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A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING REFLECTIONS OF A BLACK ASIANIST

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My career as a “*Black Asianist*” is long and intermittent. Sometimes being African American mattered, sometimes it did not, and at times it probably mattered to others more than it mattered to me. Such are the complexities and nuances of being in a field where one fundamental element of your being—your race—is rare and unexpected. As is the case with every human being in our time, at each moment in my life’s journey, I have been embedded in a national and international social context way beyond my own; have carried my accumulating biography into every situation; have perceived the world and been perceived through the lenses of group identity (race, class, gender, and so forth); and—this may be somewhat unique to me—have at times been confused, and often amazed, by how instances of individual and group behavior in real-life exhibit archetypal patterns that I first discovered in Chinese literature and that seem to transcend culture. Let me explain.¹

A Moment in Time: The Context

My “career” as a Black Asianist began in the early days of the field. When I took my first course in Chinese studies at Cornell University, most of my professors had lived in China prior to the 1949 revolution. One of them, Harold Shadick, regaled me one evening with stories of playing strip poker with Zhou Enlai. When, as undergraduates, we signed up for Chinese language classes, we were

given reel-to-reel tape recorders so heavy that I could hardly carry mine to my dorm room. The Chinese program was, I believe, funded by the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA), which among other things, supported studies in “lesser-known languages.” At that time, understanding other nations on their own terms, via their language, history, and culture, was considered essential to national security. Studies of China, for whatever purpose, were part of this larger enterprise known as area studies. To this day, I am convinced that if US policymakers and businesspeople had absorbed the lessons of Chinese history, they would never have imagined that the internet would democratize China or that China would easily accept the current international economic system without severe pushback. Thus, for example, both the government’s admiration for the First Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi (259–210 BCE), who is said to have banned and burned books, and its ongoing attempt to excise knowledge of the Tiananmen protests of 1989, should have suggested to anyone paying attention that the Chinese government would almost certainly limit the free expression of ideas whatever the medium. A major government-sanctioned reevaluation of Qin Shi Huangdi in the 1970s recast his actions of censoring and destroying books, an action that Chinese historians had condemned for millennia, as an element of his admirable accomplishment in unifying China.² Another example: had American business and financial communities understood the deep humiliation the Chinese felt in the wake of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century European and American economic imperialism, would they really not have anticipated challenges to the very mindsets that had engendered that humiliation—that is, to the assumption that an economic order created in the West should become accepted worldwide? Area studies, with its humanist emphasis, had been a good approach for anyone truly wanting to understand China.

I received my BA in Asian Studies and MA in Chinese literature from Cornell University in the 1960s, and my PhD in literary theory from American University in 1978. When I attended the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) conferences, I was usually the only Black person there. Over the years, I have only met two or three other Black scholars of my generation, although there probably were a handful more. Furthermore, at that time, Americans could not go to China, and language programs in Taiwan for Americans only got started in the 1970s. With little chance to study in a Chinese-speaking environment, I learned to read Chinese far better than I could speak it.

Then as now, most research on Asia focused on the external, collective dimensions of human life, in fields such as history, political science, international relations, economics, and more recently, national security, the environment, and so forth. Even those fields that are potentially more amenable to queries about the inner life, such as philosophy, religion, literature, and art, tended to—and I think

still do—approach these studies through their external dimensions. In my own field, literature, literary works are most often treated as expressions of intellectual or literary history or as expressions of the author’s biography or thought. I am deeply indebted to this very important work. Nevertheless, comparatively little attention is given to literature as art, with all of its literary and rhetorical devices, which include, for example, reported versus dramatized action, irony, images, metaphor, etc. Nor is there sufficient recognition that these formal elements also communicate the meaning, feeling, and emotion that is integral to understanding and that distinguish literature from discursive writing. In the field of religion, Huston Smith provides an exception to normal academic approaches to religion. In his preface to *The Religions of Man* (1958), Smith describes his aim as helping the reader to “feel why and how” religions, including Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, “guide and motivate the lives of those who live by them.”³ Of course, I have only noted tendencies, which means the exceptions are also numerous. Nevertheless, those approaches were not my interests, which hew to the inner life, especially psychology and literature.

The contributions of many Black Asianists are defined by their originality in the choice of subject matter hitherto neglected. In this, they make a major contribution by expanding the scope of the field. At one point in the 1980s, I actually assembled a short bibliography about people of African descent in Chinese history that began, as I recall, in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). However, I never pursued that study. Introducing new subject matter was not to be my role. Rather, I followed my passion for the stories of Lu Xun (1881–1936), the most famous writer of twentieth-century China, whose life and works are the subject of thousands of volumes, drawings, paintings, films, and even several tourist destinations. What has been unique in my approach, informed in part by my biography and my race, is a different way of viewing this well-worn territory.

Reflections from My Biography

No one ever really knows why he or she chooses one career path versus another. The retrospective story I tell myself suggests that my motivations for entering the field of Chinese studies were driven by a young person’s attempt to make sense of a rigorous but badly misguided high school history curriculum. That curriculum postulated, implicitly, that African Americans had no role in United States history except during the Civil War period, and that “world history,” as it was called, appropriately narrated the doings of the Great White Men of Western Europe, who apparently dominated the world from the time of the ancient Greeks up through the present. Even to me as a teenager, the omissions were thunderously loud.

I knew enough of my family’s history, which can date our earliest identified Black ancestor to late eighteenth-century Virginia, to know that this US history

was so distorted as to constitute lies. It never occurred to me, however, that there was a fuller, truer history yet to be told. I barely knew that Latin America existed. I did know that ancient Egyptian civilization was grand and glorious. However, in some vague way, visual evidence notwithstanding, I had been led to infer that these Egyptians were white. That Egypt was located in “Africa” was beyond imagining because Africa, it seemed, at best was peopled by the dark, disorganized, poverty-stricken recipients of European largesse, and there was nothing more to know. I did perceive a tiny bit about East Asia from the Chinese rugs and vases and chinoiserie wallpaper with which my mother decorated our home and somehow surmised that whatever Europe had by way of civilizational greatness, East Asia had as much of it or more, and it was of indisputable excellence. The distinction, though, between China and Japan was still murky. I did want to study history, but I did not want to study lies. By the end of my freshman year of college, I resolved to study all things Chinese. I was too naive to know that to some degree, every culture lies about its past!

Few American universities taught Chinese in the 1960s.⁴ Thus, signing up to study the Chinese language at Cornell was easy. The classes were so starved for students that being Black was not an issue. Had I been a Martian, I would have been welcomed with similar enthusiasm. In the course of my undergraduate years, I developed a more sophisticated understanding of bias in history, both inadvertent and intentional. But it felt too late to give up Chinese studies: I had invested too much time to simply throw it over. I had also learned by then that my inclinations ran more toward literature than toward history; toward the questions of the human heart that resonate across different times and places, rather than toward those elements of more public human experience that are unique to their own historical moment. Without recognizing it, I was beginning to identify my special lens.

Whatever its deficits, my high school education had given me a firm chronological framework on which to locate human activity and the initial analytic capacities with which to critique what I had been taught. I am truly grateful for that rigor. Turning these tools on the implicit racial and colonialist distortions that characterized that curriculum directly launched me into the field of Chinese studies. Years later, I met an African American scholar, whose name I have since forgotten, who had been catapulted into Japanese studies for similar reasons. Apparently, I was not as unique a creature as I had imagined myself to be.

A Different Lens: Doubleness of Vision

Fast forward several decades to the 2018 publication of my book on Lu Xun’s modern short stories.

Undoubtedly, multiple factors lie behind the unique way I came to understand these stories. Some are deeply personal and involve my encounter with the works of Carl Jung (1876–1961). Others seem to arise from a capacity that Lu Xun and I share, if I may be so presumptuous—he as a writer whose family’s fortunes had dropped precipitously and I as a Black American from an educated, middle-class background, a capacity to experience the world from both above and below, from a place of privilege and a place of disadvantage. Over time I have come to believe that he had a kind of “double consciousness,” somewhat analogous to that which W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) described as characterizing the mental life of African Americans. The parallels are suggestive, not exact.⁵ Here, I mean only a sense of two contending ways of being within one’s inner life, with one deemed lesser and consigned to the shadows but each having powerful claims on the whole psyche.

Any course in modern Chinese literature in translation logically begins with the short stories of Lu Xun, which mark the beginning of a literary era. He was a central figure in the tumultuous decades of the twentieth century, a famous intellectual and literary pioneer in his own time, and a writer launched into the stratosphere of recognition when Chairman Mao Zedong proclaimed in 1940—after Lu Xun was safely dead—that he was “the chief commander of China’s cultural revolution,” “a hero without parallel in our time.”⁶

Lu Xun’s works were available throughout the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) when those of other writers from the 1920s and 1930s were not. They remained part of the official school curriculum into the early twenty-first century. Although Mao’s encomiums had legitimate grounding in his writings, they also badly distorted the subtle genius of a sensitive soul whose small corpus of short stories contains some of the most brilliant, probing literary works in modern China. Lu Xun’s stories have typically been read as an essential part of Chinese intellectual and literary history or as expressions of his personal life and thought. My way of reading them as a kind of autobiography differs from both.

In my undergraduate Chinese literature class, we probably read “Medicine” (“Yao”), “The True Story of Ah Q” (“Ah Q Zheng Zhuan”), and others. However, it was the conclusion of “The New Year’s Sacrifice” (“Zhu Fu”), discussed later, that hit me viscerally, a recoiling that felt more physical than metaphorical. How could any piece of literature, and one in translation, produce such a stunning impact? At the time, I had relatively modest knowledge of China, and except for my language teacher, no more than a passing acquaintance with anyone Chinese. I definitely could not attribute such a shattering response to anything inherent in Chinese history or culture. The explanation had to be deeper. In fact, it required several decades of deep living, deep reflection, and considerable scholarship to arrive at an answer.

I stayed on at Cornell to earn an MA, married, moved to Washington, DC, had two children, earned a PhD, and joined the faculty of Howard University—family obligations confining me to the Washington, DC, area. I rejoiced in my first total immersion in Black culture. However, for reasons too complex to explain, Howard was not an institution where I could thrive long-term. Further, the salary was mediocre, and I had no intention of being pressed financially. I wrote several academic articles on Lu Xun's works and left academia for a career at the Library of Congress.

At that time, before internet-based research, the library's Asian collections were essential to scholars in the US who studied Asia.⁷ As head of the area studies collections and later in other capacities, I guided the division's direction and selected, or helped select, the division's chiefs. When Congress was concerned that the Chinese collections, which were magnificently strong in history and culture, might not support the US government's requirements for information about politics, economics, and national security, I testified before a congressional committee about the library's plans to address this deficiency. Subsequently, I spearheaded an application for a grant to revamp the library's acquisition processes in China. I ended my career as director of the Kluge Center, a center for advanced research in the library's collections, which provided research fellowships for scholars, including those studying Asia. My responsibilities there included managing the selection process for the \$1 million Kluge Prize, whose winners included Romila Thapar and Yu Ying-shih, for Indian and Chinese history, respectively. After retirement, I returned as a scholar to complete my book, *Reading Lu Xun through Carl Jung*. I have no idea what people thought about a Black woman in these roles. The library had given me position and power, and I did my job as conscientiously as I could. Recent PhDs take note: there are multiple career paths outside of the academy.

At least once I forgot that I was supposed to “be Black.” I failed to attend a library function that lay outside of my portfolio because I was busy with what I considered “my real job.” Belatedly, appalled, I remembered that politics sometimes demanded the appearance of a “Black face.” In fact, although everyone denied it vociferously, I had been hired in part because I was Black. The African American chair of the library's congressional oversight committee had demanded a change in the all-white profile of senior management. This inconvenient fact never bothered me: my father and my ancestors had been denied innumerable positions because they were Black, so it seemed like an appropriate “balancing out.” Besides, I was qualified.

Those years in academia and early years at the library were also marked by a crisis in my personal life that eventually led to my encounter with the works of Carl Jung, one of the founders of modern psychology and a contemporary of Lu

Xun's. During those years, I was searching my psyche in hopes of understanding the underlying psychological patterns that were shaping my life and causing me suffering. In my professional life, I was living with Lu Xun's stories, searching below the surfaces for patterns that shaped them. While rethinking these structuring features of my own life, I found myself drawn even more fully into Lu Xun's rewriting of the narrative of his contemporary Chinese reality as he interrogated cultural patterns inherited from the past that, to his mind, accounted for China's inadequate response to the challenges of Western imperialism and caused the Chinese people needless suffering.

I had been fortunate in completing my PhD in the late 1970s, a period when scholars of Chinese literature were just beginning to appreciate the value of literary theory in reading a text, the importance of clarifying the presuppositions that one brings to a work and articulating the variety of questions that one might pose. Thus, I had at my disposal a set of newly available tools that made it even possible to ask about the structuring patterns in Lu Xun's texts.

Lu Xun was writing stories at a time when the old dynastic system was collapsing, the Chinese Republic had barely come into reality, and the founding of the People's Republic of China was a few decades in the future. In the face of the West's economic and military aggression and technological superiority, many feared for China's future. Among intellectuals, who by tradition felt a moral imperative to address the nation's threats, the call was to "save China." But how?

Initially, Lu Xun anticipated that the answer would lie in modern science, and he enrolled in medical school. He left without finishing and took up a career in literature, believing that what the Chinese people most needed was not to have their bodies healed but to have their spirits changed. His comparison of physical healing to social change caused me to wonder whether he had an implicit medical model for his social ambitions: did he have a diagnosis of the illness; an etiology, an analysis of the causes; a course of treatment; and a vision of the healed state? A close reading of the texts of his two short story collections, *Call to Arms (Nahan)* and *Hesitation (Panghuang)*, provided evidence that indeed he did. As I read and reread these texts, I found myself examining literary structures, such as the ordering of events in a story, the structure of images, the various tricks of the literary trade, a process analogous to the tasks I was performing in my own life. I found in Carl Jung's theories a language that helped articulate my patterns of thought and behavior. Astonishingly, the Jungian insights that were helping me understand my own journey provided a language for articulating what I was discovering in the structures of Lu Xun's texts.

In writing my book, I drew on essential elements of Jung's thought, but necessarily oversimplified his ideas, which he developed over a sixty-year career. Here, I describe just enough of these ideas to suggest why the notion of "double

consciousness,” as structured into Lu Xun’s work and implied in his biography, might have relevance.

Unlike Sigmund Freud, who focused on psychological pathologies, Jung tried to understand how the normal human psyche functions. He proposed that the human psyche, the self, is composed of the conscious mind (or the ego self) and the unconscious mind (or the unconscious self). As humans grow to adulthood, the psyche pushes into unconsciousness those parts of the total self that the person or society finds unacceptable. These become the shadow, which is the part of the unconscious self that is most accessible to consciousness. (Other dimensions of the unconscious need not concern us here.) This is not necessarily a problem unless the split generates conflict. This arises when the shadow seeks acknowledgement by the conscious mind and reincorporation into the whole. A minor example of this is the “Freudian slip,” the embarrassing moment when an imprudent unconscious thought breaks through and speaks in public. In Jung’s system, the shadow possesses knowledge that the larger self, the whole self, needs in order to alleviate inner conflict, in order to function better in the world—a teleological thrust toward healing. Roughly stated, denying the shadow and its knowledge constitutes illness; incorporating the shadow’s knowledge into awareness leads to the cure. This process liberates the self to draw on the resources of both dimensions of the psyche so that it can adapt with greater acuity and power to the challenges of the external world.

We apply a simplistic version of this idea in our contemporary American lexicon for discussing political and racial issues when we talk of “the other” and the tendency of the ego-self, the part of the social order with the money and power, to “otherize,” to deny the full humanity of and right to full participation by some group that seeks to be recognized as a full and equal partner in the body politic, the societal self. Any side, of course, may “otherize,” “dehumanize” the opposition. We speak of social healing but rarely with sufficient awareness of the enormity of effort and the degree of psychic pain required to become whole and liberated from the past.

Carl Jung directed his attention toward healing individual patients through therapy, but he also believed that the same principles applied at the societal level. Lu Xun initiated his reflections at the national level. Although he attacked Confucianism as an outworn system that facilitated national disaster and individual suffering, as a youth, he had been schooled in its tenets. Naturally, his analysis initially presupposed Confucian categories of thought. These assumed that heaven (the metaphysical realm), nation, community, family, and interior self would all be aligned, be shaped by the same patterns.

Lu Xun had no interest in heaven. However, within his short stories, he tested his hypotheses about societal illness through the other four areas of human life.

For Lu Xun, the privileged men who dominated this patriarchal society constituted the social self; women and peasants constituted the social unconscious, the “other” that needed to be heard and incorporated. Over time, he concluded that this would only be accomplished through revolution. A man given to scrupulous self-examination, he questioned whether he, himself, as a male intellectual, one born into modest privilege, was positioned inside or outside of this system. One can easily see how the class-conscious Maoist interpreters of his work found support within these stories.

The story that nearly knocked me out of my chair when I was about twenty years old embodied all of these dimensions. In “The New Year’s Sacrifice,” the story’s first-person narrator returns to his hometown, where he fails to answer with human honesty the straightforward questions of a starving peasant woman. The next day, hearing that she has died and reflecting on her life, he recounts how the archaic family system had exacerbated her suffering; he even acknowledges that he and she are similarly trapped within the same encompassing system. Her descent into extreme poverty had been marked by her preparations for celebrations of the New Year. Yet, when the narrator awakens to celebratory sounds on the morning of the festival, he forgets all he had understood of her suffering and responds as if the encounter had never happened.

Deploying the symbolic forms of literature, the story encodes the split in the body politic, in the national psyche: male/female; intellectual/peasant; social ego/social shadow; and remembering and incorporating the shadow/forgetting and denying its existence. Taken as a whole, Lu Xun’s corpus of modern short stories examines all four social levels in terms of illness and healing: the diagnosis, etiology, therapeutic process, and vision of the healed state. He could imagine healing within the family and individual psyche, however rarely it might occur, but in the arenas of nation and community, the shadow’s attempt to be heard would result in its death. The only solution he could imagine in the public sphere was for the shadow voices to demand incorporation into the body politic. The ego forces would resist. The revolution that would likely ensue would be, he suspected, violent and bloody.

Although Carl Jung began with a focus on the psyche, and Lu Xun began by interrogating society and culture, they both arrived at analogous conclusions with respect to psychic illness and its cure. Jung and Lu Xun were contemporaries. Lu Xun knew a bit about Jung through translating *Symbols of Agony* by Kuriyagawa Hakuson (1880–1923), a study that briefly mentions Jung three or four times but says a good deal about Freud, whom I believe remains far better known in China than Jung. However, there is no evidence that Jung influenced Lu Xun in even the slightest way. Rather, both Lu Xun and Jung participated in the late nineteenth-century European *zeitgeist* that interrogated the unconscious in human life within

the secular realm. Lu Xun read works of Western thought and claimed to have read some one hundred works of European fiction before writing his first short story. Both men were much taken with Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. To a degree, both drank from the same well. Thus, Lu Xun undoubtedly knew the philosophical and literary precursors to the insights into the psyche that Freud and Jung, working in a psychoanalytic medical context, drew on in formulating their theories.

The analyses of both Lu Xun and Jung resonated with my own life experience.

In *Reading Lu Xun through Carl Jung*, I largely restricted my analysis to the short story texts. This gave me confidence that I was not imposing a Western framework on Chinese material but rather using a vocabulary of concepts to bring to awareness patterns that already existed. Nevertheless, it is also true that every text in some way reflects the author's mind at the time of composition. Therefore, I was willing to speak about the mind that produced them and even guess about the man himself as long as I explicitly acknowledged the degree of speculation that I was bringing to the evidence.

Lu Xun's short stories revealed, without ambiguity, that he deeply understood the privileges of being part of the Chinese intellectual male elite, and the psychological resistances to giving up the prestige and protection of that position. Simultaneously, he also recognized that those in his position, including himself, were morally culpable for the suffering of the social shadow, and he threw his weight into destroying that system. What enabled him to see and then act in this radical way? Let me speculate.

Lu Xun's grandfather had been a high government official whose fall into disgrace nearly bankrupted the family. Lu Xun observed cryptically that anyone who suffers such a fall will come to know what the world is really like. More concretely, in his late teens, Lu Xun had set aside his training in the Chinese classics, the established path to wealth and prestige in dynastic China, embraced knowledge flooding in from the West, and traveled to Japan to study. Japan had embraced modernization in the mid-nineteenth century and was much further along than China in mastering the tools of the modern world. Further, in Japan, Lu Xun was viewed in part as a citizen of an aging empire, an outsider; he was also positioned to see his own nation with foreign eyes and from a distance. Unlike his brother, who embraced Japanese culture and married a Japanese woman, Lu Xun retained his singular identification as a Chinese. Thus, it would seem that family decline and foreign experience facilitated in Lu Xun a capacity to experience that doubleness of vision, to see simultaneously with awareness of the suffering "other" and the privileges of "self."

Now I had acquired the tools to answer my own question. Why had “The New Year’s Sacrifice” and Lu Xun’s other short stories exerted such a hold on me? My hypothesis: When as an undergraduate I first read that story, even in translation, something of that twoness of vision seized my soul. The grating gap between the woman’s suffering and the narrator’s morally repugnant refusal to absorb its meaning resonated with my own doubleness. Some of this was personal; some was racial and social; the combination was overwhelming.

Not only had the curriculum of my high school violated my experience; the school was also mean-spirited to most students and would have proven lethal to me without my parents’ interventions. Further, the white friends from my childhood at puberty drew the mandatory social line against interracial dating. Naturally, I knew theoretically about such taboos, but it had not fully occurred to me that they would affect me personally. Those high school years had forced a painful awareness of society’s insistence on racializing my being. For several years of my young adulthood, I even absorbed aspects of Du Bois’s “double consciousness,” in part seeing “one’s self through the eyes of others.”⁸

Until recently, it had been possible for white Americans to see themselves as default “Americans” and to remain oblivious to the evidence that they too have a racial identity. Members of minority groups, particularly any group whose physical features limit the capacity to “blend-in” as white, are well aware that although they are individuals, they are also defined by their racial designation. Over time, I developed a deepening awareness that taking pleasure in my privilege, even those elements I could justly claim that I had earned, did not release me from culpability for the system that was rewarding me but denigrating others. Lu Xun’s focus on the ego/shadow dynamic at all four social levels and his self-awareness of benefiting from the system he sought to destroy were also wrapped up in the conundrums of my life.

I now feel confident that in reading that story, I was gazing into the mirror. Jung proposed that the key psychological task at midlife would be to retrieve parts of the self that had been left behind, to integrate the shadow into fuller awareness so as to achieve a less divided, more integrated self. As that process unfolded in my personal life, I came to embrace my responsibility for the social whole, to alleviate the social shadow’s distress and overcome the exclusion of people not designated as white. For my younger self, Lu Xun’s story had articulated the tensions that I would need to resolve as I matured.

The struggle to incorporate the unconscious into the conscious was so profound that in midlife, I had a series of Jungian dreams. In the earliest of these, I was terrified that water, a frequent symbol of the unconscious, would rise up and sweep me away—that is, the conscious “me,” the only part of which I was fully aware. In the final version of the dream, I am in a low-slung boat, Lu Xun is poling

the boat, and he guides it safely through a towering wave of the unconscious. Instead of drowning me, the wave deposits me safely on another shore where “one self” assures the “other self” that both parts can live together without conflict. An image of psychological healing.

The Archetypal Self, Scapegoating

The ubiquitous human pattern of scapegoating can be viewed from one perspective as an extension of the ego/shadow dynamic. In scapegoating, the ego-self, rather than relieving a severe inner conflict by absorbing the knowledge offered by the shadow-self, rejects that unrecognized, unwanted part of the self and projects it onto a third party, typically one without sufficient power to retaliate. Thus, the ego-self tries to eliminate its own internal conflict by “finding” the problem in that “other” and expelling the shadow recipient via exile or death. When perpetuated on a societal scale, those who enact the violence may well be unconscious of their role in this brutal “performance.” In fact, scapegoating only succeeds in its purpose of restoring the experience of unity within the ego-self group when the dynamic is covert.

Lu Xun’s masterpiece, “The True Story of Ah Q,” demonstrates his clear understanding of the psychological mechanism of scapegoating, the processes by which it transpires, and the social circumstances that precipitate it. When he worried that his famous story might be about events decades in the future, Lu Xun was revealing his suspicion that some archetypal pattern was at work in his story. Jung had hypothesized that the ego/shadow dynamic was a universal phenomenon but had no way of testing this view.⁹ My reading of “The True Story of Ah Q” as an intricate, accurate anatomy of a scapegoating, documented with details from the text, is radically unique in the long, complex history of interpretations of this masterpiece.

I may have had heightened sensitivity to this broadly human dynamic because the Southern lynchings of Black people offer up such perfect, violent examples of the scapegoating syndrome. The radical insufficiency of the pretexts for torture and murder of other human beings cries out for an explanation of the impetus for these horrific acts. Others have documented the historical contexts. At the psychological root, I believe, was a visceral terror of having to acknowledge the humanity of the despised Black “other.” Given the history of violent suppression of Black human beings in slavery and beyond, if this shadow-other were fully human, that would make monsters of the perpetrators, the ego-self of society. That possibility was too awful to contemplate. Better to eliminate the purported cause of the fear.

I am no longer surprised that the white faces that gaze at the camera in photos of lynchings seem empty of emotion. Their lack of affect seems no different from

the moral numbness of the crowd that Lu Xun evokes at the scapegoating of Ah Q. Those lynchings are part of my inheritance as an American. Undoubtedly, being Black elevates that history in my consciousness and heightens my sensitivity to the scapegoating syndrome.

As a Black American who has lived both as the social ego, a person of economic privilege who can “do” mainstream white culture, and one who simultaneously lives as a Black person with awareness of the killing costs of social exclusion and psychological projection, I have acquired a particular, complex way of seeing the world. Could a non-Black American scholar marshal the same literary tools and, reading Lu Xun’s short stories, arrive at the same insights? Perhaps. Yet it seems to me that the parallels between Lu Xun’s life and the full context of my biography made it far more likely that I would see this corpus through a different lens and make a uniquely “Black” contribution to modern Chinese literature.

Notes

¹ Parts of this essay draw on my publication, *Reading Lu Xun through Carl Jung*, Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2018.

² *New World Encyclopedia*, accessed January 7, 2022; see also Li Yu-ning, “Introduction,” *The First Emperor*, International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975; reissued by Routledge, 2018.

³ *The Religions of Man*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, ix.

⁴ As I recall, Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Cornell, and perhaps other “Ivies,” taught Chinese language, along with the University of Michigan, probably several California universities, and a scattering of others. The situation is dramatically different today, with educational institutions at all levels teaching Chinese.

⁵ Each of these three men, Lu Xun, Jung, and Du Bois, was a complex thinker in his own right and deeply embedded in his own culture. All left substantial bodies of written work. My use of the term “double consciousness” for all three merely points to evidence that in nineteenth-century Europe, discourse about “doubleness” in the human psyche occurred frequently in works of philosophy and literature, entered the medical realm, and factored into the development of modern psychology. See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books, 1970.

⁶ Mao Zedong, “The Culture of New Democracy,” 1940.

⁷ Many of the library’s unique Asian materials may still not be digitized. Consult the division for details. <https://www.loc.gov/research-centers/asian/about-this-research-center/>.

⁸ From “Strivings of the Negro People,” *The Atlantic*, August 1897, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1897/08/strivings-of-the-negro-people/305446/>. Here Du Bois suggests that the “shadow” element in Black consciousness involved incorporating white

views into the Black psyche. In this, Du Bois differs from both Jung and Lu Xun. For them, the shadow carries important knowledge that the whole self needs, and integrating the ego-self and the shadow-self is necessary to the well-being of the entire psyche.

⁹In chapter 3 of *Violence and the Sacred*, Rene Girard offers a credible reading of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* as an exemplary literary rendition of scapegoating. In *Reading Lu Xun through Carl Jung*, I argue that "The True Story of Ah Q" offers an even better example. Among studies that imply that scapegoating is a universal phenomenon are Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*, *The Scapegoat*, and his other works. See also Eric Neumann's *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*.

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