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Modern East Asia Paper #3

March 22, 2006

In the first several decades of the twentieth century, writers Ch'ae Man-sik and Lu Xun found their respective traditional societies of Korea and China to be greatly flawed. Both subsequently penned compelling works in which they offered their criticisms of these nations. Ch'ae Man-sik's novel, *Peace Under Heaven*, and Lu Xun's short stories, "Ah Q" and "A Madman's Diary," both use fictional characters to illustrate the flaws the author had perceived in society. Through these portrayals, Ch'ae Man-sik and Lu Xun offer their very poignant criticisms, especially of the distorted influence of Confucianism on society, but also on the nations themselves.

For both authors, Confucianism and its real-life perversions are the main targets of their writings. In *Peace Under Heaven*, this criticism is very clearly illustrated in interactions amongst the members of Master Yun's household. According to Confucian order, these familial relationships are defined by filial piety and family loyalty; Master Yun is to be respected and revered as head of the household while at the same time caring for the members of his family. This is practiced to an extent – Master Yun financially provides for members of his family – but his relationship with Ko is representative of the more typical failure of Confucian order. According to Ch'ae, "a father-in-law is supposed to love his daughter-in-law even if she has buck teeth and one eye, but Master Yun, for some inexplicable reason, outdid his wife in hating Ko,"¹ while for Ko, "she had no more intention of according him the deference due a father-in-law than she had of kowtowing

¹ Ch'ae Man-sik, *Peace Under Heaven*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), 60.

to any other doddering old relic in the neighborhood.”² Thus while their relationship maintains a semblance of Confucian order in that Master Yun financially provides for Ko while she serves in his household, their fundamental relationship has been corrupted of Confucian values. Through the illustration of such distorted relationships, Ch'ae offers his criticism of the social order: though society claims roots in Confucianism, such actions are more a façade hiding a rotting interior of poisonous relationships.

Lu Xun also deals with this emptiness of Confucianism, especially in the short-story “Ah Q.” One of the five principle relationships according to Confucian order is that between ruler and subject; however, in “Ah Q” there is a blatant failure of the relationship as Ah Q is shot to make a public example. The successful provincial candidate takes a stand against the captain, arguing that the recovery of the stolen goods is more important, though the captain asserts that they must “punish one to awe one hundred!”³ Under the façade of the ruler-subject relationship, the successful provincial candidate threatens to resign immediately, however he does not follow through with his actions and Ah Q, though innocent, is shot. Ultimately, the successful provincial candidate fails in his ruler-subject duty to Ah Q. Though this is just one example, through it Lu Xun illustrates and criticizes the emptiness of the real-life Confucian social order, perverted from its conceptual, “true” form.

In “A Madman’s Diary,” Lu Xun also questions the morality of the Confucian order. Through the words of a madman, Lu Xun suggests that across the centuries, Confucianism does not guide people as much as consume them:

² Ch'ae Man-sik, 71.

³ Lu Xun, “Ah Q,” *The Complete Stories of Lu Xun*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 110.

“...my history book has no chronology and scrawled all over each page are the words: ‘Confucian Virtue and Morality.’ Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night until I began to see words between the lines. The whole book was filled with the two words – ‘Eat people.’”⁴

As with “Ah Q,” Lu Xun criticizes the benefit of Confucian relationships; Ah Q was “eaten” by his Confucian-based relationship with the successful provincial candidate.

The other main criticism made by both authors is that of national failure. For Ch'ae, the only well-described characters in the novel are Korean. Though it pictures Korea during the colonial period, the issues dealt with are from the Korean perspective. Beyond the failures of Confucian relationships in society, Ch'ae negatively illustrates individual flaws such as greed and lawlessness which have a negative impact on society. More than this, however, Ch'ae provides a prime example of corruption, emphasizing its danger. Master Yun, hoping to improve his family line, plans for both of his grandsons to become a county magistrate and a police chief. In order to ensure these futures, he provides a steady stream of bribes. For the health of Korea, this corruption is perilous; neither son is an adequate candidate for either. Chonghak, the grandson destined to be police chief, was arrested in Tokyo, while Chongsu – destined for magistracy – is more intent on having a good time than securing his position to serve the nation.

Lu Xun, meanwhile, makes his criticism of China as a nation in a more abstract fashion. In “A Madman’s Diary” he writes, “It has only just dawned on me that all these years I have been living in a place where for four thousand years human flesh has been

⁴ Lu Xun, “A Madman’s Diary,” *The Complete Stories of Lu Xun*, trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), 4.

eaten.”⁵ Through the madman, once again, Lu Xun makes his point: China is self-destructing. It is “eating itself” as it has for centuries, however Lu Xun recognizes that as China becomes more globally involved it needs to be as strong as possible.

Though Ch’ae Man-sik and Lu Xun do not primarily offer direct solutions for these ills that they so clearly criticize, both suggest resolutions implicitly in their works. Through their illustrations of the failure and perversion of Confucianism, both Ch’ae and Lu Xun inherently pose that to restore the health of the social order, Confucianism ought to be restored or abandoned. Seemingly every relationship in both *Peace Under Heaven* and “Ah Q” is fundamentally flawed in some manner. The subsequent fighting and problems caused by these failed relationships necessitates such a change to the overriding social order.

Additionally, Lu Xun makes several further implicit suggestions as to how to remedy society’s ills. First of all, through “A Madman’s Diary,” Lu Xun suggests that it is up to the “madmen” to issue criticisms of society, as the “healthy people” cannot see the peril around them. Meanwhile, through “Ah Q” Lu Xun suggests that change is possible if the Chinese are open and actively seek change. Unlike Ah Q who believes he can join the revolution simply by changing his hairstyle and waiting for it to come to him, the Chinese can not hope to improve society simply by sitting on their heels.⁶ When the madmen recognize society’s ills, it is up to the rest of society to focus on making a positive change.

Lu Xun does, however, offer one final solution: “Save the children....”⁷ With the array of implicit solutions both Ch’ae and Lu Xun offer, pragmatically Lu Xun

⁵ Lu Xun, “A Madman’s Diary,” 12.

⁶ Lu Xun, “Ah Q,” 102.

⁷ Lu Xun, “A Madman’s Diary,” 12.

recognizes that the most successful way of reforming society's ills is through the younger generations. If they can be taught to not maintain such pseudo-Confucian, destructive relationships, to speak out against society's ills and to actively seek change, then according to Lu Xun there is hope, as "perhaps there are still children who haven't eaten men[.]"⁸

Through their various written works, both Ch'ae Man-sik and Lu Xun issued criticism of their respective nations, especially in regard to the perversion of Confucian values which left large gaps in the relationships that defined the social order. In addition, however, their works are also full of implicit suggestions to improve society, including one straight forward message from Lu Xun: "Save the children...."⁹ Both recognize the need for their societies to change and hoped, through their criticisms, to influence such change.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.