. These new visual representations mark a new epoch in the visual lexicon of Lu Xun within an art historical narrative.

Who is Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936)? He is widely known as a Chinese writer important for the modern history of China. In May 1918, Lu Xun, born Shaoxing 绍兴, published “Diary of a Madman,” the first modern vernacular Chinese short story, in the fourth volume of *La Jeunesse* (新青年 *Xin Qingnian*) (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> This marked the begin of his literary achievements, and him as a founder of modern Chinese literature.

In addition to his renown as a writer, Lu Xun showed extraordinary talent in the visual arts, playing a crucial role in advancing the act of modern China. In the 1920s, while working for the Ministry of Education, he actively advocated for the development of Chinese art education and even designed the logo for Peking University, one of China’s top universities (Figure 2). He maintained close ties with contemporary artists, inspiring many, especially graphic novelists and printmakers.<sup>2</sup> As well, Lu Xun’s legacy is also closely tied to the study of China’s art history.

Beyond literature and art, Lu Xun was also actively involved in China’s modern

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<sup>1</sup> Lu Xun 鲁迅, “Kuangren Riji” 狂人日记 [Diary of a madman], *La Jeunesse* 新青年, Vol. 4, No. 5 (May 1918): 414–24.

<sup>2</sup> Oriental Horizon 东方时空, “Liqun—Wo yanzhong de Luxun 力群——我眼中的鲁迅” [Li Qun—Lu Xun in my eyes], last modified March 18, 2009, [http://art.china.cn/mjda/2009-03/18/content\\_2798256.htm](http://art.china.cn/mjda/2009-03/18/content_2798256.htm).

democratic revolution. In 1930, he helped establish the League for Civil Rights to oppose the rule of the Republic of China government and fight for freedom of speech, publication, association, and opportunity.<sup>3</sup> In the same year, Lu Xun became one of the co-founders of the League of Left-Wing Writers. He and his members tried to support the communist revolution. With considerable political clout, Lu Xun stands as an essential pillar in the annals of China's history. His multifaceted contributions established him as a paragon of public social commentary in the chronicles of the country's contemporary era.

Since 2010, Lu Xun has emerged as a prominent internet personality on social media platforms in China. By the end of 2023, over half a million postings related to Lu Xun were posted on *Xiaohongshu* 小红书 (Little red book), a social media platform founded for public communication by Miranda Qu and Charlwin Mao in 2013.<sup>4</sup> Xiaohongshu is a social media platform for data visualization. Among Chinese writers both ancient and modern to show up on Xiaohongshu, Lu Xun and Tang Dynasty (618–907) poet Li Bai 李白 (701–762) have nearly 300 million reads on Xiaohongshu. Lu Xun ranks second, just below the poet Li Bai and well above other luminaries like Du Fu 杜甫 (712–770), Su Shi 苏轼 (1037–1101), and contemporary Nobel laureate Mo Yan 莫言 (b. 1955). Other contemporary writers like Bing Xin 冰心 (1900–1999), Shen Congwen 沈从文 (1902–1988), and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978) have less than 100,000 related content on the platform. From the

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<sup>3</sup> Zhang Wujun 张武军, “‘Zhongguo gaoerji’ yu ‘zhengzhijia’ Lu Xun” ‘中国高尔基’与‘政治家’鲁迅” [‘Chinese Gorky’ and ‘Politician’ Lu Xun], *Yishu pinglun* 艺术评论, No. 12 (2012): 92–111.

<sup>4</sup> All statistics in this paragraph are summarized from the author's search in Xiaohongshu.

publication of “Diary of a Madman” in a print journal in 1918 to the Chinese social media of 2023, Lu Xun has always been remembered by the Chinese people.

Lu Xun’s legacy persists in Chinese society, inspiring generations of artists to visually interpret his traits. These portrayals significantly contribute to his enduring place in modern Chinese history and culture. The array of Lu Xun’s depictions marks a distinct narrative of reception and representation.

The history of Lu Xun’s visual representations reflects the evolution of eras and political shifts. These embodying shifts in thought, values, and ideological orientations, hold significant scholarly value. Much art historical focus has been on analyzing the artistic techniques within Lu Xun’s portraits.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, studying the semiotic meaning of Lu Xun’s portraits using semiotic theory has also become a new research topic and a topic that focuses on the artistic skill of the artists.<sup>6</sup> In 2023, art historian Lena Henningsen published a study on the reinterpretation of Lu Xun through *Lianhuanhua* 连环画—Chinese graphic novels—in post-Mao China. This research not only underscored Lu Xun’s paramount status as a literary and revolutionary figure in China but also analyzed the reasons for his portrayal as one of the icons of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda in visual representations of Lu Xun during that

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<sup>5</sup> Tang Dongyan 唐东堰, *Luxun yu ershi shiji Zhongguo chuanmei fazhan* 鲁迅与 20 世纪中国传媒发展 [Lu Xun and the development of Chinese Media in the 20th century] (Nanchang: Baihuazhou Press, 2018), 113. There have been many studies on graphic novels featuring Lu Xun's novels, the most representative of which is Xiang Hong's thesis, in which the author analyzes graphic novels across disciplines from the perspectives of literary history and art history. Xiang Hong 向红, *Guanyu Luxun de wenxue yu meishu zhi guanxi de kuaxueke yanjiu* 关于鲁迅的文学与美术之关系的跨学科研究 [An interdisciplinary study on the relationship between Lu Xun's literature and fine arts] (Changsha: Hunan Normal University, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Sun Jinlong 孙金龙, “Luxun zuowei fuhao yinfa de quntijiyi—wenchuangchanpin sheji zhong de qinggantushi yanjiu” 鲁迅作为符号引发的群体记忆——文创产品设计中的情感图式研究 [Group Memory Triggered by Lu Xun as a Symbol—A Study of Emotional Schema in the Design of Cultural and Creative Products], *Luxun yanjiu yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Vol. 5 (July 2022): 92–5.

period.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the new trend in art historical research on Lu Xun has been to specifically investigate the transformations in the roles Lu Xun occupies across different periods through his visual representations.

With China's entry into the internet age, scholars of communication studies have kept begun to explore the visual representations of Lu Xun. From 2000 to 2010, while Lu Xun-themed content disseminated on the internet was predominantly reshaped by bloggers through text, visual creations related to Lu Xun themes gradually emerged.<sup>8</sup> Visual artistic creations associated with Lu Xun, such as comics and Flash video productions, have entered the scholarly field as subjects of evidence and research. These studies in the field of communication have expanded Lu Xun-themed research in the digital era to include not only text but also visual content.

Since 2010, internet-born memes have supplanted comics and Flash creations as the prevalent medium for reshaping Lu Xun's visual representation. In this era, visual language became predominant on social media platforms. Researchers recognize that China's youth favor polysemous memes, such as the "smile" emoji used to express a range of emotions from speechlessness to frustration and anger (Figure 3).<sup>9</sup> The widespread creation and use of memes have allowed Chinese youth to carve out a broader and freer space online, which includes the crafting and dissemination of Lu Xun-related memes.

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<sup>7</sup> Wang Kaimin 王开敏, *Xiaoxiang fuhao zai dangdai muban chuangzuo zhong de biao xian* 肖像符号在当代木版创作中的表现 [Research on the Symbol of Contemporary Portrait Printmaking] (Chongqing: Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, 2015); Lena Henningsen, "Lost in Adaptation—or Gained? The Refashioning of Lu Xun and His Works in Post-Mao Chinese Comic Art," Unpublished paper presented to the Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Tang, *Luxun yu ershi shiji*, 159–66.

<sup>9</sup> Geert Lovink, *Social Media Abyss: Critical Internet Cultures and the Force of Negation* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016).



Following 2010, the preference for Lu Xun-related memes among China's youth grew with the rise of social media platforms like *Weibo* 微博 (Microblog), *WeChat* (微信 Weixin), and Xiaohongshu. These memes' propagation has fostered active visual engagement with Lu Xun's representations, transitioning from virtual networks to tangible reality. The youth's favored Lu Xun-themed cultural and creative commodities have ushered in new opportunities for museums and exhibitions dedicated to Lu Xun. While research on these new art forms has increased over the past decade, it often merely regards young people only as consumers.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to intellectuals and artists, the public—especially the main participants in the mobile internet era, Chinese youth—have rarely been seen as creators of Lu Xun's visual representation in past research.

The intersection of youth and Lu Xun's works remains a focal point in examining the relationship between Lu Xun and Chinese youth. Studies on the selection and deletion of Lu Xun's writings in middle school textbooks over the past two decades, and interviews with Beijing's university and high school students about their interpretations of his works, afford insights into why Lu Xun's literature is important to Chinese youth.<sup>11</sup> However, the reasons why today's youth engage with Lu Xun, reshape his imagery, and maintain his influence on contemporary Chinese social media are not yet clear.

This thesis, set against the backdrop of hot topics on Chinese social media from

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<sup>10</sup> Yang Yecheng 杨晔城, "Luxun wenhualei wenchuangchanpin jiazhilun" 鲁迅文化类文创产品价值论 [Lu Xun Cultural Spinoffs Value Theory], *Luxun yanjiu yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, Vol. 3 (March 2016): 54–8.

<sup>11</sup> Tang, *Luxun yu ershi shiji*, 104–32; Qian Liqun 钱理群, *Luxun yu dangdai Zhongguo* 鲁迅与当代中国 [Lu Xun and Contemporary China] (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2017), 396–430.

2010 to 2023, investigates why Lu Xun, an old paragon with a unique historical status in modern China, has become an effective social media influencer in Chinese internet art. In linking the contemporary societal challenges faced by Chinese youth with the resurgence of Lu Xun's new visual representations in digital media, it demonstrates how artists as netizens are using the internet as a platform for a powerful social commentary. This research helps us better understand how informs the nexus between past historical narratives and the burgeoning landscape of internet art, providing a barometer for the evolution of public art expression in the digital epoch.

### **Pre-Internet Era Visual Representations of Lu Xun**

In the 1930s, Lu Xun emerged as a mentor to modern Chinese woodcut artists. He advocated for the introduction of Western printmaking into China. He also championed the use of contemporaries European woodcut artists' realist traits in depictions of poverty and response to war, thereby establishing the realist characteristics of modern Chinese fine arts. To support this endeavor beginning in 1927, he started collecting foreign prints. In 1931, by founding China's first woodcut print workshop, he cultivated a generation of young woodcut artists. (Figure 4).<sup>12</sup> Owing to his substantial contributions to the development of modern Chinese woodcut art, young artists crafted many woodcut portraits of him. To this day, woodcut prints constitute the majority of his portraits.<sup>13</sup> Thus, after the workshop's closure in 1931, these portraits by woodcut artists who saw Lu Xun as a mentor became the principal mode of his visual

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<sup>12</sup> Huang Qiaosheng 黄乔生, ed., *Luxun yingji* 鲁迅影集 [Lu Xun's Photographs] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2018), 138–39.

<sup>13</sup> Li Ye 李焯, "Gaoshan yangzhi" 高山仰止 [Admire greatly], in *Luxun meishu xingxiang xuan* 鲁迅美术形象选 [Fine Art Images of Lu Xun], ed. Beijing Luxun bowuguan. Chenliebu 北京鲁迅博物馆. 陈列部 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin meishu chubanshe, 1986), 1–2.

representation until 1949.

The woodcut print of Lu Xun by artist Li Qun 力群 (1912–2012) from 1935 to 1936 stands as the most iconic of all his woodcut portraits (Figure 5). Li Qun, in his later years, continued to honor Lu Xun as his idol and mentor, even creating a posthumous portrait in 1936 (Figure 6).<sup>14</sup> In this portrait of Lu Xun, Li Qun’s use of the woodcut knife’s triangular grooves imbued the facial lines with vigor.<sup>15</sup> He also incorporated a sickle, an edge tool of the laboring masses, in the upper left corner. Below the sickle, a hand in a combative pose grips a pen pointing towards a dog beneath it, a traditional Chinese symbol for the base and vile. In the upper right corner, books arranged on a shelf appear. Through symbols like the sickle, pen, dog, and books, Li Qun aimed to present a writer of indomitable spirit and a revolutionary who opposed feudal servility. Prior to 1949, artists like Li Qun characteristically emphasized and highlighted Lu Xun’s identity as a writer and revolutionary in their woodcuts.

In the period preceding 1949, young woodcut artists exerted influence through interactions with writers and literary critics. In 1936, Huang Xinbo 黄新波 (1916–1980), created a posthumous portrait of Lu Xun, published in a literary magazine, and penned a eulogy.<sup>16</sup> In the 1930s, Huang frequently illustrated newly published novels with his woodcuts, and actively collaborated with literary critic Hu Feng 胡风 (1902–

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<sup>14</sup> Li Qun 力群, “Aidao Luxun xiansheng jinian huaji: yirong suxie (huatu)” 哀悼鲁迅先生纪念画辑: 遗容速写 (画图) [Mourning Mr. Lu Xun Memorial Collection: Sketches of His Remains (Drawing)], *Zhongliu (Shanghai 1936)* 中流 (上海 1936), Vol. 1, No. 5 (1936): 1.

<sup>15</sup> Li Qun 力群, “Luxun xiang (muke)” 鲁迅像 (木刻) [Lu Xun Portrait (Woodcut)], *Zuojia (Shanghai)* 作家 (上海), Vol. 2, No. 1 (1936): 1.

<sup>16</sup> Huang Xinbo 黄新波, “Muke: Luxun xiansheng” 木刻: 鲁迅先生 [Woodcut: Lu Xun], *Xiaoshuojia* 小说家, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1936): 1; Huang Xinbo 黄新波, “Chentong de aisi: dao Luxun xiansheng” 沉痛的哀思: 悼鲁迅先生 [Sorrowful Thoughts: Mourning Lu Xun], *Xiaoshuojia* 小说家, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1936): 1.

1985), a co-founder alongside Lu Xun of the League of Left-Wing Writers. Hu Feng wrote the preface for Huang's collection of woodcuts published in 1937.<sup>17</sup> Before 1949, the relationship between woodcut artists and literati, tied by Lu Xun, was intimate.

In the years leading up to 1949, affected by both World War II and the Chinese Civil War, woodcut artists exchanged art through letters with friends, peers, and writers, as well, published works in literary magazines. Among these, Li Qun and Huang Xinbo's woodcut portraits of Lu Xun from 1936 were publicly released in Shanghai's literary magazines, many of which ceased publication within a year due to the chaotic situation and the Japanese invasion. Li Qun's *Portrait of Lu Xun*, created the day after Lu's death on October 20, 1936, was reprinted by the influential Shanghai newspaper *Ta Kung Pao* illustrate news of his passing. This portrait, however, was not the focus of the news and, along with the photographs of Lu Xun published alongside, was considered a minor aspect in the debate over Lu Xun's contributions to literature.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, even though the visual representations of Lu Xun created by young woodcut artists were influential in small artistic and literary groups, they remained unfamiliar to the broader public.

After Lu Xun died in 1936, both the Nationalist Party (KMT) and the CCP used him as a political pawn. On October 19, 1937, Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976), then director of the Political Department of the Central Military Commission of the CCP, publicly presented *On Lu Xun* (论鲁迅 Lun Lu Xun) on the first anniversary of Lu

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<sup>17</sup> Hu Feng 胡风, "Xinbo di muke: Xinbo muke jixu" 新波底木刻: 新波木刻集序 [Xinbo Woodcut: Xinbo Woodcut collection Preface], *Gongzuo yu xuexi congkan* 工作与学习丛刊, No. 2 (1937): 178–80.

<sup>18</sup> Fu Guoyong 傅国涌, "Dagongbao pingjia Luxun qi fengbo" 《大公报》评价鲁迅起风波 [Ta Kung Pao's evaluation of Lu Xun caused a stir], *Yuwen xinpu* 语文新圃, No. 12 (2009): 37–8.

Xun's death.<sup>19</sup> In his speech, Mao emphasized, "We commemorate him not just because he was a great writer, but because he was a vanguard of national liberation, greatly aiding the revolution... Confucius was the sage of feudal society, Lu Xun is the sage of modern China."<sup>20</sup> From 1937 to the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) by the CCP in 1949, the CCP always honored Lu Xun. In Taiwan, up to 1947, Lu Xun and his works continued to influence Taiwanese culture and intellectual youth.<sup>21</sup> The tenth anniversary of Lu Xun's death in 1946 sparked nationwide commemoration, including Taiwan.<sup>22</sup> By July 1947, the Civil War had reached the banks of the Yangtze River. The war situation, unfavorable to the Nationalist government, led to a gradual decline in public discussions in Taiwan about Lu Xun, one of the founders of the League of Left-Wing Writers that had opposed Chiang Kai-shek's 蒋介石 (1887-1975) leadership.<sup>23</sup> After the Shanghai Campaign in May 1949, the defeated KMT retreated to Taiwan and that same month, they began to implement strict censorship on public publications such as news, magazines, and books.<sup>24</sup> The KMT government, led by Chiang Kai-shek, urgently needed to consolidate its rule in Taiwan. The cultural sector in Taiwan became silent on Lu Xun, the "dissident." In contrast, the CCP, led by Mao Zedong, consistently promoted Lu Xun as a "vanguard of national liberation."<sup>25</sup> The differing political needs of the KMT and CCP polarized official

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<sup>19</sup> Mao Zedong, "Lun Lu Xun" 论鲁迅 [On Lu Xun], *Renmin ribao* 人民日报, September 22, 1981.

<sup>20</sup> Mao, "Lun Lu Xun".

<sup>21</sup> Jian-Ming Tseng 曾健民, "Tan 'Lu Xun zai Taiwan' yi 1946 nian Liangan gongtong de Lu Xun rechao wei zhongxin" 谈'鲁迅在台湾'以 1946 年两岸共同的鲁迅热潮为中心 [Lu Xun in Taiwan—Focusing on the Raising Tide of Lu Xun in Mainland China and Taiwan in 1946], *Taiwan shehui yanjiu jikan* 台湾社会研究季刊, Vol. 77 (March 2010): 261–72.

<sup>22</sup> Tseng, "Tan 'Lu Xun zai Taiwan' ," 263–72.

<sup>23</sup> Tseng, "Tan 'Lu Xun zai Taiwan' ," 272.

<sup>24</sup> Tseng, "Tan 'Lu Xun zai Taiwan' ," 273.

<sup>25</sup> Mao, "Lun Lu Xun".

evaluations of Lu Xun in mainland China and Taiwan. To highlight the superiority of party ideology, Lu Xun, who was prohibited from discussion in Taiwan, became a national propaganda icon in the PRC established by the CCP.

After the founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, the function of visual representations of Lu Xun shifted from reflecting the will of young woodcut artists to embodying the will of the state. One indication of this abrupt shift was that on October 15, 1949, Xinhua News Agency issued a call to prepare for the thirteenth anniversary of Lu Xun's death. This news report particularly emphasized that it was "the first anniversary of Lu Xun's death after the establishment of the People's Republic of China."<sup>26</sup> The *People's Daily* (人民日报 *Renmin ribao*), with its six pages, dedicated over a third of its content to articles and reports about Lu Xun.<sup>27</sup> *People's Daily* was founded on June 15, 1946, and has been the official voice of the CCP since 1948.<sup>28</sup> The report indicated that since the nation's founding, commemorating Lu Xun has reached the status of national memorialization. On November 2, 1949, the Taiwanese government announced a list of hundreds of banned books, including the "Complete Works of Lu Xun."<sup>29</sup> Henceforth, Lu Xun became labeled as a "comrade-in-arms with the CCP" by anti-communist intellectuals in Taiwan and was banned for thirty years.<sup>30</sup> Although having passed away 13 years prior, Lu Xun remained a figure active in the political struggles between parties in 1949. Consequently, after the founding of the PRC,

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<sup>26</sup> Shi Jianguo 史建国, *Zaichang yu fangu* 在场与反顾 [Now and reflect] (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 2021), 149.

<sup>27</sup> Shi, *Zaichang yu fangu*, 151.

<sup>28</sup> People's Daily 人民日报, "Baoshe jianjie" 报社简介 [Introduction], accessed May 2022. <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/50142/104580/index.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Tseng, "Tan 'Lu Xun zai Taiwan'," 273.

<sup>30</sup> Tseng, "Tan 'Lu Xun zai Taiwan'," 274.

the state could craft new visual representations of Lu Xun as a propaganda icon of the PRC. Crafting new visual representations of Lu Xun had become an important issue in the PRC.

In creating new public visual representations of Lu Xun, the state needed to utilize art forms with influential reach. China's graphic novels, known as *Lianhuanhua*, meaning a series of narrative pictures, covered a wide range of subjects and appealed to all ages. Lianhuanhua artists actively incorporated a wide range of artistic styles and influences. Traditional Chinese painting, watercolor, printmaking, and sketching became common styles within these books (Figure 7). Each page of a lianhuanhua could be considered an independent artwork, accompanied by a text narrative that required readers to use their imagination to connect the images with the text (Figure 7). The size of lianhuanhua, close to that of an adult's palm (Figure 8), made them easy to read, carry, and share. Lianhuanhua stands were usually set up on the streets, often surrounded by groups of youths where the books could be borrowed or bought (Figure 9). In 1951, Shenyang city alone had over 60 lianhuanhua stands, with more than 12,000 books of over 360 varieties.<sup>31</sup> Among Shenyang's readers, 80% were youths and children, ranging from five to seventeen or eighteen years old.<sup>32</sup> From the establishment of the PRC until the 1980s, lianhuanhua emerged as an effective medium for disseminating new visual representations and narratives to the general populace due to their pervasive popularity, artistic versatility, and convenient accessibility across

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<sup>31</sup> He Guo 禾果, "Shengyangshi beishiqu he shenhequ xiaorensu yuedu qingkuang de diaocha" 沈阳市北市区和沈河区小人书阅读情况的调查 [A survey of the situation of reading picture books in North urban area and Shenhe District of Shenyang], *Renmin ribao* 人民日报, April 4, 1951, 06.

<sup>32</sup> He, "Shengyangshi beishiqu he shenhequ xiaorensu yuedu qingkuang de diaocha".

Chinese society.

The Chinese government recognized lianhuanhua's value in communicating ideas to the masses and actively promoted and funded their production. Mao Zedong, then head of state, first emphasized the reform of mass art. In October 1949, while commemorating Lu Xun, Mao directed Zhou Yang 周扬 (1907–1989), the Deputy Minister of Culture, to issue instructions on artistic reform, hoping that art form could serve the masses.<sup>33</sup> By December, Mao approached Zhou again to establish a lianhuanhua publishing house. Mao believed that lianhuanhua was not only for children but also for adults, both illiterate and educated. He urged publishers to release a series of new lianhuanhua free from feudal ideologies.<sup>34</sup> As a result, in 1950, the Art Bureau of the Ministry of Culture established the Popular Pictures Publishing House, primarily publishing lianhuanhua and New Year pictures.<sup>35</sup> In 1951, the People's Fine Arts Publishing House was founded, incorporating the Popular Pictures Publishing House and also starting the newspaper of lianhuanhua, followed by the establishment of editorial and creative departments.<sup>36</sup> With tripartite support from the government, publishers, and magazines, lianhuanhua enjoyed a period of vigorous development.

Due to the need for universal education and to assist the illiterate, lianhuanhua creators made educational themes one of their main focuses. In the early years of the PRC, new visual representations of Lu Xun, themed around his life, emerged in this context. The texts, *Lu Xun's Childhood*, published in December 1949, and *Lu Xun*

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<sup>33</sup> Jiang Weipu 姜维朴, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (xiajuan)* 新中国连环画 60 年 (下卷) [60 Years of New China Graphic Novel (Part II)] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2009), 890–91.

<sup>34</sup> Jiang, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (xiajuan)*, 890–91.

<sup>35</sup> Jiang, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (xiajuan)*, 891–92.

<sup>36</sup> Jiang, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (xiajuan)*, 891–92.



*Memorial Hall*, released in July 1952, served as inspirational readings.<sup>37</sup> Because these graphic novels primarily portrayed Lu Xun as a model of academic passion, however, they failed to introduce his thoughts and writings to the young readers. Their narrow focus reflected the challenges of presenting an authentic Lu Xun under the weight of political directions. Moreover, during this period, Lu Xun's visual representation began to embody the government's mission of imparting a certain type of "knowledge" to the youth, with the content neither being determined by Lu Xun as an educator nor by the creators of *lianhuanhua*.

In the early days of the PRC, *lianhuanhua* artists were constrained by national educational demands, yet the public could openly discuss content restrictions in these creations of *lianhuanhua*. In 1956, Jiang Weipu 姜维朴 (1926–2019), then the chief editor of the People's Fine Arts Publishing House, published an article debating the creation of new *lianhuanhua* for children.<sup>38</sup> He argued, "Publishing *lianhuanhua* specifically for children is a decision beneficial to their education, but many currently available themes do not meet their needs."<sup>39</sup> He sought children's opinions on these *lianhuanhua*, finding that many thought "the ending of these stories is predictable from the beginning, and knowing one book means knowing them all."<sup>40</sup> Jiang stated, "In many child-targeted *lianhuanhua* that reflect real themes, young characters face the same situations as the readers. The advanced protagonists always persuade and educate

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<sup>37</sup> Gao Menghuan 高孟焕, *Luxun de tongnian* 鲁迅的童年 [Lu Xun's Childhood] (Beijing: Jiaoyu chubanshe, 1949), 1–50; Gu Tingkan 顾廷康, and Li Heling 李鹤龄, ed., *Luxun jiannianguan* 鲁迅纪念馆 [Lu Xun's Memorial Hall] (Shanghai: Shanghai qingfeng shudian, 1952), 1–48.

<sup>38</sup> Jiang Weipu 姜维朴, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (shangjuan)* 新中国连环画 60 年 (上卷) [60 Years of New China Graphic Novel (Part I)] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2009), 180–81.

<sup>39</sup> Jiang, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (shangjuan)*, 180–81.

<sup>40</sup> Jiang, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (shangjuan)*, 180–81.

others, while the ‘typical’ backward characters make mistakes, receive criticism, and struggle ideologically until they are educated by teachers.”<sup>41</sup> These works preached a singular message to the youth, yet creators and readers still retained a choice at that time. Lianhuanhua artists could publicly discuss the issues encountered in their work through newspapers and magazines, and young people could express their dissatisfaction with the lianhuanhua. The visual representations of Lu Xun as a learning model appeared only twice in lianhuanhua before disappearing. The timing of *Lu Xun’s Childhood* and *Lu Xun Memorial Hall* indicated that they were experimental products emerging in a relatively relaxed creative atmosphere guided by early political directions.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), new lianhuanhua themed around Lu Xun’s life were once again created and published. Publication of these new lianhuanhua reached its peak during this period.<sup>42</sup> The most influential of these was a lianhuanhua created in 1972 by Lu Huanhua 路焕华 (Figure 10). This book was repeatedly published in newspapers in 1973 and 1974, making it one of the most influential lianhuanhua themed on Lu Xun’s life.<sup>43</sup> This book frequently mentioned Lu Xun’s

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<sup>41</sup> Jiang, *Xinzhongguo lianhuanhua liushi nian (shangjuan)*, 180–81.

<sup>42</sup> Leading graphic novels in this area includes: In September 1972, Lu Huanhua 路焕华, published by Zhejiang People’s Publishing House, produced the 40-page pictorial novel *Lu Xun—Great Revolutionary, Thinker, Writer*. In October 1975, Lei Dezu 雷德祖 illustrated, and the Tianjin People’s Fine Arts Publishing House published the 32-page *The Story of Lu Xun graphic novel*. In August 1976, the Shanghai People’s Publishing House published the 40-page *The Story of Lu Xun and the Youth graphic novel*, illustrated by Chen Yifei 陈逸飞 and others. In September of the same year, the People’s Fine Arts Publishing House published the 24-page *Lu Xun in Guangzhou graphic novel*, illustrated by the Guangzhou Lu Xun Memorial Hall Creative Group, featuring 118 color pictures. In December 1979, Xia Baoyuan 夏葆元 and others painted, and the People’s Fine Arts published the 48-page *Lu Xun’s Adolescence graphic novel*.

<sup>43</sup> Zheng Chao 郑朝, “Wei Luxun guanghui de yisheng chuanshen xiezha—xidu lianhuanhua Luxun—weida degemingjia, sixiangjia, wenxuejia” 为鲁迅光辉的一生传神写照——喜读连环画<鲁迅——伟大的革命家、思想家、文学家> [A vivid portrayal of Lu Xun’s glorious life—enjoying reading graphic novel Lu Xun—a great revolutionary, thinker and writer], *Zhejiang ribao (Hangzhou)* 浙江日报(杭州), 1974, vol. 2.11, 3; Zheng Min 郑敏, “Luxun—weida de gemingjia, sixiangjia, wenxuejia lianhuanhua xuandeng” <鲁迅-伟大的革命家、思想家、文学家>连环画选登 [Lu Xun—A Great Revolutionary, Thinker and litterateur Selected Graphic Novels], *Jiefangjun huabao (Beijing)* 解放军画报(北京), 1974, No. 5, 37; Unknown, “Lianhuanhua de xin huaduo: Makesi keku dushu de gushi, Luxun deng shifu” 连环画的新花朵: <马克思刻苦读书的故事><鲁迅>等十幅 [The

concern for and cultivation of youth, and was specifically made to target Chinese youthful readership (Figure 7). Influenced by national ideology and political policies of the Cultural Revolutionary period, this *lianhuanhua* although based on real historical events fictionalized and exaggerated the relationship between Lu Xun, the CCP, and Mao Zedong. For instance, page 15 of this *lianhuanhua* depicted Lu Xun sending a congratulatory telegram to Chairman Mao and the Party Central Committee upon the Red Army's victorious arrival in Shaanxi during the Long March (Figure 11). In reality, on March 29, 1936, Lu Xun and the Chinese writer Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896–1981) jointly sent a congratulatory message celebrating the Red Army's successful crossing of the Yellow River and eastward campaign, expressing support for the CCP's plan for national salvation against Japanese aggression.<sup>44</sup> Contrary to the portrayal in the *lianhuanhua*, Lu Xun and Mao Dun did not mention Chairman Mao at all in this message. Through these exaggerations and fictionalizations, the content of the *lianhuanhua* twisted the facts and used his visual representation as a tool for buttress political ideals and construct personal cults.

In contrast to the individual woodcut prints created before 1949, *lianhuanhua* emerged as a genuine mass-oriented visual representation of Lu Xun. Due to their fast dissemination, simplicity, and portability, *lianhuanhua* became an essential political propaganda tool during the Cultural Revolution. Incomplete statistics suggested that

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New Flowers of Graphic Novels: The story of Marx's Hard Study; Lu Xun etc.], *Zhejiang ribao (Hangzhou)* 浙江日报(杭州), 1973, vol. 10.25, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Yan Yuxin 阎愈新, "Zaitan Luxun Maodun zhi hongjun hexin—jian da Dingergang jiaoshou de shangque" 再谈鲁迅茅盾致红军贺信——兼答丁尔纲教授的商榷 [Lu Xun Mao Dun's Letter to the Red Army—A Reply to Professor Ding Erzang's Question], *Xinwenxue shiliao* 新文学史料, No. 3 (2000): 188–96.

over 1,500 varieties of *lianhuanhua* were published during this period, with a total print run exceeding 700 million copies.<sup>45</sup> While *lianhuanhua* based on Lu Xun's life achieved a spread that woodcut prints did not, the political use of these *lianhuanhua* as propaganda tools made it even harder for youths to access the real Lu Xun.

The role of these political visual representations of Lu Xun diminished with changes in the direction of the state's propaganda and the stagnation of *lianhuanhua* creation. With China's policies of economic opening policies in 1978, cultural content from other countries and regions flooded into China, and *lianhuanhua* no longer attracted the attention of Chinese youth readers.<sup>46</sup> After 1979, there were no new publications of *lianhuanhua* themed on Lu Xun's life. Despite the political and economic upheavals from the 1980s up through Deng Xiaoping's 邓小平 (1904–1997) southern tour in 1992, China persisted with its commitment to economic openness. By 1991, the number of printed *lianhuanhua* had dropped to only a million copies of *lianhuanhua*, with the variety reduced to 50 types.<sup>47</sup> The emergence and development of television, film, and computers gradually replaced *lianhuanhua*'s market share, and turned it into a collectible.

Economic liberalization also brought a more relaxed political atmosphere to China. In 1991, a detail from a portrait based on a photo of Lu Xun smiling and talking with young woodcut artists (Figure 12) was used during the conference commemorating the

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<sup>45</sup> Peng Chan 彭婵, "Wenge" *lianhuanhua de yanjiu* "文革"连环画的研究 [A Study of the "Cultural Revolution" Graphic Novels] (Lanzhou: Northwest Normal University, 2007), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Jin Ying 金颖, *1977–1989 nian Zhongguo lianhuanhua yishuxing yanjiu* 1977-1989 年中国连环画艺术性研究 [A Study of the Artistry of Chinese Graphic Novels 1977–1989] (Shanghai: Shanghai Normal University, 2018), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Jin, *1977–1989 Zhongguo lianhuanhua*, 13–4.

110th anniversary of Lu Xun's birth (Figure 13).<sup>48</sup> Lu Xun's visual representation began to detach from the national political atmosphere, showing his more approachable side.<sup>49</sup> The state-led reinvention of Lu Xun's visual representation concluded with this conference, marking the end of that stage dominated by state efforts.

This thesis examines the visual representations of Lu Xun, focusing not on the physical likeness rendered by artists, but on their internalized visions of him. It considers how creators perceive Lu Xun and the personas he embodies in their imaginations. It traces the transformation from the pre-1949 woodcut artists' revolutionary writer to the exemplary student and political icon molded by the state post-1949. The shifting roles in Lu Xun's visual representations reflect the varying artists, audiences, and eras. Each portrayal bears the era's imprint, revealing diverse interpretations of Lu Xun across historical contexts. The way Lu Xun's visual representations was used in 2010-2023 is get another new way that responds to society's new needs.

## Chinese Youth

Across time visual representations of Lu Xun have always been intimately linked with Chinese youth. Pre-1949, it was young woodcut artists who portrayed him as a revolutionary writer challenging suppression. Post-1949, it was again the youth who became the prime viewers and propagators of the state approved depictions of Lu Xun

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<sup>48</sup> Jiangjiang bot 江江 bot(@江江 bot), "1991nian9yue24ri, jinian luxun danchen 110zhounian dahui zai beijing zhongnanhai juxing, Jiangtongzhifabiao zhongyaojianghua. 1991年9月24日, 纪念鲁迅诞辰110周年大会在北京中南海举行, 江同志发表重要讲话," [On September 24, 1991, the memorial conference of the 110th anniversary of Lu Xun's birth was held in Zhongnanhai. Jiang Zemin was delivering a speech.], Weibo photo, September 23, 2022, <https://weibo.com/5514879288/M7cgmfYKi?type=repost>.

<sup>49</sup> Huang, ed., *Luxun yingji*, 210–11.

as an exemplary student and political icon. Across the decades, from the 1930s to the 1980s, it has always been the youth who played pivotal roles in fashioning visual representations of Lu Xun, regardless if it was state or individual narratives.

It is well known that Lu Xun always cared for China's youth. His concerns for the youth were expressed in his 1925 article *Mentor* (《导师》 Daoshi).<sup>50</sup> In this piece, he discussed the newly popular societal topics youth-focused.<sup>51</sup> In this article, Lu repeatedly emphasized, "Chinese youth with aspirations should not cling to seeking impure and improper mentors, but should seek same-age friends and unite together."<sup>52</sup> He argued, "The vigorous force within the group itself is the effective measure for Chinese youth to overcome difficulties."<sup>53</sup> In this vintage article, Lu Xun held a negative evaluation of many people who tried to act as mentors and guide the youth at that time. Because Lu Xun took a different stance from most intellectuals regarding youth issues, by not wanting the youth to seek mentors, he stood out from the intellectuals of that time and gained recognition from the youth.

Lu Xun ironically became a role model to them, a testament to his uniqueness. Modern Chinese literature researcher Qian Liqun 钱理群 (b. 1939) analyzed Lu Xun's distinctiveness, noting it lies in Lu's difference from most intellectuals who sought to be mentors.<sup>54</sup> Whereas traditional Chinese intellectuals pursued social engagement, Lu Xun did not value, and even scorned, their central and privileged position in society,

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<sup>50</sup> Lu Xun 鲁迅, *Luxun quanji disanjuan* 鲁迅全集第三卷 [The Complete Works of Lu Xun, Volume III] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2005), 58.

<sup>51</sup> Lu, *Luxun quanji disanjuan*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Lu, *Luxun quanji disanjuan*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> Li Wei 李玮, *Luxun yu ershi shiji zhengzhi wenhua* 鲁迅与 20 世纪政治文化 [Lu Xun and 20th Century Political Culture] (Nanchang: Baihuazhou wenyi chubanshe, 2018), 109.

<sup>54</sup> Qian, *Luxun yu dangdaizhongguo*, 5.

politics, thought, culture, and academia.<sup>55</sup> He also rejected governmental co-option of the Northern Warlords government led by Zhang Shizhai 章士钊 (1881–1973) and the Nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>56</sup> Instead, he preferred to pursue independent and free thought amidst social criticism.<sup>57</sup> He was a good skeptic.<sup>58</sup> Qian also argued that the new generation of youth today no longer accepts others' or society's evaluations of their own worth.<sup>59</sup> Instead, they prefer their own self-awareness. It seems to me that Qian's assessment is spot on. After entering the twenty-first century and having their material needs satisfied, the pressures from society and families to pursue higher levels of education and employment kindled a desire for self-awareness among Chinese youth born and raised in an era of national stability and rapid economic development. These youth yearned to break free from the shackles of society and family to discover new possibilities in their lives. Lu Xun's unique character resonated with the youth's yearning, leading them to abandon societal evaluations.

In their pursuit of self-discovery, Chinese youth not only regard Lu Xun as a role model but also need to express themselves on public social media platforms. In the development of social media platforms after 2010, young Chinese internet users have consistently accounted for the largest proportion of internet users. As of 2022, China's youth aged 10 to 39 accounted for 48.1% of Chinese internet users, while those aged 40 and above accounted for 47.5%.<sup>60</sup> In 2018, The group aged 10 to 39 made up 67.8%

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<sup>55</sup> Qian, *Luxun yu dangdaizhongguo*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Qian, *Luxun yu dangdaizhongguo*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Qian, *Luxun yu dangdaizhongguo*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Qian, *Luxun yu dangdaizhongguo*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Qian, *Luxun yu dangdaizhongguo*, 401–02.

<sup>60</sup> KAWO 科握, ed., "Erlingersan Zhongguo shejiaomeiti pingtai zhinan 2023 中国社交媒体平台指南" [Social Media Marketing to Seniors in China 2023], last modified February 27, 2023, <https://kawo.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Social-Media-Marketing-to-Seniors-in-China-2023.pdf>: 3–5.

of Chinese internet users.<sup>61</sup> From 2018 to 2022, the proportion of internet users aged 10 to 39 gradually declined. With the deepening of China's aging society and the popularization of the internet, the internet user group has gradually penetrated into the middle-aged and elderly population. However, by 2023, the youth group still accounts for the largest proportion of Chinese internet users. After the development of social media in 2010, the large youth user group provided sufficient artists, viewers, and disseminators for the reshaping of Lu Xun's visual representation.

In this thesis, compared to the certainty of Lu Xun as an individual, the scope of Chinese youth as a research object has always been ambiguous. Currently, there are two main types of commonly used age ranges for Chinese youth. The first is the age range of 14 to 28 for members of the Communist Youth League of China (CYLC), which is officially recognized by the Chinese government. This range is widely accepted as the age range of youth in Chinese society. The CYLC is a youth organization led by the CCP. Since the founding of the CCP, the age range of the CYLC has always been the youth age range recognized and used under the rule of the CCP. From 1922 to 1982, the age range of the CYLC members was revised nine times, from 15 to 30 years old to 14 to 28 years old.<sup>62</sup> From December 1982 to the present, the age range of league members has been 14 to 28 years old.<sup>63</sup> This age range is widely applicable to various occasions. In April 2008, the Chinese government announced that starting from 2008, on May 4th,

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<sup>61</sup> KAWO, "Erlingersan Zhongguo shejiaomeiti pingtai zhinan", 3-5.

<sup>62</sup> Jiangxi Communist Youth League and Youth Work Theory Research Association 江西共青团和青年工作理论研究会, and Communist Youth League Jiangxi Provincial League School 共青团江西省团校, ed., *Gongqingtuan zhangcheng huibian—gongqingtuan zaoqi linshi zhangcheng zhi gongqingtuan shiqida zhangcheng* 共青团章程汇编—共青团早期临时章程至共青团十七大章程 [Compilation of the constitution of the Communist Youth League—early provisional constitution of the Communist Youth League to the constitution of the 17th Communist Youth League Congress] (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2015), 1-96.

<sup>63</sup> Jiangxi Communist Youth League, ed., *Compilation of the constitution of the Communist Youth League*, 96.



Chinese Youth Day, youth aged 14 to 28 can get a half-day holiday.<sup>64</sup> However, due to the increase in the number of years people spend in education, the postponement of employment, and the emergence of late marriage and childbirth, the youth age division of 14 to 28 years old is no longer applicable to the current youth situation in China.<sup>65</sup> Nowadays, the age range of 14 to 35 has become the age standard used by many communities when organizing youth activities.<sup>66</sup> The rigid and unchanging age range of 14 to 28 for the CYLC members is not applicable to defining the Chinese youth group in this thesis.

The second type is the age range of Chinese youth used by research institutions and scholars in their respective survey reports or studies. This type of age range is mainly determined by research institutions or scholars based on the research needs of each specific topic or their respective national conditions. In reports analyzing the age structure of Chinese internet users released by the internet industry, the age groups of internet users are divided into 10 years, namely 10-19 years old, 20-29 years old, and 30-39 years old.<sup>67</sup> In art historian Paul Clark's research, the age range of Chinese youth was defined as 14 to 26 years old, which was consistent with the youth range stipulated by most countries and regions around the world.<sup>68</sup> When studying the topic of Lu Xun

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<sup>64</sup> “Qingnianjie fangjia: ‘wusijingshen’ ruhe genghao chuancheng? 青年节放假: ‘五四精神’如何更好传承?” [Youth Day Holiday: How can the ‘May Fourth Spirit’ be better passed on?], last modified May 4, 2008, [https://www.gov.cn/govweb/fwxx/wy/2008-05/04/content\\_960623.htm](https://www.gov.cn/govweb/fwxx/wy/2008-05/04/content_960623.htm).

<sup>65</sup> Cao Yan 曹彦, “Guanyu tuichi gongqingtuanyuan lituan nianling wenti de tantao” 关于推迟共青团员离团年龄问题的探讨 [Discussion on the issue of postponing the age of leaving the Communist Youth League], *Shanxi qingnian zhiye xueyuan xuebao* 山西青年职业学院学报, Vol. 27, NO. 3 (2014): 17.

<sup>66</sup> Cao, “Guanyu tuichi gongqingtuanyuan lituan nianling wenti de tantao”, 17.

<sup>67</sup> Lin Hong 林红, “Xiegang” qingnian xiangxiang fenxi “斜杠”青年现象分析 [Analysis of the phenomenon of ‘slash’ youth], in *Zhongguo qingnian fazhan baogao No. 6* 中国青年发展报告 No. 6 [Report on Development of Youth in China No.6], ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院, 285–98 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2022), 285–98.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Clark, *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to netizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

and contemporary China, Qian Liqun focused on the youth group born between 1990 and 1999.<sup>69</sup> The age range of the Chinese youth group in Qian's research is more applicable to this thesis, which is also a specific topic. Due to the PRC's one-child policy implemented from 1979 to 2015, in order to highlight the growth characteristics of the population born during this period, Chinese society generally uses 1980 as a time node to divide the birth population. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is also accustomed to using birth years divided by decades as a survey group. The post-80s are Chinese people born between 1980 and 1989, and in 2023, their ages range from 34 to 43 years old; the post-90s are Chinese people born between 1990 and 1999, and in 2023, their ages range from 24 to 33 years old; the post-00s are Chinese people born between 2000 and 2009, and in 2023, their ages range from 14 to 23 years old.<sup>70</sup> In the analysis reports of Chinese internet usage from 2010 to 2023, the post-80s, post-90s, and post-00s are the three generations that are the focus of analysis. These three generations were the main user groups of Chinese social media from 2010 to 2023, and their internet growth environment coincides with the different stages of the development of the Chinese internet from computers to mobile devices. In this thesis, Chinese youth refers to the post-80s, post-90s, and post-00s.

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<sup>69</sup> Qian, *Luxun yu dangdaizhongguo*, 401.

<sup>70</sup> Li Chunling 李春玲, and Lv Peng 吕鹏, "'Baling hou' daxue biyesheng de jiuyezhuangkuang—jiyu liu suo 'jiubawu gaoxiao' biyesheng de diaocha" "'80后'大学毕业生的就业状况——基于6所“985高校”毕业生的调查 [Employment Situations of Graduates among the “80s Generation”], in *Erlingyiyi nian Zhongguo shehui xingshifexi yu yuce* 2011年中国社会形势分析与预测 [Society of China analysis and forecast in 2011], ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2011), 138–51; Zhao Lianfei 赵联飞, "Baling hou Jiuling hou daxuesheng de shehui zhengzhi taidu—jiyu shier suo gaoxiaoxuesheng diaocha jiegou de fenxi baogao" 80后、90后大学生的社会政治态度——基于12所高校学生调查结果的分析报告 [The Social and Political Attitude of the Post-1980 and Post-1990 University Students: A Report Based on the Survey of 12 Universities], in *Erlingyisan nian Zhongguo shehui xingshifexi yu yuce* 2013年中国社会形势分析与预测 [Society of China analysis and forecast (2013)], ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 236–48.

From 2010 to 2023, within these three generations of youth groups, the dominant group had been constantly changing. In the 2012 report, the post-80s were referred to as the internet generation, and the internet had a huge impact on their living conditions and ideological concepts.<sup>71</sup> In 2013, the post-90s had become the main body of China's undergraduate students.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, the post-90s began to replace the post-80s as the main focus group of internet usage reports. Compared with the post-80s, the post-90s are more truly the internet generation.<sup>73</sup> More than 30% of the post-90s began to access the internet during primary school, much earlier than the post-80s. In June 2013, 90.5% of post-90s college students believed that social network media enriched people's communication methods and objects.<sup>74</sup> From 2010 to 2023, people born between 1980 and 2009 had all successively served as the main user groups of Chinese social media. The age range of this dominant group in 2023 was 14 to 43 years old. From 2010 to 2023, each time the main user group of Chinese social media changed, it was only a change in the primary and secondary relationship. For example, the post-90s gradually replaced the post-80s as the main user group of social media starting from 2013, but the post-80s are still participating in the creation of youth culture on Chinese social media. Therefore, the research of contemporary Chinese youth should seek a more flexible

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<sup>71</sup> Li Chunling 李春玲, and Zhu Di 朱迪, “‘Baling hou’ ji ‘baling hou’ zhishijingying diaocha baogao” “80 后”及“80 后”知识精英调查报告 [The “Post-1980 Generation” and its Elites], in *Erlingyisan nian Zhongguo shehui xingshifenxi yu yuce* 2013 年中国社会形势分析与预测 [Society of China analysis and forecast (2013)], ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 174–75.

<sup>72</sup> Zhao Lianfei 赵联飞, and Tian Feng 田丰, “Daxuesheng shenghuo he jiazhi guan—jiyu shier suo gaoxiao xuesheng diaocha shuju de fenxi” 大学生生活和价值观——基于 12 所高校学生调查数据的分析 [University Students' Lives and Values—An Analysis Based on Student Survey Data from 12 Universities], in *Erlingyisan nian Zhongguo shehui xingshifenxi yu yuce* 2014 年中国社会形势分析与预测 [Society of China analysis and forecast (2014)], ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2013), 240.

<sup>73</sup> Zhao, and Tian, *University Students' Lives and Values*, 248.

<sup>74</sup> Zhao, and Tian, *University Students' Lives and Values*, 249–50.

interpretation beyond the fixed physiological age range. The definition of youth groups should be determined by the youth cultural ideology that conforms to different periods.

Overall, there was an intimate connection between Lu Xun's visual representations and Chinese youth. This connection emphasized the need to consider the evolving definitions and roles of youth in shaping these representations across different historical and cultural contexts.

### **New Visual Representations of Lu Xun on Social Media Platform**

Before 2010, Chinese internet users were required a certain level of education. They typically used such as long-form writing platforms like *Baidu Tieba* 百度贴吧 (Baidu post bar), (launched in 2003), and *Sina Blog* 新浪博客 (Xinlang boke), (launched in 2005). The long-form writing and documentation style of these traditional internet platforms shaped their user demographics: individuals who could operate computers and had access to one at home or work. Predominantly born between 1965 and 1979, in 2005 these users were aged 26 to 40, educated through middle and high school without the disruption of the Cultural Revolution, and possessed solid foundational writing skills.<sup>75</sup> Most had completed life's milestones such as marriage and parenting, held stable jobs, and had clear social roles. Thus, compared to the education level and income status of Chinese internet users before 2010, whether they were categorized as youth was not a primary previous research concern.

After the launch of Weibo in August 2009, and with the manufacturing and proliferation of smartphones, social media platforms like Weibo provided a widely

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<sup>75</sup> Sinolink Securities 国金证券, ed., *Hulianwang zhuanxi fenxi baogao* 互联网专题分析报告 [Internet Thematic Analysis Report] (Beijing: Guojin zhengquan, 2022), 1.

popular and versatile new forms of internet media. Weibo, short for *Weiboke* 微博客 (microblog), was inspired by the early and world famous microblogging platform Twitter, developed in the United States. Weibo is a platform for public sharing, disseminating, and acquiring information. Users access microblogging services via their internet-connected devices such as computers and smartphones, and share their latest updates, thoughts, or news in short messages, usually less than 140 characters, for real-time sharing with friends or followers. Between 2011 and 2012, the “Post-80s” and “Post-90s” generations were the most numerous users of Weibo, with the “Post-80s” having the highest proportion.<sup>76</sup> The advent of internet social media and smartphones allowed the “Post-80s” and “Post-90s” generations to share fresh content on social media anytime and anywhere, without the constraints of traditional computer use.<sup>77</sup> On this social media platform Weibo, the desire by China’s youth for communication and express to themselves in personal way was strongly evident.

After 2010, emerging Chinese social media platforms such as Weibo and Xiaohongshu evolved beyond mere text-based information hubs. Users disseminated information more rapidly and conveniently on social media compared to traditional internet platforms like blogs. Consequently, social media users favored concise and precise individual messages.<sup>78</sup> Images accompanied by text began appearing in user-generated content on social media platforms. These informative image-based pictures

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<sup>76</sup> Gongqingtuan Shanghai shiwei 共青团上海市委, ed., “Shanghai qingnian weibo shiyong xianzhuang” 上海青年微博使用现状 [Current Situation of Microblog Use by Shanghai Youth], in *Zhongguo weichengnianren xinmeiti yunyong baogao (erlingyiyi–erlingerer)* 中国未成年人新媒体运用报告 (2011–2012) [Annual Report on the New Media Use by Minors in China (2011-2012)], ed. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan 中国社会科学院 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), 233.

<sup>77</sup> Gongqingtuan Shanghai shiwei, ed., “Shanghai qingnian weibo shiyong xianzhuang”, 239–40.

<sup>78</sup> Gongqingtuan Shanghai shiwei, ed., “Shanghai qingnian weibo shiyong xianzhuang”, 241.

are known as memes. The characteristics of information dissemination on social media platforms were the main reason for the popularity of memes on them.

The popularity of memes is not a phenomenon unique to Chinese social media. In the United States, the “Know Your Meme” website also has a dedicated channel for recording viral internet memes.<sup>79</sup> These memes that sweep through social media are independently selected and created by users using computer or mobile image-making software.<sup>80</sup> As technology advances, various easy-to-use mobile image-making apps have emerged, continuously lowering the technical threshold for creating custom emoticons. Memes are a form of internet art that truly enables mass participation in design and dissemination. The mainstream group creating, using, and spreading memes is the primary user base of Chinese social media, consisting of Chinese youth born in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. This art form, unaffected by national and political cultural processing, has grown from the bottom up to become a public expression method for youth.

As an important figure among Chinese writers, Lu Xun received widespread public attention in internet text creation before 2010. After the 1991 conference commemorating the 110th anniversary of Lu Xun’s birth, the state no longer portrayed Lu Xun as a political propaganda icon. The state’s withdrawal allowed the public to freely discuss this once-unattainable political icon. In the intense internet discussions about Lu Xun before 2010, three main types of content existed: commemorating Lu

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<sup>79</sup> “Know your meme,” Know your meme, last modified January 1, 2024, <https://knowyourmeme.com/>.

<sup>80</sup> Jiang Jianguo 蒋建国, and Li Ying 李颖, “Wangluo tuya biaoqingbao: shenchou kuanghuan yihuo yule de dama” 网络涂鸦表情包:审丑狂欢抑或娱乐的大麻[Web Graffiti Memes: Ugly Carnival or Recreational Marijuana], *Dangan yu zhengming* 档案与争鸣, No. 1 (2017): 131.

Xun, criticizing Lu Xun, and making fun of Lu Xun.<sup>81</sup> These three types of content continued to exist on Chinese social media after 2010.

After the state unlocked the shackles controlling Lu Xun's role, anyone could reshape his persona. In the early years of China's internet development, anonymous users expressing opinions online faced Lu Xun, once a "suppressor" in the high position of national ideology. After he returned to his identity as a writer, it sparked a rebellious mentality. "Criticizing Lu Xun" became a hot topic of discussion among users. In the 2012 "ghostwriting incident" involving writer Han Han 韩寒 (b. 1982), an author under the pseudonym "Fangchigui 方尺规" published an online article titled "Questioning Lu Xun."<sup>82</sup> The author listed so-called "ten doubts" and used them to infer that Lu Xun's articles were "ghostwritten."<sup>83</sup> This article was later reposted by Han Han on his blog to prove that others' questioning of his articles was ridiculous and laughable.<sup>84</sup> Internet users who were keen on discussing "criticizing Lu Xun" merely used Lu Xun's fame and netizens' curiosity about learning "negative news about Lu Xun" to attract attention and express their own opinions. As for the truth or falsehood of these criticisms, no one cared.

The deep-rooted characteristics of the old paragon Lu Xun, shaped by Chinese

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<sup>81</sup> Lu Feishan 陆飞杉, *Wangluo shidai dui Luxun xingxiang de chongsu* 网络时代对鲁迅形象的重塑 [Reconstruction of the Lu Xun image in the internet age] (Nanning: Guangxi minzu daxue, 2012), 4–12.

<sup>82</sup> Fu Lanmei 付兰梅, "Zhongguo xiandai jingdian zuojia de wangluowenhua liyong yu wenxue jiaoyu de wangluo anquan—yi jinshinian lai de 'wangshuo' Luxun weili" 中国现代经典作家的网络文化利用与文学教育的网络安全——以近十年来的“网说”鲁迅为例 [The use of Internet culture by modern Chinese classic writers and the cyber security of literary education: the example of Lu Xun in the past decade], *Changchun ligong daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 长春理工大学学报 (社会科学版), Vol.33, No.4, 2020: 144.

<sup>83</sup> Fu, "Zhongguo xiandai jingdian zuojia de wangluowenhua liyong yu wenxue jiaoyu de wangluo anquan—yi jinshinian lai de 'wangshuo' Luxun weili", 144.

<sup>84</sup> Fu, "Zhongguo xiandai jingdian zuojia de wangluowenhua liyong yu wenxue jiaoyu de wangluo anquan—yi jinshinian lai de 'wangshuo' Luxun weili", 144.

textbooks, made the discussion hotspot of “criticizing Lu Xun” short-lived on social media. In the People’s Education Press version of junior high school textbooks before 2008, there were as many as nine of Lu Xun’s works. After 2008, it was reduced to seven. In May 2013, the People’s Education Press removed Lu Xun’s article *The Kite* (《风筝》Fengzheng) from the Chinese textbook for the first year of junior high school.<sup>85</sup> In September of the same year, this incident was taken out of context by some news media, claiming that the publisher had removed all of Lu Xun’s works from the textbooks.<sup>86</sup> After this news was released, the Chinese internet community Waige 歪歌 released a 5-minute-17-second online video titled “Missing Xun 2013 (《怀迅 2013》 Huaixun 2013)” to express the public’s reluctance to see Lu Xun’s articles deleted.<sup>87</sup> This online video sparked widespread discussion on the internet about the deletion of Lu Xun’s articles. Internet users’ reluctance to see Lu Xun’s articles deleted impacted the views criticizing Lu Xun posted on social media. Due to this public discussion about the removal of Lu Xun’s works from textbooks, the viewpoint of “criticizing Lu Xun” gradually disappeared from Chinese social media.

In 2014, the direction of public opinion in Lu Xun-related postings on social media shifted from “criticizing Lu Xun” to “commemorating Lu Xun” and “making fun of Lu Xun.” In 2014, a video mocking Lu Xun titled “Kong Yiji in 2014 孔乙己在 2014 (Kong Yiji zai 2014)” was released on the Chinese internet.<sup>88</sup> The video creator

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<sup>85</sup> “Luxun fengzheng tuichu renjiaoban jiaocai 鲁迅《风筝》退出人教版教材” [Lu Xun’s “Kite” withdrawn from the Humanistic Version of the textbook], last modified September 5, 2013. [https://culture.ifeng.com/gundong/detail\\_2013\\_09/05/29342379\\_0.shtml](https://culture.ifeng.com/gundong/detail_2013_09/05/29342379_0.shtml)

<sup>86</sup> “Luxun fengzheng tuichu renjiaoban jiaocai”, last modified September 5, 2013.

<sup>87</sup> Fu, “Zhongguo xiandai jingdian zuojia”, 144.

<sup>88</sup> Fu, “Zhongguo xiandai jingdian zuojia”, 144.



described, in the first person, a story of Kong Yiji, the protagonist of a famous short story published by Lu Xun in 1919, time-traveling to 2014 and becoming the narrator's classmate.<sup>89</sup> In the video's story, Lu Xun and the iconic characters in his writing approached Chinese youth in an easy-to-relate manner and were remembered and mocked by the youth. "Commemorating Lu Xun" and "making fun of Lu Xun" henceforth became the main content of internet users' postings about Lu Xun.

The new visual representations of Lu Xun emerged amidst the social media discussion trends of "commemorating Lu Xun" and "making fun of Lu Xun." One such meme was created by overlapping two characters' portraits (Figure 14). Lu Xun's portrait was taken from a half-body standard photo shot in Shanghai on his fiftieth birthday in 1930 (Figure 15).<sup>90</sup> The other portrait featured Yazawa Nico from the Japanese anime *Love Live!* (Figure 16).<sup>91</sup> In this image, Nico struck her signature pose: Nico Nico ni~. Both the pose and catchphrase held no special meaning. Unknown creators overlapped the images of Lu Xun and Nico. They first removed the text from Lu Xun's standard photo, reducing the portrait's information. Next, they cropped out Lu Xun's arms and pasted Nico's arms and hands into Lu Xun's photo. Finally, they added Nico's catchphrase below the meme: Nico Nico ni~ (妮可妮可妮 nike nike ni). The combination of the internet trend mocking Lu Xun with popular Japanese animation allowed Lu Xun's fictional persona to appear in memes, evolving the Chinese internet's discussion of Lu Xun from text to visual form.

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<sup>89</sup> Fu, "Zhongguo xiandai jingdian zuojia", 144.

<sup>90</sup> Huang, ed., *Luxun yingji*, 128-29.

<sup>91</sup> KirinBaka, "NicoNicoNi Yuanban~ NicoNicoNi 原版~" [NicoNicoNi Original Version], last modified February 14th, 2018. [https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1cb411J7ep/?vd\\_source=875ab3f0ac154b1c513070ccbd6418e3](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1cb411J7ep/?vd_source=875ab3f0ac154b1c513070ccbd6418e3).

The influence of this meme of Lu Xun and Nico was limited (Figure 14). The creation and dissemination of memes were done by many unknown internet users, so the exact time of creation and dissemination of this meme of Lu Xun and Nico was unknown. The Japanese anime *Love Live!* was popular in China from 2014 to 2016.<sup>92</sup> The popularity of this anime in China spread from *Love Live!* fan groups to Chinese ACG (Anime, Comic, and Games) culture fan groups and then to Chinese social media. In China, the most well-known meme related to this anime was “If miracles have a color, it must be orange.”<sup>93</sup> This meme originated from the voice actors of the anime singing a song from the anime at Animelo Summer Live, the biggest event in the Japanese ACG song world, in 2014.<sup>94</sup> At almost the same time, tens of thousands of audience members spontaneously adjusted their glow sticks to the dedicated support color of this song—orange.<sup>95</sup> In 2016, on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the founding of the CCP, the CYLC official account and other official media forwarded a commemorative video made by internet users on Weibo.<sup>96</sup> The most eye-catching slogan in this video was “If miracles have a color, it must be Chinese red.” Later, with the holding of the Rio Olympics, the slogan of miracles and Chinese red spread even more widely.<sup>97</sup> As another iconic meme of this anime, Nico’s pose and the catchphrase Nico Nico ni~ have no practical meaning and only influence ACG culture fans. This pose is simple, and the slogan is catchy. Many fans of Nico and Japanese ACG culture

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<sup>92</sup> Fenggelio 风格里哦, “ ‘Xiaojiejie’ zheci zenme xianzai turan huoqilai? ” ‘小姐姐’这词怎么现在突然火起来? [Why is the word ‘Missy’ suddenly hot right now?], Zhihu, last modified April 11, 2017. [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/kpR-LsPcjFJLI\\_6YevEZiw](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/kpR-LsPcjFJLI_6YevEZiw).

<sup>93</sup> Fenggelio, “ ‘Xiaojiejie’ zheci zenme xianzai turan huoqilai? ”.

<sup>94</sup> Fenggelio, “ ‘Xiaojiejie’ zheci zenme xianzai turan huoqilai? ”.

<sup>95</sup> Fenggelio, “ ‘Xiaojiejie’ zheci zenme xianzai turan huoqilai? ”.

<sup>96</sup> Fenggelio, “ ‘Xiaojiejie’ zheci zenme xianzai turan huoqilai? ”.

<sup>97</sup> Fenggelio, “ ‘Xiaojiejie’ zheci zenme xianzai turan huoqilai? ”.

used this pose and slogan at public events such as comic conventions to express their love for Nico and find others who also like Nico. Although it had not broken through the limited circle of ACG culture audiences like the “miracle orange,” this meme of Lu Xun doing Nico Nico ni~ still had influence. When searching “妮可妮可妮表情包 nike nike ni biaoqingbao (Nico Nico ni~meme)” in Chinese on Google, the first meme that appears is this meme of Lu Xun and Nico. Lu Xun’s portrait, as a historical narrative from the past, and Nico, representing the new ACG culture, unexpectedly became associated on social media platforms because of a meme. This meme should be regarded as the first attempt to create Lu Xun-themed memes on Chinese social media platforms. The emergence and popularity of Lu Xun-themed memes on Chinese social media is a long-term development process.

The Lu Xun doing Nico Nico ni~ in the meme was neither the revolutionary or writer in woodcut prints nor the model student and political icon in *lianhuanhua*, but a new, fictional persona. This fifty-year-old standard photo of Lu Xun was used on many public occasions and in publications (Figure 15).<sup>98</sup> In the 1960s, woodcuts, prints, and other artistic works based on this photo also appeared.<sup>99</sup> Due to factors such as the social situation, artistic trends, and personal experiences, some works deliberately emphasized Lu Xun’s serious, stern, and upright expression. After being recreated as a meme by Chinese youth who love ACG culture using images of Japanese anime characters, this serious standard photo, originally stern and distant from the youth,

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<sup>98</sup> Huang, ed., *Luxun yingji*, 128–29.

<sup>99</sup> Zhang Wen 张雯, and Chen Ronghui 陈荣辉, “Shijue xiandaixing zhong ‘Luxun xingxiang’ de ziwojiangou yu tazhejiangou” 视觉现代性中“鲁迅形象”的自我建构与他者建构 [The Self-Construction and Other-Construction of “Lu Xun’s Image” in Visual Modernity], *Yishu pinglun* 艺术评论, No.12, 2012: 126.

became youthful. In this meme, the creator imagined that Lu Xun, like them, was also a fan of Nico and likes this classic action. Lu Xun was no longer a historical figure but a peer living alongside the youth. This was similar to the content of the video “Kong Yiji in 2014,” released on social media in 2014 by an unknown creator, which hypothesized that Kong Yiji, the protagonist of a famous short story published by Lu Xun in 1919, was the protagonist’s classmate. The meme of Lu Xun doing Nico Nico ni~ and this video both belonged to Chinese youth’s way of bridging the generation gap between Lu Xun and contemporary China’s youth.

In 2017, Lu Xun-themed memes first stepped out of the limited youth subculture circle and received widespread attention from society and the media. Lu Xun-themed memes became Chinese youth’s favorite memes on Chinese social media in September 2017, ranking second in the selection of social media memes of 2017.<sup>100</sup> Chinese youth’s creation and dissemination of Lu Xun-themed memes ushered in their first popularity on social media. Lu Xun-themed memes expanded from a small range of youth with specific preferences to a wider range of young social media users. In January 2018, the CYLC, in its review of “Popular Words and Memes in 2017” published on its official WeChat public account, considered September 2017 to be Lu Xun Month.<sup>101</sup> In September, memes created with Lu Xun’s quotations as the theme swept Chinese social media. Prior to this, Sohu News had already compiled memes popular on Chinese social media that used Lu Xun’s quotations as the creative theme in July 2017.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Qingxian shi | erlingyiqi niandu liuxingyu biaoqingbao dapandian (xia)” 青鲜事 | 2017 年度流行语、表情包大盘点 (下) [Qingxianshi | 2017 buzzwords, memes roundup], last modified January 20, 2018. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/zOjWCT-rWPTMPXsf6fPJOQ>.

<sup>101</sup> “Qingxian shi | erlingyiqi niandu liuxingyu biaoqingbao dapandian (xia),” last modified January 20, 2018.

<sup>102</sup> “Luxun biaoqingbao (snashisan zhang quanji)” 鲁迅表情包 (33 张全集) [Lu Xun-themed memes], last

Therefore, after the popularity of Lu Xun's Nico Nico ni~ meme, the sudden popularity of quotation memes in the second half of 2017 was not a sudden occurrence.

The spread of Lu Xun's Nico Nico ni~ meme on social media was limited to youth groups who love ACG culture, while Lu Xun's "quotation" memes reached the entire youth group. This way of expressing on social media by writing a celebrity's name and adding a fake quote was not limited to Lu Xun. Whether Chinese celebrities or celebrities from other countries or regions, internet users could borrow their names to increase the credibility of the content they express. This made it easy for meme creators to express their own views. For example, after many people posted fake quotes by Chinese writer Mo Yan, on Weibo, they also @'ed his Weibo account to increase credibility. In October 2017, Mo Yan posted several Weibo postings to refute rumors. One of the fake quotes was: "Mo Yan said, 'I admire two kinds of people: women who go through hardships with men when they are young, and men who go through good times with women when they are wealthy.'" Mo Yan reposted this Weibo posting and said: "The logic is correct, but he also want to know who said this" (@莫言, October 26, 2017).<sup>103</sup> Many young internet users then joked that fake celebrity quotes should be written under Lu Xun's name next time because Lu Xun doesn't have Weibo and can't refute them.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, in the development from fake quotes on social media to "quotation" memes, Chinese youth have always preferred to use Lu Xun's visual

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modified January 2, 2017. [https://www.sohu.com/a/154028874\\_738427](https://www.sohu.com/a/154028874_738427).

<sup>103</sup> Song Yusheng 宋宇晟, "'Wo shizai meiyou shuouguo zheyang yijuhua' zhejuhua Luxun hai zhen shuo guo" "我实在没有说过这样一句话", 这句话鲁迅还真说过 ["I really didn't say such a thing", which Lu Xun really did say.], Chinanews 中国新闻网, last modified November 17, 2017. <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/m/cul/2017/11-17/8379501.shtml>.

<sup>104</sup> Song, "'Wo shizai meiyou shuouguo zheyang yijuhua' zhejuhua Luxun hai zhen shuoguo".

representation to create memes.

The preference of Chinese youth had led to more creators and sustained attention in the creative field of Lu Xun's quotation-themed memes. In November 2017, young people also established a community called "Making Up Celebrity Quotes 瞎编名人名言 (Xiabian mingren mingyan)" on the social media platform *Jike* 即刻 (immediately). *Jike* is a social media platform made specifically for Chinese youth. The youth in the "Making Up Celebrity Quotes" community held the "First Unofficial Lu Xun Cup Quotation Creation Competition 首届非正式鲁迅杯名言创作大赛 (Shoujie feizhengshi Luxun bei mingyan chuangzuo dasai)" and encouraged everyone to bring memes to the competition, borrowing Lu Xun's name to announce the competition rules.<sup>105</sup> When the virtual internet competition was held in November 2017, the community had already attracted 300,000 young people. The community's introduction is "Every day, we must learn a bit of inspiring celebrity quotes. As for whether they are true or false, who cares, right?" This introduction also reflected that young people do not care about the truth or falsehood of these popular quotes on social media.<sup>106</sup> Most of the fake quotes were closely related to young people's lives. For example, among Lu Xun's "quotation" memes, there was content reminding young people not to stay up late and indicating that 95% of celebrity quotes online are made up.<sup>107</sup> These fake quotes expressed young people's true thoughts about current life and were young people expressing their views in Lu Xun's name.

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<sup>105</sup> Song, " 'Wo shizai meiyou shuoguo zheyang yijuhua' zhejuhua Luxun hai zhen shuoguo".

<sup>106</sup> Song, " 'Wo shizai meiyou shuoguo zheyang yijuhua' zhejuhua Luxun hai zhen shuoguo".

<sup>107</sup> Song, " 'Wo shizai meiyou shuoguo zheyang yijuhua' zhejuhua Luxun hai zhen shuoguo".

Most of the memes created with Lu Xun's quotations as the theme used fake quotes as the accompanying text. The two quotes on these two memes are one real and one fake (Figure 17–18). The phrase “It was indeed what I said 的确是我说的 (Dique shi wo shuo de)” said by Lu Xun on this meme comes from a letter Lu Xun wrote in reply to a friend (Figure 17).<sup>108</sup> This sentence itself had no special meaning, and this meme was generally used to confirm that the content posted on social media that was quoted was indeed Lu Xun's quote. The phrase “There are two people in my heart, one is you, and the other is also you 我心里有两个人,一个是你,另一个也是你 (Wo xinli you lianggeren yige shi ni lingyige yeshi ni)” on this meme (Figure 18) was a fake quote imitating the famous line from Lu Xun's “Autumn Night” (《秋夜》 Qiuye): “In my backyard, I can see two trees outside the wall, one is a jujube tree, and the other is also a jujube tree 在我的后园,可以看见墙外有两株树,一株是枣树,还有一株也是枣树 (Zai wode houyuan keyi kanjian qiangwai you liangzhushu yishu shi zaoshu haiyou yizhu yeshi zaoshu).”<sup>109</sup> This meme was generally used by young people to express affection to their partners (Figure 18). The portrait of Lu Xun used in these two memes is from the oil painting *Never give up the struggle* drawn by Tang Xiaoming 汤小铭 (1939–2022) in 1972 during the Cultural Revolution (Figure 19). This oil painting had a strong political characteristic. The two quotes added by the creator on the memes eliminated the political characteristics of this oil painting (Figure 17–18). In the original

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<sup>108</sup> Beijing Luxun Museum and the New Culture Movement Memorial of Beijing 北京鲁迅博物馆 (北京新文化运动纪念馆). *Beijing Luxun bowuguan (Beijing xinwenhua yundong jinianguan) ziliao zaixian chaxun xitong* 北京鲁迅博物馆(北京新文化运动纪念馆)资料在线查询系统 [Database of Beijing Luxun Museum and the New Culture Movement Memorial of Beijing]. Beijing: Beijing Luxun Museum and the New Culture Movement Memorial of Beijing, 2014. <http://www.luxunmuseum.com.cn/cx/>.

<sup>109</sup> Beijing Luxun Museum and the New Culture Movement Memorial of Beijing. *Beijing Luxun bowuguan (Beijing xinwenhua yundong jinianguan) ziliao zaixian chaxun xitong*, 2014.

painting, Lu Xun's gaze was fixed forward. The creator's choice of this painting allowed Lu Xun to directly communicate with the viewer visually when the meme was used and disseminated. On social media, there was interactivity between Lu Xun and the viewers of the memes. The creators also cropped out the background in the image to simplify the visual information. This allowed the memes to highlight Lu Xun's facial features during dissemination, allowing users to focus only on Lu Xun and the text on the memes. Most young people did not add additional explanatory text outside the memes when using this type of meme. Therefore, in social media communication, they only needed to use one meme to clearly and unambiguously express their intentions in Lu Xun's name. This type of internet art, unaffected by national and political-cultural processing, exists only as a public expression of youth.

In May 2019, Lu Xun's quotation memes once again swept social media. On May 6, 2019, the media reported on the Database of Beijing Luxun Museum and the New Culture Movement Memorial of Beijing launched by the Beijing Lu Xun Museum in 2017.<sup>110</sup> This free academic database was created for academic research work. After many internet users learned of the existence of this database on May 6, 2019, they used the database to verify the authenticity of Lu Xun's quotes and the quotes in Lu Xun's "quotation" memes circulating on social media.<sup>111</sup> Due to the sharp increase in search volume in one day, the database crashed dozens of times, triggering intense social

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<sup>110</sup> Li Jing 李静, " 'Hulianwang Luxun': xiandai jingdian de houxiandai mingyun" "互联网鲁迅": 现代经典的后现代命运 [ 'Internet Lu Xun': the postmodern fate of a modern classic], *Xiandai zhongwen xuekan* 现代中文学刊, No.74 (2021): 84.

<sup>111</sup> Cui Penghao 崔芑昊, and Yu Xiaozhi 于小植, " 'Geng' 'Xiha' yu 'Danmu': lun wangluoyawenhua yujing zhong 'Luxun xingxiang' de 'tuoyu' " "梗"、"嘻哈"与"弹幕": 论网络亚文化语境中"鲁迅形象"的"脱域" [Meme, Hip-pop and Barrage Culture: On the "Disdomain" of Lu Xun's Image in the Context of Internet Subculture], *Luxun yanjiu yuekan* 鲁迅研究月刊, No. 8 (2022): 72.



discussions. Through this crash of the academic database, we can learn that most Chinese youth are able to create and disseminate his visual representations without reading more of his works or understanding his life. This is because contemporary Chinese youth are only borrowing Lu Xun's name on social media to express the views currently accepted by their group. The word "truthiness," first used by American satirist Stephen Colbert (b. 1964) in 2005, can express Chinese youth's views on Lu Xun's quotation memes.<sup>112</sup> "Truthiness" means a truthful or seemingly truthful quality that is claimed for something not because of supporting facts or evidence but because of a feeling that it is true or a desire for it to be true.<sup>113</sup> Chinese youth believe that the content expressed in Lu Xun's name is not Lu Xun's true quote but is the truth they want to spread. Whether the Lu Xun quotes on these memes are true or false is unimportant to young people. Lu Xun has become a proxy spokesperson for Chinese youth on public social media.

From Lu Xun's Nico Nico ni~ meme to Lu Xun's "quotation" memes, their production methods all used collage. Collage is one of the most important production methods and forms of expression for memes.<sup>114</sup> Creators transplant, combine, and collage image materials and internet slang from the internet to create memes. These memes combine, collage, and mix various characters, mocking and playful language, exaggerated gestures, and funny expressions to form a mixed postmodern style. The

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<sup>112</sup> "Truthiness," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, accessed March 13, 2024, <https://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/truthiness>.

<sup>113</sup> "Truthiness," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary.

<sup>114</sup> Lan Zhitong 蓝芝同, and Tan Yadan 谭雅丹, "Qingnian yawenhua shijiao xia biaoqingbao de chuanbo tanxi" 青年亚文化视角下表情包的传播探析 [Exploring the spread of emoticons from the perspective of youth subculture], *Chuban guangjiao* 出版广角, No. 288 (2017): 70.

combination of unrelated image materials and text from the internet covers the meaning contained in the original image. With the addition of new text, a meaning system rich in youth characteristics is formed.

The interaction between the active choice of youth and the passive social background has led to the emergence of Lu Xun's new visual representation—memes—on social media platforms. Due to the rapid development of mobile social media after 2010, users have shifted from primarily text-based expression to primarily visual expression on the internet, promoting the popularity of memes as visual representations on social media. The meme culture in contemporary youth culture is a passive result based on the visual usage characteristics of contemporary internet social media. The enduring popularity and dissemination of memes as a vehicle for visual representation on social media are inseparable from the fresh creativity constantly injected by young people into this form of visual representation. Young people combine memes with other cultural types or popular internet trends that they love, creating a rich meme culture that accommodates different times and themes.

### **Visual Representations of Lu Xun in Memes: From Subculture to Mainstream**

The final artistic effect of memes bore no relation to the content described in the original images. In addition to Tang Xiaoming's oil painting *Never Give Up the Struggle*, Li Yitai's 李以泰 (b. 1944) woodcut print *Marxism is the Most Lucid and Lively Philosophy*, created during the Cultural Revolution in 1974, had also been used multiple times in meme creation (Figure 20). This woodcut print was recognized as one of Lu Xun's most iconic visual representations. The artist depicted Lu Xun's contemplative

state while studying Marxist works. This Lu Xun “quotation” meme, based on the woodcut print, also was a fake quote (Figure 21).<sup>115</sup> The creator only retained Lu Xun’s half-body portrait and added and highlighted the smoke from the cigarette Lu Xun held in his hand. The visual representation of Lu Xun with exaggerated smoking behavior originated from the mural at the square entrance of Lu Xun’s Hometown in Shaoxing, which opened to the public for ticketing in October 2003 (Figure 22). The Marxist works depicted in the original woodcut print were not the focus of the meme (Figure 21). The emphasis of this meme was on Lu Xun smoking. The visual representation of Lu Xun with exaggerated smoking behavior was rare, yet it has become the most famous visual representation of Lu Xun on Chinese social media after 2010.

The added smoke traces in Lu Xun’s hand were the result of the unauthorized modification of Li Yitai’s original Lu Xun painting by the managing authority of Lu Xun’s Hometown and the mural designer. In July 2004, Li Yitai, the artist of the original painting, filed a lawsuit against the managing authority of Lu Xun’s Hometown and the designer of the mural for modifying the original work without the painter’s permission and using it as a commercial advertisement without attribution.<sup>116</sup> Compared to the original work, the visual representation of Lu Xun used by Shaoxing City for promotion greatly exaggerated the smoke traces, which were originally subtle and complementary, into three curving lines with highlighting. Li believed that this infringement seriously damaged the intention and composition of the original painting. In February 2005, the

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<sup>115</sup> Song, “‘Wo shizai meiyou shuouguo zheyang yijuhua’ zhejuhua Luxun hai zhen shuoguo”.

<sup>116</sup> Beijing Youth Daily 北京青年报, “Luxun banhua gai guanggao meiyuan jiaoshou gao shaoxingshi zhengfu deng qinquan 鲁迅版画改广告 美院教授告绍兴市政府等侵权” [Lu Xun’s prints changed into advertisements Professor of the Academy of Fine Arts sued Shaoxing Municipal Government and others for infringement of copyright], last modified February 6, 2005. <http://lianghui.china.com.cn/chinese/zhuan/zhsheq/780613.htm>.

court ruled that Li won the lawsuit and awarded him economic compensation. The court also ordered the managing authority of Lu Xun's Hometown to remove the mural. Although there were no further court records, the mural still stands in Lu Xun's Hometown, and Li likely settled with the managing authority. This also exempted this visual representation depicting Lu Xun smoking from copyright disputes for its widespread dissemination on social media, increasing the possibility of multiple secondary creations.

This smoking Lu Xun is the most favored visual representation among the youth. This smoking Lu Xun is the most beloved visual representation among the youth. This is the jersey designed by the men's football team of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Peking University in 2018 (Figure 23a).<sup>117</sup> On the back of the jersey, Lu Xun's birth name, Zhou Shuren 周树人, was written, as if Lu Xun were a member of this team (Figure 23a). In football, the number 10 player is the team's core organizer or attacking player. The number 10 player of this team was Lu Xun (Figure 23a). This player number arrangement indicated that Lu Xun was both a close peer and a great role model in the hearts of the football team members. In the upper right corner of the front of the jersey was the team's logo, with the establishment year of Peking University's Department of Chinese Language and Literature, 1910, below the logo (Figure 23b). Above the logo was a football and three Chinese characters “斯文在 siwenzai,” meaning knowledge and culture are present. In the upper left corner of the

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<sup>117</sup> Deng Xianglan 邓香兰, “Huanying jiaru zhongwen nanzu 欢迎加入中文男足” [Welcome to the Chinese Men's Soccer Team], Weixin, last modified August 25, 2018, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Hd\\_qm-647X6UeKJI\\_xWvdA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Hd_qm-647X6UeKJI_xWvdA).

front of the jersey is the team's slogan (Figure 23c). Because the team's performance ranked at the bottom among the departments at Peking University, the designer flipped Nike's swoosh logo 180 degrees and wrote "JUST LOSE IT" below, instead of Nike's original "JUST DO IT."<sup>118</sup> At the bottom of the front of the jersey, the designer used this most famous visual representation of Lu Xun from social media, removed the exaggerated smoke traces, and wrote a fake quote imitating Lu Xun's famous "two jujube trees" quote: "I like two football teams, one is the men's football team of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature." The second half of the quote, "and the other is also the men's football team of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature," was designed on the back of the jersey, with the team name "The men's football team of the Department of Chinese Language and Literature 中文男足 (zhongwennanzu)" highlighted in larger font. The jersey designer used the fake quote to replace the exaggerated smoke traces to restore the function of the meme's dialogue with the viewer, as if Lu Xun were introducing this team to the public. In the creation of Lu Xun's visual representations, young people do not care about the special political meaning or other connotations of the original images they use. They only add explanatory information or delete unnecessary information to the visual representations of Lu Xun they like based on their actual needs.

In March 2023, Chinese youth and Chinese official media engaged in a discussion on the current employment predicament on social media, borrowing the characteristics of the fictional characters in Lu Xun's writings. The theme of this discussion was "Kong

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<sup>118</sup> Deng, "Huanying jiaru zhongwen nanzu".

Yiji literature (孔乙己文学 Kongyiji wenxue).” Kong Yiji was a character in Lu Xun's novels, impoverished yet still wearing a long gown symbolizing scholars, lacking livelihood skills, and appearing pedantic and numb.<sup>119</sup> During the spring recruitment of 2023, many young users on social media lamented, “At first reading, I did not know the meaning in the book; upon rereading, I am already a person in the book.”<sup>120</sup> They expressed their confusion and despair of “graduation equals unemployment” with sentences such as “Education is the high stage I cannot descend from, and even more so the long gown Kong Yiji cannot take off” and “If I had not been educated, I could find other work to do, but I happen to be educated.”<sup>121</sup> As “Kong Yiji Literature” gradually spread on multiple social media platforms, on March 16, China’s official media CCTV.com published an article stating that Kong Yiji’s tragic fate was due to his inability to let go of his identity and face as a scholar.<sup>122</sup> This article caused a huge uproar on Chinese social media. Young people criticized the official media for attributing Kong Yiji’s tragic fate to personal reasons without considering social factors.<sup>123</sup> Many people also mentioned that Lu Xun wrote novels not to criticize Kong Yiji but to condemn the evil old society.<sup>124</sup> In December 2023, “Kong Yiji Literature” was selected as one of the top ten internet buzzwords in China.<sup>125</sup> Behind the popularity

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<sup>119</sup> Beijing Luxun Museum and the New Culture Movement Memorial of Beijing. *Beijing Luxun bowuguan (Beijing xinwenhua yundong jinianguan) ziliao zaixian chaxun xitong*, 2014.

<sup>120</sup> China Digital Times 中国数字时代, “‘Kongyiji wenxue’ shi shenme geng? ‘孔乙己文学’是什么梗?” [What’s the deal with ‘Kongyiji Literature’?], last modified March 21, 2023. <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/chinese/694043.html>.

<sup>121</sup> China Digital Times, “‘Kongyiji wenxue’ shi shenme geng?” last modified March 21, 2023.

<sup>122</sup> Lei, Huohuo 雷嚯嚯, “Zhengshi ‘Kongyiji wenxue’ beihou de jiaolv 正视‘孔乙己文学’背后的焦虑” [Confronting the Anxiety Behind ‘Kongyiji Literature’], CCTV.COM 央视网, last modified March 16, 2023. [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/x5ulpnRwQtFw\\_8wzn4Es6w](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/x5ulpnRwQtFw_8wzn4Es6w).

<sup>123</sup> Lei, “Zhengshi ‘Kongyiji wenxue’ beihou de jiaolv”.

<sup>124</sup> Lei, “Zhengshi ‘Kongyiji wenxue’ beihou de jiaolv”.

<sup>125</sup> Luo Xin 罗昕, “‘Shida wangluo liuxingyu’ gongbu: xianyanbao, tezhongbinglvyou deng ruxuan ‘十大网络流行语’公布: 显眼包、特种兵旅游等入选” [‘Top Ten Internet Buzzwords’ Announced: Conspicuous

of this internet buzzword in 2023 are the struggles of many helpless Chinese youths facing a grim employment situation, fighting for the right to speak in public spaces against the state's official propaganda agencies that wish to whitewash the situation.

In this internet hot topic, the smoking Lu Xun changed from an informal portrait to a formal news media illustration. On March 16, CCTV.com used the young people's favorite smoking Lu Xun as an illustration in the news.<sup>126</sup> The image of the smoking Lu Xun used by CCTV.com was not the version with exaggerated smoke traces favored by the youth, but Li Yitai's original work (Figure 24). This again proved that CCTV, as an official media outlet, cannot express the true demands of contemporary Chinese youth. The BBC used the huge mural of Lu Xun's Hometown as an illustration in its news report.<sup>127</sup> On April 1, 2023, the emerging news website "Semafor" published an article titled "The hottest meme in China is a century-old scholar."<sup>128</sup> Lu Xun-themed emoticons began to go global.

Behind these news media illustrations, a spontaneous activity quietly took place on Chinese social media platforms, starting in March and continuing to this day. Many young people, when visiting Lu Xun's Hometown, would take photos of themselves lighting a cigarette for Lu Xun by holding a lighter and using a misaligned photographic angle (Figure 25). Young people expressed their respect for Lu Xun through a casual and humorous way of lighting cigarettes. After the meaning of Kong Yiji's character

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People, Special Forces Tourism, and More Make the Cut], last modified December 8, 2023, [https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_25584310](https://m.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_25584310).

<sup>126</sup> Lei, "Zhengshi 'Kongyiji wenxue' beihou de jiaolv".

<sup>127</sup> Grace Tsoi, "Kong Yiji: The memes that lay bare China's youth disillusionment", last modified June 10, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-65425941>.

<sup>128</sup> Diego Mendoza, "The hottest meme in China is a century-old scholar", last modified April 1, 2023, <https://www.semafor.com/article/03/31/2023/kong-yiji-meme-china>.

was distorted by official media, young people wanted to seek comfort from Lu Xun through action. Compared to memes, these photos uploaded to social media of lighting cigarettes for Lu Xun no longer rely on those true or false Lu Xun quotes. These photos leave the text behind, completely highlighting the visual representation of Lu Xun smoking. A woodcut print created during the Cultural Revolution with the intention of political propaganda was first exaggerated with smoke traces. Then, in the era of social media, due to these modified smoke traces, the visual representation of Lu Xun in the woodcut print became popular among the youth and turned into a quotation meme. Finally, because of an official public opinion that put pressure on the youth, it broke away from the original meaning of the woodcut print and the various interpretations of the memes' texts, completely becoming the most famous visual representation of Lu Xun in the internet age. Lu Xun transformed from a serious literati into a person smoking, unrestrained, or contemplating while gazing into the distance. As for what kind of person Lu Xun really was, the answer is not unique. The thoughts of each person who went to Shaoxing to light a cigarette for Lu Xun may be different. These photos without captions are a more silent yet powerful form of social commentary.

Chinese internet art from 2010 to 2023 was a new art form created by youth in public spaces. Compared to another youth-led art form—graffiti art—both memes and graffiti are art forms that need to be created in public spaces, facing the public.<sup>129</sup> Communication studies scholar Jiang Jianguo 蒋建国 (b.1970) analyzed that internet memes are a form of internet graffiti that subverts traditional aesthetics.<sup>130</sup> Both memes

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<sup>129</sup> Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art: The Graffiti Revolution* (London: Abrams, 2008), 15–26.

<sup>130</sup> Jiang, and Li, “Wangluo tuya biaoqingbao: shenchou kuanghuan yihuo yule de dama”, 131.



and graffiti metaphorically express emotions such as mockery and helplessness to society.<sup>131</sup> He also argued street graffiti and internet memes as typical representatives of youth culture, with computer screens replacing city walls, and mice and photo editing software replacing spray paint cans.<sup>132</sup> However, this replacement involved transformative substitution. The tangible and portable computers and smartphones, along with the intangible internet, provide memes with a much broader creative space compared to graffiti art painted on city walls.

By further comparing artist characteristics, production media, and dissemination media, memes and graffiti art exhibit many distinct features. In terms of artists, graffiti artists need to have professional and outstanding artistic skills, and it is created by a very small number of people facing the public in the real world. For internet art represented by memes, meme creators do not need to have sufficient artistic cultivation; as long as they can use a computer or mobile phone, they can create a meme. For those widely circulated memes, we cannot know the source and creator information. Memes are an art form created by the public for the public. Because internet art spreads in the virtual world of social media, there are almost no restrictions on creation and dissemination.<sup>133</sup> In China, many graffiti artworks are concentrated in public art areas, such as the 798 Art District in Beijing.<sup>134</sup> Before the opening of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Beijing government provided many creative spaces for young artists, but after creating, the artists felt that what they painted was not street graffiti but official

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<sup>131</sup> Jiang, and Li, “Wangluo tuya biaoqingbao: shenchou kuanghuan yihuo yule de dama”, 131.

<sup>132</sup> Jiang, and Li, “Wangluo tuya biaoqingbao: shenchou kuanghuan yihuo yule de dama”, 131.

<sup>133</sup> Zhang Xiaozhu 张筱竹, “Tuyaren biezou!!! 涂鸦人别走!!! ” [Don't go, Graffiti Man!!!], last modified December 18, 2015, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/20428886>.

<sup>134</sup> Zhang, “Tuyaren biezou!!!”

propaganda paintings.<sup>135</sup> Unauthorized graffiti art is illegal in both China and the United States, and it is not easy to find legal creative spaces.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, the unrestricted creative space for internet art has become the reason for its rapid development in China, allowing more and more young people to participate in creation and complete the relay race of dissemination.

After forming a unique meme culture within youth culture, facing new social realities, young people began to use the smoking Lu Xun as a tool to engage in dialogue with the external society. In this context, the theme and content of the emerging memes are not the self-expression of youth based on their inner preferences, but the counterattack of united youth after facing oppression and blow from the external society. When Lu Xun-themed memes first appeared, Chinese youth had the mentality of making fun of Lu Xun when creating and spreading memes. Young people used these not-so-real but youth culture-filled visual representations of Lu Xun to transform Lu Xun from an old paragon into a peer.

### **Visual Representations of Lu Xun: From Amusing Peer to Inspirational Icon**

In February 2021, new Lu Xun-themed memes emerged, inspired by the TV series “The Age of Awakening 觉醒年代 (Juexing niandai),” which was produced to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CCP.<sup>137</sup> The character traits of the young Lu Xun in the series, such as his love for food and his poor communication skills, were labeled by netizens with contemporary Chinese youth culture tags like

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<sup>135</sup> Zhang, “Tuyaren biezou!!!”

<sup>136</sup> “New York Consolidated Laws, Penal Law - PEN § 145.60 Making Graffiti,” New York State Senate, accessed March 13, 2024, <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/PEN/145.60>.

<sup>137</sup> *Juexing niandai* (觉醒年代 [The awakening age]), directed by Zhang Yongxin 张永新, CCTV, 2021, TV series.

“foodie” and “social anxiety disorder.”<sup>138</sup> The image of Lu Xun resigning from his job and standing at the entrance of the education department with a wooden sign saying “I quit 不幹了(Bu gan l)” went viral on Weibo’s hot search list (Figure 26).<sup>139</sup> This new visual representation of Lu Xun became a public symbol for young people to complain about their “corporate slave 社畜 (Shechu)” lifestyle.<sup>140</sup> In the creation of Lu Xun’s internet visual representations, Lu Xun moved from the education department of the last century to the ordinary work positions of contemporary youth.

The visual representations of Lu Xun that emerged in 2021 were another powerful social commentary following the smoking Lu Xun. Chinese youth continued to use Lu Xun to express their dissatisfaction with and resistance to the current state of society. The Chinese term “corporate slave 社畜” originated from the Japanese vocabulary that emerged in the 1990s and was a self-deprecating term used by low-level corporate employees in Japan. “Corporate slave” implied that office workers are the livestock of the company. Subsequently, this term gradually became popular in East Asian society. On May 4, 2021, Chinese Youth Day, at 9:33 a.m., Zhang Jun 张军, the public relations director of the Chinese internet company Tencent, posted on Weibo, “While we are busy making various plans to pay tribute to the youth, the youth are sleeping (@腾讯张军, May 4, 2021).”<sup>141</sup> Almost all the reposts and comments on this Weibo posting were rebuttals and protests from young people. One young person commented on this Weibo

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<sup>138</sup> *Juexing niandai*, CCTV, 2021, TV series.

<sup>139</sup> Cui, and Yu, “‘Geng’ ‘Xiha’ yu ‘Danmu’,” 73.

<sup>140</sup> Cui, and Yu, “‘Geng’ ‘Xiha’ yu ‘Danmu’,” 73.

<sup>141</sup> Pengpai News 澎湃新闻, “Tengxun gongguanrongjian weibo yinfa zhengyi wangyou zenme jiaqi hai buneng shui ge lanjiao ma 腾讯公关总监微博引发争议, 网友: 怎么假期还不能睡个懒觉吗” [Tencent public relations director’s weibo controversy, netizens: how the holidays cannot sleep a lazy?], last modified May 5, 2021. [https://m.thepaper.cn/kuaibao\\_detail.jsp?contid=12533221&from=kuaibao](https://m.thepaper.cn/kuaibao_detail.jsp?contid=12533221&from=kuaibao).

post, “The purpose of social and economic progress is to enable people, including young people, to live a happier life, not for them to be driven by capital to create surplus value and die suddenly (@Vinleng\_, May 4, 2021).” Another young person said, “Why not sleep? To get up and work 996 for you? Do you want this blessing (@为谁风露立中宵 6, May 4, 2021)?”<sup>142</sup> In recent years, the “996” work week of Chinese internet companies means working from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day, six days a week. This work week had made office workers in the internet industry miserable and expanded from the internet industry to other industries. On Youth Day in 2021, this Weibo posting by a corporate executive mocking young people had received 30,000 reposts, 15,000 comments, and over 1 million followers by noon on May 4, becoming a social hot topic and triggering heated discussions.<sup>143</sup> In August 2021, the Japanese-derived term “corporate slave 社畜” was replaced by the Chinese term “working people 打工人 (Dagongren)” on Chinese social media.<sup>144</sup> Young people used the scene of Lu Xun resigning from his job in the series to create “Lu Xun Quit 鲁迅不干了” memes (Figure 27). “I quit” briefly became the slogan of Chinese youth in 2021.<sup>145</sup> Young people saw themselves as the working-class proletariat in opposition to these capitalist work organizations. The wooden sign saying “I quit” that Lu Xun held up in the series just happened to meet the collective needs of Chinese youth, namely, they wanted to resist this kind of irregular exploitation at work and express their strong dissatisfaction

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<sup>142</sup> Pengpai News, “Tengxun gongguanzongjian weibo yinfa zhengyi wangyou zenme jiaqi hai buneng shui ge lanjiao ma”.

<sup>143</sup> Pengpai News, “Tengxun gongguanzongjian weibo yinfa zhengyi wangyou zenme jiaqi hai buneng shui ge lanjiao ma”.

<sup>144</sup> Cui, and Yu, “‘Geng’ ‘Xiha’ yu ‘Danmu’ ,” 73.

<sup>145</sup> Cui, and Yu, “‘Geng’ ‘Xiha’ yu ‘Danmu’ ,” 73.

with ineffective supervision of corporate work week.

The “Lu Xun Quit” memes differed from the previous memes made using collage techniques (Figure 27). These memes were based on the scene of Lu Xun resigning from the education department in the TV series (Figure 26).<sup>146</sup> Initially, young people directly used stills from the TV series and posted them on social media, but these serious stills were too formal and not suitable for young people to use on social media with a relaxed communication atmosphere. So many painters on social media began to draw memes based on the stills. The creators of “Lu Xun Quit” memes need some drawing skills. Compared to the creators of the previous type of memes, these young internet users who draw memes are called internet illustrators. In the drawing process of “Lu Xun Quit” memes, most internet illustrators chose to draw Lu Xun’s image as a cute version, with a small sign saying “I quit” next to the character (Figure 27). On Xiaohongshu, by the end of 2023, there were about 1,400 postings for the search term “Luxun bu gan 1 鲁迅不干了 (Lu Xun Quit),” while searching for “Luxun biaoqingbao 鲁迅表情包 (Lu Xun memes)” only yielded 1,000 postings. “Lu Xun Quit” memes became a social commentary tag independent of Lu Xun-themed memes.

In 2021, after the “Lu Xun Quit” memes became associated with the current social reality topic of “996,” young people were not satisfied with only using these memes on social media. Searching for “Lu Xun Quit” postings on Xiaohongshu, many postings were photos of office desks or study desks shared by young people (Figure 28a–28b). These photos all feature visual representations designed based on the “Lu Xun Quit”

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<sup>146</sup> *Juexing niandai*, CCTV, 2021, TV series.

memes, made of clay or acrylic, as desktop ornaments. Lu Xun-themed memes had evolved from virtual social media to art objects in real life.

The name of this type of art object has many names in Chinese, so it is not unique in English expression. This type of art object had an informal expression on Chinese social media called “zhoubian 周边.”<sup>147</sup> The word “zhoubian” in Chinese originally means “around” as a locative pronoun. Young people believe that these art objects are all secondary artistic creations around a certain theme or character. Art objects related to Lu Xun can be called “Lu Xun zhoubian,” meaning they are art objects created around the character theme of Lu Xun, with Lu Xun as the center. On social media and shopping apps, young people search for, discuss, and purchase artworks usually using the name “zhoubian.” In current Chinese academic papers and news, the word “zhoubian” is only used to represent products related to anime, games, and web novels, to distinguish them from cultural and creative art products made by museums and publishing houses.<sup>148</sup> The name “zhoubian” vividly shows how these art objects are designed and conceived. This type of art object also has a formal expression called “Derivative,” representing something that is based on another source. The term “Derivative” was used in the “Museum Regulations” issued by the Chinese government and the cultural industry survey reports issued by various national departments.<sup>149</sup> The

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<sup>147</sup> Cheng Hui 程辉, “Yi ‘wenchuang chanpin’ wei zhuti de wenxianzongshu yanjiu zhiyi” 以“文创产品”为主题的文献综述研究之一 [Literature Review of ‘Cultural Creative Product’ Research (I)], *Gongye sheji* 工业设计, No. 2 (2018): 30;

<sup>148</sup> Cheng, “Yi ‘wenchuang chanpin’ wei zhuti,” 30.

<sup>149</sup> In the newly announced “Museum Regulations” written: “The State encourages museums to explore the connotations of the collections, combined with cultural and creative, tourism and other industries to develop derivative products to enhance the development capacity of museums.” Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China. Museum Regulations, 02. 09. 2015; Cheng Hui, “Literature Review of ‘Cultural Creative Product’ Research (I),” 30.

term “Derivative” originated as a mathematical concept and later evolved into a financial concept.<sup>150</sup> This term emphasizes the commodity attribute of this type of art object. In this thesis, I use the English term “Cultural Creative Commodity” used by scholars in mainland China and Taiwan when studying this type of art object.<sup>151</sup> This name is also the most common term for this type of artwork in Chinese currently. The name “Cultural Creative Commodity” first appeared in Taiwan in 2010.<sup>152</sup> In 2013, due to the popularity of a museum gift tape launched by the National Palace Museum in Taipei in mainland China, this type of art object began to be introduced to mainland China. The name “Cultural Creative Commodity” can accurately express the type of these art objects.

The young artists who create Lu Xun-themed cultural creative commodities were mainly divided into two categories. The first category was independent artists who operated their online stores. These artists draw design inspiration from popular social media themes. For example, the ceramic artist Houshanqi 后山器, who operated his online store to sell his works.<sup>153</sup> The Lu Xun ceramic figurine desktop ornament made by Houshanqi depicted the most widely known classic visual representation of Lu Xun (Figure 29).<sup>154</sup> The hairstyle, cigarette, beard, and gray long gown are the most representative artistic features in Lu Xun’s visual representation. Wearing a long gown

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<sup>150</sup> Cheng, “Yi ‘wenchuang chanpin’ wei zhuti,” 30.

<sup>151</sup> Cheng, “Yi ‘wenchuang chanpin’ wei zhuti,” 29–30; Shih-Wen Hsiao, Ming-Feng Wang, Dai-Jung Lee, Chien-Wei Chen, “A Study on the Application of an Artificial Neural Algorithm in the Color Matching of Taiwanese Cultural and Creative Commodities,” *COLOR Research and Application*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (2015): 341–51.

<sup>152</sup> Xie Liang 解亮, “Wenchuang chanpin zhong tuxing sheji tanjiu” 文创产品中图形设计探究 [Exploration of graphic design in cultural and creative product], *Xueyuan 学园*, No. 16 (2017): 136–37.

<sup>153</sup> “Lu Xun 鲁迅 ‘I Don’t Work Anymore’ Series Desktop Ornament Decoration Crafts 摆件礼物周边,” Taobao 淘宝, April 10, 2023, <https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?id=667192036463>.

<sup>154</sup> “Lu Xun 鲁迅 ‘I Don’t Work Anymore’ Series Desktop Ornament.”

symbolizes Lu Xun's identity as an intellectual in the last century, while smoking indicates his rebellious and struggling inner world. This contrast just happens to cater to the needs of Chinese youth in reshaping Lu Xun's visual representation. Faced with endless overtime, the company's unfulfilled promises of salary increases, and the risk of layoffs, Chinese youth, out of the need to survive, can only wrap themselves in a "long gown" to endure these injustices and protect their aspirations, ideals, and dignity before leaving campus and graduating. This mini sculpture is both close to the real Lu Xun and close to the real living situation of Chinese youth.

The other category of artists was employed by museums and publishing institutions. These artists designed and released artworks in the name of museums or publishing institutions, and the names of the artists themselves are unknown.<sup>155</sup> They must reinterpret Lu Xun's artistic image based on the design requirements of the museum or publishing institution and Lu Xun's real-life experiences. In June 2022, the cultural creative commodities sold in the Lu Xun-themed literary and creative cafe opened by the People's Literature Publishing House in Beijing were all made based on Lu Xun's literary works and real-life experiences, such as bookmarks engraved with selected sentences from Lu Xun's works (Figure 30). In the cafe, the People's Literature Publishing House also sells books related to Lu Xun (Figure 30). This new type of literary and creative cafe combined Lu Xun's serious literature with the Lu Xun-themed cultural creative commodities loved by Chinese youth, bringing the popularity of Lu Xun as a Chinese social media influencer back to Lu Xun's literary works.

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<sup>155</sup> Xie, "Wenchuang chanpin zhong tuxing sheji tanjiu", 136-37.



Chinese youth's behavior of rereading Lu Xun was not guided by the government or publishing houses but was a spontaneous act. In a 2015 interview, scholar Qian Liqun affirmed the significance of Lu Xun to Chinese youth and advocated guiding young people to read Lu Xun.<sup>156</sup> Chinese writer Yu Hua 余华 (b. 1960) once said that he read Lu Xun from elementary school to middle school, and Lu Xun was not a writer for children.<sup>157</sup> He couldn't understand Lu Xun when he was young, and he hated Lu Xun the most at that time.<sup>158</sup> When he reread Lu Xun at the age of 35, he realized how remarkable he was.<sup>159</sup> For most ordinary Chinese youth who are not engaged in literary writing, they also need an opportunity to reread Lu Xun.

Chinese youth are facing a grim reality of survival at present. According to World Bank data, since China began its reform and opening up in 1978, its GDP has grown by an average of over 9% per year, lifting more than 800 million people out of poverty.<sup>160</sup> During the same period, there have also been significant improvements in the provision of healthcare, education, and other services.<sup>161</sup> This economic cycle ushered in an explosive period of rapid development during the 2000-2008 Beijing Olympics cycle.<sup>162</sup> Most of the post-80s, post-90s, and post-00s were born under the one-child policy and can enjoy economic and educational resources superior to the previous generation. It was undeniable that these people grew up in a happy era. Contemporary

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<sup>156</sup> Xu Zhiyuan 许知远, "Luxun de dangdai yiyi 鲁迅的当代意义" [The Contemporary Significance of Lu Xun], last modified October 20, 2019, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/87682916>.

<sup>157</sup> Southern Metropolis Daily 南方都市报, "Yuhua: wo ceng taoyan qiaobuqi Luxun zuopin 余华: 我曾讨厌、瞧不起鲁迅作品" [Yu Hua: I Used to Hate and Despise Lu Xun's Works], last modified September 22, 2014, [https://news.ifeng.com/a/20140922/42045871\\_0.shtml](https://news.ifeng.com/a/20140922/42045871_0.shtml).

<sup>158</sup> Southern Metropolis Daily, "Yuhua: wo ceng taoyan qiaobuqi Luxun zuopin".

<sup>159</sup> Southern Metropolis Daily, "Yuhua: wo ceng taoyan qiaobuqi Luxun zuopin".

<sup>160</sup> "Overview," World Bank, last modified April 20, 2023, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>.

<sup>161</sup> Clark, *Youth Culture in China*, 189.

<sup>162</sup> Clark, *Youth Culture in China*, 189.

Chinese youth, who have had a rich childhood thanks to the rapid development of China's internet technology, fall into a predicament caused by the "996" work week when they grow up. In China, the number of deaths from cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases accounts for more than 40% of the composition of resident disease deaths. Although the overall incidence rate is higher among the elderly, the frequency of sudden deaths among young people due to long working hours and staying up late is gradually increasing.<sup>163</sup> The content creator "智能路障 zhinengluzhang (Smart roadblock)" released a 30-minute-54-second video of everyone reading Lu Xun's short story "Kong Yiji" in December 2020.<sup>164</sup> By the end of 2023, it had 8 million views. Most of the comments on the video are young people expressing their negative attitudes towards society.<sup>165</sup> The desktop ornaments placed on the office desk were external visual representations of Lu Xun, expressing young people's resistance, dissatisfaction, and helplessness towards society. Even in public opinion spaces, they could not fully vent their negative emotions. So, young people shared their thoughts after rereading Lu Xun on social media or leave comments on interpretation videos. They found ways to vent their emotions from Lu Xun's literary works.

#### Contemporary Chinese youth and the young woodcut artists of a hundred years

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<sup>163</sup> " 'Cusi' weihe dingshang nianqingren? Youshenme banfa neng jianshao beiju fasheng? '猝死'为何盯上年轻人?有什么办法能减少悲剧发生?" [Why is 'sudden death' targeting young people? What can be done to minimize the tragedy?], CCTV. com, last modified January 14, 2021. <https://news.cctv.com/2021/01/14/ARTI70RmTl7xz1o99zF1MpNm210114.shtml>.

<sup>164</sup> Zhinengluzhang 智能路障, "[Weilu yehua] Zhenhan renxin! Meixiangdao women de chuzhong kebenshang, you zheme niubi de kewen. (tan Luxun ba) 【围炉夜话】震撼人心! 没想到我们的初中课本上, 有这么牛逼的课文。(谈鲁迅 8)" [[Around the Fireside] Shocker! I didn't realize we had such awesome texts in our middle school textbooks. (Talking about Lu Xun 8)], last modified December 14, 2020. [https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1H54y1t7Fm/?spm\\_id\\_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd\\_source=875ab3f0ac154b1c513070ccbd6418e3](https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1H54y1t7Fm/?spm_id_from=333.337.search-card.all.click&vd_source=875ab3f0ac154b1c513070ccbd6418e3).

<sup>165</sup> Zhinengluzhang, "[Weilu yehua] Zhenhan renxin! Meixiangdao women de chuzhong kebenshang, you zheme niubi de kewen. (tan Luxun ba)".

ago have the same role model—Lu Xun. For Chinese youth, Lu Xun was no longer the scary existence described as “one fear of classical Chinese, two fear of writing essays, three fear of Zhou Shuren” during their primary and secondary education.<sup>166</sup> China’s youth have begun to regard Lu Xun as a spiritual comfort in their numb lives. They vented their emotions and gained encouragement through these Lu Xun-themed cultural creative commodities and reading Lu Xun’s works in the silence of public opinion. When facing social pressures, Lu Xun became an existence with more room for interpretation and attraction for contemporary Chinese youth.

When Lu Xun's “quotation” memes were popular on Chinese social media, Chinese youth’s attitude towards Lu Xun was still mainly “making fun of Lu Xun.” This kind of mocking of Lu Xun within the youth group, which regarded Lu Xun as a friend’s visual representation, transformed into commemorating Lu Xun after the creation and dissemination of “Lu Xun Quit” memes. Young people began to miss Lu Xun who once bravely spoke out for Chinese people in difficult situations in his writing. The visual representations of Lu Xun created by young people began to become a vehicle for youth to express their dissatisfaction with the external society on social media and also brought Lu Xun back from the interesting role reshaped by young people when they mocked him to himself and his works.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the dynamic interplay between the historical narratives surrounding Lu Xun and the emergent realm of Chinese internet art, focusing

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<sup>166</sup> Cui, and Yu, “ ‘Geng’ ‘Xiha’ yu ‘Danmu’ , ” 76.

on the pivotal role of youth in reshaping Lu Xun's visual representation in the post-2010 era. By tracing the evolution of Lu Xun's image from traditional political and cultural symbolism to a fluid, youth-driven tool for self-expression and social commentary, this research illuminates the complex nexus between past and present, tradition and innovation, in the digital age. The analysis of memes and cultural creative commodities as vehicles for youth expression and resistance offers a compelling case study of how internet art is transforming the landscape of public discourse and creative practice in contemporary China. In doing so, this thesis provides a valuable barometer for understanding the evolving nature of artistic expression and cultural identity in the face of rapid technological and social change.

Chinese youth have shaped various fake personas of Lu Xun through multiple social media hot topics, such as the Lu Xun who likes ACG culture, the Lu Xun who says fake quotes, and the unrestrained Lu Xun who smokes. However, they have now turned to re-reading Lu Xun's works to seek the help of the real Lu Xun and obtain spiritual comfort from this old paragon. Chinese youth have gone from not needing to understand Lu Xun's works and being able to create memes based on their own preferences, to needing to read Lu Xun's works. This is a process of self-growth and self-redemption for the group. At the moment when they read Lu Xun's works, Lu Xun, the historical figure, and his works, as historical narratives of the past, have completed their historical mission in the process of enriching the emerging internet art. This process is also a process of returning from the false to the real. The length of time for the process of returning to reality depends on the growth speed of the group leading this

connection. Taking Chinese youth's reshaping of Lu Xun's visual representation as an example, the growth speed of the youth requires both the accumulation of self-awareness and the pressure of the external social environment to promote the group's self-awakening.

The memes and cultural creative commodities studied and analyzed in this thesis are mostly secondary creations made by young users on social media. Most of the visual representations of Lu Xun in these internet artworks were not original. The creators were simply adding and subtracting visual information from the Lu Xun imagined in woodcut prints, portrait photos, and TV character. Internet art, represented by memes, has far lower requirements for artists in terms of artistic skills compared to traditional art forms. However, with social media as the medium of dissemination, internet art has extremely high dissemination and viewing efficiency, becoming a true mass art. Memes save viewers' time and space, yet provide viewers with unlimited emotional feedback. If a viewer of a meme cannot find a meme that matches their current mood or viewpoint expression, the viewer can transform into a creator and create for themselves. The easy and convenient creation process allows internet art, represented by memes, to become a powerful social commentary anytime, anywhere.

From 2010 to 2023, Lu Xun's visual representation on social media platforms had returned from being a friend of the youth to being a role model. This return does not mean the disappearance of contemporary youth's characteristic of resisting mainstream national culture, but only represents that youth no longer use this youth culture characteristic to shape Lu Xun's visual representation. Lu Xun's visual representation

has become a flexibly usable tool in contemporary internet art where the creation and acceptance groups are both youth groups. Lu Xun's role has been deconstructed and reorganized by Chinese youth into a "database" covering different identities. As for which identity Chinese youth need to extract, it serves the current hot topics and mainstream emotions of Chinese youth. Chinese youth's shaping of Lu Xun's visual representation will change in the future. Youth culture is like a spring. Due to the more open, vast, and fast information space of social media, contemporary youth who have grown up in a huge innovation and are more suitable for the internet age of the new generation, youth culture always maintains a constant vitality and stands like a spring. When facing oppression from outside the youth culture circle, this spring can bounce back far beyond its usual height.

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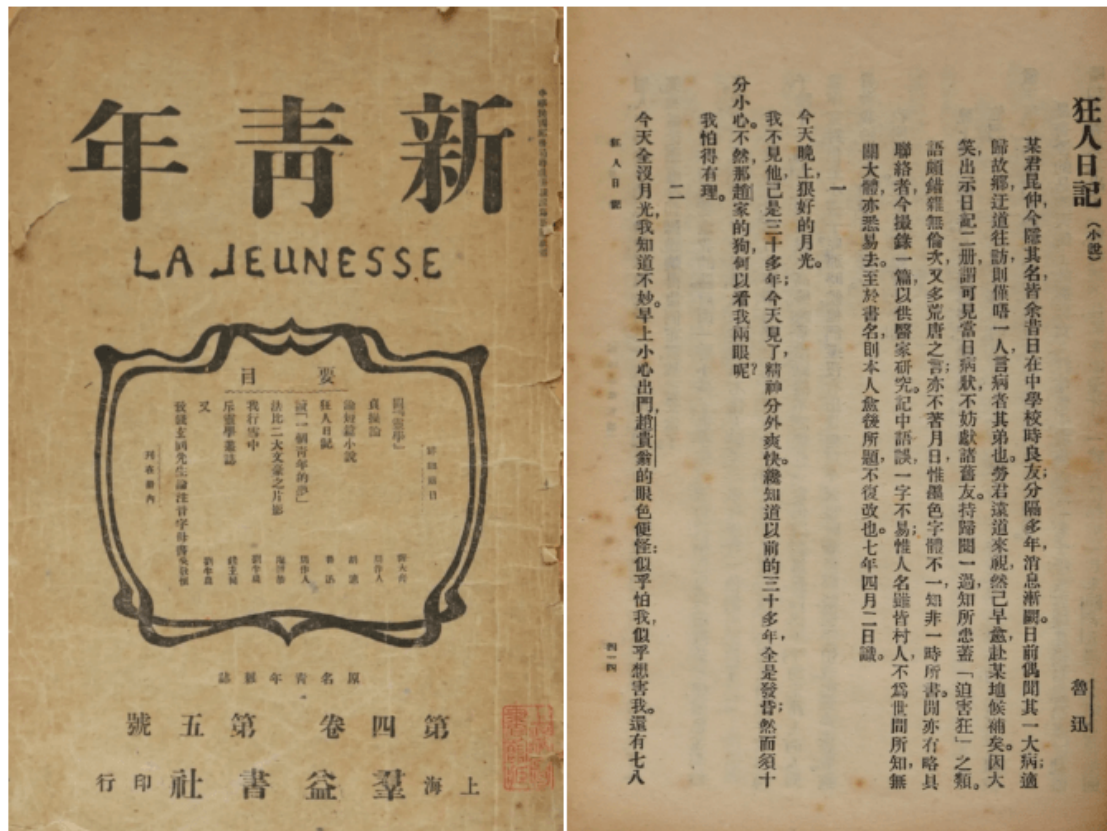


Figure 1. Right: Lu Xun 魯迅, first page of “Kuangren riji” 狂人日記 [Diary of a Madman], *La Jeunesse* 新青年, Vol. 4, No. 5 (May 1918): 414.

Left: Cover of *La Jeunesse*, May 1918.



Figure 2. Lu Xun 鲁迅, *Logo of Peking University*, published in *Beida shenghuo xiezhen* 北大生活写真 [Portrait of Life at Peking University], 1921.





Figure 3. Smile emoji, accessed from “Zhongguo biaoqingbao wenhua de qianshijinsheng 中国表情包文化的前世今生” [The Past and Present of Chinese Emoji Culture], Zhihu 知乎, April 23, 2019, <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/63035108>.



Figure 4. A group photo of Lu Xun with Japanese artist Yoshiyoshi Uchiyama (内山嘉吉 Neishan Jiagi), who taught woodcutting techniques, and workshop participants in Shanghai on August 21, 1931.



Figure 5. Li Qun 力群, *Portrait of Lu Xun* 鲁迅像 (Luxun xiang), 1936, Woodcut print, Shanghai Lu Xun Museum.





Figure 6. Li Qun 力群, *Mourning Lu Xun Memorial Collection: Sketches of His Remains (Drawing)* 哀悼鲁迅先生纪念画辑：遗容速写(画图) (Aidao Luxun xiansheng jinian huaji:nyirong suxie huatu), 1936.



关怀和培养  
青年

“创造这中国历史上未曾有过的第三样时代，则是现在的青年，他们的使命！”鲁迅为革命培养大群新的战士。他热情地关怀和培养青年的成长，叫他们坚持斗争，并指出：“到延安的路是中国的生路。”

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Figure 7. Lu Huanhua 路焕华, page 17 of *Lu Xun—Great Revolutionary, Thinker, Writer* 鲁迅——伟大的革命家、思想家、文学家 (Luxun—weida de gemingjia, sixiangjia, wenzxuejia), 1972.



Figure 8. Graphic Novel (连环画 Lianhuanhua) *Huang Jiguang*, 2000.





Figure 9. Lianhuanhua Street Bookstall, by He Daqi 何大齐 (b. 1940), accessed from “Xiaorensu tan 小人书摊” [Lianhuanhua Street Bookstall], Beijing Wanbao 北京晚报, August 20, 2021, <https://www.bjskpcj.cn/beijing/29-folkways/16486-2021-08-20-07-12-39>.



鲁迅

伟大的革命家、思想家、文学家

Figure 10. Lu Huanhua 路焕华, cover of *Lu Xun—Great Revolutionary, Thinker, Writer* 鲁迅——伟大的革命家、思想家、文学家 (Luxun—weida de gemingjia, sixiangjia, wenzxuejia), 1972.





Figure 11. Lu Huanhua 路焕华, page 15 of *Lu Xun—Great Revolutionary, Thinker, Writer* 鲁迅——伟大的革命家、思想家、文学家 (Luxun—weida de gemingjia, sixiangjia, wenzxuejia), 1972.

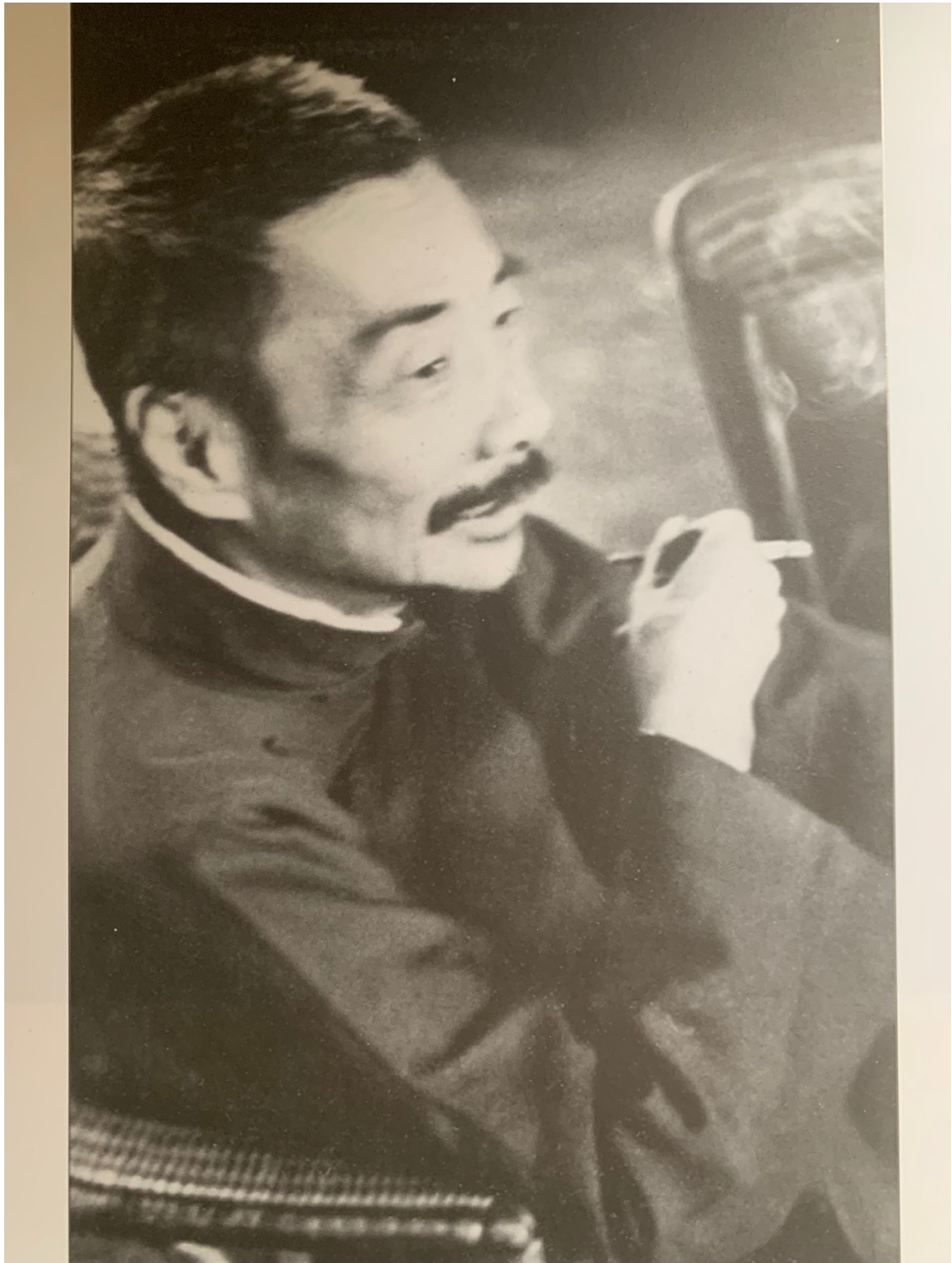


Figure 12. On October 8, 1936, Lu Xun was at the Second National Mobile Woodcut Exhibition.



Figure 13. In 1991, the memorial conference of the 110th anniversary of Lu Xun’s birth was held in Huairen Hall 怀仁堂, Zhongnanhai 中南海. Jiang Zemin 江泽民 (1926–2022) was delivering a speech.



Figure 14. Unidentified artist, *Nico Nico ni* 妮可妮可妮 (nike nike ni), Fabiaoqing 发表情. Accessed March 13, 2024. <https://www.fabiaoqing.com/biaoqing/detail/id/199026.html>.





Figure 15. Portrait Photograph of Lu Xun, 1930.



Figure 16. Japanese anime and music game—*Love Live!* character Yazawa Nico’s logo pose: “Nico Nico ni”.



Figure 17. Meme: “It was indeed what I said.” (的确是我说的)



Figure 18. Meme: “There are two people in my heart, one is you and the other is also you.” (我心里有两个人，一个是你，另一个也是你) Imitation from: “In my backyard, you can see two trees outside the wall, one is a jujube tree and the other is also a jujube tree.” (在我的后园，可以看见墙外有两株树，一株是枣树，还有一株也是枣树。)





Figure 19. Tang Xiaoming 汤小铭, *Never give up the struggle* 永不休战 (Yongbu xiuzhan), 1972, Oil on canvas, 108x140cm, Guangdong Art Museum.

作品解析

作为近现代中国文化界、思想界的巨人，鲁迅在20世纪20年代后期走向马克思主义，并由他巨大的号召力对许多青年学子产生影响。作品刻画了鲁迅研读马克思主义著作时，凝神思考的情态。形象惟妙惟肖，逼真传神，被公认为是鲁迅最经典的形象之一。

作者简介

李以泰（1944— ），上海人，中国美术学院教授。1980年毕业于浙江美术学院（今中国美术学院）研究生班并留校任教。曾任中国美术学院版画系主任、浙江省版画家协会副主席等职。



马克思主义最明快的哲学 李以泰  
版画 45.5cm×47cm 1974年 中国美术学院美术馆藏

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Figure 20. Li Yitai 李以泰, *Marxism is the most lucid and lively philosophy* 马克思主义是最明快的哲学 (Makesi zhuyi shi zui mingkuai de zhexue), 1974, Woodcut print, Art Museum of the China Academy of Art.



Figure 21. Meme: “I didn’t say that, but it does make sense.” (我没说过这话，不过确实在理! ).



Figure 22. An official publicity photo of the mural used by the Shaoxing municipal government,2021.[https://www.sx.gov.cn/art/2021/9/6/art\\_1229354839\\_59328322.html](https://www.sx.gov.cn/art/2021/9/6/art_1229354839_59328322.html)



Figure 23a. Unidentified artist, Peking University Chinese Department Men's Soccer Team Jersey, 2018. [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Hd\\_qm-647X6UeKJI\\_xWvdA](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Hd_qm-647X6UeKJI_xWvdA).



Figure 23b. Detail of the team logo.



Figure 23c. Detail of the team slogan.





Figure 24. The illustration of “Zhengshi ‘Kongyiji wenxue’beihou de jiaolv 正视‘孔乙己文学’背后的焦虑” [Confronting the Anxiety Behind ‘Kongyiji Literature’], last modified March 16, 2023, [https://baike.baidu.com/reference/62775948/533aYdO6cr3\\_z3kATPOInvulOy7MNoyuuLKHUbNzzqIPmGapB4P1FJ836c828L12BUXIv5Utc5kNw\\_2mShUnqZZUB6paSvJow3KKEDWF](https://baike.baidu.com/reference/62775948/533aYdO6cr3_z3kATPOInvulOy7MNoyuuLKHUbNzzqIPmGapB4P1FJ836c828L12BUXIv5Utc5kNw_2mShUnqZZUB6paSvJow3KKEDWF).

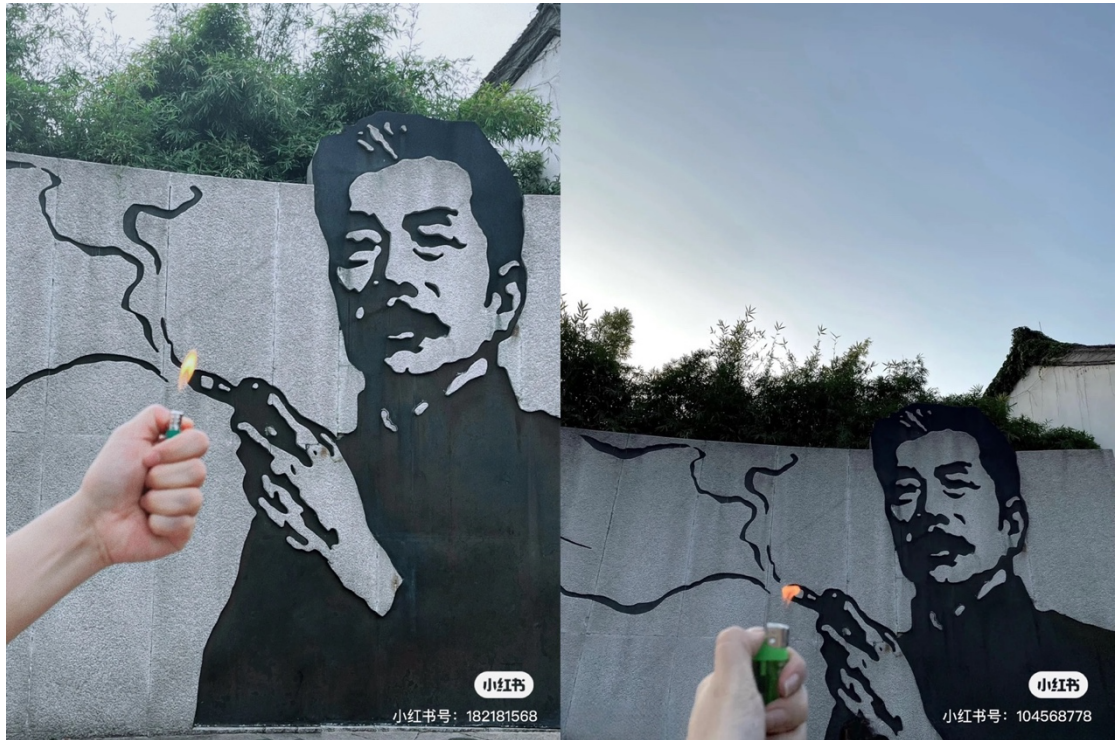


Figure 25. Left: Travel souvenir photo, posted by Xiaohongshu 182181568 on social media platform Xiaohongshu, 2023.

Right: Travel souvenir photo by Xiaohongshu 104568778 on social media platform Xiaohongshu, 2023.



Figure 26. Lu Xun (actor: Cao Lei 曹磊 b.1977) “不幹了” still from the TV series

*The awakening age* 觉醒年代 (Juexing niandai), 2021.





Figure 27. Meme “不幹了 I Quit”, painted and posted by Xiaohongshu 1591978939, 2022. This meme was based on the TV series drawing.



Figure 28a. Desk decoration made of clay, designed by an unidentified artist and posted by Xiaohongshu 1630934725 on social media platform Xiaohongshu, 2022.



Figure 28b. Desk decorations made of acrylic, designed by an unidentified artist and posted by Xiaohongshu 954942015 on social media platform Xiaohongshu, 2023.



Figure 29. Houshanqi 后山器, Lu Xun's ceramic miniature sculpture. Accessed April 10, 2023. <https://item.taobao.com/item.htm?id=667192036463>.





Figure 30. Left: Lu Xun Café at Renmin wenxue chubanshe (人民文学出版社 [People's Literature Publishing House]), Photography by Xuying Liu, 2022.

Middle: Bookmarks engraved with selected sentences from Lu Xun's works, Photography by Xuying Liu, 2022.

Right: Books related to Lu Xun, Photography by Xuying Liu, 2022.