CHAPTER 2

Translating National Character: Lu Xun and Arthur Smith

> Shortly before I left China, an eminent Chinese writer pressed me to say what I considered the chief defects of the Chinese. With some reluctance, I mentioned three: avarice, cowardice, and callousness. Strange to say, my interlocutor, instead of getting angry, admitted the justice of my criticism, and proceeded to discuss possible remedies. This is a sample of the intellectual integrity which is one of China's greatest virtues.[1]

Thus Bertrand Russell on one of his many conversations with the Chinese writers and academics who hosted his trip to China in the winter of 1920. During his visit, the philosopher gave numerous lectures, conversed with the urban elite, made friends, and toured Chinese cities and the countryside with great enthusiasm. When he returned to England in the following year, he did what he had always done after a trip abroad: he wrote about his experiences in minute detail. The essays he wrote eventually crystallized into a book entitled *The Problem of China* (1922), which has a lengthy chapter on the subject of "Chinese character." Russell began by dismissing the common myth of the "subtle Oriental," arguing that "in a game of mutual deception an Englishman or an American can beat a Chinese nine times out of ten."[2] One might suspect that the author was targeting a popular Orientalist myth about Chinamen that had dominated the writings of European and American missionaries for well over a century, but the passage quoted above seems to contradict that speculation.

This passage demonstrates an interesting twist on what ethnographers call the relationship between the knower (Russell) and his native informant (the Chinese interlocutor), for the latter is shown as soliciting self-knowledge from the Western philosopher and ends up being neither a native informant nor much of a knower. What does Russell's narrative tell us about the Chinese and about himself as an author? Should it be read

as just another case of the Orientalism that Said criticizes in a somewhat different context? In other words, has Russell invented a factitious China for the gaze of Westerners? It seems to me that the dramatic encounter between Russell and his Chinese interlocutor, which is not without resemblances to the dialogue between Heidegger and his Japanese interlocutor discussed in Chapter 1, points to something far more complicated than Orientalist maneuvers. Among other things, it suggests that the making of the myth of national character involves a large measure of coauthorship; furthermore, since the chapter was promptly rendered into Chinese and published in a respectable journal in China, the myth was, in fact, coauthored twice and differently: once in the English original and again in Chinese translation.

The coauthorship of Chinese character in the English original, symbolized here by the exchange between the two interlocutors in that conversation, has the effect of consolidating the author's own knowledge about the other even as the subjectivity of the anonymous other is consumed in the process of appropriation. Like missionaries before him, Russell took something to be an essential Chinese virtue that, in fact, bears eloquent witness to the circumstances of modern history within which are embedded his own language and that of his Chinese interlocutor. Avarice, cowardice, and callousness are staple categories of a long-standing missionary discourse about Chinese character that need not surprise the reader. Inasmuch as Russell himself was deeply entrenched in the nineteenth-century European theory of national character, he remained impervious to the historical contingency of his own discourse. By the same token, the "eminent" Chinese writer whose identity was suppressed by Russell's narrative belonged to a generation of Chinese caught in the traumatic circumstances of their time. In their desire to resolve the crisis of national identity in the age of Western imperialism, the majority of China's elite would have asked a similar question.

Having said that, however, I must emphasize that the relationship between Russell's book and its intended English-speaking audience by no means authorizes a single reading, for rupture takes place as soon as translation begins. I am referring to the second stage of coauthorship—when a Chinese translator began introducing Russell's chapter on Chinese character to an *unintended*, Chinese-speaking audience. This translation was brought out by *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern miscellany) in 1922 directly following the first publication of the essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*. As a matter of fact, the chapter on Chinese character was the only one of Russell's fifteen-odd chapters rendered into Chinese at that time. This chapter was

chosen because, as the translator Yuzhi put it in an appended note, "the question of the Chinese *guomin xing* [national character] is one that fascinates us more than anything else."[3] Like many of his predecessors, Russell was being reframed by the Chinese debate on national character through the mediation of translingual practice.[4]

This preamble on Russell is intended to raise a number of questions, theoretical as well as historical, concerning the discursive relationship between East and West in the modern era. What happened when translation and translingual practice subjected the European theory of national character to the interpretation of an "unintended" audience of Chinese speakers? Is there an intellectually more challenging way to account for the historical transaction between East and West than Orientalism, since the latter often reduced the exchange to a matter of specularity between the gazer and the object of the gaze? What kind of light, one might ask, mediated that gaze? What were the terms of the Chinese debate on national character? How did May Fourth writers and critics articulate their agenda concerning the transformation of Chinese national character through literary efforts?

I begin by taking a brief look at the debate on national character before the rise of modern Chinese literature and then focus on the specific role that Western missionaries such as Arthur Smith played in the invention of the myth of Chinese character. I examine the ambivalent reinvention of that myth by the Chinese themselves, especially in May Fourth literary discourse, whose climactic event is Lu Xun's "True Story of Ah Q" (1921). By unraveling the circumstances of Lu Xun's contact with Smith's book, *Chinese Characteristics*, as well as his lifelong obsession with the question of national character, I try to illustrate the central predicament of modern Chinese intellectuals, who sought self-knowledge under the heavy burden of modernity.[5]

The Myth of National Character

The Chinese compound *guomin xing* (or variants *minzu xing*, *guomin de pingge*, etc.) is a Meiji neologism (*kokuminsei*), or one of several neologisms, that the Japanese used to translate the modern European notion of national character often associated with intellectual movements between the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Fueled by the idea of *Volksgeist* (folk spirit), which dominated nationalist discourse in German Romanticism, national character stressed the organic differences between nations and, more often than not, the great depth of the German mind and

German uniqueness. Among the leading French and German thinkers of the time, Herder (1744–1803) exercised the most profound impact on the development of this essentialist notion of national individuality and consciousness.[6] His theory attained an enormous popularity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and still prevails in our post–Cold War era in some mediated forms.[7] The idea of national character subsumes human differences under the totalizing category of national identity and has proved tremendously useful in legitimizing Western imperialist expansion and domination of the world.[8] Its rhetoric of racial superiority, in particular, has been deployed to explain away the violence of the East–West encounter in terms of cultural essentialism and evolutionary progress, thus depriving the conquered race or nation of the ground of authority from which alternative views of difference, cultural or historical, could be articulated. (As is shown in Chapter 9, Zhang Binglin was probably one of the few to recognize the gravity of this situation and to fight in the desperate attempt to reclaim discursive authority for the Chinese.)[9]

The concept of national character, like the majority of Japanese neologisms brought into China at the turn of the twentieth century and afterward, was first used by late Qing intellectuals to develop their own theory of the modern nation-state. In a 1902 essay entitled "Xinmin yi" (Discourse on the new citizen), Liang Qichao expressed a keen interest in identifying the cause of the evils responsible for the deplorable state of the Chinese *guomin* (citizen).[10] Among other things, he attributed the evils to flaws or weaknesses in Chinese national character. In "Lun Zhongguo guomin zhi pinge" (On the character of the Chinese citizen; 1903), he pinpointed these flaws as a lack of nationalism, a lack of the will for independence and autonomy, and the absence of public spirit.[11] Between the years 1899 and 1903, Liang wrote numerous essays elaborating this idea from various angles. Examples include "Zhongguo jiruo suyuan lun" (China's weaknesses and their historical origins), "Shi zhong dexing xiangfan xiangcheng yi" (Ten moral characteristics and their positive or negative implications), "Lun Zhongguo renzhong zhi jianglai" (On the future of the Chinese race), "Guomin shida yuanqi lun" (On the ten essential spirits of the citizen), and, most important, his *Xinmin shuo* (The new citizen).[12] No matter what its contemporary political purpose in the aftermath of the Hundred Days Reform, Liang's theory exerted a profound influence on Chinese intellectuals that by far exceeded the exigencies of any particular political agenda in the years that followed. Sun Yat-sen, for instance, found it necessary to speak of China's problems in these terms. The Chinese, he said, are a peace-loving people, but they are servile, ignorant, self-centered, and lacking in the ideal of freedom.[13] The fact that Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen were the foremost critics of Western imperialism of their time and yet still had to subscribe to a discourse that European nations first used to stake their claim to racial superiority points to the central predicament of the Chinese intellectual. This predicament, as my analysis shows, characterizes all subsequent attempts either to claim or to reject Chinese national identity.[14]

In February 1917, *Xin qingnian* (New youth) published an article by Guang Sheng entitled "Zhongguo guomin xing jiqi ruodian" (The national character of the Chinese and its weaknesses). This essay deserves special attention because it crystallizes all the seminal arguments surrounding the notion of national character prior to the May Fourth movement. The author defined national character as an aggregate of *zhong xing* (racial character), *guo xing* (state character), and *zongjiao xing* (religious character), and on this basis he compared the Chinese with other races and nations. In short, he conceptualized the major differences between the Europeans and the Chinese according to their different attitudes toward foreign nations and religions. The Europeans are xenophobic and exclusionist; the Chinese, tolerant. Guang Sheng's point was that the Chinese capacity for tolerance had led to a disregard for independent thinking and individual freedom, which he saw as going hand in hand with the lack of a judiciary and a democratic tradition. He concluded by emphasizing the need for a radical transformation of the flawed national character, because it was no longer capable of meeting the historical demands of the modern world.[15]

If a Darwinian view compelled Guang Sheng to explain the weaknesses of Chinese character in terms of historical expediency,[16] the anti-traditionalist Chen Duxiu dispensed with all of this as he tried to give the concept an essentialist turn in his "Dong xi minzu genben sixiang zhi chayi" (The fundamental difference between the thought of Eastern and Western peoples) and "Wo zhi aiguo zhuyi" (My kind of patriotism). To this leader of the New Culture movement, the Chinese national character was criticizable simply on the grounds that it was Chinese and that it was traditional. Chen Duxiu's position was more or less shared by Li Dazhao in "Dong xi wenming genben zhi yidian" (The fundamental differences between the civilizations of the East and West; 1918) and Meng Zhen in "Xinqi boruo de guoren" (The feeble spirit of the Chinese).[17] The question of national character was thus effectively incorporated into the campaign against traditional culture and cast in predominantly negative terms during the New Culture movement and the May Fourth period,

whence it turned practically into a near equivalent of *guomin liegen xing* (flawed national character), as we now know it.[18] As *gaizao guomin xing* (transforming the national character) became the dominant theme in the meta-narrative of Chinese modernity, many began to accept modern literature as the best means to remedy China's problems. Over the years, literature and literary criticism proved remarkably successful in rendering the discourse of national character transparent and inimical to historical analysis—so much so that very few studies, except for Marxist criticism, have escaped the grip of its self-evident rhetoric.[19]

What is wrong with the Chinese national character? Who is responsible for its flaws? How can we change it for the better? These are the kinds of questions that profoundly disturbed the May Fourth generation who both inherited the intellectual burden of their late Qing predecessors and faced many historical crises in their own time. But the same questions also inspired those who had lost faith in the majority of the popular theories that professed to explain the cause of China's weakness. Lu Xun is a case in point. Becoming disenchanted with the study of medical science in his youth, he raised doubts about the potency of science, asking what medicine could really do for a nation weak in spirit. He seized upon the theory of *guomin xing* as an alternative and believed that he had found a diagnostic method to cure the sick Chinese people. At this embryonic stage of May Fourth literature, the theory of national character equipped Lu Xun and his generation of writers with a powerful language of self-criticism, one that would ultimately target Confucianism as the chief evil of Chinese tradition. More significantly, the theory of national character led them to justify Chinese literary modernity as a national project whose importance to China's nation-building efforts fundamentally outstripped that of state wealth, military power, science and technology, and the like. Modern literature was thus entrusted with the clinical task of "dissecting" (Lu Xun's favorite verb) the sick mind of the nation in order to restore life to its weakened body. It became for Lu Xun "a way to find out about his people—about what constitutes, or is lacking in, the 'Chinese national character'—now that he had realized that root of their illness did not at all lie with their bodies."[20] The medical and anatomical tropes that dominated the debate on literary modernity effected a subtle homology between the literary and the clinical, and this "metaphorical" analogy helped arrogate the healing power of medical science to May Fourth literature while elevating the status of literature above that of science on the basis of a mind-body opposition.

Lu Xun became acquainted with the theory by reading Liang Qichao and other late Qing reformers, but not until he went to Japan and especially after reading Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* (in a Japanese translation) did he seriously begin to contemplate the possibility of transforming the Chinese character by means of literature.[21] Through the power of his charismatic influence, the subject of national character has gained a firm hold on the imagination of Chinese intellectuals for nearly a century in the form of a collective obsession. Since they are preoccupied with defining, identifying, criticizing, and transforming the Chinese character, many of them stop short of problematizing the discourse of national character itself or reflecting on the contingency of its own historical validity. As recently as the 1980's, post-Mao intellectuals once again asked the century-old question: "What is wrong with Chinese character?" as if one could, indeed, come up with a genuine answer.[22] Of course, until that question itself is subjected to interrogation, one can hardly raise alternative questions concerning modern Chinese history and literature.

Lu Xun and Arthur Smith

The theory of Chinese character was imported to Asia by Westerners, mainly Western missionaries, long before Chinese enlightenment thinkers used it to promote modern literature. The circumstances of Lu Xun's encounter with this theory through the works of Arthur Smith provide rich grounds for a focused look at the meaning of Chinese literary modernity in the early twentieth century. Smith (known to the Chinese as Ming Enpu) was a missionary from North America who spent many years in China during the latter part of the nineteenth century.[23] He wrote a number of books on the subject of Chinese people while a missionary in rural North China. *Chinese Characteristics* was first published as a series of essays in the *North-China Daily News* of Shanghai in 1889; like most missionary travel narratives, it enjoyed great popularity among Westerners in Asia, as well as in Britain, the United States, and Canada and reached a wide audience, religious and secular alike. It was the most widely read and influential American work on China of its time and as late as 1920 was still among the five most read books on China among foreigners living in China.[24] As evidence of its continued influence on the American understanding of the Chinese, a contemporary critic of Smith's views observes that "Smith builds up a complex view of some basic Chinese characteristics. If some of them seem familiar today, we should remind ourselves that earlier writers, from Marco Polo to S. Wells Williams, left out a great many things that are just those that we think most interesting."[25]

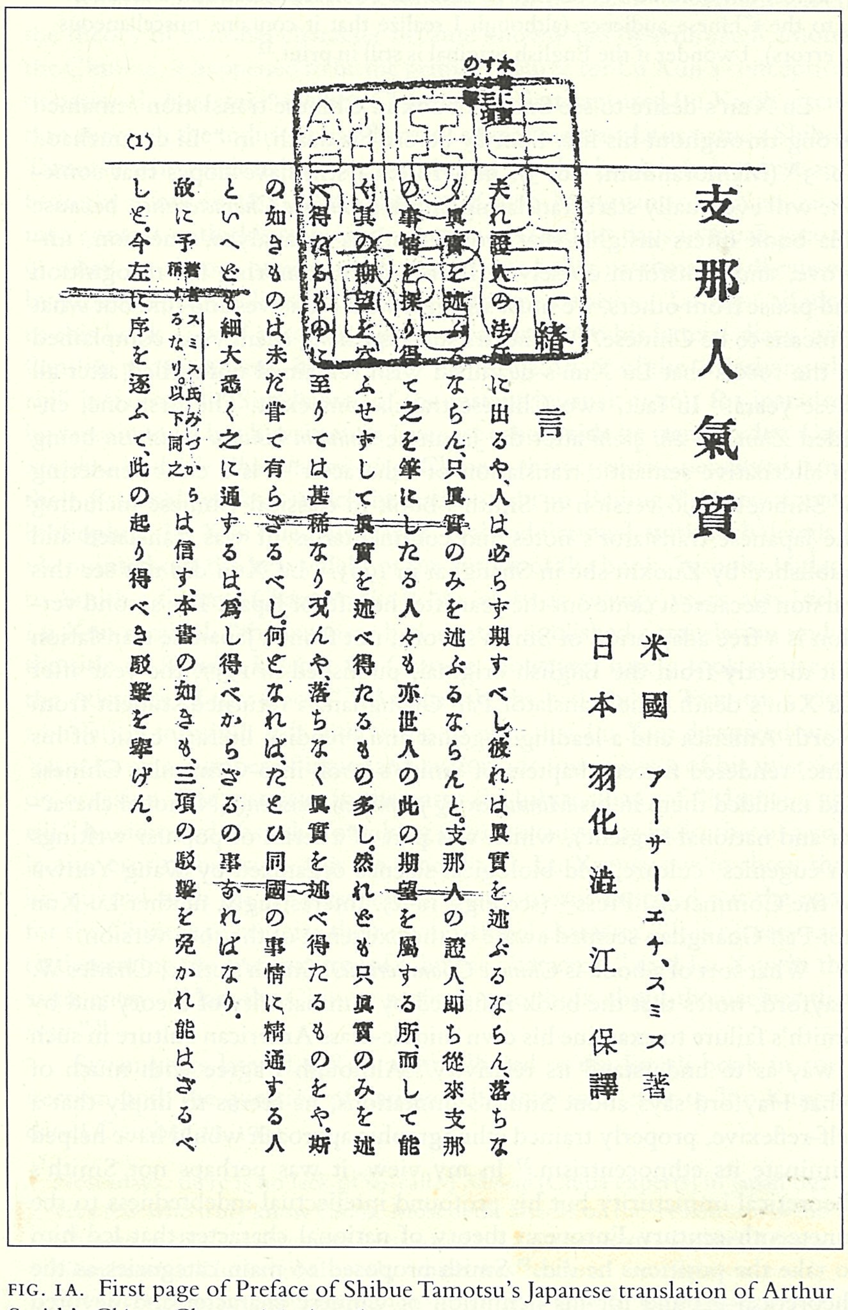
Although Smith's book was but one of many channels through which the theory of national character became known and disseminated among the Chinese, it happened to be the primary source for Lu Xun's conception of national character.[26] *Chinese Characteristics* first captured Lu Xun's attention through the industrious efforts of a Japanese translator named Shibue Tamotsu who rendered the 1894 edition of Smith's book into Japanese and brought it out in 1896. According to Zhang Mengyang, Lu Xun came into contact with this translation during his student days in Japan (1902–9) when the theory of national character was being passionately discussed by Japanese nationalists.[27] On more than one occasion, Lu Xun alluded to this book as well as to the Japanese translation in his letters, diary, and familiar prose (*zawen*). In the entry for July 2, 1926, of the "Mashang zhi riji" installments (Subchapter of the instant journal; 1926), for instance, he mentioned a book written in Japanese whose title he translated as *Cong xiaoshuo kanlai de Zhina minzu xing* (Chinese characteristics perceived from their fictional works), which he had bought in Beijing.[28] (A passionate bibliophile, Lu Xun filled his diaries, real and fictional, with such details.) He pointed out the heavy debt of the author of the book, Yasuoka Hideo, to Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*.[29] "As early as twenty years ago [*sic*]," Lu Xun recalled, "the Japanese had already published a translation under the title of *Shinajin kishitsu*. We Chinese, however, barely took notice of the existence of that book."[30] Apparently, he had Shibue Tamotsu's 1896 translation in mind. It is interesting to note that Lu Xun disagreed with Yasuoka on a number of issues and even made fun of some of his mistakes on occasion. For instance, in the entry for July 4, 1926, of "Mashang zhi riji," he ridiculed Yasuoka for taking Chinese cuisine as indicative of a collective erotic obsession. On the other hand, Lu Xun strove to show that his quarrel with the Japanese author by no means canceled out the need for the Chinese to criticize their own national character. "It is no easy task to determine the true nature [of Chinese character]," said Lu Xun in the same entry. "Alas, the Chinese prefer not to think about themselves that way."[31]

Seven years later, Lu Xun again alluded to the Smith book in connection with the question of national character in a letter to Tao Kangde dated October 27, 1933.

> Nowadays, there is no lack of so-called *Shinatō* [China experts] in Japan but very few who truly know China. Most of the attacks on the weaknesses of the Chinese in that country have been based on a master text—Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*. The original work, which was rendered into Japanese nearly forty years ago, surpasses the similar line of work done by the Japanese themselves. It would be a good idea to have the book translated and introduced to the Chinese audience (although I realize that it contains miscellaneous errors). I wonder if the English original is still in print.[32]

Lu Xun's desire to see Smith's book in Chinese translation remained strong throughout his life. Shortly before his death, in "'Li ci cunzhao,' no. 3" (Memorandum, no. 3), he wrote: "I still have hopes that someone will eventually start translating Smith's *Chinese Characteristics*, because this book offers insights that would lead us to analyze, question, improve, and transform ourselves. Rather than clamoring for recognition and praise from others, we must struggle with ourselves and find out what it means to be Chinese."[33] Scholars such as Zhang Mengyang complained in the 1980's that Lu Xun's deathbed wish remained unfulfilled after all these years.[34] In fact, two Chinese translations exist. The first one, entitled *Zhinaren zhi qizhi* after the Japanese *Shinajin kishitsu—kishitsu* being an alternative semantic translation of "character"—is a close rendering of Shibue's 1896 version of Smith's book in classical Chinese including the Japanese translator's notes and commentaries. It was translated and published by Zuoxin she in Shanghai in 1903.[35] Lu Xun did not see this version because it came out the year after he left for Japan. The second version is a free adaptation of Smith's work, not from a Japanese translation but directly from the English original, published in 1937, the year after Lu Xun's death. The translator Pan Guangdan, a returned student from North America and a leading eugenist and Freudian literary critic of his time, rendered fifteen chapters of Smith's book into vernacular Chinese and included them in his *Minzu texing yu minzu weisheng* (National character and national hygiene), which was part of a series of popular writings on eugenics, culture, and biological science organized by Wang Yunwu of the Commercial Press[36] (see Figs. 1a–c). Interestingly, neither Lu Xun nor Pan Guangdan seemed aware of the existence of the 1903 version.

What sort of a book is *Chinese Characteristics*? Smith's critic, Charles W. Hayford, notes that the book is flawed by "immaturity of theory and by Smith's failure to examine his own middle-class American culture in such a way as to understand its relativity." Although I agree with much of what Hayford says about Smith's limitations, he seems to imply that a self-reflexive, properly trained ethnographic approach would have helped eliminate its ethnocentrism.[37] In my view, it was perhaps not Smith's theoretical immaturity but his profound intellectual indebtedness to the nineteenth-century European theory of national character that led him to take the positions he did.[38] Smith proposed 26 main categories as the theoretical ground for his definition of Chinese character and devoted



(1)

支那人氣質

緒　言

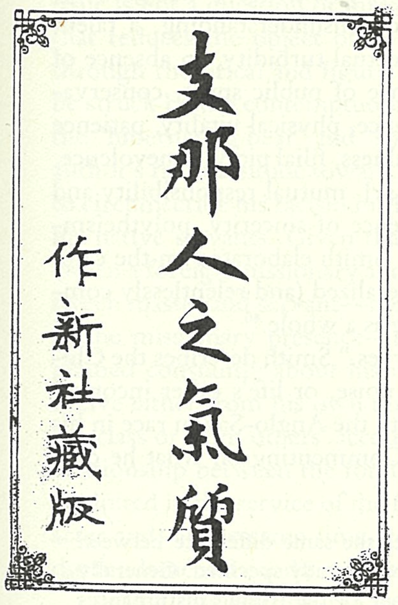
米國　アーサー、エチ、スミス著

日本　羽化澁江　保譯

夫れ證人の法廷に出るや、人は必らず期すべし彼れは眞實を述ぶるならん、落ちなく眞實を述ぶるならん、只眞實のみを述ぶるならんと。支那人の證人即ち從來支那の事情を採り得て之を筆にしたる人々も亦世人の此の期望を屬する所、而して能く其の期望に答ふせずして眞實を述べ得たるもの多し。然れども只眞實のみを述べ得たるものに至りては甚稀なり。況んや落ちなく眞實を述べ得たるものをや。斯の如きものは未だ嘗て有らざるべし。何となれば、たとひ同國の事情に精通する人といへども、細大悉く之に通ずるは、爲し得べからざるの事なればなり。

故に予（譯者稱す　スミス氏みづからなり。以下同之）は信ず、本書の如きも、三項の駁撃を免かれ能はざるべしと。今左に序を逐ふて、此の起り得べき駁撃を擧げん。

FIG. 1A. First page of Preface of Shibue Tamotsu's Japanese translation of Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics* (1906)



支那人之氣質

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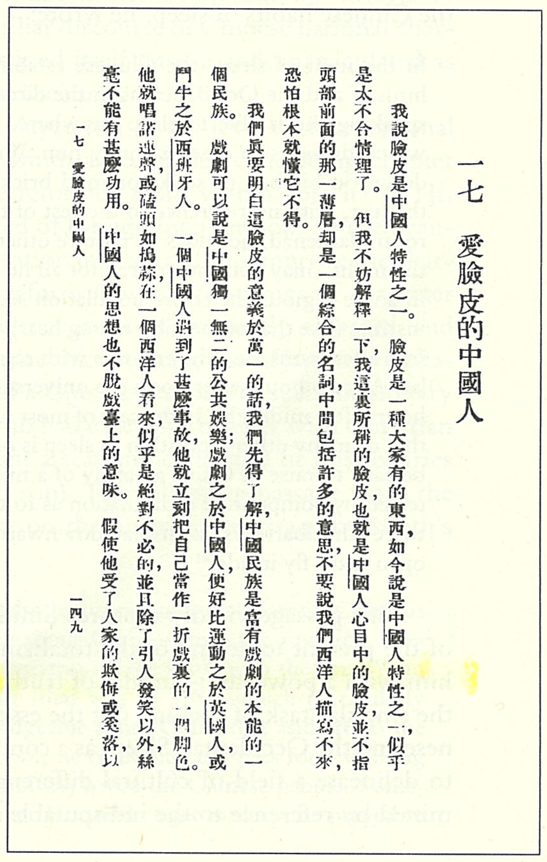
FIG. 1B. Title page of the 1903 Chinese rendering of the Japanese version of *Chinese Characteristics*



一七　愛臉皮的中國人

我說臉皮是中國人特性之一。臉皮是一種大家有的東西，如今說是中國人特性之一，似乎是太不合情理了。但我不妨解釋一下，我這裏所稱的臉皮，也就是中國人心目中的臉皮，並不指頭部前面的那一薄層，却是一個綜合的名詞，中間包括許多的意思，不要說我們西洋人描寫不來，恐怕根本就懂它不得。

我們眞要明白這臉皮的意義於萬一的話，我們先得了解中國民族是富有戲劇的本能的一個民族。戲劇可以說是中國獨一無二的公共娛樂；戲劇之於中國人，便好比運動之於英國人，或鬥牛之於西班牙人。一個中國人遇到了甚麼事故，他就立刻把自己當作一折戲裏的一門脚色。他就唱諾迎擊，或磕頭如搗蒜，在一個西洋人看來，似乎是絕對不必的，並且除了引人發笑以外，絲毫不能有甚麼功用。中國人的思想也不脫戲臺上的意味。假使他受了人家的欺侮或奚落，以

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FIG. 1C. Sample page from Pan Guangdan's 1937 vernacular Chinese translation of *Chinese Characteristics*

a chapter to each: face, economy, industry, politeness, a disregard for time, a disregard for accuracy, a talent for misunderstanding, a talent for indirection, flexible inflexibility, intellectual turbidity, an absence of nerves, contempt for foreigners, an absence of public spirit, conservatism, indifference to comfort and convenience, physical vitality, patience and perseverance, contentment and cheerfulness, filial piety, benevolence, an absence of sympathy, social typhoons [*sic*], mutual responsibility and respect for law, mutual suspicion, an absence of sincerity, polytheism-pantheism-atheism.[39] Within each chapter, Smith elaborated on the category by telling anecdotes and making generalized (and relentlessly comparative) statements about the Chinese race as a whole.[40]

Take the chapter on "the absence of nerves." Smith describes the Chinese as being oblivious to levels of pain, noise, or life's other inconveniences that Occidentals (often equated with the Anglo-Saxon race in his writings) find unacceptable or offensive. Commenting on what he calls the Chinese habits of sleep, he wrote:

> In the item of sleep, the Chinese establishes the same difference between himself and the Occidental as in the directions already specified. Generally speaking, he is able to sleep anywhere. None of the trifling disturbances which drive us to despair annoy him. With a brick for a pillow, he can lie down on his bed of stalks or mud bricks or rattan and sleep the sleep of the just, with no reference to the rest of the creation. He does not want his room darkened, nor does he require others to be still. The "infant crying in the night" may continue to cry for all he cares, for it does not disturb him. In some regions the entire population seem to fall asleep, as by a common instinct (like that of the hibernating bear), during the first two hours of summer afternoons, and they do this with regularity, no matter where they may be. At two hours after noon the universe at such seasons is as still as at two hours after midnight. In the case of most working-people, at least, and also in that of many others, position in sleep is of no sort of consequence. It would be easy to raise in China an army of a million men—nay, of ten millions—tested by competitive examination as to their capacity to go to sleep across three wheelbarrows, with head downwards, like a spider, their mouths wide open and a fly inside.[41]

This passage vividly captures Smith's style of presentation. The use of the present tense and of the totalizing phrase "the Chinese" provided him with a powerful grammar of truth, and he devoted this grammar to the singular task of spelling out the essential difference between the Chinese and the Occidental. Sleep, as a common physiological marker, serves to delineate a field of cultural difference whose meanings are predetermined by reference to the indisputable superiority of the Occidental. At

issue is not a question of misrepresentation, but one of discursive power that reduces the object of its description to a less than human animal through rhetorical and figurative uses of language. One cannot help but be struck by the contemptuous metaphors meant to be humorous such as the "hibernating bear" and "spiders." This contempt no doubt reflects the author's racist attitude toward the Chinese, but something else in it seems to circumscribe his racism in class terms; that is, Smith's relationship with his native servants. Given that the closest tie that could be formed between a foreign missionary and a Chinese in those early years was that between master and servant—the local gentry openly showed their hostility to the missionary presence—it is not surprising that Smith, who complained constantly about his native servants, cited many anecdotes that derive either from his own unhappy experience with the Chinese working class or from others' accounts of similar experiences. This class-based relationship between the foreigner and his native servant was invariably exploited in the service of the familiar discourse of Chinese national character and, at the same time, remained itself unseen and unarticulated as the fundamental condition of that discourse.

When this relationship gets played out at the level of international politics, the rhetorical question Smith asked in his concluding chapter seems inevitable: "Can China be reformed from within herself?"[42] His answer is that China stands in need of foreign interventions so the evangelical message of Christian civilization may spread and improve the character of its people. "In order to reform China, the springs of character must be *reached* and *purified*, conscience must be practically *enthroned*, and no longer imprisoned in its own palace like the long line of Japanese Mikados"[43] (italics added). How would a Chinese respond to such missionary rhetoric? The novelist Lao She, who had extensive contact with Christian missionaries in his early youth, left a scathing caricature of missionaries in his novel, *Er Ma* (Mr. Ma and son). The following passage from the novel may shed some useful light on the unspoken message of Smith's statement.

> The Reverend Evans was a man who had spent over 20 years in China as a missionary. He knew everything about China—from the mythical days when Fu Xi invented the Eight Trigrams, all the way up to the time Yuan Shikai proclaimed himself emperor (that was an event which particularly delighted him). He was so knowledgeable about China that aside from the fact that his spoken Chinese was poor, he could literally pass for a walking encyclopedia of China. And he genuinely loved the Chinese people. Sometimes in the middle of the night when he couldn't get to sleep, he prayed to

> God that China would someday by colonized by the British; with burning tears in his eyes, he beseeched the Lord: if the Chinese don't let the British take over, then all those masses of yellow-faced, black-haired souls will *never* make it to heaven![44]

If Reverend Evans is a mere fictional character brought to life by the genius of Lao She, he is no more so than the Chinese characters portrayed by Smith. The points of resemblance between Evans and Smith are startling, although in Smith's case the reader does not have a detached narrator directing attention to the irony of the situation or to Smith's violent verbs. The fact is that those verbs translate extremely well into imperialist action: invasion (reaching), conquer (purifying), and the seizure of sovereignty (enthroning).[45]

"Missionary discursive practices were intended to, and in fact did, shape reality rather than merely passively reflect or mirror it," as James Hevia points out in a recent study.[46] His analysis of the missionary accounts (including Smith's *China in Convulsion*) of the atrocities committed by the Allies in retaliation for the Boxer Rebellion lends a great deal of insight into the ways in which those early *representations*—such as the implicit and explicit comparison with biblical events, the portrayal of deceased missionaries as martyrs, and pronouncements on Chinese character—shaped the historical "real" and the ways in which future generations perceived it.[47] Missionary discourse and the imperialist actions of the Eight Powers in the aftermath of the Boxer movement implicate each other in more ways than the metaphorical linkages suggested above. (Incidentally, Lao She's father, who was a Manchu guard at the Forbidden City in Beijing, was killed during the Allied assault on the city.)[48]

Indeed, the same can be said of the missionary discourses on the Chinese national character that should not be taken as mere false representations of the Chinese but, rather, as genuine historical events that have shaped the course of modern history and the relation between China and the West. Smith's book belongs to a special genre of missionary and imperialist writings that made a huge difference in modern Western perceptions of China and the Chinese, as well as the self-perception of the Chinese and the Westerners themselves. Some of the earliest efforts to theorize about Chinese character were written by American missionary S. W. Williams, who published *The Middle Kingdom* in 1848; British missionary Henry Charles Sirr, whose *China and the Chinese* came out in 1849; French missionary Evariste-Regis Huc, who brought out *The Chinese Empire* in 1854; and Thomas Taylor Meadows, who wrote *The Chinese and Their Rebellions* in 1856 and is quoted by Smith in *Chinese Characteristics*.

Others include Sir Walter Henry Medhurst, the famous author of *The Foreigner in Far Cathay* (1872), and British journalist George Wingrove Cooke, who served as the China correspondent for the *London Times* between 1857 and 1858. Smith quotes from the preface to Cooke's published collection of letters in his own introduction to *Chinese Characteristics*. His quote is particularly illuminating for understanding the myth of national character in the nineteenth century. The intertextual relationship thus established between Smith and Cooke betrays the status of Western knowledge regarding Chinese character that is thoroughly embedded in the theoretical discourse of its time and has little to do with the transparent or objective truths it claims. In fact, Cooke himself expressed a certain degree of ambivalence regarding the knowledge claims of this discourse. To illustrate my point, I quote a lengthy passage from Cooke's preface:

> I have, in these letters, introduced no elaborate essay upon Chinese character. It is a great omission. No theme could be more tempting, no subject could afford wider scope for ingenious hypothesis, profound generalization, and triumphant dogmatism. Every small critic will, probably, utterly despise me for not having made something out of such opportunities. The truth is, that I have written several very fine characters for the whole Chinese race, but having the misfortune to have the people under my eye at the same time with my essay, they were always saying something or doing something which rubbed so rudely against my hypothesis, that in the interest of truth I burnt several successive letters. I may add that I have often talked over this matter with the most eminent and candid sinologues, and have always found them ready to agree with me as to the impossibility of *a Western mind forming* a conception of Chinese character as a whole. These difficulties, however, occur only to those who know the Chinese practically: a smart writer, entirely ignorant of the subject, might readily strike off a brilliant and antithetical analysis, which should leave nothing to be desired but *Truth*.
>
> Some day, perhaps, we may acquire the necessary knowledge to give to each of the glaring inconsistencies of a Chinaman's mind its proper weight and influence in the general mass. At present, I at least must be content to avoid strict definitions, and to describe a Chinaman by his most prominent qualities.[49] (Italics added)

Apart from dropping or changing the words italicized above, Smith's quotation from Cooke's preface misses the subtle irony of the latter's apology by construing it as a failed attempt to describe Chinese character. Using Cooke's ambivalent rhetoric to his own advantage, he argues that, after several hundred years of acquaintance with China, Westerners are now ready to form some kind of integrated knowledge about the Chinese just as they have done with other complex natural phenomena.[50] His own work would typify such knowledge.

Did Smith invent a China for the Orientalist gaze of the West? True, Smith played an important part in introducing the resources of a totalizing discourse about the Chinese to the elite Chinese such as Lu Xun, and the affinities between his text and the phenomenon Said discusses in *Orientalism* seem obvious. Such an explanation cannot, however, bring out the full complexity of the picture, particularly when one is also dealing with the translation and translingual practice surrounding the theory of Chinese national character within China. What happens when the same missionary discourse is put to an "unintended" use by an "unintended" audience? What kind of reality does it shape? These questions must be asked in the context of Chinese translingual practice, for as soon as the host language is brought into the picture (and it must be), the situation becomes far more blurred than the often-assumed specular relationship between the subject and object in contemporary East–West cultural criticism. Unlike some of the earlier Orientalist philosophers and philologists who had written stories about the Far East, Smith and some of his predecessors such as Henry Charles Sirr and the others mentioned above were also translated into Chinese (although many of these translations were excerpts rather than whole texts). And the majority of these translations came via Japan, having either been introduced by the Japanese first or simply reworked from Japanese translations.[51] The fact that these texts were translated and read by the Chinese and participated in the Chinese debate on national character presents us with a different set of problems from the Orientalist problematic that Said treats so well in another context.

Translating National Character

When knowledge passes from the guest language to the host language, it inevitably takes on new meanings in its new historico-linguistic environment; the translation remains connected with the original idea as no more and, perhaps no less, than a *trope of equivalence*. Everything else must be determined by the users of the host language. In the course of translingual practice, the assumed meanings of Smith's text were thus intercepted by the unintended audiences (first Japanese and then Chinese) who subjected them to unexpected readings and appropriation in the context of the host language. Lu Xun was among the first generation of this unintended Chinese audience, but he was no ordinary reader or translator. On the basis of an earlier Japanese translation of the Smith book, he "translated" the missionary theory of Chinese character into his own literary practice and became the foremost architect of modern Chinese fiction.

From early on, Lu Xun's struggle with the question of national identity was fraught with conflicts, doubts, and ambivalences. On the one hand, he was attracted to the discourse of national character as a theory that would enable him and others to explain the traumatic experience of the Chinese since the Opium War of 1839–42; on the other hand, his subscription to that theory was simultaneously thwarted by his situated subjectivity as a Chinese, which had nothing in common with the condescending view of missionaries like Smith. In *Wang you Lu Xun yinxiang ji* (Reminiscences of my late friend Lu Xun), Xu Shoushang, a lifelong friend of Lu Xun, recalled Lu Xun's early contact with the discourse of national character in Japan.

> During the time the two of us were together at the Kōbun Institute, Lu Xun would often bring up three major questions for discussion, and these were all interconnected questions: First, what was the best ideal of human nature? Second, what was most lacking in Chinese national character? Third, what were the roots of its sickness? His decision to give up medicine in order to throw himself wholeheartedly into literary movements was driven by the desire to solve those problems, and he grappled with them throughout his life. He knew that even though such problems would not disappear overnight it was still worth the effort, and he was willing to make personal contributions to a possible solution. With that goal in mind, he started creating journals and translating fiction and wrote the several million words that he did in the subsequent years.[52]

Xu's view is supported by Lu Xun's confession in the much-quoted preface to his first collection of short stories, *Nahan* (Call to arms). Recalling the circumstances of his conversion from medical studies to modern literature at the Sendai Medical School, Lu Xun wrote:

> I do not know what advanced methods are now used to teach microbiology, but at that time lantern slides were used to show the microbes; and if the lecture ended early, the instructor might show slides of national scenery or news to fill up the time. This was during the Russo-Japanese War, so there were many war films, and I had to join in the clapping and cheering in the lecture hall along with the other students. It was a long time since I had seen any compatriots, but one day I saw a film showing some Chinese, one of whom was bound, while many others stood around him. They were all strong fellows but appeared completely apathetic. According to the commentary, the one with his hands bound was a spy working for the Russians, who was to have his head cut off by the Japanese military as a warning to others, while the Chinese beside him had come to enjoy the spectacle.
>
> Before the term was over I had left for Tokyo, because after this film I felt that medical science was not so crucial after all. When the people of a nation

FIG. 2. The execution of an alleged Chinese spy in Manchuria by Japanese soldiers during the Russo-Japanese War (1905)

> were ignorant and weak *guomin* [citizens], it mattered little whether or not they were physically strong if in the end they amounted to little more than the object of a futile spectacle or the audience for such a spectacle. Physical illness, by comparison, seemed not such a terrible thing after all, although it too cost lives. I came to the conclusion that the important thing to do was to transform people's spirit and that literature was the best suitable means to that end. Hence my decision to promote a literary movement.[53]

This passage tends to be quoted and analyzed by critics who wish to establish a straightforward biographical reading of the author's fictional works. For many years, scholars have labored to identify the slide in question, but with little success; and it has been suggested that the famous incident may have been fabricated by the author out of events he had witnessed or heard about.[54] In 1983, Japanese scholar Ōta Susumu brought to light an obscure photo carrying the date 1905 (see Fig. 2). The small print on the side reads "Execution of a Russian spy. Among the audience were also soldiers laughing (shot outside the town of Kaiyuan, Manchuria, on March 20, 1905)." The date coincides with the period of the Russo-Japanese War described in Lu Xun's narrative and, moreover, the content of the photo bears a striking resemblance to that of the slide he claims to have seen. For all these similarities, however, scholars have not been able to establish the exact relationship between the two.[55]

However, the recovery of the slide and the factual ground for Lu Xun's narrative would not automatically account for the power of Lu Xun's narrative. One would be still interpreting Lu Xun in the scholarly mode of the *free indirect style*, that is, a paraphrasing, albeit in scholarly narrative prose, of his enlightenment ideas in his own terms.[56] My reading intends to focus on the rhetoric of representation in this haunting narrative of violence: Who represents and who gets represented? Who views the representation?

Lu Xun's strikingly poignant description of his traumatic experience calls for a reading that must account for the violence of representation, and not just the representation of violence, inflicted by a cinematic spectacle upon an unintended audience—Lu Xun the narrator.[57] The spectacle, the viewers framed by the spectacle, the viewers outside that frame, the unintended Chinese viewer among the audience, who in turn becomes the narrator that recounts the story one reads, and, finally, the reader who is made to go through the mediated viewing experience—all these must be taken into account as part of our complex experience of Lu Xun's representation of horror. In a later and less discussed essay that evokes the same incident, Lu Xun tried to grapple with the contradiction of his position as a Chinese viewer in that soul-wrenching moment. In this 1926 essay—entitled "Tengye xiansheng" (Professor Fujino) and devoted to the fond recollection of Fujino Gonkyurō, a teacher at the Sendai Medical School—Lu Xun reframed his story about the news slide:

> During my second year, bacteriology was added to the curriculum and the configuration of bacteria was taught exclusively through film slides. Whenever the lecture ended early, the instructor would show slides of news to fill up the time, much of which had to do with the Japanese military triumph over the Russians. Unfortunately, some Chinese were depicted in one of those shows who had been caught by the Japanese for allegedly spying for the Russians and were about to be executed. *There was a group of Chinese men witnessing the execution within the film but, in the lecture hall, there was another Chinese watching. It was I myself.*
>
> "*Banzai!*" They clapped hands and cheered loudly.
>
> As a rule, the clapping of hands and cheering would follow each of the shows. But this time I found them particularly jarring to the ear. Years later after I returned to China, I was to witness similar scenes of execution that people would watch with relish and cheer as if they were all intoxicated. Oh, what imbecility! It was there and then that my thinking underwent a transformation.[58] (Italics added)

The transformation alluded to here is Lu Xun's decision to abandon his medical studies. More explicitly than in the preface quoted earlier, Lu Xun drew a sharp distinction between himself and the cheering Japanese viewers in the lecture hall—he cannot join in their cheering and clapping. With equal vehemence, he refused to identify with the Chinese onlookers he saw in the film or in real life. His subjectivity coincided with, but refused to be, either the object or audience of such representation. The coincidence and the refusal duly translated into numerous spectacles of violence in stories such as "Medicine," "A Warning to the Public," and "The True Story of Ah Q," as well as in some of his "Wild Grass" poems in which an unfeeling crowd watches the execution or plight of their countrymen with great relish. Staged as a representation of Chinese national character, the drama of violence in these texts also unfolds at the level of reading where the reader is shocked to discover that she or he is implicated in the violence of representation by being induced to play the role of a witness to the same spectacle of horror enacted over and over again in Lu Xun's texts. Indeed, the multiple coincidences and noncoincidences between the reader, the narrator, the spectator within the text, and those outside it raise important questions for our understanding of Lu Xun's subject position in the matter of Chinese national character.

Scholars are divided on Lu Xun's view of national character. To some, Lu Xun's concept of *guomin xing* refers to the negative aspect of national character (*guomin liegen xing*), which they locate specifically in the context of national struggles against imperialism and feudalism during the Republican period.[59] Others see this concept as an equivalent of *minzu xing* defined as a totality of homogeneous ideas, mood, will, and emotion conditioned by social norms and by national history and economy.[60] Whatever their personal agenda, most critics share the assumption that national character is an essential, unproblematic category of analysis in the study of Lu Xun.[61] Rather than viewing Lu Xun as a participant in the making of a historical discourse, they generally credit him with the discovery of Chinese national character per se. "The True Story of Ah Q" readily plays into this picture.

"Ah Q" stands for a twentieth-century legacy in Chinese literature and culture. As contemporary critic Li Tuo sums up so well: "The word 'Ah Q' never used to exist in the Chinese language. It was the pure invention of Lu Xun. However, once the idea escaped from under the pen of its creator, it took on a life of its own and traveled among hundreds of thousands of people whose repeated evocations and citations helped

generate further topics and discourses."[62] Of those topics and discourses, the theory of national character has claimed the attention of the majority of Chinese readers and critics. Drawing mainly on Lu Xun's own desire to transform the national character of the Chinese, critics hail "The True Story of Ah Q" as a quintessential text about the Chinese national character.[63] They cite much evidence from Lu Xun's own works in support of that view, and their evidence generally affirms the character of Ah Q as an embodiment of Chinese national character.[64] But little attention has been paid to the equal contribution to the myth of national character made by the body of literary criticism that aims to legitimize the reading of national character. The criticism is inescapably contaminated by the same intellectual predicaments with which Lu Xun himself had to struggle. The latter's nightmare of having to bear witness to the cinematic scene of horror is replayed in a literary criticism that insists on testifying to the execution of the flawed national character in Lu Xun's fiction. Such is the power of Lu Xun's representation of fragmented subjectivity that the cinematic scene always comes back to haunt the critics in various forms of violence.

In textual analyses, Ah Q's obsession with face is often cited as a central argument for Chinese national character. Ah Q's tendency to rationalize defeat has inspired some of the most entertaining episodes in the story. The most poignant is the moment when Ah Q, who has never held a writing brush in his life, is asked to draw a circle (in place of a signature) on a court document that probably contains his own death sentence. Embarrassed that he cannot make the circle round, Ah Q thinks that "in this world it was the fate of everybody at some time to be dragged in and out of prison, and to have to draw circles on paper; it was only because his circle had not been round that he felt there was a stain on his reputation. Presently, however, he regained composure by thinking, 'Only idiots can make perfect circles.' And with this thought he fell asleep."[65] This depiction no doubt reflects the essence of Ah Q-ism, but what does it tell us about Chinese national character in general? One thing at least is certain: before the arrival of the missionary discourse, face had not been a meaningful category in the comparative study of cultures, much less the unique property of the Chinese. The first chapter of *Chinese Characteristics*, for example, is devoted to face.[66] We are told that "once rightly apprehended, 'face' will be found to be in itself a key to the combination lock of many of the most important characteristics of the Chinese. . . . To save one's face and lose one's life would not seem to us very attractive, but we have heard of a Chinese District Magistrate who, as a special favour, was allowed to be beheaded in his robes of office in order to save his face!"

Smith attributed the cult of face to the strong Chinese instinct for drama: "Upon very slight provocation, any Chinese regards himself in the light of an actor in a drama. He throws himself into theatrical attitudes, performs the salaam, falls upon his knees, prostrates himself and strikes his head upon the earth, under circumstances which to an Occidental seem to make such actions superfluous, not to say ridiculous. A Chinese thinks in theatrical terms."[67]

James Hevia makes an illuminating observation about Smith's category of face in his discussion of the Allies' brutality against the city of Beijing during their crackdown on the Boxer Rebellion.

> Smith presented this "Chinese characteristic" as an accurate representation of Chinese social behavior, and it has come down to us largely unquestioned in that form. The point is not whether face is actually an organizing category in Chinese practices but rather the place that it holds in a Western discourse of ritualized destruction and lesson teaching. We must consider, in other words, the role of face in authorizing the destruction of walls, towers, and temples. The China lore of missionaries such as Brown and Smith constituted "face" as a singular attribute of the colonized, while denying that representatives of the allied powers were concerned themselves with appearances or that their discursive practices might actually produce "face." Constructing their Chinese in these terms (making their object, as it were, responsible for the illusions of face), the Powers could then in good conscience act with impunity against symbols they took as significant to a Chinese mind that could mistakenly ascribe magical powers to walls and confuse the apparent and the real.[68]

But what happens when this missionary story about face is put to an unintended use by the Chinese? One must account for the complexities of the trajectory of a discourse when translingual practice is involved. Thirty years after Smith made those pronouncements about face in Chinese culture, his script was enacted almost verbatim by a theatrical Ah Q. In the scene preceding his execution, Ah Q is put on a convict's cart and paraded through the streets. When he realizes that he is heading for the execution ground, he regrets that he has not sung any lines from an opera and searches his memory for a suitable song: "His thoughts revolved like a whirlwind: *The Young Widow and Her Husband's Grave* was not heroic enough. The words of 'I regret to have killed' in *The Battle of Dragon and Tiger* were too poor. *I'll thrash you with a steel mace* was still the best. But when he wanted to raise his hands, he remembered that they were bound together; so he did not sing *I'll thrash you* either."[69] Vain, pathetic, ridiculous, and, worst of all, theatrical, Ah Q's performance seems to confirm

Smith's description of Chinese character except for some significant details. First, Lu Xun was already acquainted with Smith's theory of Chinese character before he conceived the idea of "Ah Q," which suggests that his story might be connected with the earlier text in more ways than just confirming Smith's point. Second, Smith's magistrate wore a dignified robe, whereas Lu Xun's narrator informs us that Ah Q is forced into a "white [mourning] vest of foreign cloth." Are there points of allusion between the two texts? Does the Ah Q who wears a "white vest of foreign cloth" represent Chinese character, or something else? One further question: Is the theory of Chinese character fabricated with the same foreign material as the mourning vest?

In 1926, five years after the publication of "Ah Q," Lu Xun mentioned Smith's chapter on face in an essay and made the following tongue-in-cheek comment:

> I know quite a number of foreigners who devote themselves to the study of so-called Chinese *ti mian* or *mianzi* [face]. They are either influenced by Smith or have discovered the topic through their own experiments. But I suspect that those foreigners are long seasoned in this kind of knowledge and have even put it to standard practice. I am sure that, if they continue to improve on their knowledge, they will not only be invincible in diplomatic transactions, but win the good faith of those upper-class *Shinajin* [here Lu Xun uses a derogatory Japanese term for the Chinese] as well. They will then have to say *hua ren* [a Chinese term for the Chinese] instead of *Shinajin*, for this form of address, too, has to do with the face of the "Chinese."[70]

Lu Xun's satiric barb is directed at those whose knowledge of Chinese character is far from disinterested. The study of face, as he observed with acute insight, has something to do with transactions between imperialists and the upper-class Chinese, and the theory is useful to them not so much because it provides a credible explanation for the Chinese race as because their mutual interests are served by it. If class figures as an important factor in Lu Xun's understanding of Chinese character, how does Ah Q fit into this picture? Does not an illiterate, homeless lumpen like Ah Q precisely call the theory into question? Did Lu Xun contradict himself? Where exactly did he stand in relation to Smith?

Patrick Hanan's study of the literary prototype for Ah Q sheds important light on these questions. Taking up Zhou Zuoren's suggestion that Lu Xun's technique of irony in "Ah Q" was mainly modeled on that of Gogol, the Polish novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz, and the Japanese novelist Natsume Sōseki, he pursues at greater lengths the textual linkages be-

tween "Ah Q" and two stories written by Lu Xun's favorite Polish writer, Sienkiewicz. His analysis reveals striking similarities between "Ah Q" and Sienkiewicz's "Bartek the Victor" and "Charcoal Sketches," both of which are characterized by the use of a "high irony on the narrator's part to treat the meanest figures in village life."[71] The protagonist in "Bartek the Victor" is a Polish peasant whose talent for self-deception anticipates Ah Q's philosophy of so-called spiritual victory. Bartek is a perennial loser in the games of life, and Zolzik, the hero of the other story, is a pathetic figure whose romantic longings or lust for the wife of the peasant Repa prefigures Ah Q's absurd romance. In fact, the connections between "Ah Q" and the Sienkiewicz stories established by Patrick Hanan extend well beyond those parallels to certain broad features. The disquisition on Ah Q's name, for example, echoes a passage at the beginning of "Bartek the Victor," and according to Hanan, the word *zhengzhuan* in the title of Lu Xun's story may have been inspired by the ironic term "proper biographies" found in "Charcoal Sketches," although Lu Xun's narrator chooses to give us a different explanation within the context of the story.[72] Hanan's investigation by no means suggests that Lu Xun's story is derivative of Sienkiewicz's works, but it does indicate that the character of Ah Q exceeds national boundaries by a large measure and that the problem of class as transposed from the Polish literary prototype may be the relevant factor here.

Class-informed readings do from time to time pose a challenge to the interpretation of Ah Q as an embodiment of national character, but that challenge seldom proceeds from a concern with the interplay of textual sources as Hanan has analyzed. It is represented by orthodox Chinese Marxist critics who, since Qian Xingcun in the 1930's, have interpreted the story of Ah Q on a basis of class struggle.[73] According to this line of criticism, Lu Xun's story does not reflect the Chinese national character but rather the deplorable situation of the lower-class Chinese peasant who had to live through the hard times of the Republican revolution. In arguing for a class-informed reading, these critics base their claim on Lu Xun's works. The complexity of Lu Xun's thinking allows the Marxist critics to find powerful evidence from his voluminous prose writings to discredit a reading based entirely on the theory of national character.[74] They demonstrate that Lu Xun draws a line between the upper class (*shangdeng ren*) and the downtrodden (*xiadeng ren*) when discoursing on Chinese national character.[75] The key evidence they cite is an essay called "Deng xia manbi" (Writing under the lamplight) in which Lu Xun commented on Bertrand Russell's remarks about Chinese character and criticized him for mistaking

the smiles on the faces of the Chinese coolies as a quintessential Chinese virtue. Russell wrote:

> I remember one hot day when a party of us were crossing the hills in chairs—the way was rough and very steep, the work for the coolies very severe. At the highest point of our journey, we stopped for ten minutes to let the men rest. Instantly, they all sat in a row, brought out their pipes, and began to laugh among themselves as if they had not a care in the world. In any country that had learned the virtue of forethought, they would have devoted the moments to complaining of the heat, in order to increase their tip.[76]

Lu Xun observed sarcastically: "If the coolies did not smile to their patron, China would stop being the kind of country it is now."[77]

Marxist criticism is illuminating in its attention to the manifold layers of Lu Xun's thinking about China as a hierarchical society, but it has tended to dismiss Lu Xun's concern with national character as a limitation in the evolution of his thought and to take his later interest in class as a sign of his surmounting of that limitation.[78] To my mind, this argument is not convincing, because it cannot explain the dynamic of a discursive struggle where no ideas, certainly not Lu Xun's, could uniformly follow a single tendency. To impose a judgment of historical limitation on Lu Xun from a teleological point of view is to blot out the extraordinary complexity of Lu Xun's mind, one that has confounded critics with such contradictory evidence.[79] A more fruitful critique of the concept of national character, it seems to me, lies not in the homology between Lu Xun and a theory imported from the West (the usual assumption of Marxist critics when they fault Lu Xun for his early limitations), but rather in the tensions between the two, including those moments when Lu Xun appears to endorse the theory without reservation. My own reading of "Ah Q" will explore these tensions by focusing on the rupture of the imported theory caused by the narrator's insertion of a different subjectivity in the narrative.

Subjectivity in Cross-Writing: The Narrator in "The True Story of Ah Q"

On more than a few occasions, Lu Xun confessed that "The True Story of Ah Q" was intended to be a portrayal of the national soul of the Chinese. For example, his preface to the Russian edition of the story contains the following statement: "I tried my best to paint the soul of our countrymen in modern times, but I am not so certain whether my endeavor has been successful or not."[80] This remark is repeatedly invoked by

critics who try to restrict the story to a single privileged reading. Here, I call attention to another essay, entitled "Zaitan baoliu" (My further views on reservation), in which Lu Xun gives this reading an unexpected twist. Writing in the third person, which brings the familiar voice of the narrator of "Ah Q" immediately to the reader's mind, he says: "Twelve years ago, Lu Xun wrote a story called 'The True Story of Ah Q' with the intention of exposing the weakness of his fellow citizens, although he did not specify whether he himself was included therein or not. This year, a number of individuals have come out to identify themselves as 'Ah Q.' That must have been part of the unfortunate karma of the modern age."[81] At one level, this quote is a sardonic reflection on some contemporary interpretations of the story as a roman à clef; at another level, however, the author inadvertently raises a question relating to the relationship among the author, text, and the reader, as well as to the problem of interpretation. What intrigues me here is not whether Lu Xun was capable of including himself in the criticism or to what degree he shares the national weaknesses that he attributed to Ah Q and to the people of Weizhuang. There is ample evidence in Lu Xun's works for his belief that critics are no more exempt from criticism than anybody else. "It is true that I dissect other people all the time," wrote Lu Xun, using one of his favorite anatomical tropes, "but I dissect myself much more often and much more savagely."[82] The narrator of his earlier story "The Diary of a Madman," confesses that he might be just as guilty of the crime of cannibalism as the people he accuses. It is not as if one needs to interrogate again the relationship between the critic and the object of criticism, which has been pointed out by most Lu Xun scholars.

The unexpected twist that Lu Xun gave to the reading of "Ah Q" in the essay "Zaitan baoliu" is, to my mind, the linkages he perceived between the text and the act of interpretation. This perception led to a profound distrust of the author–reader continuum, a distrust that, on the one hand, exposes the author to the same critique (should he himself be included?) as he has meted out to others and, on the other hand, obstructs the reader's identification with the object of criticism (roman à clef). What this means for interpretation of the story is that it brings the question of narratorial mediation to the fore. That is, if the identity of Ah Q or the question of who should be included in the Ah Q category (author or reader?) need not guide the direction of one's reading, then the question becomes What is there in the narrative itself that makes the critique of Ah Q and national character possible in the first place? This question places the mediation of the narrator and the construction

of his subjectivity at the heart of the problem of interpretation. Lu Xun's account of the classroom scene in his preface to *Nahan* finds interesting resonances here. The staging of the spectacle of horror that is watched by Chinese spectators within the frame of the photograph is in turn watched by an unintended audience, Lu Xun, who becomes the retrospective narrator of the refracted viewing experience. This convoluted relationship between a spectacle and its several relays of audiences as well as the voice that recounts the story is mirrored by an equally complicated relationship between the text of "Ah Q" and its implied readership as well as the mediatory voice of the narrator.

Criticisms that emphasize ideology in "The True Story of Ah Q" have tended to overlook the facts that Lu Xun went to great lengths to tease his hero and that the reader cannot but be entertained by Ah Q's monumental stupidity, although s/he may feel slightly guilty afterward. And why not, since the implied reader is induced to join the cannibalistic mob watching the execution of the "tragic" hero in the final scene? Killing two birds with one stone? Precisely. Lu Xun seemed to take as much delight in compromising the implied reader as he did in poking fun at his characters. How did he accomplish all this in a deceptively straightforward narrative?

Hanan's analysis of Lu Xun's technique pinpoints irony as the chief rhetorical figure in the story. "Ah Q" falls into what Hanan calls the "category of presentational irony" in that the narrator is given a distinct persona, referring to himself in the first person and speaking in a tone "in violent contrast to the events described; one is lofty, the other squalid, and the contrast makes the latter ridiculous."[83] In other words, Lu Xun's narrator is responsible for the "raising" and "lowering" effect of irony as, for example, in his treatment of Ah Q as a candidate for a biography and his simultaneous debasement of a time-honored genre of historiography by linking it with the life of an illiterate, depraved peasant. This use of irony may legitimately be grasped in terms of Bakhtin's perceptive analysis of comic style in novelistic discourse, particularly, his concept of "parodic stylization." This term describes a typical aspect of heteroglossia or hybrid construction where the "act of authorial unmasking, which is openly accomplished within the boundaries of a single simple sentence, merges with the unmasking of another's speech." Bakhtin mentions Gogol, one of Lu Xun's favorite Russian writers, in this context and sees his writing as an example of grotesque pseudo-objective motivation, that is, a highly mediated representation or hybridization of another's language or "general opinion" by the narrator *as if* it were his own language or opinion.[84] I find this understanding of narratorial mediation very useful and, by ex-

tending it to the reading below, try to bring out the manner in which the knowledge of national character in "Ah Q" is mediated through the opaque presence of the narrator. Specifically, I argue that the narrator is the key factor in the construction of the multilayered meanings within the story and that those meanings are embedded in the structured relationships that bind the narrator (dramatized "author"), Ah Q, the residents of Weizhuang, and the implied reader together.

Like Ah Q, the narrator is a fictional character invented by Lu Xun, but unlike the "realistic" peasant, this "I" inhabits two fictional/stylistic worlds simultaneously (or two diegeses, in Genette's terminology) and shuttles between them with the imputed invisibility of an omniscient narrator. Chapter 1 opens with the first of these worlds when the first-person narrator introduces himself as the "author" of a work that bears the title of "The True Story of Ah Q," a work that has not yet been written. The fact the narrator speaks from within the narrative about writing a story that has already been written (as far as the reader is concerned) draws a fine line between the extradiegetic level (i.e., narrator speaking from outside the fictional world he is recounting) and the autodiegetic level (narrator being the subject and object of narration simultaneously) within the narrative itself.[85] Indeed, the two levels quickly collapse into one as the story unfolds, which leads to the difficulty of reading between the lines, or rather between the levels. Yet these levels are absolutely crucial to an understanding of the relationship between the narrator and the fictional world he depicts.

The second of the fictional worlds is much easier to grasp than the first since it more or less conforms to the ordinary expectation of what a good story should consist of: time, place, events, character, and so forth. In this case, the privileged time is the period before and after the 1911 Revolution, and the setting is a village in southern China called Weizhuang, where a series of events will change the lives of the villagers and end the wretched life of Ah Q. The formal boundary of this world is marked by Chapter 2, where the narrator ceases to speak in the first person and begins to assume the third-person omniscient voice. Since the first-person narrative in Chapter 1 frames the third-person narrative in the following chapters (one may in fact treat the introductory chapter as a narrative frame), it cannot but affect the meanings that subsequent episodes generate in the story. What I am trying to suggest is that the reading of Ah Q's story cannot but take full account of the presence or erased presence of the narrator.

As a dramatized "author," the narrator in Chapter 1 reveals himself to be an old-fashioned Chinese literatus caught in a period of transition.

His several allusions to the journal *New Youth* suggest that the time of his writing, which was that of the May Fourth period, is separated from the time of the story by almost a decade. The narrator's knowledge of the old learning is obvious as he deliberates the pros and cons of the various biographical genres; moreover, he has some knowledge of Western literature as well. But he is uncomfortable with the old learning, which he mocks and parodies relentlessly; nor does he particularly fancy the idea of the new. For instance, his exaggerated concern with Ah Q's name and family genealogy parodies the pretentiousness of traditional Confucian values, but the adoption of the Western alphabet does not necessarily relegate him to the camp of the New Culturalists either. The following is extracted from his elaborate disquisition on Ah Q's name:

> Since I am afraid the new system of phonetics has not yet come into common use, there is nothing for it but to use the Western alphabet, writing the name according to the English spelling as Ah Quei and abbreviating it to Ah Q. This approximates to blindly following the *New Youth* magazine, and I am thoroughly ashamed of myself; but since even such a learned man as Mr. Chao's son could not solve my problem, what else can I do?[86]

Ah Q is a product of translingual practice after all! Recall that the making of this story itself involves as many as four different languages directly or indirectly: English (Arthur Smith), Japanese (Shibue Tamotsu et al.), Polish (Sienkiewicz), and modern vernacular Chinese. The protagonist Ah Q's name, as the narrator tells us, is an English transliteration and abbreviation of an ambiguous Chinese folk name, although in the story proper Ah Q himself detests all that the Imitation Foreign Devil symbolizes. But if there is the least likelihood that the narrator or the stylistic voice might be mistaken for Lu Xun himself, one can hardly miss the marked difference in the above quote. Whereas Lu Xun was a regular contributor to the *New Youth* magazine and a leader of the New Culture movement, this narrator here adopts the views of a Mr. Chao while putting them down at the same time. The subtle stylistic device, which explores the ambiguous space between "tradition" (read Chinese) and "modernity" (read Western), builds up an extremely complex narrative structure in which the voice of the narrator shifts back and forth, creating the "raising" and "lowering" effects of irony within a broad range of stylistic possibilities. The shifting voice, which switches to the third person in the subsequent chapter, provides the key to the interpretation of the story.

My question in this reading is not To what extent is Ah Q a symbol

of national character? or To what extent may he be viewed as a specimen of the lower-class peasant? Rather, I ask What are the relationships between the narrator and Ah Q and between the narrator and the people of Weizhuang? Where does the question of national identity figure in this scenario? Even in the chapters dominated by the third-person omniscient narrator, these questions cannot be ignored, because the omniscient point of view is clearly restricted by a selected narrative focus on the village of Weizhuang. In other words, the invisible narrator never leaves the village, even as Ah Q is forced to go to town after a series of blunders involving women, theft, and punishments by the Zhao family. This is rather unusual for a self-proclaimed biographer who ought to be following his hero wherever he goes. But Lu Xun's narrator is a most peculiar biographer. What he does is, instead, to skip the gap between Ah Q's departure and his next arrival and move on to tell what happened after Ah Q returns to the village. The opening passage of Chapter 6 marks one of those returns that may provide a clue to the nature of this narrative strategy: "Weizhuang did not see Ah Q again till just after the Moon Festival that year. Everybody was surprised to hear of his return, and this made them think back and wonder where he had been all that time" (pp. 93, *89*). At this point, the narrator sees *with* the collective eyes of the people of Weizhuang, and throughout Chapter 6 his knowledge of Ah Q is carefully restricted to what the village folks know, although he also manages to maintain an ironic distance from them at the same time. When Ah Q lies about his adventure in town, the narrator observes in a detached manner: "According to Ah Q, he had been a servant in the house of a successful provincial candidate. This part of the story filled all who heard it with awe" (pp. 95, *90*).

Elsewhere, the narrative point of view does not always coincide with that of the villagers. In the majority of the chapters, the narrator weaves in and out of Ah Q's mind, using psycho-narration, thought language, free indirect style, and the like to bring out the contrast between harsh reality and Ah Q's delusions. But it is always within Weizhuang or within the transactions between Ah Q and the villagers that the narrator locates his story. Should Weizhuang be interpreted as a microcosmic image of China? If so, the people in it must represent the national character, as Lu Xun himself once suggested in the preface to the Russian edition of "Ah Q." But what about the narrator, who also inhabits the microcosm of Weizhuang? If he is contained by that world, what enables his sarcasm at the stupidities of Ah Q and at the pettiness and cruelty of the village people?

Here we can note the role of writing, for writing empowers the narrator in the same way that illiteracy disempowers Ah Q.[87] The story begins with the narrator's disquisition on historical writing and Ah Q's name, and it practically ends with an almost symmetrical episode in which Ah Q not only is incapable of signing his name on a piece of court paper that probably contains his own death sentence but, when asked to draw a circle instead of his signature, fails to accomplish that task as well. The scene is unforgettable.

> Then a man in a long coat brought a sheet of paper and held a brush in front of Ah Q, which he wanted to thrust into his hand. Ah Q was now nearly frightened out of his wits, because this was the first time in his life that his hand had ever come into contact with a writing brush. He was just wondering how to hold it when the man pointed out a place on the paper, and told him to sign his name.
>
> "I—I—can't write," said Ah Q, shamefaced, nervously holding the brush.
>
> "In that case, to make it easy for you, draw a circle!"
>
> Ah Q tried to draw a circle, but the hand with which he grasped the brush trembled, so the man spread the paper on the ground for him. Ah Q bent down and, as painstakingly as if his life depended on it, drew a circle. Afraid people would laugh at him, he determined to make the circle round; however, not only was that wretched brush very heavy, but it would not do his bidding. Instead it wobbled from side to side; and just as the line was about to close it swerved out again, making a shape like a melon seed. (pp. 111, *108–9*)

If Ah Q had drawn a perfect circle, it would have resembled the English letter O, not far in the alphabet from the letter Q. But since the power of naming and writing is in the hands of the narrator, Ah Q's failure to draw the miraculous circle is not surprising. All he can do is tremble before the enormous symbolic authority attached to writing in Chinese culture and later rationalize his failure into victory as is his wont. By contrast, the narrator's ability to write entitles him to certain kinds of subjectivities denied to Ah Q even as it frees him from the latter's vices. In fact, the presentation of the narrator as Ah Q's opposite signals the vast chasm existing between them as members of two different classes known as *shangdeng ren* and *xiadeng ren*. The narrator's criticisms of Ah Q and condescension, sympathy, and even ambivalence toward him are conditioned by his elevated status as a writer and by his exclusive access to knowledge. This includes not only the knowledge of Chinese history and Western literature exhibited in the course of the story but also knowledge obtained through an omniscient narrative point of view that penetrates the mind of Ah Q as well as the minds of the public in Weizhuang.

Being a dramatized author/narrator also means cutting out a subject-position in the fabric of the story. The subject-position in "Ah Q" significantly ruptures one's knowledge of Chinese national character. It is not as if the myth of Chinese character were not there; after all, Smith's treatise on the Chinese obsession with face was hardly lost on Lu Xun or Ah Q. My point is that Lu Xun's story creates not only an Ah Q but also a Chinese narrator capable of analyzing and criticizing the protagonist. The introjection of such narratorial subjectivity profoundly supersedes Smith's totalizing theory of Chinese character and leads to a radical rewriting of the missionary discourse in terms of Chinese literary modernity. This rewriting sought to redefine the role of the Chinese literary elite vis-à-vis the lower class represented by ignorant underdogs like Ah Q, as May Fourth literature appointed itself the voice of enlightenment speaking to and about the masses. May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun deployed the theory of Chinese character to justify this endeavor by pointing an accusing finger at the indigenous tradition, culture, and the classical heritage and, in so doing, hoped to emerge as the subject and agent of their own history.

Was their enlightenment project largely successful? Did these intellectuals become advocates of wholesale Westernization and liberal ideologies? How did they negotiate the changing relationship between themselves as cultural critics on the one hand and the state and the rest of the nation on the other hand? These and related questions are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

The Discourse of Individualism

The meaning of a word is its use in speech.
—Wittgenstein

"There can be no question that subjectivism and individualism, joined with pessimism and a feeling for the tragedy of life, along with an inclination to revolt and even the tendency to self-destruction, are the most characteristic qualities of Chinese literature from the May Fourth Movement of 1919 to the outbreak of war with Japan."[1] Jaroslav Průšek's statement has exerted a decisive impact on the study of modern Chinese literature in Europe and the United States and, to a lesser degree, in China. Nowadays, one cannot talk about modern Chinese literature without recognizing some of the broad features highlighted by Průšek. Although his viewpoint is constantly invoked and discussed, it is seldom noticed, however, that the text Průšek cites to substantiate his statement happens to be one of the most interesting examples of translingual practice in modern fiction. The passage in question comes from Mao Dun's novel *Ziye* (Midnight), which contains an intimate exchange between Captain Lei and his onetime sweetheart Mrs. Wu, now the wife of a powerful Shanghai industrialist. Captain Lei takes a well-worn copy of Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* in Chinese (*Shaonian Weite zhi fannao*; trans. Guo Moruo, 1922) from his pocket and presents it to Mrs. Wu to impress her with his selfless devotion. Commenting on this famous scene (Captain Lei's self-conscious replication of Werther's part in translation never fails to amuse the Chinese reader), Průšek remarks: "The passage is extremely interesting for the way it shows how the greatest product of European Romanticism found a kindred spirit and mood among Chinese revolutionary youth. It testifies to how the moods in China were reminiscent