

JUANSHENG AS THE FAILED MADMAN IN “DEAD QUIET AND EMPTINESS:” DEATH DRIVE
AND THE GENDERED MELANCHOLIC SUBJECT IN LU XUN’S “REGRET FOR THE PAST”

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There is no subject without an object that is already lost.
Esther Sánchez-Pardo

Introduction: Juan/Kuang, Psychoanalysis, and Lu Xun

This paper calls attention to the issue of melancholia in Lu Xun’s “Shang shi” 傷逝 (Regret for the Past, 1925), and explores how it is related to the notion of *kuang* 狂 (madness) in Lu Xun’s “Kuangren riji” 狂人日記 (A Madman’s Diary, 1918).¹ In the classical cultural category, both *kuang* 狂 (madness, represented by the madman in “A Madman’s Diary”) and *juan* 狷 (melancholia, represented by Juansheng in “Regret for the Past”) are regarded as non-conformist attitudes and have assumed equal importance. In the “Zilu” 子路 chapter of the *Lun yu* 論語 (The Analects of Confucius), Confucius says: “If I cannot get men who steer a middle course to associate with, I would far rather have the *kuang* and the *juan*! The *kuang* assert themselves and go steadily forward; the *juan* choose to not act” 不得中行而與之 必也狂狷乎 狂者進取 狷者有所不為也 (Confucius, p. 177).² What Confucius implies here is that both the *kuang* 狂 and the *juan* (homonym of the *juan* in Juansheng in “Regret for the Past”), though they stray from the norms of the world (middle course), still preserve their personal integrity and thus can be worthy companions. While the *kuang* asserts himself and actively reconstructs his world via paranoia, the *juan* resigns from the world and passively abnegates the self. The Confucian notion of the *kuang* is reminiscent of Lu Xun’s *kuang ren* (madman), and the *juan* reminds us of Juansheng, the melancholic subject in “Regret for the Past.” In studies of Lu Xun, while the concept of *kuang* (madness) has been widely discussed, the issue of *juan* (melancholia) still leaves much room to be explored. It is the aim of this paper to highlight the issue of *juan* in “Regret for the Past” in light of the Freudian notions of death drive (desire for death) and melancholia.

“Regret for the Past” revolves around the failed romance between a sentimental and effeminate May Fourth intellectual, Juansheng 涓生 and his jilted lover, Zijun 子君. Fashioned in the intimate diary form, Lu Xun features Juansheng as the first-person male protagonist-narrator, who excessively laments over the mysterious death of Zijun and thereupon abandons himself to a sense of guilt, ascetic self-flagellation, and even sadistic

¹ “Regret for the Past” was collected in *Panghuang* 彷徨 (Wandering), and “A Madman’s Diary” was collected in *Nahan* 吶喊 (Cheering from the Sidelines). In this paper, the English translation of “Shang shi” is taken verbatim from Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang’s “Regret for the Past.” However, I have changed the Wade-Giles romanization found in the original translation into the *pinyin* system. William A. Lyell also translates “Shang shi” and entitles it “Mourning the Dead” in *Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*.

² The translation also draws on Michelle Yeh’s rendition (p. 126). For the discussion of “madness” in Chinese culture, please see Michelle Yeh’s “The Poet as Mad Genius.”

self-persecution. The intensity, spontaneity, and self-reflexivity of these overflowing emotions read uncannily like “stream of consciousness,” enshrouded by recurrent tropes of silence, emptiness, alienation, depletion, loss, absence, futility, and bereavement, all of which thematize death. As Joseph H. Smith writes: “Death and threatening death as absence, lack, alienation, separation, and loss enter in with the first imaging. Death symbolizes all of these, and all of these symbolize death” (Smith, p. 131). As a text of loss, absence, and death, “Regret for the Past” dramatizes how the death drive instinct works in the male protagonist and how the intellectually privileged male subject of melancholia is configured and sanctified by relegating the female into an objectified “other,” who, then, functions solely for mirroring the sombre contemplation of the melancholic male subject.

Reading “Regret for the Past” as a paranoiac sequel to “A Madman’s Diary,” this paper will regard the two male protagonists (the “madman” and Juansheng) as Lu Xun’s alter egos, developed in tandem within different sociohistorical contexts. Treating sound and space as a point of departure, I explore the intertwined relationship between subjectivity and the aesthetics of acoustics and territorialization. I argue that Lu Xun’s Juansheng is his failed “madman,” and that Juansheng’s failure embodies Lu Xun’s own sense of futility at the personal, national, and historical levels. I then further point out that despite their differences, both madness/*kuang* (represented by the madman) and melancholia/*juan* (represented by Juansheng), which register a masculine cultural privilege, represent critical attitudes, or the attitudes of a non-conformist, to the ongoing system, which was in Lu Xun’s time, modernity.

Sound and Space: the Realm of Death Drive

Freud’s notion of the “death drive instinct” stems from his reconfiguration of the “pleasure principle.” The “pleasure principle” is associated with the force that drives the subject to avoid pain and magnify pleasure, a principle that nonetheless has to be negotiated with(in) the “reality principle,” which forces the subject, in a compromise with the social norms in reality, to postpone his/her pleasure. However, in his “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” (1920), Freud observes that human beings’ compulsory repetition of unhappy experience actually problematizes, if not completely overrides, his previous formulation of the pleasure principle. It is through an analysis of the “repetition compulsion” that Freud formulates his theory of the death instinct. For Freud, death exists even before life, and all organisms wish to die in their own way. He states: “If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons—becomes inorganic once again—then we shall be compelled to say that ‘the goal of all life is death’ and, looking backwards, that ‘what was inanimate existed before what is living’” (Freud, p. 18, 38).³ In other words, the death drive is associated with the nullification of desires and articulation of inertia, the destructive ego’s instinct to “restore an earlier state of things” or to “return to the quiescence of the inorganic world,” a regressive thrust towards death where the ego cannot be injured once and for all by the outside world (Freud, p. 18, 62). The death drive, the drive towards destruction, is dubbed

³ The citation style of Freud’s work in this paper is as follows: the number 18 refers to the volume of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. The number 38 indicates the page number in that volume.

Thanatos vis-à-vis *Eros*, the life, libidinal, sexual, and erotic instinct that tries to preserve and prolong life itself by affection, coherence, unity, or “energy cathexes.” Throughout his works, Freud maintains that the death drive is a “tendency towards stability,” the mental apparatus of “reducing to nothing, or at least of keeping as low as possible, the sums of excitation which flow in upon it.” The ultimate result of this “reducing” is death, which generates a sense of extreme pleasure known as the “nirvana principle” (Freud 19, 159). In this way, the death drive is actually compatible with, or even reinforces, the “pleasure principle.” This is the point Freud emphasizes in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” (1924).

Sound is one of the contested spheres in the dynamic interplay between death and life instincts. For Freud, sound is associated with the noisiness, bustle, clamor, and restlessness of life, while silence and dumbness are linked with death.⁴ In “The Theme of Three Caskets” (1913), Freud notes the association between silence and death. He says: “Psychoanalysis will tell us that in dreams dumbness is a common representation of death” (Freud, p. 12, 295). Later in “The Ego and the Id” (1923), Freud reiterates: “The death instincts are by their nature mute [...] the clamor of life proceeds for the most part from Eros” (Freud, p. 19, 46). Julia Kristeva, in *Black Sun*, echoes Freud’s view on the link between death and silence. She writes: “Melancholia [...] ends up in asybolia, in loss of meaning [...] I become silent and I die” (Kristeva, p. 42).

In addition to sound, space also plays a vital role. Freud intimates that the death drive is characterized by a misanthropic withdrawal from the external world to the self; that is, a return from the external world, fraught with disappointment, frustration, and threat, to the final self-sufficient and self-referential womb/home that is theoretically safe. Freud refers to this as a “detachment of libido” from external objects and a regression in service to the ego. Thus, the open external space, with its hustle and bustle, is associated with the spatial extension of the self and a socially engaging life force. Conversely, the internal sealed-up space, metaphorized, in the extreme as a kind of private tomb or womb, wherein there exists nothing but the “self,” is linked with dumbness, emptiness, and death.

In her analysis of Melanie Klein’s works on melancholia, Esther Sánchez-Pardo elaborates on this spatial distinction. She contends that the external reality or space poses “dangers and lethal traps” for the melancholic subject, who, in his desperate attempt to safeguard “incorporation and preservation inside the psyche,” desires to retreat from reality into self, to be left alone “with his misery” as well as his own memories and inner desires (Sánchez-Pardo, p. 69, 148). Sánchez-Pardo regards this inner space as “a troubled interior space that poses a traumatic relationship with exteriority” and points out that within the contested space, wherein life and death drives stage their struggles, “interiority and exteriority are constituted not as opposites but as intimately and problematically linked. In these basic spatial forms, the struggle between the life and death drives repeats itself ad infinitum [...] and a battle is staged between inside and outside, interiority and exteriority, introjection and projection, mind and body, memory and desire” (Sánchez-Pardo, p. 12). In her analysis of Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake*, Susan Moore goes one step further by pertinently materializing this spatial distinction into the xenophobic and self-enclosing “compounds” vis-à-vis the clamouring and socially engaging “pleeblands” (Moore, p. 94).

⁴ For further analysis of the association between silence and death drive, see Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (US & Canada: Routledge, 2003), p. 107.

The Death Drive in Juansheng and the Mysterious Death of Zijun

The dynamic interplay between death and life instincts, with sound and space as the contested spheres, is well staged in “Regret for the Past,” generating a tension that drives the narration of the whole text. Even before Zijun’s arrival, Juansheng feels the touch of Thanatos, and Zijun plays no more than the role of an invigorating Eros, who, no matter how limited her life force is, can still temporarily help Juansheng escape from his futuristic foretaste of the dark force of death.

Juansheng lives in a xenophobic and secluded hostel, which is similar to Moore’s spatial metaphor of the insular “compounds.” William A. Lyell points to the hostel’s alienating nature. He maintains: “The *huiguan* of the Chinese text were hostels where people from the same area stayed while away from home; occasionally *huiguan* served as housing for people with the same occupation” (Lyell, p. 338). Juansheng’s solitary room in the hostel further exacerbates his alienation from the outside world. He lives in a silent thus dead life in a shabby room “tucked away in a forgotten corner of the hostel,” which is “quiet and empty” (Lu, p. 197). This desolate room, like a silent, cryptic, or smothering vault entombing the already half-dead and claustrophobic male protagonist, is surrounded by the muted and dying, such as “the half dead locust tree” and “the old wisteria tree, the trunk of which looked as if made of iron” (Lu, p. 197).

It is only when hearing the sound of Eros that the “I” narrator can be stimulated to life. Juansheng recalls: “I was expecting Zijun’s arrival. As I waited long and impatiently, the tapping of high heels on the brick pavement would galvanize me into life” (Lu, p. 197). Withdrawn to himself, Juansheng is like an impassive half-dead man inhumed in the secluded shabby room, waiting for the stimulation of life from the external world via his Eros, Zijun. As Juansheng recalls her visits: “She would bring in a new leaf from the half withered locust tree outside the window for me to look at, or clusters of the mauve flowers that hung from the old wisteria tree, the trunk of which looked as if made of iron” (Lu, p. 197). The “new leaf” and the “mauve flowers” are symbols of life and hope. Sprung up from the dying trunks, they are imbued with only a feeble life force. Though the symbolic force of the leaf and flowers are diminished by their muteness and immobility, they are, nonetheless, significant because they are harbingers of Juansheng’s Eros/Zijun, who is assertive, determined, and confident at that time, as evidenced in her own words: “I’m my own mistress. None of them has any right to interfere with me” (Lu, p. 198). It is the arrival of Eros that invigorates the narrator from his deathlike dumbness to vigorous speech. As Juansheng describes the scene when she visits him: “The shabby room would be filled with the sound of my voice as I held forth on the tyranny of the home, the need to break with tradition, the equality of men and women, Ibsen, Tagore and Shelley...” (Lu, p. 198)

Escaped from his tomb-like home in the hostel, the male protagonist’s erotic cohabitation with his Eros/Zijun neutralizes his death instinct. This turns out to be his “happiest and busiest time” (Lu, p. 200) as he is now engaging with the “clamour of life” on Jizhao Street 吉兆 (literally, “Auspicious Omen Street”). In sharp contrast to Juansheng’s previous status of ennui, now, both his mind and body are mobilized by this life force. He states: “One part of my mind became as active as my body” (Lu, p. 200). Zijun as the Eros, flourishes, too. As she “became more lively,” “grew plumper and her cheeks became rosier,” and she “was too busy,” especially occupied with cooking to

provide life nourishment for Juansheng (Lu, p. 202). Further, the dog and the chickens, which she raises and loves as if they were her children, also symbolize the constructive “reproduction power” of Eros in her capacity to procreate the family.

However, hidden behind this gaiety of life, the force of Thanatos in Juansheng still looms large, a dark force that threatens to render meaningless the constructive work of Eros with its deconstructive power. This is foreshadowed by the difference between Juansheng’s preference for quiet and immobile plants and Zijun’s preference for clamouring animals, such as the dog Asui and the chicks. In other words, Zijun prefers to live *loudly* while Juansheng prefers to live (and die) *silently*. Their dissimilar dispositions symbolize different forces: the restlessness and noisiness of life instinct of Zijun in contrast to the stillness and silence of death characteristic of Juansheng and his tendencies toward negation, dissolution, stability, homeostasis, and inactivity.

Consequently, Thanatos does not cease to work in Juansheng even though engaged with the “clamour of life.” This dark force especially possesses Juansheng when the life force in Zijun begins to decline. When Juansheng and Zijun receive the news that Juansheng has been fired, he finds that Zijun, “fearless as she was, had turned pale.” Due to the hardship of life, Juansheng first notices that “recently she seemed to have grown weaker” (Lu, p. 203). Later, continuing to note her depletion, Juansheng writes: “I had never imagined a trifle like this could cause such a striking change in someone so firm and fearless as Zijun. She really had grown much weaker lately” (Lu, p. 204). With the decline of Zijun and the diminution of the power of Eros in her power to tame Thanatos, Juansheng is seized upon by a compulsion to regress to his previous state of inactivity. He writes: “I had a sudden vision of a peaceful life—the quiet of my shabby room in the hostel flashed before my eyes” (Lu, p. 204). Concomitant with his desire for a spatial return to his tomblike space in the hostel is the physical depletion of his body. He states: “I realized I must have grown weaker myself lately too” (Lu, p. 204).

The working of the death drive in Juansheng, however, is best manifested by his withdrawal to himself and his stubborn resistance to external stimulus. According to Freud in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” within the death drive, “protection against stimuli is an almost more important function than reception of stimuli” (Freud, p. 18, 27). Possessed by the death drive and with the desire to return to the previous state of inertia, stimulus from the clamouring outside is too much for Juansheng. The sound of Eros, that is, the crowdedness of the space, the noise of the animals, Zijun’s quarrelling with the neighbor, all that is inherent to a socially-engaging world, is for the male narrator, Juansheng, nothing but a nuisance. He writes: “Unfortunately, there was no room where I could be undisturbed, and Zijun was not as quiet or considerate as she had been. Our room was so cluttered up with dishes and bowls and filled with smoke, it was impossible to work steadily there [...] on top of this there was Asui and the chicks” (Lu, p. 205).

In his desire to withdraw to the previous state of stillness, Juansheng thus engages in a strategy of defense against inflowing stimuli in the external world. He carries this out by first refusing to eat. Juansheng notes: “My appetite was much smaller than before” (Lu, p. 205). The loss of appetite is a symptom of the loss of life force itself. Therefore even the daily eating becomes nuisance external stimuli from which Juansheng desperately tries to escape. He writes: “Then there was the never-ending business of eating every day...apparently she had forgotten all she had ever learned, and did not

realize that she was interrupting my train of thought when she called me to meals” (Lu, p. 205).

Hidden behind this loss of appetite for food is the unsaid loss of desire for sex, what Freud regards as the important marker for the erotic life force in its power for human reproduction. Actually, it is merely within three weeks that Juansheng “was able to read her soberly like a book, body and soul” (Lu, p. 201). As Zijun becomes more engaged with the secular “clamouring of life” on Jizhao Street, both her “body and soul” lose their attractiveness. As Juansheng coldly observes, she becomes plumper and by doing household chores diligently she becomes unpleasing to his eye. He notes: “She kept at it so hard all day, perspiration made her short hair stick to her head, and her hands grew tough” (Lu, p. 202). Her soul, like her body, now preoccupied with the quotidian life, can no longer stimulate the intellectual, Juansheng, as is evidenced by the statement: “Apparently she had forgotten all she had ever learned” (Lu, p. 205). It’s fair to say, that since he regards Zijun as unattractive, Juansheng likely feels little if any erotic desire for her.

In addition to what Freud refers to as “anorexia nervosa,” Juansheng defends against external stimuli by destroying Zijun/Eros. In his “Economic Problem of Masochism,” Freud notes that the death drive, in detaching the libido from the outside world is first directed outward to destroy, sadistically, the objects upon which the subject projects his destructive instinct:

In (multicellular) organisms the libido meets the instinct of death, or destruction, which is dominant in them and which seeks to disintegrate the cellular organism and to conduct each separate unicellular organism [composing it] into a state of inorganic stability (relative though this may be). This libido has the task of making the destroying instinct innocuous, and it fulfils the task by diverting that instinct to a great extent outwards—soon with the help of a special organic system, the muscular apparatus—towards objects in the external world. The instinct is then called the destructive instinct, the instinct for mastery, or the will to power. (Freud, p. 19, 163)

Juansheng’s destruction of Zijun as the projected object is conducted repetitively and incrementally by first destroying the hens and the dog. Thus, the hens are Juansheng’s first object of destruction. Juansheng remembers: “Later on, after much argument and insistence, the hens started appearing on our table, and we and Asui were able to enjoy them for over ten days” (Lu, p. 206). The hens are like “children” to Zijun, thus, the hens’ destruction is for all intents and purposes targeted at Zijun as Eros, in an attempt to restore Juansheng’s previous life of dead silence. In response to his destruction of the hens, Juansheng notes: “After that life became much more peaceful. Only Zijun was very dispirited, and seemed so sad and bored without them, she grew rather sulky” (Lu, p. 206).

Juansheng’s next projected object of destruction is the dog Asui. He recalls: “Finally I muffled his head in a cloth and took him outside the West Gate where I let him loose. When he ran after me, I pushed him into a pit that wasn’t too deep” (Lu 206). The loss of Asui deals a further blow to Zijun. The name “Asui” was given to the dog by Zijun and

means “following (Zijun),” suggesting an intimate and metonymic relationship between the dog and Zijun. The dog’s tragedy thus foreshadows Zijun’s own death. While the noise of Asui is muffled and a life of dead silence is eagerly anticipated by Juansheng, its absence nonetheless weighs heavy on Zijun. Juansheng notes: “When I got home, I found it more peaceful; but I was quite taken aback by Zijun’s tragic expression. I had never seen her so woebegone” (Lu, p. 206).

Juansheng’s desire to nullify Zijun, restore his previous life of silence and return to a solitary and reclusive space is repeated uncannily in his mind. This is first noted when Zijun becomes resentful after the loss of Asui. It is from Zijun’s misery that Juansheng generates a sadistic pleasure towards his love/hate object. He notes, “I smiled secretly to myself, cold with indignation” (Lu, p. 209). Ultimately, he harbors a sadistic death wish towards her, as if he were a magician secretly chanting a spell. He writes: “Suddenly I thought of her death, but immediately was ashamed and reproached myself” (Lu, p. 209).

The second moment happens when Juansheng tells Zijun that he no longer loves her. Juansheng’s words affect Zijun deeply and make her appear half-dead. Juansheng observes: “Her face turned ashy pale, like a corpse” (Lu, p. 210). Later when he comes to the quiet library to escape from the “clamour of life” at home, the same sadistic wish occurs to him again: “Suddenly I thought of her death, but immediately was ashamed and reproached myself” (Lu, p. 210). It is only when Zijun willingly leaves his home that Juansheng can finally regain his life of dead silence and emptiness. He recollects: “It was dark inside, and as I groped for the matches to strike a light, the place seemed extraordinarily quiet and empty” (Lu, p. 211). Naturally, the departure of Zijun (the Eros), induces for Juansheng, the poignant touch of entombment and death, as he indicates in the phrase, “feeling my surroundings pressing in on me” (Lu, p. 211).

The third moment occurs after Zijun leaves his home. Although she has left, Juansheng still wants her to die so that she can be completely nullified. He says: “I had thought of her death [...] I realized I was a weakling. I deserved to be cast out by the strong, no matter whether they were truthful or hypocritical. Yet she, from first to last, had hoped that I could live longer...” (Lu, p. 213) It is the mute but powerful death instinct in him, which (driven by the Nirvana Principle) desires to be at peace. This propels Juansheng to sadistically destroy his projected object once and for all, to finally put Eros, the noise-maker of life, to eternal reticence. Although Zijun, (the Eros), no matter how limited and evanescent her life power is, still wants him to “live longer” from first to last. This brings to fore the destructive and disassembling death force in Juansheng, which drives him to rush towards death in contrast to the constructive and assimilatory life force in Zijun that tries to prolong that journey, albeit death is the inevitable destination.

Zijun finally dies an uncanny death and fulfills Juansheng’s wish. Freud states: “It is true that one can kill a person by the mere wish” (Freud, p. 17, 248). Thus, it is as if Juansheng kills Zijun through his secret wish. Zijun’s mysterious death is also a silent acknowledgement of the resignation of life force in revitalizing Juansheng. Her early death as the Eros also underscores the mortality of life itself as well as the ineluctable destination of death. Zijun represents the very paradoxical relationship between life and death, namely, the carrying on of life *per se* is actually a process of dying, what Heidegger terms the existentially tragic “being-toward-death.” Therefore, Eros is death, and death is Eros.

Pathological Mourning: Juansheng as the Melancholic Subject

In his “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” Freud explains that a process of introjection happens when the destructive force returns from the projected external objects. He writes, “The destructiveness which returns from the external world is also taken up by the super-ego, without any such transformation, and increases its sadism against the ego.” The return of the destructive force from the outside results in “a sense of guilt” and “a person’s conscience becomes more severe and more sensitive the more he refrains from aggression against others.” This is what Freud terms the “moral masochism,” which “originates from the death instinct and corresponds to the part of that instinct which has escaped being turned outwards as an instinct of destruction” (Freud, p. 19, 170).

In “Regret for the Past,” after destroying the external objects, Juansheng undergoes this introversion by spatially and mentally withdrawing into himself. He narrates: “I went out now much less than before, sitting or lying in this great void, allowing this deathly quiet to eat away my soul. Sometimes the silence itself seemed afraid, seemed to recoil” (Lu, p. 214). Here, sound and space interlock again to mark a boundary between the noisy and socially engaging life force and the quiet and spatially reclusive death instinct. Tormented by moral masochism with a desire for self-punishment, Juansheng’s super-ego, now sadistically criticizes his ego in an eschatological vision:

I wish we really had ghosts and there really were a hell. Then, no matter how the wind of hell roared, I would go to find Zijun, tell her of my remorse and grief, and beg her forgiveness. Otherwise, the poisonous flames of hell would surround me, and fiercely devour my remorse and grief. In the whirlwind and flames I would put my arms round Zijun, and ask her pardon, or try to make her happy.... (Lu, p. 215)

The whole text is fraught with this obsessive sense of guilt and remorse over Zijun’s death, registering what Freud calls the “melancholia” syndrome, which is characterized by “dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment” (Freud, p. 14, 244). By studying these self-reproaches and the sense of guilt many people feel upon the death of their loved ones in his “Mourning and Melancholia” (1915-1917), Freud maintains that in response to the loss of a love object, “mourning” is a “normal” condition that lasts for a limited period of time, while “melancholia” is a kind of “pathological disposition” in its obsession with unending grief and guilt. He writes: “Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition” (Freud, p. 14, 243). Freud holds that after an object loss in what he refers to as object cathexis or fixation, the result is usually “a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one” (Freud 14, 249). However, in the case of melancholia,

The free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification. (Freud, p. 14, 249)

Thus object-loss is tantamount to ego-loss. This kind of regression from object-choice to narcissistic over-identification results in a painful yet euphoric self-torment and self-persecution. Freud further points out that in melancholia, the patient's self-flagellation, which results from the loss of a love object, is hardly applicable to the patient. The vehement self-criticism is actually an accusation intended toward the lost love object. He states, "with insignificant modifications they [criticism and accusations] do fit someone else, someone whom the patient loves or has loved or should love" (Freud, p. 14, 248). In line with this, Juansheng's self-hatred is in fact an accusation oriented towards Zijun, the lost object he should have loved.

Gendering Melancholia: The Melancholic Male Subject and the Oppressed Female Object

In what capacity should the melancholic subject (exemplified by Juansheng) rant his accusations against himself, against his lost object, and against the lost ideal that emerges as always already lost? According to Freud:

[the melancholic] has a keener eye for the truth than others who are not melancholic... [and] it may be, so far as we know, that he has come pretty near to understanding himself; we can only wonder why a man has to be ill before he can be accessible to a truth of this kind. For there can be no doubt that if anyone holds and expresses to others an opinion of himself such as this (an opinion which Hamlet held both of himself and of everyone else), he is ill, whether he is speaking the truth or whether he is being more or less unfair to himself. (Freud, p. 14, 246)

As a result of his hyperesthesia, the melancholic I/eye is bestowed an advantaged point of view and privileged knowledge of truth. The subject achieves this by detaching the libido from the outside and withdrawing to self. Interpreting Freud, David L Eng and David Kazanjian maintain: "By withdrawing from the world and practicing a mode of individuated thinking modeled on analytic geometry, the [melancholic] subject gains control over himself and the space around him, initiating his pursuit of truth" (Eng, pp. 18-19).

Freud's consistent use of "he" in his analysis of the melancholic subject begs the question: "Who is legitimate to bemoan the loss in a melancholic way at both the personal and collective levels?" In her feminist analysis of Freud's notion of

“melancholia,” Juliana Schiesari contends that the melancholic subject for Freud is unanimously a male (exemplified by Hamlet) bestowed with a privilege for cultural and artistic articulation:

Freud’s melancholic subject also falls within a venerable cultural tradition that has, in fact, historically legitimated loss in terms of melancholia for men. By privileging a nostalgic ideal that is also kept absent and deferred, the self not only reconverts the loss into self-display but also legitimates that display as part of a cultural myth—that of the melancholic intellectual and artist. (Schiesari, p. 6)

Why are women deprived of the rights of melancholia and the articulation of melancholia? In his “Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes” (1925), Freud says that women have an imperfect or even non-existent superego or ego ideal. He declares: “Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men [...] they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life” (Freud, p. 19, pp. 257-258). Later in “The Ego and the ID,” Freud reiterates this notion, associating the super-ego with the father figure. Freud proclaims: “The super-ego arises, as we know, from an identification with the father taken as a model” (Freud, p. 19, 54). It naturally follows that during the process of “regression,” a female’s underdeveloped superego cannot have the same sadistic criticism of her ego as does the male’s superego or ego ideal. Freud asserts: “We see how in him one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and as it were, takes it as its object... what we are here becoming acquainted with is the agency commonly called ‘conscience’” (Freud, p. 14, 247).

According to Freud, possessing a lesser superego, women are not subject to melancholia; rather they usually become the object of melancholia, namely the lost object that triggers the male subject’s melancholia. In reference to Freud, Schiesari points out, “The critical agency of the moralizing conscience functions in terms of an objectification, which positions a superior moral side of the psyche over and against a lesser ‘immoral’ one. [...] This object, at once vilified, desired, and judged by a ‘superior, moral’ instance, is situated in the same way as a woman in classic phallocentrism (that is, as a devalued object, as abject and at fault)” (Schiesari, p. 9). Insofar as the object of loss is usually identified as female in the masculine discourse of melancholia, Freud’s “moral masochism” is actually bound up with misogynistic sadism. Schiesari holds: “That unnamed, ‘feminized,’ objectified, inferior other is the condition for the morally superior, male subject of melancholia, the grandeur of whose name is a function of his expressive self-criticism, that is, repressed criticism of that devalued other” (Schiesari, p. 11).

Women are thus excluded from the melancholic subjectivity. As Hamlet’s case demonstrates, it is always the melancholic Hamlet who grieves, thinks, and speaks, while Gertrude and Ophelia are represented as objects of melancholic contemplation, aggression, and derision. Excluded from the sphere of melancholia, Gertrude and Ophelia are thus identified as hysteric and depressed, typical feminine maladies according to Freud. In Lu Xun’s “Regret for the Past,” Juansheng is similar to Hamlet and Zijun can be likened to Ophelia. However, for Schiesari, male melancholia and female depression

are clinically identical, nonetheless, distinguishable at the cultural level. While the male melancholia contributes to the male's ego-formation and stimulates him for artistic expression at both the personal and collective levels, the female malady of depression, regarded as a debilitating disease, is a form of failed melancholia that only suggests personal loss, failure, inarticulateness, or inexpressive babble, what the male melancholic subject still desires to muffle. Consequently, the female is excluded from the symbolic realm of language and relegated to deathlike silence. This is the case with Juansheng and Zijun in "Regret for the Past." In Lydia Liu's words: "The male subject [Juansheng] takes advantage of the silence of the dead" and expresses his will through his writing (Liu, p. 167). Consequently, for the male melancholic subject, what really matters is not the lost object but the loss of the articulation of loss itself. During this process, the female, who is usually identified as the lost object, cannot represent or speak for herself but can only be represented and spoken. Schiesari observes:

The melancholic ego, in order to authenticate its conflicted relation between *innen* and *umwelt* inner and outer world, is dependent on loss as a means through which it can represent itself. In so doing, however, it derealizes or devalues any *object* of loss for the sake of loss itself: a sort of suturing between lack and loss, an idealization of loss that paradoxically empowers the ego. Thus, the melancholic ego, I argue, refocuses attention not on the lost *object* but on the loss, on the "what" of the lost object, whose thingness points back to the *subject* of the loss (not the "whom" that is lost in mourning but the "who" that presents himself as losing in melancholia) (Schiesari, p. 43)

Like Hamlet, the melancholic prince at the threshold of modernity in the Renaissance period, Juansheng, Lu Xun's alter ego, exemplifies *homo melancholicus*. He, too, is a confused modern man at loss and tormented by moral scruples, self-doubt, self-absorption, a fixation on the past, and nihilism at the turn of Chinese history (May Fourth).

Juansheng's vehement self-criticism is but an accusation of his love object Zijun, who embodies Eros, the life force itself, and whom Juansheng willingly relinquishes for the sake of artistic grief and contemplation. His denunciation of her thus affords an ontological meditation on human existence itself, a kind of skepticism towards life itself, bordering on Arthur Schopenhauer's suicidal despair and Jean-Paul Sartre's existential nihilism. In so doing, Juansheng sado-masochistically exhibits his non essence of being, his nothingness, and his unworthiness. He is, so to speak, "void" of existence, what Schiesari refers to as the Hamletian "hollow reed with pure deferral and diffusion."

Juansheng's object/ego loss can be extended to a temporal loss. As Freud implies, in mourning, the mourner acknowledges the death of the love object and announces the death of its history so that he can invest in new objects in the present. While in melancholia, the melancholic subject is unwilling to declare the death of the love object; instead, with sustained devotion to the past, he brings its ghost and spectres into the present endlessly. As David L Eng and David Kazanjian explain: "Unlike mourning, in which the past is declared resolved, finished, and dead, in melancholia the past remains

alive in the present” (Eng, p. 3). Juansheng’s accusation of himself is such a condemnation of a past that is already lost and that he stubbornly wishes to recuperate.

A personal loss can be translated into a collective loss, as Schiesari observes: “Understanding (their) history as loss, male melancholic voices, whether Renaissance or postmodern, speak of some *epochal historical change* that supposedly leaves them, and with them all of ‘us,’ in some state of lack and loss” (Schiesari, p. 265, emphasis mine). If taking into account the historical context in Lu Xun’s text, the male subject’s melancholic sense of ineffable loss and his psychotic delirium of hallucination come right after the euphoric ecstasy of the May Fourth movement in its espousal of historical progress. The failure of this May Fourth movement is epitomized by the gloomy outcome of (modern Chinese) Nora, who, according to Lu Xun in his “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home,” has to either become a prostitute or return home after she is encouraged to leave home under the applause of the modern revolutionary discourse: “After leaving, though, she can hardly avoid going to the bad or returning” (Lu, p. 87). In “Regret for the Past,” Zijun is like Nora who heroically leaves her father’s home under the encouragement of a May Fourth intellectual, but has no choice but to return after she is jilted by him. This, according to Lydia Liu, is the “male-centered discourse of modern love” (Liu, p. 167). In their melancholic contemplation, Juansheng as well as Lu Xun is reluctant to lay the already dead May Fourth history to rest so that they can embark on a new course of history. Instead, they are obsessed with the past and willingly bring the spectres of the past to the present.

In addition, the object/ego loss in melancholia is spatial loss. In terms of spatiality, while mourning is deeply rooted in the external world and thus characterized by exteriority, materiality, and sociality, melancholia is more concerned with the ego and thus featured with interiority, spirituality, and solipsism, all of which are a result of the melancholic subject’s frustration with or loss of the outside world. Furthermore, this spatial loss represents the loss and fragmentation of the country, just as Sánchez-Pardo says: “Modernist literary discourses are haunted by the specter of object loss: loss of a coherent and autonomous self, loss of a social order in which stability reigned, loss of metaphysical guarantees, and in some cases loss and fragmentation of an empire” (Sánchez-Pardo, p. 18). In “Regret for the Past,” Juansheng’s object loss and ego loss is situated against the very backdrop of a fragmented China resulting from both the internal weak government and the external foreign powers in their rush to carve up China. In a word, Juansheng is already half dead in a temporal and spatial world that is already lost, already a mourner of his lost history and country before the loss of his love/hate object, Zijun.

As culturally and artistically privileged melancholic subjects, Juansheng and Lu Xun contemplate ego loss and national and historical loss by objectifying Zijun, who, like Ophelia under the sadistic scrutiny of Hamlet, is relegated merely to the sphere of “depression,” a failed melancholia. Acting as men’s Eros or Muse, women play the role of mirroring the male melancholic subject’s projection and serve as a mere springboard to facilitate their melancholic yet creative self-expression, which usually draws its cannibalistic nourishment from the lost or dead objects personified in women. In sublimated articulation of melancholia for the loss of the self and ideal, Juansheng and by extension Lu Xun can leave their authorial names in history. The name can survive the vicissitudes of time and is thus capable of outliving its bearer. In this way, Juansheng and

Lu Xun transcend the mortality of their corporeal bodies. In sharp contrast, Zijun, as the object of loss, is forever confined to the realm of corporeality and mortality leaving no trace of her existence, just as Juansheng reminds us with these words, “How terrible to bear the heavy burden of emptiness, treading out one’s life amid sternness and cold looks! And at the end not even a tombstone to your grave!” (Lu, p. 212).

However, what is repressed and depressed will inevitably return. Driven by the “compulsion to repeat,” the story ends with two uncanny “returns,” the perpetual recurrence of the same thing. One example is the eerie return of the spooky dog, Asui, who eerily phantoms the already dead and thus repressed Zijun. Curiously, Juansheng does not immediately move from the house on Jizhao Street where he and Zijun have lived. His words suggest that he is expecting the return of Asui. He states: “I was waiting for something new, something nameless and unexpected” (Lu, p. 214). Asui’s return, like Zijun’s death, is yet another wish fulfillment for Juansheng. Asui’s spectral revisitation signals the uncanny return of the posthumous Zijun (the Eros), the depleted life force in Juansheng that now only has an abject and spectral existence. He writes: “A glance round the room revealed nothing, but when I looked down I saw a small creature pattering around—thin, covered with dust, more dead than alive...” Asui, the specter of Zijun (the Eros), suggests the depletion of life and the shadow of death, a kind of meager, debased, and abject “dead living” for Juansheng.

With the expected return of Asui/Zijun, Jizhao Street thus deserves its name, “Auspicious Street,” mirroring Sánchez-Pardo reference to the “benign space” wherein the return of the lost object is anticipated and made possible:

When the absence of the object is recognized, the place the object originally occupied is experienced as space...if this space is felt to contain the promise of the return of the object, it is felt to be benign...If in contrast to this benign expectancy it is believed that space itself eliminates good objects...it is felt to be a malignant space. The belief in benign space depends ultimately on the love for the object surviving its absence, thus a place is kept for the object’s second coming” (Sánchez-Pardo, p. 215).

With Asui, the mnemonic trace of Zijun, Juansheng returns to the same room in the hostel that he once occupied, the home of his primordial inertia before Zijun’s descent. He writes: “On my return, as ill luck would have it, this was the only room vacant. The broken window with the half dead locust tree and old wisteria outside and square table inside are the same as before [...] here is the same shabby room as before, the same wooden bed, half dead locust tree and wisteria. But what gave me love and life, hope and happiness before has vanished” (Lu, p. 197, 214). With the return to his dead, quiet and empty room, namely, to the “earlier state of things,” to “the quiescence of the inorganic world” without love, life, hope, or happiness, the death drive in Juansheng almost completes its cycle.

Melancholia and Madness: Juansheng/Lu Xun as the Failed Madman

According to Freud, the plight of the melancholic subject possessed by the death drive can only take two paths. He says, “What is now holding sway in the superego is, as it were, a pure culture of the death instinct, and in fact it often enough succeeds in driving the ego into death, if the latter does not fend off its tyrant in time by the change round into mania” (Freud, p. 19, 53). In other words, the death drive leads either to a suicidal death of the ego, at once associated with dumbness and emptiness, or a possible mania characterized by megalomania, delusions of persecution or grandeur, elation, talkativeness, irritability, impulsiveness, and hyperactivity. While the madman (also driven by the death drive) in “A Madman’s Diary” represents the second consequence, Juansheng in “Regret for the Past” embodies the first consequence of the male subject’s melancholia and the death drive.

Like melancholia, madness is also gendered and usually associated with truth. In analyzing the paranoid delusions of Senatspräsident Schreber, Freud observes that for males, paranoia is usually bound up with grand social reasons. He states: “The strikingly prominent features in the causation of paranoia, especially among males, are social humiliations and slights” (Freud, p. 12, 60). In the case of the Senatspräsident, because he is extremely disappointed at the external world (what he calls “cursorily improvised men” and “world-catastrophe”), he radically withdraws his libido from the external world and regresses in service to his ego. The external world thus becomes irrelevant to him. Here Freud echoes Michel Foucault, who similarly argues, in *Madness and Civilization*, that madness, during the Renaissance, was associated with truth and God and usually suggested the limits of the external social order.

The mechanism of paranoia is usually an attempt of the paranoic to rebuild the lost world. Freud states: “And the paranoic builds it again, not more splendid, it is true, but at least so that he can once more live in it. He builds it up by the work of his delusions. The delusion formation, which we take to be the pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction” (Freud, p. 12, pp. 70-71). This process of recovery is associated with sound, noise, and the clamouring life in the external world, while the previous process of repression and regression from the external world to the ego is characterized by silence and death. Freud claims: “The process of repression proper consists in a detachment of the libido from people—and things—that were previously loved. It happens *silently*; we receive no intelligence of it, but can only infer it from subsequent events. What forces itself so *noisily* upon our attention is the process of recovery, which undoes the work of repression and brings back the libido again on to the people it had abandoned” (Freud, p. 12, 71, my emphasis).

“A Madman’s Diary” begins with the madman’s *noisy* process of recovery via paranoid delusions and ends with the madman’s final recovery, leaving the process of ego repression and regression *silent* and *invisible* in the text, so much so that we can only infer the social cause of his paranoia. The madman’s final recovery, which is usually read as negative in academic studies, can be interpreted as a positive sign. Although, out of disappointment and frustration, the madman first abandons the society and withdraws to his own ego, he finally, after a period of paranoia, returns to the external world and establishes rapport with his people. The madman’s violent hallucination stages the struggle between libido-regression and an attempt at recovery by bringing the libido back

again into the clamouring external world. Lu Xun himself experiences such a process as is declared in his “Preface to *Cheering from the Sidelines*.” Frustrated by the society at this specific time in history, Lu Xun, in an effort to detach from the outside world, withdrew to a secluded hostel. Later, however, he entered the world and decided to devote himself to wakening the numb people in the “iron house,” the Chinese version of Max Weber’s “iron cage.”

Unlike the madman whose paranoia is a mechanism for a hopeful recovery, Juansheng in “Regret for the Past” exemplifies the suicidal death of the ego. Resulting from a sadomasochist objectification of itself, death is the only possible outcome. Like the three visions of Zijun’s death before she dies, there are also three separate moments when Juansheng envisions his own ego death.

The first moment occurs when Juansheng (day)dreams of flying and auto-eroticism. After he cruelly informs Zijun that he no longer loves her, Juansheng leaves home and imagines her departure in the quiet library. He recalls this moment: “Then I felt light as a cloud floating in the void, with the blue sky above and high mountains and great oceans below, big buildings and skyscrapers, battlefields, motorcars, thoroughfares, rich men’s houses, bright, bustling markets, and the dark night” (Lu, p. 210). In Freud’s interpretation of dreams, males’ (day)dreams of flying and levitation, which derive from their childhood experience of romping (*hetzen*), are usually associated with the idea of birds and the desire for sex. Freud claims: “The close connection of flying with the idea of birds explains how it is that in men flying dreams usually have a grossly sensual meaning; and we shall not be surprised when we hear that some dreamer or other is very proud of his powers of flight. [...] A good number of these flying dreams are dreams of erection” (Freud, p. 5, 394).

Juansheng’s daydream of flying is also associated with his poignant desire to become a true wild bird. He regards himself as a “wild bird in a cage” (Lu, p. 204) who has not forgotten how to fly. As he claims, “I haven’t forgotten how to flap my wings” (Lu, p. 210). In his “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood” (1910), Freud analyzes da Vinci’s obsession with flying (machines) and his childhood memory of a kite flipping its tail into his mouth. Contending that men’s dream of flying or being a bird is only a disguise for sex, Freud maintains:

When we consider that inquisitive children are told that babies are brought by a large bird, such as the stork; when we find that the ancients represented the phallus as having wings; that the commonest expression in German for male sexual activity is ‘vögeln’ [‘to bird’: ‘Vogel’ is the German for ‘bird’]; that the male organ is actually called ‘l’uccello’ [‘the bird’] in Italian—all of these are only small fragments from a whole mass of connected ideas, from which we learn that in dreams the wish to be able to fly is to be understood as nothing else than a longing to be capable of sexual performance. (Freud, p. 11, pp. 125-26)

Freud then concludes that the child Da Vinci’s desire for flight is actually a repressed desire for sex, and, since the kite’s tail can be interpreted as a phallic symbol, da Vinci’s dream can be interpreted as a demonstration of da Vinci’s narcissism and homosexuality.

Extending this analysis, the kite's tail is symbolically similar to Juansheng's wings, and the desire for "flapping" thus intimating the desire for a narcissistic and auto-erotic sex.

Sex, as Freud indicates, is the uncanny union of both life and death instincts. In terms of its power of reproduction and the preservation of the species, hetero-sex is associated with the libidinal life instinct, and the loss of it suggests a withdrawal from the love object and the external world. This "detachment of libido" from external objects and its regression into the ego is concomitant with an abandonment of object-love and a return to infantile, narcissistic, and auto-eroticism. In terms of its sadistic violence and aggression towards the external love object or towards the narcissistic self, sex embodies the dark force of Thanatos. Hovering alone above the alienated external world, Juansheng, by sloughing off his corporeal body and floating as light as a cloud in the "void," namely, in the nothingness of death, experiences a kind of deadly homoerotic ecstasy.

Juansheng's second vision of death takes place after Zijun finally leaves their home. Though relieved, Juansheng writes of "high mountains and great marshlands, thoroughfares, brightly lit feasts, trenches, pitch-black night, the thrust of a sharp knife, noiseless footsteps" (Lu, p. 212). This futuristic vision suggests a spatial transition. Juansheng moves from his floating position overlooking the secular world to that of a solitary and ghostly walker haunting the mundane world. The "pitch-black night" suggests Thanatos' dark force; "the thrust of a sharp knife" insinuates Juansheng's imagined heroic death as well as his sadomasochistic and homoerotic desire for penetration and pain; the "noiseless footsteps," namely the footsteps of the ghost walker, alludes to the "dead dumb" footsteps of Thanatos. In both visions, Juansheng positions himself as a detached observer alienated from the hustle and bustle of the external world, which he both secretly desires and fears.

The third and last vision takes place after Zijun dies and Juansheng returns to his previous tomblike home in the reclusive hostel. Alert in the thanatotic darkness of the night, Juansheng is like a nocturnal ghost that shies away from daylight. He recalls a funeral procession he sees in the morning: "There were paper figures and paper horses in front, and behind crying that sounded like a lilt" (Lu, p. 215). Imagining Zijun's funeral, Juansheng writes: "Then Zijun's funeral springs to my mind" (Lu, p. 215). There is, at this point, a gradual introjection of the two funerals. The first is a memory of a stranger's funeral in the external world, followed by an image of the funeral of Zijun, his love/hate object. The scene of Zijun's funeral is representative of Juansheng's own funeral, as Zijun, the love/hate object, has now been narcissistically introverted into his own ego, this, by process of regression from sadism towards his love object to moral sadism towards his own ego. The force of this uncanny identification with the dead is so strong that T. S. Eliot observes it poetically in his "Little Gidding:"

We die with the dying:

See, they depart, and we go with them (Eliot, p. 38)

"Regret for the Past" ends with death, the perversion and negation of life, which is exemplified in oblivion, resignation, falsehood, and especially in silence and dumbness. Juansheng confesses: "I must make a fresh start in life. I must hide the truth deep in my wounded heart, and advance silently, taking oblivion and falsehood as my guide..." (Lu, p. 215). Juansheng's "fresh start in life" suggests his sense of nirvana in that he imagines

he can achieve a brand-new and transcendental life through a euphoric death in this secular world, a new life for the dead subject. This text, sub-headed as “Juansheng’s Notes,” is actually a deathbed note cried out by the male protagonist-narrator before his envisioned suicidal death.

In brief, both the madman and Juansheng suffer from the frustration of the external world and as males enjoy a privileged social, intellectual, artistic, and moral position. Both suffer from the death drive and experience the libido’s detachment from the external world and its regression in service to the ego, a process concomitant with the abandonment of object-love and a return to infantile auto-eroticism. While in the madman, the returned libido is used for a *loud* aggrandizement of the ego in an attempt to fend off the death drive and reconstruct a lost self and world via the mechanism of paranoia, in Juansheng, the regressed libido is deployed for a *silent* sadomasochist objectification, minimalization, and even complete annihilation, of the ego.

As Lu Xun’s alter egos, the madman and Juansheng manifest Lu Xun’s different mentalities at different social-historical periods. In 1918 when Lu Xun wrote “A Madman’s Diary,” he was relatively optimistic and hopeful about his sacred mission to spiritually save his people. As he declared in his “Preface to Cheering from the Sidelines:” “Though I was convinced to my own satisfaction that it wouldn’t be possible to break out, I still couldn’t dismiss hope entirely, for hope belongs to the future. I couldn’t resist cheering now and then from the sidelines so as to console those bold warriors still charging through the fields of loneliness, and to encourage them to ride on” (Lyell, pp. 27-28). However, after the May Fourth movement in 1919, Lu Xun, as well as other intellectuals, came to regard the revolution as futile. As Lu Xun wrote in his work “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home:” “When a cruelly treated daughter-in-law becomes a mother-in-law, she may still treat her daughter-in-law cruelly; officials who detest students were often students who denounced officials; some parents who oppress their children now were probably rebels against their own families ten years ago” (Lu, p. 89). Lu Xun wrote “Regret for the Past” at a time when he would have been most melancholic and pessimistic, after the failure of the May Fourth movement. This suggests that “Regret for the Past” is, for all intents and purposes, an elegy chanted on the part of Lu Xun in expression of the futility of his “madman” mission, the personal, national, and historical failure, expressed by the narrator. In Leo Lee’s words, “Regret for the Past” depicts “Lu Xun’s own failings as a typical May Fourth Romantic Intellectual” (Lee, p. 63). The names of the anthologies within which the two stories are collected reveal Lu Xun’s sentiments at two distinct moments within a particular social-historical context. Wherein the progressive, active, and hopeful *Cheering from the Sidelines* expresses Lu Xun’s optimism at the time, the pessimistic, hopeless, and desperate *Wandering* indicates his disillusion after the May Fourth movement. However, despite their differences, both the madman and Juansheng represent critical attitudes, or the attitudes of a non-conformist, to the ongoing system, which was in Lu Xun’s time, modernity. It can therefore be said that while the madman revolts *loudly* and *externally* against mainstream society, Juansheng also rebels, though *silently* and *internally* in his melancholic way.

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