



# Potential Conflicting Convergence of Maoism and Lu Xun's Thought in the History of Modern China

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## ABSTRACT

Lu Xun is a heroic figure in China. He tried to enlighten the people and awaken them with his various works. All his works are very close to reality and stand at the forefront to expose the cruel truth of the dark society. Being close to reality, it is the words that go deep into people's hearts. His works in various forms are popular with people, who can easily relate to their life reality. His Western hybrid writing style makes people from all walks of life like writing. Due to such a wide influence and popularity, his works attract politicians who try to reach people and promote their agenda through Lu Xun's works. In this review paper, through literature review, the researcher tries to examine how Lu Xun's awakening intentions in his works and the exploitative intentions of the political world produce conflicting convergences.

**Keywords:** Lu Xun, Modern China, Mao Zedong, convergence, Left-wing writers

## Introduction

In Chinese history, there has been a traditional practice of famous and influential figures being used to gain political benefits for the court and dynasty. The Communist Party, while following the same traditional line, continues to use famous figures, including writers, especially revolutionary writers and activists, to promote its political prosperity. One of the famous figures who contributed to the growth of the Chinese Communist Party in the 20th century was Lu Xun. His contributions were extensive and had a significant impact in terms of ideology, politics, and factions. Even after his death, the factionalized Communist Party and its fragments continued to use Lu Xun's writings to explain their advantages.

In this critical review paper, the researcher has referred to several works on Lu Xun and his writings, mainly related to political awakening, and tried to evaluate for what purpose these works were written by Lu Xun, and how they were used by the political circles for their own benefit and as a tool to oppose their carnival, the researcher has also tried to find out, why the contradictions that led to the political convergence of Mao Zedong and Lu Xun were realized in the historical events of the Chinese Communist Party.

## Lu Xun and his thoughts as reviewed in academic writings

Guo Yu (2019) from Leshan Normal University, Sichuan, China, published a paper titled "A General Analysis of Lu Xun's Short Stories", which analyses in detail how Lu Xun's short stories became the focus of the literary world and made a valuable contribution to awakening the people. He explained that Lu Xun's short stories were of great significance in introducing Lu Xun to the world of revolutionary literature. His style of writing, which blended Western styles with China's complex cultural traditions, added a new flavour to Chinese literature. There is no doubt that these works were bound to be accepted by a wide audience, and some were even adapted into dramas to achieve further impact.

Lu Xun portrayed a variety of characters in his short stories, which have merged into the nominal heroes in the minds of the Chinese. Their gaze injected new hope and a new dimension of life into people living in despair. From the perspective of fiction, Lu Xun led his full revolutionary style of short stories that had a greater impact on the masses. This impact not only awakened the betrayed Chinese, but also awakened the political class that was considered to be a betrayer.

In an article titled "The Political Use of Lu Xun" published in Cambridge University Press's China Quarterly, Marle Goldman (1982) explains how the tremendous capacity of the emotional awakening power inspired by Lu Xun's works was explored by China's political hierarchy before and after his establishment.

Marle Goldman argues that Lu Xun was not directly involved in politics. However, his writings clearly show the failure of the political class in creating an ideal society. He always expressed this failure through his writings by exposing the dark side of society. Nevertheless, despite the change in the overall ideas of the Party, certain aspects and views of the Party remained consistent with Lu's writings. It is evident that the views expressed by Lu Xun through his writings were conveniently distorted by different fictions within the Party. Sometimes, his views were interpreted as being completely opposite to his views, and sometimes they happened to be very opposing views.

In the early twentieth century, his writings were mainly focused on exposing the bad influences of social customs and prevalent inhumanity. These views were fabricated in order to represent the futuristic ideas of the Party. From a few years before his death, he was clearly concerned with the bad practices of the Party and its organizations. Even this straightforward critical view was fabricated by the Party and was a commentary by the real Party and Mao Zedong's followers. He was always portrayed by the Party as a pure political subordinate, as he liked to portray himself as an independent writer.

Through his article titled "True Story of Lu Xun" published on the China File website, Geremie R. Barmé (2017), explains how Lu Xun became a literary hero in the history of Chinese culture. He created a wide variety of works with a unique writing style that allowed him to reach more people in China regardless of their literacy status. Barmé points out that during the May Fourth Movement, Lu Xun's writings argued that writing in the West would have greater literary development (2017). It was opposed by some prominent figures such as Mao Zedong. At the same time, Mao and some political figures used Lu Xun's writings to awaken the Chinese against the Kuomintang and its rule. Geremie R. Barmé tells how the situation turned and soon there was a place where Lu Xun and his followers were banned from organizing meetings to expose the dark side of society. In the years that followed, Lu Xun and his followers often gathered in unusual places such as cafes, bookstores, and publishing houses to discuss Western literature. Slowly, as the Chinese Communist Party began to prosper, it began to control these groups and their gatherings. It even used to choose the topics that these intellectuals would discuss. Lu Xun opposed this unreasonable control by the party, and many of his followers had to face harsh and direct consequences. All this was done by the party while promoting literature as a weapon against government evil and social injustice. Lu Xun's satirical works against the Guomin Party were encouraged by the party. The same party resorted to rejecting his satirical works, saying that they were appropriate in a communist regime.

Eva Shan Chou's paper (2017), "The End of Fiction, the Beginning of Politics: Lu Xun 1926-1927" in SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS details how Lu Xun's works were transformed from fictional works that people used to read to powerful political writings that had the potential to change people's direction and awaken them to revolt against oppression. Eva explains how Lu Xun, while enthusiastic about experiments in Western literature, urged all writers to return to traditional folk literature. It was basically to reach out to the masses and draw them to the party. Lu Xun's works exposed the ills of society and its unwarranted effects, such as poverty, corruption, and crime, and the party wanted writers to portray how society was viewed through their perspective. Mao always made a point to other writers to use Lu Xun's writings as an example of how to portray society correctly. It always led to the rejection of all writings when he was presented as a revolutionary hero. The entire nation, intellectuals, readers and other writers were led to follow Lu Xun. Moreover, the party instructed Lu Xun to follow its views.

The Communist Party distorted Lu Xun's thoughts, and this distortion reached a critical point during Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward. During this period, Lu Xun's works were passed through the party's propaganda department to oppose critics. Under the explicit instructions of the party, the Left-wing Writers League was disbanded without even having consultation with Lu Xun, the head of the league. Lu Xun then formed another organization under the name of the Chinese Writers' Union. He only welcomed writers who held non-Marxist views. Lu Xun felt that with such writers, the revolutionary spirit would be diluted. Therefore, he formed another group with like-minded people. This complete rejection of the party's policies faced the party's intolerance. Thus, Zhou Yang's group and Lu Xun's faction indulged in a literary war, which lasted until Lu Xun's death.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, these events were rewritten in Chinese history by the same party's cultural department, and inevitably, they watered down the entire literary war and many of Lu Xun's works, including letters and articles he wrote against the party's policies were not included in his collection. Since Zhou Yang had insisted on Mao's command until the 1960s, it cannot be believed that the war against Lu Xun was not conducted under Mao's command. Although Mao was the protagonist and follower of the whole campaign to downplay Lu Xun, officials in the cultural department raised it a step higher in their positions in the cultural department for personal gain. As time went on, under changing circumstances, a rift broke out between Mao and officials in the cultural department. This time, Lu Xun was again used by the Mao couple to criticize those who they had earlier given the responsibility to criticize Lu Xun. At this time, the newspapers were taken over by members of Lu Xun's rebel faction. Letters and essays that were not previously in Lu Xun's works were all published. By the fall of 1966, the situation was reversed again, and enemies of Lu Xun like Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi happened to become part of the party leadership. Once again, Lu Xun's works were

used by these enemies to attack predecessors such as Mao. Even after Lu Xun's death, the commemorative activities held on the anniversary of his death were still controlled by the party. During the May Fourth Movement, none of his assistants were invited to participate. In all the searches of these shows, Lu Xun is once again portrayed as a person who supports the party's views.

In fact, Lu Xun never had direct contact with Mao Zedong, nor did he ever study Mao Zedong's thoughts. However, Lu Xun was seen as a foot soldier and loyal follower of Maoism in front of the masses. On the other hand, all the connections between Lu Xun and the May Fourth Movement were diluted. This was purely a fabrication of Lu Xun's image among the masses for the benefit of party leaders like Mao, who Lu Xun had always opposed. The political massacre left him with deep scars.

During the Cultural Revolution, Lu Xun's image was not welcomed by the party. The party considered it as reintroducing Western style into China. Condemnation was inevitable. At the same time, Lu Xun's Western writings were used by the same party leadership to reach out to the masses. Lu Xun was never against awakening the masses with his works. However, he never agreed to submit to the party leadership and then create works for them. He was the opposite of Mao Zedong Thought, which advocated traditional style as a political tool in the past. This is the reason; Lu Xun's writings always opposed the early society, but never evaluated the current society. He never directly opposed the party through words, but his satirical expressions were a clear reflection of the thoughts.

Thus, Lu Xun evolved into a radical with left-wing ideas in communist China. The outburst of criticism against Lu Xun's writings was not unexpected. The cultural departments of the party were willing to restrict and control his writings. As long as he was identified with the communist movement, his writings received unparalleled awards and were called out as coming from the heart. Then, the most basic qualities of Lu Xun as a person and the quality of his writings were ignored because of his rejection of the party's momentum. The opposition he and his writings faced was enormous. It was to such an extent that his works could not be sold in Beijing.

Nicolas D Kristof (1990), through his article published in the New York Times, believes that Lu Xun's influence in China can be said to be everlasting. He and his writings were widely quoted in all political speeches not only when he was alive, but even after his death. This was thanks to the widespread influence that Lu Xun had acquired through his revolutionary writings. Due to this influence, Lu Xun has always been a political tool in the hands of the political circles. Political leaders used him as part of their propaganda against the carnival both before and after his death.

Once the tide shifted from the Cultural Revolution to the political power struggle, the same Lu Xun and his works were brought out again to align with Mao's views. His rebellious attitude towards the party was presented as Mao's rebellious attitude, while once again proving that Lu Xun was a true follower of Mao. As the political game continued to evolve, Lu Xun's focus shifted to the back seat.

By the 1970s, the situation changed again and Zhou Enlai came to power. When Zhou Enlai was committed to bringing all political leaders back to the party, Lu Xun was brought into the picture again. This time it was the rebels who used the essence of Lu Xun and his works against Zhou Enlai. In this process, Lu Xun's anti-Confucius writings were repeatedly used to criticize Zhou Enlai. All the relevant essence of Lu Xun's works on betrayal, the process of betrayal, and the consequences of betrayal were aptly used to frame Zhou Enlai and later Deng Xiaoping. The threats within the revolution mentioned in Lu Xun's works were all meant to point out the behavior of bureaucracy within the party. In the 1970s, when political factions reached their peak and the party organization was severely suppressed, Lu Xun and his works once again became Zhou Enlai's weapons. Zhou Enlai used them against the Shanghai Group, and the Shanghai Group did the same to Zhou Enlai. At the same time, Zhou Enlai, with Mao Zedong's consent, convened a meeting to begin compiling Lu Xun's complete works, including his poems, essays, letters and novels. However, this time the Shanghai Group dominated the cultural field, and Lu Xun's works were used by Zhou Enlai against them. After 1950, there were obstacles to the publication of Lu Xun's complete works again. The Shanghai Group easily deleted selected parts of his works and avoided their publication. In some published works, they deliberately removed annotations to help readers understand who Lu Xun was criticizing. The struggle between the bureaucratic leaders and the Shanghai Group spread to the economic field. The Shanghai Group opposed the introduction of Western technologies, saying that they would undermine China's socialism. To refute this claim, the bureaucratic group headed by Zhou Enlai proposed Lu Xun's method of absorbing Western culture and integrating it into Chinese culture. The bureaucracy successfully assimilated Lu Xun's selected works to show the public that Lu Xun was well-informed about both Chinese and Western things. Thus, he tried to create a new China with Western ideas. In 1976, the Shanghai Group came to an end, and the bureaucracy continued to use their Lu Xun strategy to discredit the Shanghai Group's expansion members. Earlier, the Shanghai Group used Lu Xun's works as an example of Lu Xun being the first to see the betrayal of the Cultural Revolution promoted by Mao. Similarly, the bureaucracy began to see Lu Xun as the first to see the betrayal of the Shanghai Group.

The writer Manik Bhattacharyya (2021), explained Lu Xun's unique achievements in the cultural and political history of China through his work "The Lofty Height of a Writer: My Evaluation of Lu Xun" published on the webpage of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts. The highly influential style and wide range of genres of works made Lu Xun's ideas reach the lowest level of people. It must penetrate the upper class and its oppressive ideology.

The author argues that Lu Xun's Westernization approach blended traditional values and scientific understanding. His writings helped to eradicate myths and introduce fresh and broad ideas to people from the

lower classes. Further escalating to other areas such as political oppression and social darkness. Thus becoming the most effective enlightenment tool and thought-provoking tool for the oppressed masses.

As the bureaucratic group continued their use of Lu Xun as a weapon against the group, in Shanghai. The Shanghai group retaliated by distorting Lu Xun's works. It is said that they have destroyed Lu Xun's works to the extent, which is unrecognizable. As part of these political factional wars, Lu Xun has never received the praise he deserves, nor has he been thoroughly criticized. The only positive result was that Lu Xun's accomplices were rehabilitated during the May Fourth Movement and brought back into the cultural world.

There is a strong belief that Lu Xun was an agent of Mao during the Cultural Revolution. This image forced Lu Xun to immerse himself in realistic thoughts and writing. On the other hand, Mao's disciples continued to praise Mao for pointing the progressive direction for the development of Chinese culture through the Cultural Revolution. It is worth mentioning that during the Cultural Movement, Mao had asked writers to stay away from Lu Xun-style writing. The discussion about Lu Xun's status with the party continued. The two factions, one seeking further party control over society and the other seeking an open society, continued to argue over Lu Xun. Lu Xun wanted to shake up the political system through literature while exposing the ills of society. However, in the past few years, literature has become a clear reflection of the decadent political spirit. They never conflicted with the political system, but supported all bad behaviors and practices.

In fact, judging by the way the two factions of the political system, the rebels and the rulers used him, Lu Xun was never on their side. He and his works challenged the rebels and the party leaders. After Lu Xun, his followers were equally threatening. They are considered to be the true representatives of Lu Xun and believed to be able to pass on Lu Xun's legacy. Therefore, their rehabilitation takes a long time.

The popular genre of Zewen introduced by Lu Xun successfully inspired several writers to come forward and write about the dark side of society. The regime wanted to control this genre only during the Cultural Revolution, not before or after the Cultural Revolution. This Zewen genre was praised by all sectors of society for its bold exposure of the dark side of society.

In his article published in the BBC in September 2014, Ji Wei (2014) pointed out that Lu Xun's works were popular during the Cultural Revolution. His works were widely used by people from all walks of life to enlighten the dark side of society. Some argue that the political use of his writings and all political parties tried to claim him as their supporter in order to make disgraceful use of his writings.

However, the author argues that the use of Lu Xun in political circles was mainly to degrade the image of the opposition while highlighting the real leaders of the opposition. In this prospect, Mao Zedong took the lead in using Lu Xun as his party man. All this happened when Mao Zedong regarded him as a right-wing writer. Therefore, there was a contradictory choice of the political class at that time, including Mao Zedong, in terms of Lu Xun and Lu Xun's works. On the one hand, Lu Xun's ideas of introducing Western literature were severely criticized, and on the other hand, his writings, including of course those in Western literature, were adopted for their own use. In conclusion, there is a clear disagreement on what made the confluence of contradictions a reality and a weapon in the political circles during the anti-KMT struggle and after the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The author of this article, Charles Custer (2019) brings out the influence of Lu Xun in Chinese history. He specifically mentions his influence on the Chinese Communist Party. Although Lu Xun was a staunch believer in the left, his ideology seemed to be different from other left-wing writers.

He and his writings helped to reveal the loopholes of the ruling power and the dark truths of society. Therefore, his various works were able to receive strong support from all walks of life. When this support fell into the hands of the political class, it had transformed into an influence. The article explains how the Chinese Communist Party portrayed Lu Xun as a nationalist when it was in power, and the party used his ideologically charged writings to fight against the nationalist government. However, the author of the article did not propose what forces were behind the intersection of Lu Xun and the Chinese Communist Party in China's construction. 'The Sage of Modern China', the work by Davies (2013) brings out some very important aspects of the discussion among Chinese intellectuals about Lu Xun's involvement in the left and his misguided contribution to the development of the Chinese Communist Party. It is believed that his core leftist ideology gave enough space for party insiders to use his writings for uprisings and of course against political opponents. At the same time, the article argues that everyone can classify Lu Xun as a rightist based on the substance of his writings. The Chinese Communist Party also took full advantage of this gap and labeled him as a right-wing extremist. This frequently changing classification created a serious confusion in the minds of the Chinese people, who have been thinking and pondering over the confusing writings. However, this work fails to provide enough evidence to prove how the massive convergence of contradictory ideologies occurred and led to the historical events of the rise of the CCP and the founding of the new China (PRC).

In the work 'The Emergence of Hope in Lu Xun's Novels', Nunez (1994) attempts to explain how each of Lu Xun's works had a significant impact on the perceptions of the Chinese people. The creation of new dimensions of perception had such an impact that every citizen began to attribute the storylines and real-life characters to themselves. In summary, the author proves that Lu Xun's powerful writing style eventually became a weapon in the hands of the political circles. Each of Lu Xun's works has powerfully become a tool for awakening in the hands of the masses. However, the author does not point out how Lu Xun's thoughts, which were full of Western style, merged with the left-wing extremists to shape the ideas of the same masses. In conclusion, Lu Xun's works have made a significant contribution to the establishment and prosperity of the Chinese Communist

Party. The author does not mention the key aspects of how this fusion of left-wing ideology overcame the so-called right-wing ideology to reach out to the Chinese masses.

### Conclusion

By reviewing all the works of different writers cited above, it is clear that Lu Xun and his works were optimally used for political purposes by all factions of the political system in modern China. To a large extent, they succeeded in using Lu Xun as a powerful weapon, and forced their opponents into a corner. Although it is clear that due to the popularity of Lu Xun's works, various political parties tended to his works and tried every means to weaponize his works against their opponents.

In all the works, it is clearly mentioned that Mao Zedong and his followers played an active role in using Lu Xun's works for political purposes. All this happened when Mao Zedong and Lu Xun as individuals never had any idea of convergence. Lu Xun never became a member of the Chinese Communist Party, and Mao Zedong never accepted Lu Xun's cultural westernization ideas. This is therefore a controversial fusion of Maoism and Lu Xun's writings. What prompted this controversial fusion of Maoism and Lu Xun's thought is worth exploring. There is a clear convergence between Maoism, which takes an extreme leftist approach to society, and Lu Xun, who in a unique way can sometimes be categorized as rightist but most of the time is used by the left.

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