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A Study on the Basic Theory of Lu Xun’s Literary Translation: “Everything Is an Intermediate Object”

Abstract Although among the modern Chinese intellectuals endeavoring for the enlightenment of the people, Lu Xun is the most rebellious and resolute, his rebelliousness against tradition does not mean that he has nothing to do with tradition itself. On the contrary, in order to fight against a tradition, as a precondition he must have a deep understanding and cognition toward that tradition. The emergence of Lu Xun’s philosophical proposition, “everything is an intermediate object” (yiqie doushi zhongjianwu), occurs exactly in this way. With the evocation of this philosophical thought, the “intermediate object” (zhongjianwu), we see the inseparable indigenous tie predestined between Lu Xun and Chinese traditional culture, even while he fiercely fights it. Lu Xun’s innovative idea was produced in the process of deducing and developing the excellent and discarding the worthless in Chinese traditional culture, while absorbing and learning from the advanced thought of the West. Furthermore, his philosophy of the “intermediate object” forms the basis of his study and practice in translation. His purpose in translation is to bravely step out of the circle of inherent traditional culture, to come to the advanced “middle zone” where Chinese and Western cultures collide, and to probe into the new cultural factors from the West. In doing so he seeks to reform and improve Chinese traditional culture, and thus meet “the third era which China has never experienced before.” However, Lu Xun’s idea of “intermediate objects” is neither the traditional idea of the “golden mean” (zhongyong zhidao) nor that of “hypocrisy” (xiangyuan 乡愿). Unfortunately they are often mixed together into chaos by many people. So it is necessary to have further discussion about these terms and distinguish them separately.

Keywords Lu Xun, intermediate object, Chinese culture, bridge of translation,
realistic significance

There is a popular saying among Chinese: “It is the pride of the British that they have a Shakespeare who can never be talked about enough; similarly, it is the pride of the Chinese that we have a Lu Xun who can never be talked about enough.”¹ For almost a century Lu Xun has been discussed as a revolutionary, philosopher, and author. However his literary career began and ended in translation. Lu Xun left to the world not only a large number of essays of translational theories, but also literary translation works amounting to about five million words, which is almost equal to the word count of his entire Chinese literary creation. Lu Xun actually deemed his work in translation to be of higher value than his own literary creations. Indeed his translation works deeply influenced his own literary creations and gave rise to many of his philosophical creations. He could well be called “the soul of translation in China.” To discuss Lu Xun’s literary achievements, one cannot avoid the discussion of his translations, as well as his idea of “intermediate object,” the basis of his life philosophy and the fundamental theory of his practice of translation.

“Intermediate Object”: The Life Philosophy of Lu Xun

The idea of an “intermediate object” (zhongjianwu 中间物) was first put forward by Lu Xun when he was contemplating about the relationship between the colloquials of the modern Chinese language and the writings of the classical Chinese language, with which Lu Xun used for his translation and writings. The first time that Lu Xun put forward the concept of the “intermediate object” is in the year of 1926, when he wrote his essay “Written after Tomb” (Xie zai Fen houmian), for Tomb (Fen) is a book of collections that “combines classical Chinese and modern colloquial Chinese.”² As Lu Xun states:

… Among my readings I read books of Confucius and Mencius earliest, and I am most familiar with these books. Yet it seems that they are irrelevant to me. Mostly because of my laziness, I often relieve myself with the thought that all things in their course of change must have some kind of intermediate object. Between animals and plants, between the invertebrate and the vertebrate, there all exist intermediate object, or we can simply say, on the chain of evolvement, everything is an intermediate object (yi qie dou shi zhongjianwu 一切都是中间物). At the beginning of the innovation of writing, it is very natural to have several dubious authors appear, and it is inevitable,

¹ Chen Shuyu, Shui tiaozhan Lu Xun—Xinshiqi guanyu Lu Xun de zhengyi, 530.
² Lu Xun, “Xie zai Fen houmian” [Written after Tomb], Lu Xun quanjí, vol. 1, 302.
and also necessarily to be so. … However, they should also wither away gradually with time running. At most they are like a piece of wood or a piece of stone of a bridge, not the goal or the model of the future.³

The point is that we should not understand Lu Xun’s idea of “intermediate object” as only a view of the evolution of language, for he said that “everything is an intermediate object.” Since the idea of an “intermediate object” is abstracted into a general concept, it should occupy a more important position in Lu Xun’s philosophy. … To Lu Xun, it is not only a concept of time in history, but his outlook of the world, the outlook of history, and the outlook of his standard of value. It is both a dimension of time [historical] and a dimension of space [logical] at the same time.⁴

To explain it briefly, Lu Xun’s idea of an “intermediate object” means that nothing is perfect in the world, but it is in a dynamic, “intermediate” process of constant change moving towards “perfection.” Confucians call this perfection the “golden mean” (zhongyong zhidao 中庸之道). That is to say, in a broad sense, Lu Xun’s “everything is an intermediate object” means that absolute perfection does not exist in the world. Therefore the traditional Confucian ideals of the “golden mean”⁵ and “extreme perfectness” are unattainable because of man’s limitation and deficiency. Thus, positing that “everything is an intermediate object” is a kind of imperfect “limit,” “defection,” “deflection,” and “temporariness,” but always with the possibility to be improved and heightened to a another level. To Lu Xun, the imperfection of things is not a reason for despair. On the contrary, Lu Xun employs this kind of philosophy of life to guide himself to fight, to move forward constantly. Even knowing that it is impossible for him to reach the status of perfection, he would still go on, infinitely approaching perfection. This is Lu Xun’s way of living.

³ Ibid. The original Chinese: “……孔孟的书我读得最早，最熟，然而倒似乎和我不相干。大半也因为懒惰罢，往往自己宽解，以为一切事物，在变转中，是总有多少中间物的。动植之间，无脊椎和脊椎动物之间，都有中间物；或者简直可以说，在进化的链子上，一切都是中间物。当开首改革文章的时候，有几个不三不四的作者，是当然的，只能这样，也只能这样。……但仍应该和光阴偕逝，逐渐消亡，至多不过是桥梁中的一木一石，并非什么前途的目标、范本……”


⁵ The “golden mean” (zhongyong zhidao 中庸之道) is a profound issue in Chinese traditional culture. It is greatly misunderstood by many people. Nowadays many people consider it as an ideal moderate position between two extremes. See my detailed explanation below.
Since “everything is an intermediate object,” considering those so-called perfect idols, Lu Xun also does not consider them to be “the models of the future.” Naturally Lu Xun considers his own life to also be an intermediate one. Therefore, Lu Xun was not pleased to be complimented by others with the titles like “sage,” “do-gooder,” “man of exemplary virtue,” and “man of honor” during his lifetime. He would rather be the “weed” that “decays fast” and changes into the “intermediate object” of soil for the growth of new plants. Especially in Lu Xun’s later years he invested his time and energy into translation—the intermediate bridge of communication between the West and China. This is one good proof of his practice of his own philosophy of life.

Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” actually is a modern concept aiming at constant innovation for the better. However, some people criticize Lu Xun’s thought of the “intermediate object” because they are unable to distinguish it from the Confucian “golden mean” or the deception of “hypocrisy” (xiangyuan 乡愿). But what, exactly, is the Confucian “golden mean?” What are the differences between Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” and the “golden mean” or “hypocrisy?”

According to the Dictionary of the Origins of Chinese Characters (Shuowen jiezi), which is the ancient authority for the explanation of the original meaning of the Chinese characters, zhong 中 means “central,” and it is capable of going through from the bottom to the top. Since the original meaning of zhong is “central,” zhong also means “right,” “fair and square,” and “true morality.” So this term has the power of transfexion. Yong庸 is explained as “utility” or “practice.” It also has the same meaning as geng 庚, or “change.” So we can understand yong as being functional. Thus the connotation of zhong and yong combined together should be “practice of the fairest morality.” This is quite similar to Confucius’ explanation: “Finding and practicing (yong) the true central (zhong) balance of our moral being indeed is the highest human achievement. People are seldom capable of doing it for a long time.” Besides this, Confucius also remarks: “The hypocrite [xiangyuan, one who will not offend anyone] is the enemy of...
Thus we can see the differences between the “golden mean” and “hypocrisy.” Wherever there are the philistine sycophants—the “hypocrites”—there will be moral corruption. Both Confucius and Lu Xun had great indignation against them.

Unfortunately our contemporaries have confused all of these terms into chaos. For instance, according to the Sea of Words (Cihai 辞海), one rather authoritative modern Chinese dictionary, there is the following explanation of the “golden mean”:

A Confucian ethic which means unbiased and even-handed way of doing things (bupian buyi 不偏不倚), namely, when doing anything, neither overdoing nor underdoing (wuguo wubuji 无过无不及). This attitude is considered as the highest standard of morality. … Later, it is used generally to refer to something commonplace or to persons of compromise, who dare not persist on the truth, and is featured with conservation and making no effort to seek progress.12

Indeed, gradually this appears to have become the prevailing explanation of the “golden mean.” For example: “Zhong 中 is not slanting, is to cut both ways, is between; yong 庸 means mediocre and unambitious.” 13 That is, namely, philistinism. In this way, the “golden mean” is explained as such a stodgy middle way, claiming for eclecticism, and the practitioner of it is generally considered to lack an adventurous spirit. The “golden mean” is thus misunderstood as a slick and sly way of behaving and a mean philosophy of life. Especially, eclecticism—pretending to have considered much in choosing one’s direction in life, while lacking the adventurous spirit to progress—is considered as depravity in the nature of the Chinese, and is also considered the reason for the tragedy of China’s hanging behind. It is even thought to be the reason for the chaos of people’s thoughts that caused the tragedy of China’s Cultural Revolution.14

Therefore, we see that the “golden mean,” with profound connotations, has long been misunderstood. The duty for the contemporary scholars is to clarify the fact, and clearly allow people to distinguish between the “golden mean” from

11 Confucius, Lunyu, 302. The original Chinese reads: “乡愿，德之贼也”。
12 Cihai, 1408. The original Chinese of the explanation of “Zhongyong”: “’中庸’: 儒家伦理思想。指处理事情不偏不倚、无过无不及的态度,认为是最高的道德标准。……后来泛指平庸、妥协、保守、不求上进。”
13 See: www.baidu.com, and Ciyouan, vol. 1, 87. The original Chinese reads: “不偏叫中, 不变叫庸。” There are a lot of confused understandings of this term on the internet.
14 References from http://zhidao.baidu.com, and from discussions with many Chinese people.
“hypocrisy.” The deception of eclectic ism should not be considered to be a Confucian idea any more. To Sum up: the Confucian “golden mean” is the “practice of the fairest morality,” which is quite different from the deception of “hypocrisy.” Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” emphasizes that nothing is perfect, so the “golden mean” is unattainable because of man’s limitations. But through constant innovation and movement in the direction of perfection is always possible.

**Formation of Lu Xun’s “Intermediate Object”**

The formation of Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” has several sources, such as from the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture, as well as from the influences of Western sages. Through extensive reading and contemplation, Lu Xun “adopted the modern while holding to the ancient, so as to establish the new” (qujin fugu, bieli xinzong 取今复古, 别立新宗). Lu Xun’s creative idea of the “intermediate object” was produced exactly in this way. Since there are a lot of misunderstandings about the formation of Lu Xun’s idea of the “intermediate object,” it is necessary for us to discuss this in an expanded way.

Firstly, the formation of Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” is the result of his inheritance of Chinese culture, as contained in Book of Changes (Yijing). Many people consider Lu Xun as one of the firmest rebels against Chinese tradition, because of Lu Xun’s severe criticism toward it in his writings. Yet if we want to understand Lu Xun’s personality, we must put it against his background of traditional Chinese culture.

In fact, his whole career not only connects with the traditional Chinese culture, but is also closely intertwined with it. It is exactly this kind of complicated relationship of intertwinement that forms his plight of existence. Without this intertwinement, there would be no Lu Xun.16

This intertwinement can be discussed first in the close connection and the indigenous predestined relationship between Lu Xun’s thought of “intermediate object” and the Book of Changes, the origin of Chinese culture. The Book of Changes is the first Chinese book with the earliest systematic explanation of the important concept of the “central” (zhong 中). Inherited from

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15 “Qujin fugu, bieli xinzong” (取今复古, 别立新宗) is Lu Xun’s idea of literary creation. See: Lu Xun, “Wenhua pianzhi lun” [On the perverted development of culture], Lu Xun quanji, vol. 1, 57.

this source, local expressions and dictions including the “central” can be seen everywhere in China. For example, “mainstay” (zhongliu dizhu 中流砥柱), “pretty and intelligent” (xiuwai huizhong 秀外慧中), “like the sun in broad daylight” (ruri zhongtian 如日中天), “pertinent” (zhongken 中肯), “moderate” (shizhong 适中), “backbone” (zhongjian 中坚), “neutralization” (zhonghe 中和), and so forth. Even our country is called the “Middle Kingdom” (Zhongguo 中国).17

In Book of Changes, one important idea is the “harmony between man and nature” (tian ren heyi 天人合一),18 which is the most important idea for understanding Chinese culture. The “harmony between man and nature” tells us that man is only one part of the universe. Man should have a harmonious relationship with nature. Since there are no permanent and fixed rules for all the things on earth, change is the only unchangeable concept in the world. Therefore, the idea of the “center” (zhong 中) and harmony between yin 阴 and yang 阳 is neither rigid nor fixed. The strength of yang and the gentleness of yin are not isolated existences, but exist to develop, interact with, and reflect each other. In this way, for the boundless universe, “all different kinds in harmony make a world. Without differences there would not be the continued growth” (he shi sheng wu, tong ze bu ji 和实生物，同则不继).19 Both yin and yang develop to reach a new balance and harmony through change. The mutual interaction and support among the different things continues. Such a new kind of balance is balance in change, which could also be called “keeping pace with time” (shizhong 时中) or “changing with the seasons” (yushi xiexing 与时偕行). A well-known quotation from the Book of Changes with the same idea remarked as this is: “The want demands the change, the change brings the growth, and the growth will last forever” (qiong ze bian, bian ze tong, tong ze jiu 穷则变，变则通，通则久).20 This quotation embodies the innovative spirit of traditional Chinese culture.

Through Lu Xun’s writing and translation we can easily find the close connection and the predestined relationship between Lu Xun’s thought and the

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17 See Wu Jun’s monograph Lu Xun fanyi wenxue yanjiu, 46.
18 “Tian ren heyi” (天人合一) is a core concept of Chinese traditional culture. Yet there are many detailed and different explanations of it.
19 “He shi sheng wu, tong ze bu ji” (和实生物，同则不继) is an idea that was put forward by Shibo (史伯, 551–475 BCE), an ancient ideologist who lived in the late period of the Western Zhou dynasty. But this traditional Chinese idea appears even earlier than that period. Many ancient books in China mention this idea in different ways. Actually it is one of the kernels of Chinese traditional culture.
20 Qin Lei, Dazhong baihua yijing, 334.
Book of Changes. Lu Xun’s connection with the Book of Changes exhibits the attitude towards the basic philosophical problem of “harmony between man and nature.” One good example is Lu Xun’s idea of the “intermediate object,” which is full of the spirit of “keeping pace with time” from the Book of Changes.

Secondly, the formation of Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” has a close relationship with the inheritance and development of Confucianism, which inherited and advocated the thought of the “center” as it originated from the Book of Changes. It is well known that Confucius was very much fascinated by the Book of Changes, and had diligently read the book many times. Thus comes the popular saying in China that Confucius read the Book of Changes such that “the leather binding [of the bamboo scroll] had broken three times” (weibian sanjue 韦编三绝). From this we know that Confucius was deeply impressed by the profound connotation of the “center” in traditional Chinese culture.

The doctrine of the “golden mean” from Confucianism is the inheritance and development of the thought of “not to acting until a suitable time comes” (shizhong 时中) from the Book of Changes. For Confucius, “virtue” is the point of correspondence between man and nature. The reason for this is that although the forms of expressions of man and nature are different, their spiritual essence is the same. The essential moral character of nature should be included in man’s character. Nature gives birth to everything, so if man gets the proper energy from nature, he can communicate with nature. Therefore, virtue as the foundation of the universe is also the origin of human morality, which is the embodiment of the rule of universe. In this way, “harmony between man and nature” is the “limitless realm” of the Confucian “golden mean.” To Confucius, the “golden mean” is the goal for his pursuits, even though he knows it is impossible to obtain it.

Many people think Lu Xun fiercely criticized Confucius. Nevertheless, Lu Xun appreciated Confucius’ spirit of pursuing the ideal of life persistently. As early as the year 1927, Lu Xun published his essay, “Against ‘Excursive Conversation’” (Fan “mantan” 反“漫谈”). In this essay Lu Xun comments on Confucius. He states that Confucius was “persuading one person, even knowing that he would not listen” (buke

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21 “Weibian sanjue” 韦编三绝: [Confucius] read the Book of Changes many times diligently; even the leather rope which pulled on the bamboo slips of the book was broken several times. This is a popular phrase in China.

22 See Lunyu, Cheng Changming’s 程昌明 annotated edition, 64 (Taiyuan: Shanxi guji chubanshe, 1999).
yuzhiyan er yuzhiyan 不可与言而与之言). This is just the same as “keeping on doing something even knowing it is impossible” (zhiqi bukewei er weizhi 知其不可为而为之). There must be such persons so the world will not be lonesome. For this I admire him.23

Actually, the spirit advocated by Confucius was inherited by Lu Xun. Just like Confucius, Lu Xun was also a great reformer, and he did not, contrary to common misunderstandings, merely criticize Confucius. Lu Xun once said: “Confucius is really great. He lived in an era when witchcraft and superstition prevailed, yet he was simply unwilling to comply with the conventions and refused to talk about the ghosts.”24 Lu Xun also thought that Confucius was “discontented with the society” and he was willing to “seek for ways of social reform.”25 As Lu Xun points out:

As for the arguments between Confucius and Laozi [the founder of Daoism], my opinion is that Confucius wins and Laozi fails. Laozi upholds “gentleness” (rou 柔), and Confucius upholds gentleness also. But the differences between them are that Confucius makes progress through gentleness, while Laozi makes retreat through gentleness. The point is that Confucius is a doer who does everything big or small to come true his goal, even he knows it is impossible (知其不可而为之), while Laozi is a talker who does nothing with his doctrine, “doing nothing is doing everything” (无为而无不为).26

From the above examples we can see, it was under the influence and inspiration of Confucius that Lu Xun bravely took up the arduous task of building the translational bridge of the “intermediate object,” to “seek new voices from the

26 Lu Xun, “‘Chuguan’ de ‘guan’” [About “Guan” in “Chu Guan”], Lu Xun quanji, vol. 6, 539. The original Chinese reads: “至于孔老相争，孔胜老败，却是我的意见：老，是尚柔的，‘儒者，柔也’，孔也尚柔，但孔以柔进取，老却以柔退走。这关键，即在孔子为‘知其不可为而为之’的事无大小，均不放松的实行者，老则是‘无为而无不为’的一事不做，徒作大言的空谈家。”
foreign land."27 Obviously, it was from Lu Xun’s deep thinking on life’s “greatest virtue,” which he kept in mind continuously, that Lu Xun proposed the concept of “intermediate object.” For Lu Xun, it is impossible for man to be equal with nature’s “golden mean” because man cannot reach the point of perfection. Lu Xun once said: “If there does exist something like ‘the perfect,’ this world must have become solidified.”28 Just like Confucius, Lu Xun also kept pursuing the truth even while knowing its impossibility.

Thus it is evident that the idea of the “golden mean” from Confucianism and the idea of the “middle way” (zhongdao 中道) of the Book of Changes comes down in one continuous line. Just like Confucius, Lu Xun’s “tough” fight was also a spiritual demonstration aimed at the approach to the perfect ideal realm of the “golden mean” from the limited “intermediate” position. Thus we can see the spiritual connection between Lu Xun and Confucius.

Thirdly, the formation of Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” benefitted from the influence of Buddhism. The karma between Lu Xun and Buddhism came very early when he was a child in his birthplace of Shaoxing, where his personal cultivation, coupled with the Buddhist customs and activities of local people, influenced him greatly. In the strong Buddhist atmosphere of his hometown, the Buddhist cultural spirit was rooted in his life since his childhood. In his youth when he studied the Buddhist Scriptures in Japan under his teacher Zhang Taiyan 章太炎,29 his early unconscious acceptance of Buddhism became a foundation for both his receiving foreign influences and his absorption of an “inherent heritage.”30 Furthermore, in his mission for the saving of the nation through enlightenment, there was the evident influence of the Buddhist concept of “all the creatures are equal” (yiqie zhongsheng, jie shi pingdeng 一切众生，皆是平等). At that time, Lu Xun studied Buddhist scriptures “so hard that no others could catch up with him.”31 During the period from 1908 to 1918, Lu Xun studied Buddhist scriptures even harder and with greater concentration in his lonely and frustrated

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27 Lu Xun’s original words which is well known: “别求新声于异邦.” See Lu Xun: On the Power of Satanic Poetry (Moluo shi li shuo 摩罗诗力说), Lu Xun quanji, vol. 1, 68.
28 Lu Xun, “Huanghuajie de zagan” [Emotions on Yellow Flower Festival], Lu Xun quanji, vol. 3, 428. The original Chinese reads: “倘使世上真有什么‘止于至善’，这人世间便同时变了凝固的东西了。”
29 Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936) is a famous ideologist and revolutionary in the later period of Qing dynasty.
30 “Inherent heritage” here refers to Lu Xun’s original, “nei bushi guyou zhi xuemai” (内不失固有之血脉). It refers to Lu Xun’s passion and attention to the inheritance of the traditional Chinese culture.
31 Xu Shoushang, Wangyou Lu Xun yinxiaoji, 46.
days, his thought and knowledge constantly becoming mature and more profound. It was through the thinking and studying of this period that Lu Xun carried through the spiritual dialogue and the reformation of personality influenced by the Buddhist doctrines. It was also this experience that enabled him to stand his mental and physical sufferings and to sublimate a kind of dauntless personality and achieve a high degree of spirituality for enlightenment and his perception of life.

Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” is a kind of imperfect “limit” and “temporariness,” but this philosophy of life can be adopted to fight against despair. This is similar to the Buddhist spirit. Liang Shuming, one of China’s greatest philosophers, once talked about the wonderfulness of the bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism by saying that “doing while not doing, not doing while doing, that is the way of perfection.” From this quotation we can sense that the implication of Buddhism is similar with Lu Xun’s idea. Like Mahayana Bodhisattva’s occult “intermediate” doing, Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” is also neither “neutral” nor “perfect,” yet it represents the life philosophy of resistance against despair and his tragic heroic disposition of life. Without the imperfect “intermediate object” there would not be the perfect ultimate ideal. Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” contains the transcendent concepts of “limitlessness” and “eternity,” which is the portrayal of Chinese traditional spirit of “constantly striving to be stronger” (ziqiang buxi 自强不息). Therefore, Lu Xun becomes the thinker who considers himself ‘intermediate’ but persistently seeks limitlessness. He does not choose perfection, but will always cherish the ultimate ideal. Lu Xun also had a preference for “arduous Theravada Buddhism” (jianku de xiaocheng fojiao 艰苦的小乘佛教), which nourished Lu Xun’s unremitting spirit of persistence against bitter loneliness in his tribulation, and at his life position of the “intermediate object.” Lu Xun’s attitude of “being sad for their misfortune but angry for their nonresistance” (aiqi buxing, nuqi buzheng 哀其不幸,怒其不争) towards his countrymen is also consistent with the Buddha’s silent compassion and revelation for the masses. In his painful journey of spirit, Lu Xun’s passion and devotion to the world is both permanent and never changing. This is also the result

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33 “Constantly strive to be stronger” (ziqiang buxi 自强不息) originally derives from the *Book of Changes*. See: *Original Zhou yi (shang)*, annotated by Huang Shouqi 黄寿祺 and Zhang Shanwen 张善文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2007).


35 Theravada Buddhism (艰苦的小乘佛教) is a different form of Buddhism. See Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 8, 200.
of his being influenced by the Buddhist doctrine when he was a student of Zhang Taiyan, the famous scholar of Buddhism. Lu Xun always cherished deep emotion for the “world which is full of love,” fighting for brightness and freedom, never drawing back in the face of failure. His own saying is: even if one “knows that the way in front is leading to the tomb, but still one must persist in going toward it. This can be described as fighting against despair. For I consider those people who still fight even in despair are more courageous and more solemn and stirring than those who fight with hope.”

In a way, Lu Xun’s fight is the demonstration of his willingness to be the “intermediate object” in the “chain of evolvement,” to “shoulder up the strobe of darkness and release the youth to the brightness.” He was willing to be the “ladder of evolvement,” to be the stones to pave the road, and to put up the bridge for the travelers. From this perspective, Lu Xun’s thought of the “intermediate object” as a kind of supreme enlightenment to his own life, and is also the profound comprehension of Buddhist doctrines. This is why Lu Xun said: “Shakyamuni is really a great sage, his revelation is quite clear about those problems which often confused me in my life. What a great sage!” Therefore, like Confucianism, Buddhist culture is also one component of Lu Xun’s consciousness of life and the spiritual world.

Finally we have to admit that the formation of Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” also owes a lot to the influence of Western thought. As early as 1902, when Lu Xun studied in Japan, he paid much attention to the discussion about the future and opportunities of China. As a student of Zhang Taiyan, Lu Xun always went “to gatherings and attended lectures.” He paid close attention to and pondered over the important issues that related to China’s future. During that period, with a lot of reading and thinking, Lu Xun translated and compiled many important literary works from the West, including On the Power of Satanic Poetry (Moluo

36 The “world which is full of love” is a translation of the Chinese, youqing shijie (有情世界). It is a special term deriving from Buddhism.
38 Lu Xun, “Women xianzai zenyang zuofuqin” [What is required to be a father today], Lu Xun quanji, vol. 1, 135 and 145.
39 Xu Shoushang, Wangyou Lu Xun yinxiaqiang, 46. The original Chinese reads: “释迦牟尼真是大哲, 我平常对人生有许多难以解决的问题, 而他居然大部分明白启示了。真是大哲!”
40 Lu Xun, “Yin Taiyan xiansheng er xiangqi de ersanshi” [Trifles remembered because of Mr. Taiyan], Lu Xun quanji, vol. 6, 578.
On the Perverted Development of Culture (Wenhua pianzhi lun 文化偏至论), and so on. These works made Lu Xun think about the exploration of the history of human civilization and the different approaches toward the management of the country and the welfare of the people. It was also in this period that Lu Xun began to read the works of Nietzsche. The young Lu Xun abandoned the study of medicine and adopted literature as his career. This action demonstrates Lu Xun’s determination to improve national character and move from pursuing the goal of “awakening countrymen” (lieren 立人) to that of “establishing the nation” (liguo 立国). Contemplating the historical lessons and current situation of China, Lu Xun pointed out that the key to China’s modernization was to “awaken the countrymen.” At this point in his career he came across Nietzsche and was attracted to and influenced by him. Nietzsche’s thought in Thus Spoke Zarathustra especially attracted Lu Xun deeply. He translated this book twice, in 1918 and 1920, into both classical Chinese and modern Chinese, respectively.

Nietzsche’s theories of the “Last Man” and of “Superman” were those that influenced Lu Xun most. Actually Lu Xun’s later life of translation was not only the construction of a bridge of translational language from “domestication” to “foreignization” and then to “optimization,” but also the “intermediate” bridge intending to lead Chinese people from being the “Last Men” to “Supermen,” and then to “Universal Men.” According to Nietzsche’s explanation in the prologue of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, the “Last Men” refers to those people who are cowardly, insignificant, shallow, hopeless, and who lack the spirit of creativity. Nietzsche’s concept of the “Last Man” was used to make a contrast with his “Superman.” By doing so, Nietzsche tried to spur people’s self-esteem for the acceptance of his idea of the “Superman.” His description of the “Last Men” and “Supermen” is a unity of opposites that complement and depend on each other. Lu Xun selectively absorbed Nietzsche’s theories, and translated Nietzsche’s the “Last Man” (der letzte Mensch) into Chinese as moren 末人, which was a new term in Chinese. Lu Xun expected to inspire those timid and docile countrymen with the help of Nietzsche’s theory of “Superman,” and to arouse China’s “Last Men” to fight, and to help the weak becoming stronger. Therefore, Lu Xun created many characters of “Last Men” in his writings. The literary images of Lu Xun’s writing—such as Kong Yiji 孔乙己, Ah Q 阿Q, Runtu 闰土, Sister Xianglin 祥林嫂, and the Madman (kuangren 狂人)—were all miserable “Last Men.” These literary creations reflect Lu Xun’s yearning for the appearance of China’s “Supermen.” Although Lu Xun did not produce the world famous novels that Victor Hugo and Tolstoy did, Lu Xun created a large number of Chinese-style characters of the “Last Men” in his short stories and essays. He describes the “Last Men” as distorted people under the oppression of feudalism. These characters of “Last Men” serve as mirrors to help Chinese people to scan themselves, to wake up, to find the roots of
their illnesses, and “to arouse the attention for finding solutions.”41 As a result, Lu Xun’s writing of the “Last Men” became a precious cultural heritage and is an immortal monument in the history of Chinese literature.

Moreover, Lu Xun accepted Nietzsche’s idea about restoring the dignity and independent creativity of individuals. Like Nietzsche, Lu Xun scorned and criticized the foolishness of the “Last Men.” However he was full of sympathy for the “Last Men.” Lu Xun was “sad for their misfortune but angry for their nonresistance.”42 Thinking about ways to awaken the people, Lu Xun once said, “feeding the youths with chaff will never make them strong, and their future achievements will even be insignificant. For those, you can find them in Nietzsche’s ‘Last Men.’”43 Lu Xun’s literary images of the “Last Men” were of those persons who were cutting themselves off from social realities, low-spirited, too cowardly to march ahead. Lu Xun also criticizes them in his collections of short novels, Call to Arms (Nahan 呐喊) and Wandering (Panghuang 彷徨). He depicts not only their “physical defects,” but also their “mental defects.” He felt extremely worried for these insignificant countrymen who were shut in iron houses waiting for suffocation. One of the typical images of the “Last Men” created by Lu Xun is certainly Ah Q. He is penniless and frustrated from suffering of all kinds of disgrace. He does not even have a name. However, Ah Q calls out for revolution before his death. Through Ah Q’s rouse, Lu Xun demonstrates the rebellious consciousness of the “Last Men” in the feudal society of China, and the awakening of humanity in the Chinese people.

Another typical image of the “Last Man” in Lu Xun’s writing is the “passerby,” who also displays a rebellious consciousness.44 The “passerby” keeps on walking, “rushing into the wild field staggering.” He wants to know what is behind the tomb. Even when there is no clear goal or scheduled plan ahead, he still insists on going down alone. The passerby’s insistence of walking on is a resistance to “despair,” and symbolized by a yearning for the ideal and a tenacity in seeking one’s spiritual home. Through images of the “Last Men” like Ah Q and the passerby, Lu Xun reveals the absurdity of the situation and the twist of human


42 The original Chinese “哀其不幸, 怒其不争” is from On the Power of Satanic Poetry, when Lu Xun made comments on George Gordon Byron, (1788–1824), referring to his attitude towards the people of his nation at his time.


nature in ordinary people. With these touching images Lu Xun analyzes the national character. In doing so he seeks to arouse the people. With his writing he constructs a bridge between himself and the readers, prescribing a good recipe for the wounded humble countrymen, and points out a road of survival for them, along which the nation can walk into a new age. With the idea of an “intermediate object” and the spirit of innovation, Lu Xun even presents himself as a “last man.” As Lu Xun states: “I am actually the last man among intellectuals, but I am also the toughest one. I do not do things according to the will of my class, and even against it. That is the reason why the old intellectuals all hate me.”45

With the influence of Nietzsche, Lu Xun not only depicts the miserable images of the “Last Men” in his literary works, but also portrays “Supermen” who are capable of saving the country. Lu Xun’s viewpoint of “Superman” can be seen in his On the Power of Satanic Poetry, which he compiled in 1908. In the “Prologue,” Lu Xun quotes Nietzsche’s words about “Superman” from Thus Spoke Zarathustra. For the explanations of his concept, Nietzsche uses the words “earth,” “sea,” and “lightening” as the symbols for the three characteristics of “Supermen.” Nietzsche’s philosophy of “Superman” explores how people can establish new values of life and “re-evaluate traditional moral cultures.” “Superman” embodies new moral concepts and reflects the will of life and vigorous spirit of creativity. Nietzsche sought the significance of “Superman,” because he believed firmly that human beings were different from other animals, and that man’s value could be realized by constantly outdoing themselves. Therefore, Nietzsche’s approach to the “Superman” is an ideal approach to realize the value of life. Surveying Lu Xun’s idea of “improving man’s personality,” we can see the profound influence of Nietzsche’s theory of “Superman” on him. Lu Xun’s ideas of “improving man’s personality” and “constructing the nation” are hence connected integrity. Only when man’s personality is improved, will all the other things be done successfully. Lu Xun calls enthusiastically for the appearance of rebellious poets in China. It is from the influence of Nietzsche’s theory of “Superman” that Lu Xun advocates forcefully for individualism and calls for “improving man’s individuality.” In his On the Power of Satanic Poetry, Lu Xun compliments the poets of Romanticism with the representative of Byron. Obviously, those Western poets are models of “spiritual soldiers” whom Lu Xun appreciated.

45 Xu Guangping, Guanyu Lu Xun de shenghuo, 29. The original Chinese reads: “我其实是知识阶级分子中最末的一个，而又是最顽强的。我没有照着同阶层的人们的意志去做，反而时常向他们挑战，所以旧的知识分子如此恨我。”
Furthermore, in his study of the West, Lu Xun puts forth an important notion of the “Universal Man.” This notion appears in Lu Xun’s book, *Hot Wind* (*Refeng* 热风), in which he points out that many people are afraid of the elimination of the title of “Chinese” from the world, while I am afraid that the Chinese will be elbowed out of “Universal men.” I think the title of “Chinese” will never be lost. As long as there are human beings, there will be Chinese … but in order to develop and get a position in this world, one must have advanced knowledge, morals, personalities, and thoughts. These things take a lot of energy and need a lot of effort.  

Because of this, Lu Xun sought new ideas from Western countries in order to call his countrymen to wake up. He also said: “We should get rid of all these traditional delicate things in China and learn from foreigners who fired at us with guns. Only by doing so can our nation have new hope.” Lu Xun’s appeal and call is aimed at waking Chinese people’s awareness and letting them get rid of their narrow patriotism. Lu Xun encourages Chinese young people to walk upward and not to listen to those who give themselves up; to do the things you can do, to say the things you can say; to give out your light and warmth, even if it is as faint as the light of a firebug, it can still give some light to the darkness. So you needn’t wait for the torch…. If then there were no torch, I would be the only light. If there were a torch, or the sun would rise, I would disappear willingly. I would not complain. On the contrary, I will praise the torch or the sun, for they illuminate mankind and include me.

This quotation can also serve as a good example of Lu Xun’s belief in the idea of “intermediate object.” He is willing to be the only light when there is no other light. But he is ready to disappear when the torch or the sun reappears. He himself serves only as an “intermediate” light before a brighter light appears.

Lu Xun’s idea of the “Universal Man” was put forth early in the last century. At that time, it was against the mainstream thought of China and was quite a new idea.

46 Lu Xun, “Refeng: suiganlu 41” [Hot wind: A collection of my reflections, 41], *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 1, 323.
48 Ibid., “Refeng: suiganlu 41” [Hot wind: A collection of my reflections, 41], *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 1, 341.
produced from the verge of “intermediate object.” When Lu Xun put forth his idea of “Universal Man,” he was abused and misunderstood by many of his contemporaries. But to observe his ideas under the new situation of the twenty-first century, we can only be impressed by the sharpness of his eyesight and the breadth of his mind.

On the whole, Lu Xun’s idea about China’s “Superman” demonstrate a far-sighted spirit of humanity and cosmopolitanism rather than a narrow patriotism and nationalism. It is an achievement of Lu Xun’s study and contemplation of the West. In sum, Lu Xun opens up a road through learning from the West by translation, making Chinese people change from the “Last Men” to “Supermen,” and finally to the “Universal Men.” This is the ultimate goal of Lu Xun’s transformation of his life into one “intermediate” bridge of translation.

Translational Communication: The “Intermediate” Bridge of Lu Xun’s Life

Translation is a bridging “intermediate object” for communication. It is quite natural that Lu Xun’s thought of the “intermediate object” can also be analyzed from the angle of his translational career, to which he dedicated thirty-three years. Lu Xun considered his life as the “intermediate” bridge of the cultural communication between China and Western countries. He advocated that different cultures should communicate with each other, and we should evaluate different cultures according to a fair and just standard. In this way, the “intermediate object” is a modern consciousness. It is a new and advanced entity, which digests and absorbs the outstanding factors of both traditional Chinese culture and Western culture. The concept of “intermediate object” emphasizes the inherent relationship between different cultures and proposes that the evaluation and communication between different cultures should abide by a just and scientific standard of value, as well as promote the mutual amalgamation of different cultures, which plays a positive role in the construction and development of national culture. Lu Xun’s concept of “intermediate object” had guided his own theories of translation and was embodied in his own practices of translation greatly.

Taken from the angle of cultural communication, Lu Xun’s theory of the “intermediate object” refers to neither the field of Chinese culture nor the field of Western culture separately, yet it keeps its interior relations to its original traditional culture while absorbing the advanced elements from the exterior cultures. Such a cultural consciousness of the “intermediate” withholds the outstanding factors of its original traditional culture and also surmounts some specially fixed cultural consciousness. This culture of the “intermediate” sets up a new value standard of culture with an improved and broader visual field to
communicate among different cultures, and to promote the integration and prosperity of different cultures of the world. So we can say, such a kind of new national culture as Lu Xun has advocated, is neither the original Chinese traditional culture nor any type of Western culture. It is an improved and innovative kind of national culture of the “intermediate,” in a broad view of the world culture. This is because, from one perspective, Lu Xun inherited and absorbed the spirit of Chinese traditional culture. From another perspective, he understood and cherished the excellent elements of Western cultures, so that he could bring forth his own innovative opinion in the process of contrasting and studying the two kinds of different cultures.

In the 1920s, Liu Bannong 刘半农, one of Lu Xun’s good friends, sent Lu Xun a pair of couplets, which appraised Lu Xun as “good with the theories of Tolstoy and Nietzsche from the West, and also good with the writing style of Wei and Jin Dynasty of China.”

Liu’s comments are quite appropriate here. Lu Xun himself admitted that his thought contains both Chinese traditional values and the extensive absorption and acceptance from Western culture by way of translation. In his article, *On the Perverted Development of Culture*, Lu Xun states:

> The sagacious and intelligent scholars should clearly see the situation of the world. They should observe it and compare it, so as to get rid of crankiness, and absorb the prime and inspiration from outside. Then use them for the goodness of the country. They should establish new learning, which is neither behind the trend of the world nor without the internal tradition of our own. They should adopt the modern from the West and return to and maintain our own ancient tradition, combine the two in order to set up our own new school of learning. In this way, we can find the deep meaning of our own life. If the people are enlightened, individuality will be improved, the nation will be united, so we can establish our own independent country.

From this quotation, we can understand the core of Lu Xun’s idea of the “intermediate object” in a better way.

The idea of “intermediate object” can also be summed up as “adopting the modern, resuming the ancient, and creating new learning” (取今复古, 别立新宗). From the above quotation it is obvious that Lu Xun’s attitude toward the

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49 Sun Fuyuan, *Lu Xun xiansheng shishi wuzhounian zagan erze*, 75–76.
50 Lu Xun, “Wenhua pianzhi lun” [On the perverted development of culture], *Lu Xun quanjí*, vol. 1, 57. The original Chinese reads: “明哲之士, 必洞达世界之大势, 权衡校量, 去其偏颇, 得其神明, 施之国中, 畏合无间。外之既不后于世界之思潮, 内之仍弗失固有之血脉, 取今复古, 别立新宗, 人生意义, 致之深邃, 则国人之自觉至, 个性张, 沙聚之邦, 由是转为人国。”
inheritance and development of Chinese national culture is summed up as “one should be fond of the ancient, but should not ignore the modern. One should stress on the contemporary, but should not forget tradition” (好古而不忽今，力今而不忽古). The road pointed out by Lu Xun is a road of inheritance and development for national culture. It is a road of integration which is “fair and just” (zhong zheng 中正), and is in conformity with the traditional cultural spirit of China from the Book of Changes. These principles still have realistic significance and guidance even for today in the new century. It is because of Lu Xun’s philosophy of the “intermediate object” that he was far-sighted and broad-minded, able to emancipate the mind in the collision between Chinese culture and Western cultures, and able to perform the modern transformation of ideological and cultural ideas. This is in opposition to the previous reformers who held tightly to the old and the imperfect, sticking to dogmatic concepts, such as “Chinese learning” or “Western learning,” “used only as the tools,” (中学，西学，体用，道器), and so forth. Therefore, Lu Xun stepped bravely out of the circle of inherent traditional culture, to come to the advanced “intermediate zone” where Chinese and Western cultures collide, to probe into the new cultural factors from the West, to reform and improve Chinese traditional culture, and thus to meet “the third era, which China has never experienced before.”

Lu Xun’s saying “everything is an intermediate object” refers to the idea that the absolute perfectness does not exist in this world. But this is not all that the theory of the “intermediate” can tell us. From this theory we can also see that the “golden mean” is the perfect and fittest degree, which ordinary people can hardly reach. But man can be “infinitely close to this degree of perfectness,” and man should have the spirit of pursuing toward it. This is in agreement with Confucius’ “even knowing it is not possible, but still keep on doing it.” Therefore Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” is a kind of a knot that is developing and changing constantly and infinitely close to the ideal degree of the “golden mean.” As Lu Xun once stated, “discontentment is the wheel for going forward.” Thus although the “intermediate object” is dissatisfaction, imperfection, finite, deficiency, nevertheless, it has a tendency toward the infinite and eternal upward pursuit and development. It is just this kind of tendency that promotes the development of society and encourages the constant pursuits and displays of the beautiful presentations of life.

51 Lu Xun, “Dengxia manbi” [Rambling digression under the lamp], Lu Xun quanji, vol. 1, 225. The original Chinese reads: “创造中国历史上未曾有过的第三样时代,则是现在的青年的使命!”

52 Lu Xun, “Buman” [Discontentment], Lu Xun quanji, vol. 1, 376. The original Chinese reads: “不满是向上的车轮，能够载着不自满的人类。向人道前进。”
By contrasting Chinese traditional culture with Western cultures, Lu Xun pursues the drawbacks and deep-rooted cultural obstacles of Chinese traditional culture that hindered its modernization of a national culture, thus bringing forth his own ideas about enlightenment, the transformation of national characteristics, and the rebuilding of a national spirit. It was the traditional Chinese idea of the “middle way” (zhong dao 中道) that gave Lu Xun enlightenment and inspiration, and it was also the learning and absorption from the West that made his deductive reasoning of the “intermediate” possible. Together the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture and the absorption from the West made his new idea “intermediate object” a success.

Precisely because Lu Xun started out from the idea that “everything is an intermediate object,” he could give a far-sighted survey of the differences and similarities between Chinese and Western cultures, and integrate the outstanding factors in those two cultures together. Thus Lu Xun set a new path for the development of culture for the Chinese nation.

The great success of Lu Xun’s literary creation and its great influence owes to his idea of “intermediate object” and his practice of translation, which is a communicational bridge of the intermediate itself. It is because Lu Xun stood upon the position of the “intermediate” that he could transform his concepts into a modern style, and renew his understandings about the world and about himself. In doing so he faced straight towards life, introspected, fought against the darkness outside, and examined himself inside at the same time, thus opening up a new realm in his life.

On the whole, Lu Xun’s achievements in his literary translation and literary creation benefited from his thought of the “intermediate object,” which derives from the traditional Chinese culture of “valuing the central” (gui zhong 贵中). Lu Xun practiced his thought of the “intermediate” successfully in his literary translation and creation, so that he could utilize translation as an “intermediate” bridge, thereby bringing in the truth from the outside world and arousing his countrymen. Lu Xun found the bridge of translation with his life to communicate Chinese and Western cultures. It is because of his philosophy of the “intermediate object” that he could interface with different cultures rationally, without any bias towards any of them. He stood in the “intermediate” position to conduct a profound observation and introspection, as well as to have criticism and selection, to sense the essence of the world. It is also because of his position as an “intermediate object” that his ideas could surmount his contemporaries. Lu Xun not only paid close attention to the reality and a way forward for the Chinese people, but also the existence and development of the whole of mankind.

In conclusion, Lu Xun’s “intermediate object” is an advanced integration
formed by the combination of Chinese traditional culture’s outstanding factors and those of outside cultures. Lu Xun stood in the front position of his times, with his passionate writings. He called to arms for the rebuilding of China’s new culture. From the bringing out of his idea of “intermediate object” to the innovative literary writing and translation, and to the publication of his translational works and his literary creations, as well as to his principles of living and doing things, we can summarize the following: The appearance of Lu Xun’s philosophy of the “intermediate object” is the result of his profound understanding of Chinese traditional culture, and his inheriting, developing, and deducting of the thought of “keeping pace with time” from the Book of Changes, as well as the result of his study and absorption from the West by translation. Even today, the “intermediate object” is still a new subject, which needs further explanation and research, and is a subject of the life philosophy of Lu Xun. In it there is always something new to discuss, and it will always benefit the development of world culture.

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