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# The Sacred and the Cannibalistic: Zhou Zuoren's Critique of Violence in Modern China

## **Abstract**

This article explores the ways in which Zhou Zuoren critiqued violence in modern China as a belief--driven phenomenon. Differing from Lu Xun and other mainstream intellectuals, Zhou consistently denied the legitimacy of violence as a force for modernizing China. Relying on extensive readings in anthropology, intellectual history, and religious studies, he investigated the fundamental “nexus” between violence and the religious, political, and ideological beliefs. In the Enlightenment’s effort to achieve modernity, cannibalistic Confucianism was to be cleansed from the corpus of Chinese culture as the “barbaric” cultural Other, but Zhou was convinced that such barbaric cannibalism was inherited by the Enlightenment thinkers, and thus made the Enlightenment impossible. Through critiquing the violence in intellectual persecution and everyday life, and through identifying modern intellectuals and the masses as the major sponsors and agents of violence, Zhou questioned the legitimacy of the mainstream Enlightenment, modern political movements, and national salvation by defining them as inherently irrational and violent.

## **Disciplines**

Chinese Studies

## **Comments**

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# The Sacred and the Cannibalistic: Zhou Zuoren's Critique of Violence in Modern China

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This article explores the ways in which Zhou Zuoren critiqued violence in modern China as a belief-driven phenomenon. Differing from Lu Xun and other mainstream intellectuals, Zhou consistently denied the legitimacy of violence as a force for modernizing China. Relying on extensive readings in anthropology, intellectual history, and religious studies, he investigated the fundamental “nexus” between violence and the religious, political, and ideological beliefs. In the Enlightenment’s effort to achieve modernity, cannibalistic Confucianism was to be cleansed from the corpus of Chinese culture as the “barbaric” cultural Other, but Zhou was convinced that such barbaric cannibalism was inherited by the Enlightenment thinkers, and thus made the Enlightenment impossible. Through critiquing the violence in intellectual persecution and everyday life, and through identifying modern intellectuals and the masses as the major sponsors and agents of violence, Zhou questioned the legitimacy of the mainstream Enlightenment, modern political movements, and national salvation by defining them as inherently irrational and violent.

To kill a man is not to protect a doctrine, but it is to kill a man.  
—Sebastian Castellio, *Contra libellum*, # 77, Vaticanus

## *Introduction*

When it comes to violence, the contrast between wide practice and limited research is undeniable. In *On Violence*, Hannah Arendt notes that, although it plays an enormous role in human affairs, violence and its arbitrariness have been “taken for granted,” and, following Hobbes, she attributes the phenomenon to human nature.<sup>1</sup> The same can be said about the attitude towards violence in China. In discussing violence in elite culture, Barend J. ter Haar writes that violence in Chinese culture “has hardly been studied in a systematic way.”<sup>2</sup> Andrew F. Jones makes a similar

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego: HBJ, 1970), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Barend J. ter Haar, “Rethinking ‘Violence’ in Chinese Culture,” in *Meanings of Violence: a Cross Cultural Perspective*, eds. Göran Aijmer, and Jos Abbink (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 123.

observation in his discussion of Shi Zhicun 施蛰存 (1905-2003) and Yu Hua 余华 (1960- ).<sup>3</sup> Arendt's explanation aside, it might also be the case that, as a means to an end, violence is effective in practical terms and is therefore justified as necessary, especially in the resistance to injustice.<sup>4</sup> Any criticism of violence or advocacy of nonviolence is easily dismissed as socially unrealistic and politically naïve.<sup>5</sup> Critical response to the work of Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967) is a case in point. This study will demonstrate how his critique of violence<sup>6</sup> was marginalized in the discourse on the Chinese Enlightenment that began with the May Fourth movement.<sup>7</sup>

Differing from Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881-1936), who seldom questioned the use of violence in resistance, Zhou Zuoren consistently denied the legitimacy of violence as a force for modernizing China. According to Zhou, Lu Xun always insisted on answering hostility with more hostility: "If someone stares at him, he will get even with cursing; if someone curses him, he will repay it with a beating; if someone beats him, he will kill that person. He has such a harsh proposal, and such a great attitude."<sup>8</sup> Ironically, Zhou's sarcastic kudos from the 1960s could be read as a compliment, since Lu Xun's uncompromising attitude has been valued in the mainstream. From the outset, Zhou stressed that violence was not suitable for promoting social progress in China's historical context. Rather, he sought social change and intellectual engagement through nonviolence. He might have received influence from Christianity and the work of Tolstoy in formulating such ideas.<sup>9</sup> In 1918, it led him to the "New Village Movement," a utopian socialist movement

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Jones, "The Violence of the Text: Reading Yu Hua and Shi Zhicun," *positions* 2: no.3 (1994): 570-602.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Audi, "Preliminary theoretical considerations concerning the justification of violence," in *Violence in Modern Literature*, eds. James A. Gould, and John J. Iorio (SF: Boyd & Fraser Publishing, 1972), 66.

<sup>5</sup> For example, it is not until recently that Mahatma Gandhi's thoughts "officially" entered into China with the translation of *Gandhi's Outstanding Leadership* by Pascal Alan Nazareth. See Shang Quanyu, 甘地: 杰出的领袖 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2012) for the Chinese version.

<sup>6</sup> While there are numerous definitions of violence, in this article I will define it broadly, based on Zhou's use of the term, as the intense force inflicted on human beings to cause physiological, psychological, or symbolic damage for maintaining or subverting power relationships (domination, ideology, etc.).

<sup>7</sup> Although David Der-wei Wang and others have pushed the beginning of Chinese modernity to the Late Qing period, I will still define the mainstream Chinese Enlightenment as an intellectual movement from 1917 to 1927.

<sup>8</sup> Zhou Zuoren, *Memoir of Zhou Zuoren* 知堂回想录 (HK: San Yu Publishing, 1980), 425.

<sup>9</sup> Kōbai Inoue, "An Interview with Zhou Zuoren" 采访周作人, *A Retrospection of Zhou Zuoren: Literature Review* 回望周作人: 研究述评, trans. Dong Bingyue (Zhengzhou: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2004), 29; Ozaki Fumiaki, "The Zhou Zuoren Who Parted Ways with Chen Duxiu" 与陈独秀分道扬镳的周作人, *A Retrospection of Zhou Zuoren: Literature Review*, trans. Li Guangmo, 46; Ha Yingfei, *Half Confucian, Half Buddhist* 半是儒家半释家 (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 2007), 16-66.

founded in Japan by Saneatsu Mushanokōji (1885-1976).<sup>10</sup> By 1919, Zhou further argued that violence had to be avoided because of its potential to destroy a society and contaminate the intellectual atmosphere. Taking China's reality and history into consideration, he deemed it dangerous to resort to violent measures in social and political reforms, and regarded revolution as "unnecessary demolition." Any person who aspired to live a "model human life" had to rely on reason rather than violence.<sup>11</sup> Driven by his wish to preserve and nurture human life, he tirelessly maintained that "violence is not a choice" —no matter how legitimate an end it might serve.<sup>12</sup> Zhou's denial, in the late 1910s, of both the legitimacy of violence in general and revolution in particular prefigured his disagreement with the mainstream practices of his time. To him, the only meaningful form of resistance, as he proposed in 1922, was "resistance with reason."<sup>13</sup> However, he eventually abandoned his utopian dreams and became disillusioned with the increasingly violent tendencies that grew out of the idealism of the May Fourth movement.

Zhou eventually admitted that violence was part of the human condition. As he wrote in 1926, class struggle was not a Marxist invention but an undeniable fact, as true as the Darwinian idea of competition for survival.<sup>14</sup> In 1931, he repeated that human beings were organisms and that the principles of organic life also applied to humankind. In harsh competition, only the fittest survived and only force could answer force. To explain this cruel reality, he borrowed Wu Zhihui's 吴稚晖 (1865-1953) words: "One shoots you with a machine gun and you return fire with a machine gun."<sup>15</sup> Ironically enough, his faith in Darwinism did not convince him of the ultimately progressive direction of social development, but rather reinforced his pessimism about the cost of this development. The 1927 "White Terror" perpetrated by Chiang Kai-shek 蒋介石 (1887-1975) convinced him that "nonviolence" was impracticable. He transformed his previous proposal of "resistance with reason" into a purely epistemological activity. This choice further detached him from mainstream social movements, leading him to observe and meditate upon their violent nature in a highly artistic way.<sup>16</sup> The tensions between his lighthearted style and his disturbing subject matter helped create a sophisticated critical space—one which deserves more

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of Zhou's participation in the movement, see Qian Liqun, *Biography of Zhou Zuoren* 周作人传 (Beijing: Shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1990), 223-34.

<sup>11</sup> Zhou Zuoren, "New Village in Japan" 日本的新村, *Collected Essays of Zhou Zuoren* 周作人散文全集 vol.2, ed. Zhong Shuhe (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 136, 141.

<sup>12</sup> Zhou, "A Visit to New Village in Japan" 访日本新村记, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 181.

<sup>13</sup> Zhou, "The Centennial of Friedrich Schiller" 诗人席烈的百年忌, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 707.

<sup>14</sup> Zhou, "An Amateur's Comments" 外行的按语, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 512.

<sup>15</sup> Zhou, "On Enlisting Soldiers" 关于征兵, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 792.

<sup>16</sup> Zhou's artistic achievements have been widely recognized, and although self-portrayed as a hermit, in the 1930s he became the spiritual leader of the influential Peking School 京派, which included such important writers as Sheng Congwen 沈从文 (1902-1988), Xiao Qian 萧乾 (1910-1999), Zhu Guangqian 朱光潜 (1897-1986), and Yu Pingbo 俞平伯 (1900-1990).

scholarly attention than it has received. His case shows how a critique of violence is eventually silenced in the dominant discourses of social progress, communist revolution and national salvation.

In his numerous writings on violence, Zhou was continually pulled between his universalist ideals and his awareness of the contingent political reality in which he lived. For example, he seldom stayed within the discourse on the Chinese national character but consistently regarded its negative traits as universal human defects. He strove to explain these defects by attributing them to such factors as human nature, reason, individuality, gender and sexuality, revolution, belief and violence, among others. Approaching the “Chinese” problems as universal from a philosophical and anthropological perspective, he de-essentialized the concept of “China” and made it a placeholder he could use to examine human complexity. In a politically charged milieu, these examinations distinguished him as a thinker, even as they failed to reach his contemporaries. As he could not establish effective dialogues with his fellow intellectuals, they came to perceive him as a modern hermit terrified by bloody realities. His apparent detachment led them to dismiss his works as irrelevant, with the writer Lu Xun deriding them as “trinkets.” His critique of violence thus often ended as a monologue. Such a failure revealed the incompatibility between his individualistic, rationalistic and universalist thinking on the one hand and the dominant discourses celebrating the collective, the political and the national on the other.

Read as a whole, Zhou’s critique of violence formed an alternative to the mainstream conceptualization of violence. It also formed an indispensable dimension in his reflection on the limits of the Enlightenment project. As I have argued elsewhere, Zhou intended to carry out his own enlightenment project, focusing on gradual diffusion of reason and modern knowledge while refusing ideologically driven mainstream practices.<sup>17</sup> Here I further argue that, in Zhou’s critique of Chinese modernity, if belief framed the epistemological foundation of the mainstream Enlightenment project and the consequent political movements, violence constituted the mode of practice for those movements. Zhou proposed resisting such violence with reason, but this proposal was met with silence. As though his being ignored were not enough, he was also made a sacrificial lamb.

In Zhou’s rationale, belief formed what Andrew Murphy calls a “nexus,”<sup>18</sup> a “reciprocal” relationship with violence: Violence became instrumental as well as essential to the practices of sustaining or demolishing the prevailing religious, political, and ideological beliefs, which, in return, popularized and sanctified the use of violence. If uncritical belief was what Zhou criticized as the end, violence was the practical means to such an end.

<sup>17</sup> Tonglu Li, “To Believe or Not to Believe: Zhou Zuoren’s Alternative Approaches to the Chinese Enlightenment,” *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture*, 25.1 (2013): 206-60.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Murphy, *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 2.

As a study to make sense of such complexities, this article will delineate Zhou's critique of violence in the context of Chinese modernity. It will focus on the ways in which violence was legitimized by thinkers in the intellectual and political mainstream. It will also explore its rationalization, its institutional and everyday manifestations, its proponents and agents, and its influence on intellectual identity. As a prolific writer, Zhou developed his ideas in a non-systematic fashion with references to the bloodstained social practices of his time. He concurrently focused on issues of faith, violence, and everyday life. These themes recur constantly, anchoring his fragmented writings. It is possible, therefore, to construct from them a mosaic that illustrates his systematic critique of violence. As we will find out, Zhou shares much common ground with scholars today, who continue his project by dissecting the cultural hegemony that formed the core of Chinese modernity.

### *Cannibalism and the Nexus of Belief and Violence*

Zhou Zuoren endeavored to explore the fundamental "nexus" between violence and the religious, political, and ideological beliefs through a universalist approach. He relied on extensive readings in anthropology, intellectual history, and religious studies as lenses through which to view China's reality. Several questions drew his concern: What was behind the intermittent violence? What ultimately drove violence? How was violence legitimized and even sanctified in human history? While commenting in 1934 on the persecution of homosexuals by German Nazis, Zhou ridiculed the extreme act of book burning for its similarity to the deeds of the Chinese First Emperor and the popes of the Middle Ages. The parallels not only served his rhetorical purposes but also reflected his understanding of historical continuity, which manifested itself not through progress but through the recurrence of violence:

In the past, whenever a man went crazy, the savages thought that he was possessed by gods and issued oracular pronouncements through his delirious words. These people also thought that gods carried out divine punishments through the madman's killings and arson. Therefore, they would fear and worship him. In medieval times, priests thought that he was possessed by demons and would whip and confine him, even burn him alive to exorcise the demons and save his soul. It was not until the modern era that people realized that he had a mental disorder and needed to be treated as a patient.<sup>19</sup>

In his version of the "History of Madness," religious beliefs motivated the faithful to inflict harm on people's bodies. In this passage, being "modern" and "civilized" means the separating faith from knowledge, consequently reducing violence. "Savage people" believed that violence was divine punishment and accepted it as their destiny. For Zhou, the European Middle Ages were the historical equivalent of a cautionary

<sup>19</sup> Zhou, "On Arresting Homosexuals" 关于捉同性恋, *Collected Essays* vol.6, 449.

example: an age when religious prelates reigned, using violence with the professed aim of achieving truth and justice. It was in this sense that the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazis was a regression to the Middle Ages.

Zhou's purpose was not only to criticize Nazi Germany but also to observe how China had regressed. This made particular sense in the 1930s, when the Nationalist government was developing relationship with the Nazis. To him, however, China's situation was even worse than Germany's. The problem was not the violent persecution of homosexuals, but the legitimization of practices like ruthless killings, cannibalism, and rape—at least as they were recorded in unofficial histories 野史. As Zhou pointed out in 1936, he and his intellectual nemesis Lu Xun had a common interest in reading about historical catastrophes in unofficial histories.<sup>20</sup> Recalling the unofficial accounts he read in early years, Zhou confessed that the Sichuan massacres committed by Zhang Xianzhong 张献忠 (1606-1647) during the late Ming had left the deepest impression on him. Fascinated by how “advanced” the technology of violence was, Lu Xun attributed the killing to Zhang's political desperation, which had been provoked by the impossibility of his taking the throne.<sup>21</sup> On another occasion he questioned how the massacre victims could have accepted their destiny without any resistance.<sup>22</sup> Differing from Lu Xun's politicized reading, Zhou's psychological/psychoanalytic reading of the victims and victimizers focused on the ways in which these ruthless killings compromised humanity itself. Another unforgettable book was *Record of My Past Trauma* 思痛记, written by Li Xiaochi 李小池 (1842-1903). Li had been caught by the Taiping rebels and bore witness to their violent acts. Zhou complained in 1940 that nobody, including Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962), understood his obsession with such books.<sup>23</sup> The unofficial accounts functioned as the common ground for the Zhou brothers to construct a counter-memory about the Chinese nation that could stand apart from the imagined glorious Confucian social order constructed by official historians. Reading the terror recorded in their writings marked a disenchanting moment in Zhou's encounter with social reality and formed his major point of reference in his conceptualization of the modern.

The types of historical violence Zhou focused on are those inherent to Confucian ideology; cannibalism, one such type of violence, constantly haunted him. Literary and historical accounts of cannibalism in ancient China are not difficult to find. The symbolic use of cannibalism in defining Chinese culture became widely known with the publication of Wu Yu 吴虞 (1872-1949) and Lu Xun's works in the late 1910s. For Wu and Lu Xun, invoking cannibalism was more or less a rhetorical tactic they could use to condemn Confucianism. For Zhou, the corporeal dimension of cannibalism was not to be ignored: physical cannibalism became symbolic, while the symbolic variety

<sup>20</sup> Zhou, “On Lu Xun” 关于鲁迅, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 434.

<sup>21</sup> Lu Xun, “Random Thoughts during Sickness” 病后杂谈, *Complete Works of Lu Xun* 鲁迅全集 vol.6, (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2005), 170-71.

<sup>22</sup> Lu Xun, “Random Notes in the Cool of the Morning” 晨凉漫记, *Complete Works* vol.5, 248-49.

<sup>23</sup> Zhou, “*Record of My Past Trauma*,” *Collected Essays* vol.8, 368-69.



endorsed the physical consumption of human flesh. He stated in 1925 that the Chinese are a cannibalistic people: “Symbolically speaking, there is the man-eating Confucian ethical code. For those positivists who ask for evidence, we suggest that they read history.” Then he turned to discuss “the most celebrated event”: the Song loyalists from Shandong managed to travel to the royal court’s new southern location; en route, they lived on dried human flesh.<sup>24</sup> This traumatic event lingered in Zhou’s mind. In 1947, he wrote a piece of doggerel about it while being imprisoned as a traitor:

Reading unofficial history, I often feel like I am encountering ghosts and goblins;  
They occupy my mind in the day and break into my dreams at midnight.  
[...]  
There were the Shandong loyalists during the Jingkang Reign [1126-1127].  
Loyal and righteous, they survived on human flesh as they traveled south.  
Some leftovers were still there when they arrived at the capital city.  
Submissively, the “two-legged lambs” approached the cooking vessel. It is indeed  
lamentable.  
How privileged they were to be made into smoked jerky!  
Chewed by the loyalists, their flesh was transformed into the righteous *qi*.  
Eating human flesh could bring enormous fortune.  
Eventually, those cannibals will accomplish outstanding achievements.  
Praised for being capable and virtuous, they will lecture in academies.  
Distinguished and influential, they will engage in political affairs.  
As ephemeral as a single day, a thousand years pass by,  
There is no difference between the present and the past.  
The so-called “new trends” are nothing but a deception,  
If things from the past return to our life.<sup>25</sup>

The poem is written in a casual style conjoining seriousness with lighthearted humor. In the words of Kiyama Hedio, it combines a “playful freestyle and a critical moralism.”<sup>26</sup> Titled “Spring Purification Festival” 修禊, it reveals, in a deeply sarcastic tone, how the human body itself became an object of consumption and how

<sup>24</sup> Zhou, “Eating Martyr” 吃烈士, *Collected Essays* vol. 4, 245. The story was originally recorded by Zhuang Chuo (1079-1149) in his *Chicken Ribs* 鸡肋编. Based on similar records, Yu Hua’s 1988 novella *Classical Love* 古典爱情 provides graphic and disturbing scenes of transactions in the human flesh market. See Yu Hua’s *Classical Love* (Beijing: renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2006), 1-39.

<sup>25</sup> Zhou, *Poems Written in the Tiger Bridge Prison* 老虎桥杂诗, ed. Zhi An (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 48-49.

<sup>26</sup> Kiyama Hideo, *Zhou Zuoren during the Sino-Japanese War* 北京苦住庵记, trans. Zhao Jinghua (Beijing: sanlian shudian, 2008), 238.

cannibalism contributed to the loyalists' righteousness. To Zhou, the absurdity of reality could only be depicted using such a style.<sup>27</sup>

What disturbed him was not only the cannibalistic act *as such*, but its glorification, legitimization, and sacralization accomplished in the name of resisting foreign invasions, maintaining unconditional loyalty to the emperor, and promoting righteousness. The celebrated cannibalism of the Song loyalists in the poem implies that political beliefs demand human sacrifice in a literal sense. Picturing the loyalists chewing dried human flesh and transforming it into the righteous *qi*, Zhou substantiates the deep connection between the corporeal and the ideological. Therefore, it is sarcastic as well as realistic when he writes that it is an "honor" for the victims to sacrifice their bodies for the great cause. In such a political discourse, the killing and eating of the anonymous, innocent civilians not only becomes acceptable, but also acquires a sublime status and an aura. To borrow from Yue Gang's discussion of the gender-specific cannibalism in *Three Kingdoms*, "the victim is offered as food to the political 'phallus'."<sup>28</sup>

What made it even more unacceptable to Zhou was that cannibalism was "aestheticized" through the mediation of language by the cannibal-loyalists, who had the leisure to name the slim senior male they ate "more firewood is needed" 饶把火, the young female "better-tasting than lamb" 不慕羊, and the small child "both flesh and bones are mushy" 合骨烂, while giving all the common name of "two-legged lamb" 两脚羊. Such stylized and flippant naming indicated that, desperate and starving as they were, the cannibals still wrung pleasure from the act of eating their fellow humans. The dual functions of the mouth, eating and speaking, thus formed a mutually enhancing relationship: eating human flesh could not in itself provide sufficient gratification; it had to be recognized and fixed in the symbolic order, which, in Lacanian terms, is language itself. Lu Xun also paid particular attention to this case, regarding such euphemistic naming as a political tactic to legitimize cannibalism: Consuming human flesh became justifiable only with a linguistic conversion, through which human beings became animals and flesh became meat.<sup>29</sup> Zhou went beyond the political domain, viewing the "aesthetic cannibalism" as a symptomatic act that marked the point of no return for the fall of humanity, an indicator of "the total death of the human heart and soul."<sup>30</sup> As Howard Goldblatt puts it, cannibalism is "the ultimate secular taboo, for at its most extreme, it combines the sin/crime of murder, in the pursuit of revenge, survival, or (as in Larson's cartoon) curiosity and pleasure; a repudiation of the sanctity of mortal remains; and the removal of the veneer of

<sup>27</sup> Shu Wu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits* 周作人的是非功过 (Beijing: renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1993), 113, 248.

<sup>28</sup> Yue Gang, *The Mouth that Begs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 57.

<sup>29</sup> Lu Xun, "Body Search" 抄靶子, *Complete Works* vol.5, 215-217.

<sup>30</sup> Zhou, "On Man-eating" 谈食人, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 613. It is renamed as "Exotic Events in History" 谈史志奇 in *Talks in the Candle Light* 秉烛谈 (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1940).

civilized behavior.”<sup>31</sup> Ironically, Zhou observed that it was always those cannibal-loyalists who fell below the standards of civilized humanity who later gained control of knowledge production and political power.

Zhou’s point was that such phenomena were not unique in history. As we can see, this poem is framed by his apprehension that cannibalistic ghosts are being reincarnated in China: while physical cannibalism might have ceased to exist, symbolic cannibalism still prospered. This is why he turns on the May Fourth intellectuals toward the end of the poem. He suggests that they are precise reincarnations of the cannibals his poem excoriates, and that their pursuit of the “modern” merely covers up the resumption of historical violence. By using the term “new trends” in his poem, according to Chen Yimin, Zhou was punning on the title of *The Renaissance* 新潮, a journal edited by Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896-1950). Fu had been Zhou’s disciple at Peking University during the Enlightenment years and held high official positions in the KMT government in the 1940s. It might have been Fu’s unsympathetic perception of Zhou as a traitor after the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) that motivated him to write this poem.<sup>32</sup> However, Zhou’s critical view of the Enlightenment should be understood more as an effort to reflect on the dilemmas of Chinese modernity itself than as a personal act of retaliation.

In the Enlightenment’s effort to achieve modernity, cannibalistic Confucianism was to be cleansed from the corpus of Chinese culture as the “barbaric” cultural Other. Whereas for Lu Xun, the modernizing project relied on the children who had not eaten human flesh and thus could escape the stigma of cannibalism, Zhou was more pessimistic: there was no escape, at least for the intellectuals of his generation who claimed to be “modern.” Such a view reminds us of Benedetto Croce’s famous maxim: “All history is contemporary history,” by which he means “all serious study of the past is informed by the problems and needs of the writer’s own time.”<sup>33</sup> The problem for Zhou was mainly the inescapable continuity of history, which determined that the “barbaric” cultural Other was never far from the modern.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Howard Goldblatt, “Forbidden Food: ‘The Saturnicon’ of Mo Yan,” *World Literature Today*, 74.3 (2000): 477. Gary Larson (1950- ) is a U.S. cartoonist who authored *The Far Side*.

<sup>32</sup> Chen Yimin, “The Lost Poems of Zhou Zuoren and His Life in the Zhongshu Prison 忠舍轶诗与狱中的周作人,” *Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan* 3(1999):57-62. In another doggerel poem written in the same period of time, Zhou directly referred to Fu as the righteous loyalists. See Kiyama Hideo, *Zhou Zuoren during the Sino-Japanese War*, 281-3. For Fu’s purges of the “traitors” after the war based on the idea of loyalty, see Wang Fan-sen, *Fu Ssu-Nien: A Life in Chinese History and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 177-179.

<sup>33</sup> Dain A. Trafton, “Political Doctrine in Croce’s History of the Kingdom of Naples,” in *The Legacy of Benedetto Croce: Contemporary Critical Views*, eds. Jack D’Amico, Dain A. Trafton and Massimo Verdicchio (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 103.

<sup>34</sup> Yue Gang argues that “In its drive to modernize, the May Fourth new culture movement inherited a colonial legacy that was infused with the teleology and ideology embedded in historiographical writing since the Enlightenment” (*The Mouth that Begs*, 71). He goes on to argue that Lu Xun borrowed the anthropological discourse on cannibalism to diagnose the old

*Intellectual Persecution and Institutional Violence*

In the early 1920s, Zhou Zuoren insisted that, despite the intensifying political struggles, the most dangerous tendency in China was the persecution of intellectuals, which began with the project of unifying thought among citizens. In 1920, he stressed that although people might live a similar material life, their spiritual lives radically diverged. Individual differences were irreducible and could not be annihilated in the name of "Great Harmony," for such attempts would lead to a new form of despotism that sapped culture and thought of its uniqueness.<sup>35</sup> Ironically, he considered the Enlightenment itself the heir of traditional tactics of repression and oppression. Zhou's such view was indebted to his reading of European intellectual history. He cited the British scholar J. B. Bury on the history of freedom of thought in Europe: "[T]he intellectual justification of the Protestant rebellion against the Church had been the right of private judgment, that is, the principle of religious liberty. But the Reformers had asserted it only for themselves, and as soon as they had framed their own articles of faith, they had practically repudiated it."<sup>36</sup> Zhou noted that this was even the case in literature: once a new trend establishes itself as mainstream, it starts to suppress newer ones that challenge its position. He was not surprised upon hearing the news in 1925 that Leo Tolstoy's works were banned in Socialist Russia: "The Russians were a religious people, but now the social system has changed and it is said that God and the Bible have lost their followers."<sup>37</sup> The novelty lay only in the

China, while the discourse was transformed into a colonial discourse due to the imbalanced power relationship between China and the West. It is in this colonial discourse that Lu Xun formed a "colonial gaze" to define China as "cannibalistic," and unleashed his "hatred and self-hatred, disgust and distain" towards the Chinese through his allegorical representation of cannibalism (*The Mouth that Begs*, 100). However, we should also notice that the postcolonial perspective might not be sufficient, considering the fact that the Zhou brothers' early traumatic experience in reading the stories on cannibalism happened long before they were exposed to Western anthropology.

<sup>35</sup> Zhou, "The Ideal and Reality of the New Village" 新村的理想与实际, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 240.

<sup>36</sup> Zhou, "Tolerance in Literature and Arts" 文艺上的宽容, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 512, cited from J. B. Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought* (Cambridge, MA: The University Press, 1913) 81. In his 1936 book *The Right to Heresy: Castellio against Calvin*, Stephen Zweig also observed similar phenomena in European religious history.

<sup>37</sup> Zhou, "Matters about Tolstoy" 托尔斯泰的事情, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 68. Chinese intellectuals were divided in their attitude toward the newly established Soviet Russia. Zhou belonged to the camp that questioned the Soviet society for its endangering individual freedom and its violent approaches towards social change. Xu Zhimo, for example, expressed his deep concern similar to that of Zhou after traveling to Russia. He writes, "They believed the existence of the Paradise, which could be materialized. But there is a sea, a sea of blood, between the current reality and that Paradise. Human have to swim through the sea of blood

fact that, “In the past one thing was banned and now it is another. In the past, the suppression was from the emperor and now it is from the masses. Yet both are equally arbitrary and despotic.”<sup>38</sup> The old system had been overthrown, but what survived was the same mechanism of intellectual persecution.

Several events in the 1920s alarmed Zhou because they demonstrated the tendency of violent suppression of dissent in the intellectual fields. In 1923-1924, a group of scientists led by Ding Wenjiang 丁文江 (1887-1936) waged a war against the so-called metaphysicians, such as Zhang Junmai 张君勱 (1886-1969), who proposed to define the meaning of life beyond the domain of the sciences. During the debate, the scientists called Zhang a “ghost of metaphysics” 玄學鬼 and wanted to beat him down. In 1924, Zhou argued that the necessary course was not to *destroy* the “ghosts” with radical measures, but to *prevent* them from harming the living. In Zhou’s view, what the European Church had done—burning people’s bodies to keep them from falling into hell—was to be avoided. “We could not adopt it because our purpose is the opposite: we intend to exorcise the ghosts, and therefore we need different approaches.”<sup>39</sup> This can be read as a footnote to his proposal for “a revolution of thought,” which aimed to get rid of the old beliefs instead of persecuting those who held them. Behind his sarcastic remark about the Inquisition lay his apprehension that “evil seeds” might be planted amid the effort to beat down the “evil.” If science became the only criterion for judging the truth of a claim, it could turn into absolute scientism and even become an aggressive force for suppressing other voices. Following the same line of reasoning, he questioned the anti-Christianity movement, which proposed a total elimination of the religion, and expressed concern about the return of the despotic “ghost” through it.<sup>40</sup> As he observed, although the movement might have a legitimate motive, the oppression and terror implicit in its violent approaches were indefensible.<sup>41</sup> Such approaches were no different than what the Boxers had done; their spirit might still be haunting modern people.<sup>42</sup> Seen as “evil seeds” planted by the Enlightenment, the movements that looked to science to save the nation could eventually incite large-scale physical violence.

before they can reach the other shore. Now they decided to have the sea of blood come into being first.” *Complete Works of Xu Zhimo* 徐志摩全集 vol.4 (HK: Commercial Press, 1983), 109.

<sup>38</sup> Zhou, “Sambenito” 黑背心, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 206.

<sup>39</sup> Zhou, “Our Enemy” 我们的敌人, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 561.

<sup>40</sup> See Ozaki, “The Zhou Zuoren Who Parted Ways with Chen Duxiu,” 145-162; Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 117-126; Ni Moyan, *Zhou Zuoren and His Bitter Rain Study* 苦雨斋主人周作人 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2003), 178-185; Qian Liqun, *21 Lectures on Zhou Zuoren* 周作人研究二十一讲 (Beijing: zhonghua shuju, 2004), 193-208.

<sup>41</sup> Qian, *21 Lectures on Zhou Zuoren*, 197.

<sup>42</sup> Zhou, “Reading the Bloodshed in Beijing” 读京华碧血录, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 420.

The White Terror of 1927 marked the end of the Enlightenment project in China.<sup>43</sup> While there are different interpretations of the KMT's ruthless killing of the Communists, Zhou, in 1928, summarized the massacre as the culmination of a pervasive campaign to persecute intellectuals.<sup>44</sup> In view of the anti-Christianity movement and its subsequent development, Zhou predicted the White Terror: "I have feared the rise of a reactionary movement for the past six years, and now it is finally here. Much as our sage Kang Youwei 康有为 said, 'the prophecy has unfortunately come true.'" Zhou defined those events as "reactionary" in the sense that they aimed at unifying people's thoughts; they were not only manufactured by outside forces to suppress the Enlightenment but also generated from within the Enlightenment, by those who saw extending violence as a logical way to achieve consensus—or at least the appearance of it. To Zhou, the superficial distinctions between the old and the new, the backward and the progressive, were unimportant when they fed the same hostile attitude toward intellectual freedom: "Killing people for their thought is most horrible. If China wants a better future, such killing must stop, and new schools of thoughts in politics, economics, religion, and art should be allowed to express themselves."<sup>45</sup> When the intellectual field was split and most intellectuals took sides with either the KMT or the CCP, Zhou distinguished himself as a liberal intellectual who endeavored to go beyond politics. For that reason he underplayed the political causes of the events and decried killing people for their thoughts as unacceptable, no matter what purposes were served by it. Yet his proposal for intellectual freedom could not be heard by those engaged in the killing; even their victims might have regarded Zhou's position as naïve.

The White Terror was an unspeakable trauma for him. It went so far beyond his rational comprehension that he had to attribute its violent course to psychological traits embedded in the minds of his countrymen. He expressed his frustration in 1928:

It seems that Chinese people regard killing not as a negative means to prevent harm (assuming it is effective) but as the end in itself. They take advantage of the occasions to satisfy their desire for killing. I cannot guarantee that this does not happen in other countries, but it is certainly a deep-rooted hereditary disease in China. From emperor and generals to scholars and hooligans, all are severely infected. If China perishes in the future, this disease, rather than imperialist invasion, will be the final cause.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> For a detailed account of the cleansing, see Yang Kuisong, "A Study on the KMT's Party-Cleansing Movement in Nanjing in 1927" 1927年南京国民党清党运动研究, *Lishi yanjiu* 6(2005): 42-62.

<sup>44</sup> Zhou, "Postscript to *Talk about Tigers*" 谈虎集后记, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 434.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Zhou, "How Should It Be Discussed?" 怎么说才好, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 319-320.

From the Qing's killing of the revolutionaries and Yuan Shikai's 袁世凯 killing of the Nationalists, to the Nationalists' killing of the Communists,<sup>47</sup> history "progressed" into the modern era. People were obsessed with killing, regardless of right or wrong. The result was defeat for all factions, and triumph for violence alone. He could still comprehend violence as a means, yet he could not rationalize it as an end, unless he accepted it as something innate in the psyche of the Chinese people. In 1927 Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893-1976) defined such violence as the motor of revolution in his "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan." Mao believed he had found the truth about liberating China, a truth that promised to erase all other terrors with the greatest Terror that ever existed. Zhou, on the other hand, regarded all terrors as equal, and the latest obsession added but another link to the unbreakable chain of violence in the country.

In Zhou's understanding of the contemporary China, the European Inquisition became a necessary point of reference. As he wrote in 1928, "Chinese people are inclined to kill others for their thought, accusing them of being heretical and of violating orthodox teachings. The same phenomena also existed in Europe from ancient times through the nineteenth century."<sup>48</sup> Naturally, he used the term "Dark Ages" (traditionally used to describe the period beginning with the fall of the Roman Empire and ending with the Renaissance) to describe his own time, in which "The beasts in the forests have finally stopped harming people, but the invisible ghosts and spirits are still wondering around to claim the souls of people." Under such circumstances, the political slogans such as "of the people," "by the people" or "the freedom of assembly and speech" became meaningless. He wrote that his prime concern was to examine "repressing the freedom of thought in cases such as literary and religious inquisitions." In western cultural history, the two cultural traditions that attracted his attention were the *auto-da-fé* and *sambenito*.<sup>49</sup> The *auto-da-fé* or "the act of faith" was a public ceremony performed during the Spanish Inquisition to punish the heretics and apostates, and the *sambenito* was the garment worn by the convicted heretics during the ceremony. In his writings, both become profound symbols of intellectual persecution.

Zhou then targeted the agent of the Inquisition, the Catholic Church. Although he appreciated the tradition of humanistic thought within Christianity and defended freedom of belief, in 1927 he still criticized the Church for having launched the Inquisition, harshly pointing out its internal contradictions:

Christianity is a religion of fraternity, but it has an old tradition, and God sometimes is tyrannical. In addition, there is a Satan just as there are clowns in theater. Thus,

<sup>47</sup> In his writing, Zhou never denounced the Communists' killing of landlords prior to the White Terror. However, he did question communism as a violent, dogma-driven social movement.

<sup>48</sup> Zhou, "On Witchcraft" 关于妖术, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 531.

<sup>49</sup> Zhou, "Sambenito," 203.

the heretical and the orthodox opposed each other and such conflicts have hindered cultural development. It is written in Exodus 22.18, "You shall not permit a sorceress to live." If one believes in the existence of witchcraft, there will be an anti-witchcraft movement, which is no less problematic than witchcraft itself.<sup>50</sup>

With its binary view of good and evil, Christianity became inherently violent through its demand that an evil be created and then conquered. Zhou understood this moral equivalent of binary opposition as a Daoist dialectical process, in which opposing forces not only clashed with, but also transformed into each other: the Church became evil when, seeking to purge evil itself, it violently removed witchcraft. The ruthless killing proved that the Church itself believed in the truth of witchcraft, for only those who believed in the effectiveness of witchcraft would wage a war against it.<sup>51</sup> In the 1930s and 1940s, Zhou continued to explore the genealogy of intellectual persecution and used it to draw parallels to terrifying modern violence. In 1937, he associated the European Inquisition with the intellectual persecution in Chinese history when discussing the role of the cat in witchcraft. Such "ruling by terror" goes beyond national boundaries since humankind shares the same fate. He was "deeply terrified and shocked, and could not look at those events with indifference and delight, because mankind is one."<sup>52</sup> To him, the Chinese literary inquisitions were similar to witch trials, as they had both been lingering on his mind and oppressing his spirit.

Zhou rationalized witchcraft, whose practitioners he regarded as the victims of Inquisition, as an historical phenomenon deeply associated with both science and religion. In a 1941 essay on *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* by Montague Summers, he discussed the nature of witchcraft and its fate in the Christian era: "From a perspective of cultural history, witchcraft, with its charms and spells, is the science of a primitive people. It is based on the natural law. While science is based on facts and can be verified, witchcraft is founded on the law of association and may not necessarily be able to be verified."<sup>53</sup> As a way of making sense of the world and preserving humanity, witchcraft contains no malign or mythical element. Persecutions based on such accusations, therefore, were unfounded, and he "could not stop sympathizing with the witches who played the various tricks. The torture and killing in the Inquisition was unnecessary."<sup>54</sup> When compared to the polemical slurs he wrote in the 1920s, the seemingly casual term "unnecessary" illustrates the more resigned and detached attitude toward violence he had taken over the

<sup>50</sup> Zhou, "From Jews to Catholics" 从犹太人到天主教, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 61. The phrase from Exodus is cited from the NKJV Study Bible, copyright ©1997, 2007 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Zhou, "On Cats" 赋得猫, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 560.

<sup>53</sup> Zhou, "The History of Witchcraft and Demonology" 妖术史, *Collected Essays* vol.8, 539.

<sup>54</sup> See footnote 51.



intervening decades. Even when this violence was irrationally done in the name of progress, national salvation, or revolution, it could by then do little to raise his ire.

*The Gendered Body and the Violence of the Everyday*

While the everyday seldom became a major concern to Lu Xun, to Zhou, it was a domain for studying the consciousness and lifestyle of the majority, and a major battlefield for Enlightenment. His obsession with the “trivial” matters such as food and drink, customs, leisure and festivals offended some leftist critics in the 1930s. Commenting on the habit of drinking, he defended himself in 1938: “Although persuading others in drink is a trivial matter, I am continually talking about it. Am I making a fuss over a trifle? Not necessarily. The world is in reverse order. Some trivial matters may not be as trivial as they seem to be, and often some apparently significant matters may not be as significant as they are claimed.”<sup>55</sup> Such opinions subvert grand narratives of enlightenment, national salvation, and revolution. The significance of the trivial matters in the everyday life, however, needed to be defined. Some scholars have argued that Zhou “resacralized” the everyday in the course of denying the force of the grand narratives. Such an impression might be based more on the literary works he created to negate the political reality. As Susan Daruvala puts it, “By equating politics and religion and disconnecting both from an (implicit) ineffable, Zhou was able to deflect the May Fourth nation-building project from what remained. This was not only the individual but also the ordinary and the everyday which were, in a sense, resacralized. The process I refer to as resacralization is most clearly understood and realized in relation to the aesthetic category of flavor (*quwei*).”<sup>56</sup> It is insightful to highlight the significance of “the ordinary and the everyday” in Zhou’s aesthetic construction. However, beyond the aesthetic domain, no indication can be found that he resacralized the everyday to fill the center of signification left empty by his renunciation of mainstream practice. Rather, he celebrated the corporeality of human life, promoting the everyday as a desacralized, mundane space. It is a space celebrating “life for life’s sake,” or a life of “decadence” in Ito Noriya’s terms: such a space refused to serve a higher political purpose, and insisted on regarding the (regulated) leisure as the end in itself.<sup>57</sup> Putting the inverted world order back into its “normal” order, the everyday became, in Zhou’s rationale, *the* major site upon which people construct the meaning of their life.

Assigning epistemological and ontological importance to the everyday, Zhou found no less violence when turning his eyes to the *reality* of the everyday. This form

<sup>55</sup> Zhou, “On Encouraging Others to Drink” 谈劝酒, *Collected Essays* vol.8, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Susan Daruvala, *Zhou Zuoren and an Alternative Chinese Response to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 122.

<sup>57</sup> Noriya Ito, “Life for Life’s Sake” Seikatsu no tame no seikatsu, *Journal of the Institute for Advanced Studies on Asia*, vol.155 (2009): 61-92.

of violence might not be as visually disturbing or intense as those carried out during “significant” social events. For that reason, it becomes “invisible” in traditional historiography. Through the mediation of moral, ideological, or religious doctrines, violence was transformed into a legitimate means of regulating people’s daily conduct, to sustain the (male-centered) social order, and to serve allegedly higher social and spiritual purposes. As presented in his writings, everyday violence is principally directed toward women. To some extent, the doctrines have consolidated their domination of the everyday through applying meticulous “techniques” for negating the female body and repressing sexual desire, and through instilling contempt for women. Contesting the violence of the everyday, Zhou regarded it critical to transform the various belief systems that underpinned it. But by the late 1910s he realized that they were difficult to transform. And the domain of the everyday rather often became the stronghold of “savage” beliefs. While discussing Edward Carpenter’s *Love’s Coming-of-Age* in 1918, Zhou cited Havelock Ellis:

In religion and politics we have, after a great struggle, gained the priceless possibility of liberty and sincerity. But the region of sex is still, like our moral and social life generally, to a large extent unreclaimed; there still exist barbarous traditions which medieval Christianity has helped to perpetuate, so that the words of Pliny regarding the contaminating touch of a woman, who has always been regarded as, in a peculiar manner, the symbol of sex—“Nihil facile reperiabatur mulierum profluvio magis monstrificum”—are not even yet meaningless. Why should the sweetening breath of science be guarded from this spot? Why should not “freedom and faith and earnestness” be introduced here? Our attitude towards this part of life affects profoundly our attitude towards life altogether.<sup>58</sup>

Here Ellis points out an important phenomenon in the West: that people’s attitudes about and values regarding sex, did not “progress” with the progress of science. Sex life had still remained off-limits to scientific investigation through the end of the nineteenth century. Zhou fully accepted Ellis’s view on the importance of sex life, and tried to prove how the taboos on sex compromised people’s general quality of life. Meanwhile, as he wrote in 1926, over thousands of years, the lower and broader domain of people’s life was as static as the bottom of the sea.<sup>59</sup> Thus, it was difficult to erase the pervasive everyday violence associated with conventional beliefs.

Against the religious views that despise the body as impure and as inferior to the soul and spirit, Zhou proposed a “pure view” 净观 of the human body and of sexual desire. He translated the phrase Ellis cited from Pliny, “Nihil facile reperiabatur mulierum profluvio magis monstrificum” as “nothing is uglier than women’s menstrual flow.” The phrase, which could be rendered more neutrally as “nothing

<sup>58</sup> Zhou, “*Love’s Coming-of-Age*” 爱的成年, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 65-6. Cited from Havelock Ellis, *The New Spirit* (London: George Bell, and Sons, 1890), 126-7.

<sup>59</sup> Zhou, “Customs on Returning from A Funeral and Buying Water” 回丧与买水, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 415.

could easily be found that is more remarkable than the monthly flux of woman,"<sup>60</sup> bore severe consequences in practice. Dean-Jones has pointed out that Pliny's claims of the power of menstrual women were used during the Inquisition to identify witches.<sup>61</sup> Zhou indicated that, if the power of the time-honored phrase was sustained by Christianity dogma, it could engender harmful attempts to efface menstrual "ugliness." In other words, delegitimizing the female body, along with its bodily discharges and desires, paved the way for inflicting violence on it.

Comparing the Bible with the works of other non-Christian cultures, Zhou inferred that asceticism in Christianity went too far to serve the needs of the human body. Although not being against the idea of asceticism, he was fully aware of its negative implications. Following Ellis, he argued that human desire should be regulated, but only for making its enjoyment stronger, longer lasting and more refined. As he commented on *Married Love* by Marie Stopes, "Religious asceticism is abominable. Yet it is possible to apply reasonable regulations on desire. By so doing, not only could pure love be cultivated, dreams could also be conceived to become the seeds of art."<sup>62</sup> In 1927 he cited Ellis's opinion that, with its view of the female body, Christian asceticism denied the purity and beauty of erotic love:

The breath of Christian asceticism had passed over love; it was no longer, as in classic days, an art to be cultivated, but only a malady to be cured. The true inheritor of the classic spirit in this, as in many other matters, was not the Christian world, but the world of Islam. *The Perfumed Garden* of the Sheik Nefzoui was probably written in the city of Tunis early in the sixteenth century by an author who belonged to the south of Tunis. The opening invocation clearly indicates that it departs widely from the conception of love as a disease: "Praise be to God who has placed man's greatest pleasure in the natural parts of woman, and has destined the natural parts of man to afford the greatest enjoyments to woman."<sup>63</sup>

Ellis dreamed of a classical era during which erotic love was cultivated. Zhou might not be as nostalgic as Ellis was, but he did find the attitude toward erotic love in some "heretical" works—such as *The Perfumed Garden* (which he doubtless read in Burton's famous translation) and Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*,—was much more "natural" and healthier than that of Christianity. Both works celebrated female-centered bodily enjoyment. To him, such views were quite "modern."<sup>64</sup> As for Christianity, the

<sup>60</sup> Cited from Marlene Zuk, *Sexual Selections: What We Can and Can't Learn about Sex from Animals* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 154.

<sup>61</sup> Lesley Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249.

<sup>62</sup> Zhou, "Married Love" 结婚的爱, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 58.

<sup>63</sup> Zhou, "A Second Discussion on *The Perfumed Garden*" 再谈香园, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 278. Cited from Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol.6 (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1911), 513.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 280.

influence of its outdated views of the female body still prevailed, no matter how much reform was carried out. This led to a disappointing result: not only were women still despised as “chamber pots” by the religious reformer Martin Luther (1483–1546), misogyny was even popular among some modern philosophers such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Otto Weininger.<sup>65</sup> Zhou insisted that, no matter how “modern” their ideas appeared to be or how stridently they might denounce Christianity, these philosophers were still under its sway where women were concerned.

While most of the Enlightenment thinkers almost exclusively targeted Confucianism during and after the Enlightenment, Zhou was among the few who brought Buddhism into discussions of gender and sexuality.<sup>66</sup> He argued that Buddhism in China had played a role comparable to that of Christianity in Europe. While admitting that Buddhism, through its benevolence, sought to entice women to pursue the eternal happiness of the afterlife, he contested its view of the female body as impure. In 1924, He pointed out the differences between the Confucian and the Buddhist views on women, arguing that the Confucian biases were merely based on lived experiences and could be changed if people’s life changed. The Buddhist ones, by contrast, were deeply rooted in a religious interpretation of physiology, which viewed the female body as innately inferior. This belief, being religious rather than empirical, resisted emendation.<sup>67</sup> He would restate this opinion in later years: “The biased opinions of Buddhism and Christianity, they are more horrible in that they conceptualized women as filthy and abominable based on religious beliefs and superstitions.”<sup>68</sup> In this passage, Zhou seems to dichotomize the secular (Confucianism) and the religious (Buddhism). For this reason, he goes so far as to express optimism regarding China’s situation, “because the religious influence is weak. The contempt for women mainly came from the Confucian Ethical Codes, and is based on rational theory and lived experiences.”<sup>69</sup> Here Zhou mainly focuses on the thought of Confucius instead of the doctrines of the quasi-religious Neo-Confucianism. Thus what he offers is less a “scientific” comparative study than a humanistic proposal to dismiss the religion-based practices.

As he observed in 1936, the resentment toward women in Buddhism was reflected in popular Buddhist literary works such as *Precious Scrolls on Liu Xiang* 刘香宝卷, whose theoretical premise was that women’s endless suffering was caused by their physiological inferiority and impurity. The only way out for them was to convert to the Pure Land Buddhism. It required such feasible practices as paying homage to the

<sup>65</sup> Zhou, “Reflection on *the Contempt of Sexual Desires Sutra*” 诃色欲法书后, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 358-9.

<sup>66</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 147.

<sup>67</sup> Zhou, “Reading Away from the Sea of Desires” 读欲海回狂, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 342.

<sup>68</sup> Zhou, “The Way-out for Women” 女子的去路, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 232. Renamed as “Madam Liu Xiang” 刘香女 in *Guadou ji* 瓜豆集 (Shanghai: Yuzhoufeng she, 1937).

<sup>69</sup> Zhou, “Taboos on Women” 女人的禁忌, *Collected Essays* vol.9, 451.

“three jewels” (Buddha-Dharma-Sangha), feeding monks, giving alms, building bridges, repairing roads, helping the poor, and the like. Based on rudimentary Buddhist teachings, such a belief had become popular among common people, particularly middle- and lower-class women.<sup>70</sup> In her previous life, Liu Xiang is a young woman of Hunan origin who refuses marriage. She practices Buddhism at home, and gets a Buddhist name “Shanguo,” (“good result”). Shanguo is reincarnated as Liu Xiang, whose husband is the Number One Scholar in the imperial examination. Liu Xiang also chants Buddhist sutra, abstains from eating meat, and persuades people to perform good deeds. Eventually, she attains the highest status in the Pure Land after dying in the company of her family.

Zhou observed that Liu Xiang had become the role model for women suffering though miserable lives. One such case was a tragedy reported in his hometown of Shaoxing, Zhejiang. The report told of a young woman whose favorite book was *Precious Scrolls on Liu Xiang*, and how she had, committed suicide to resist an arranged marriage. Zhou was appalled by such news because it reminded him of the exact kinds of misfortunes that had happened in the past. Although his hometown had been rapidly modernizing and losing its traditional aura, the old and “insignificant” misfortunes in peoples’ everyday life kept recurring. In his experience, all such young women refused marriage. “Regarding the *baojuan* as the Classics and History, and the Buddhist nunnery as their destination,” they devoted themselves to Buddhist practices and often died young from depression.<sup>71</sup> Buddhism impressed the general public as helping those women by giving them an imaginary sense of hope, yet Zhou disagreed, arguing that what hope they got was only for relief in the life to come. Based on a premise of women’s physical inferiority, this Buddhist teaching was not only inherently repressive and violent, but also left no room for women to initiate any change in their earthly lives.<sup>72</sup>

Seeking a universal interpretation for the genealogy of religious violence, Zhou further turned to “savage cultures,” relying on the works of Freud and James Frazer to explore the origin of taboos on women. He concluded that on a superficial level, the resentment borne against women in labor or having a menstrual period arose because of those women’s filthiness and the power to contaminate. The hidden reason was, in fact, people’s fear of the mystic power of the god of birth and life.<sup>73</sup> In the savage time he imagined, women were believed to have enormous mystic power. Both the power wielded by prehistoric women and the social sanctions placed upon them did not bear any implication of moral bias. Women’s impurity and the sages’ sacredness were all different manifestations of the same mystic power, which was similar to morally neutral physical forces. Containment was needed because such forces could possibly

<sup>70</sup> Zhou, “The Way-out for Women,” 232.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 231.

<sup>72</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 152.

<sup>73</sup> Zhou, “Dogs’ Scratching the Carpet” 狗抓地毯, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 520-1.

injure women themselves or anything they touched. What exacerbated the situation was this later development:

As culture progressed, the sages gradually eliminated the restraints imposed on them and retained their sacredness, whereas women were not so fortunate and they still had to be constrained. With time, people's feeling of mystery about them became the feeling of impurity, and fear became detestation. This is the universal misfortune of women from all over the world. It is not limited to one particular location, and China is simply part of it.<sup>74</sup>

Zhou's anthropological reconstruction of women's history left unexplained why only the sages managed to keep their power while women failed to do so. His purpose was, however, to rationalize the origin of myths that sanctioned the use of violence against women, and the ways that such violence became self-inflicted. Seen in the context of the Chinese Enlightenment, Zhou's interpretation differed significantly from the popular theories that emphasized socioeconomic causes for women's suffering.<sup>75</sup> Highlighting the religious root of discrimination against women, he warned against the blind optimism about women's liberation that resulted from radical social reforms, none of which would eradicate violence against women in everyday life unless they touched upon its time-honored religious biases.

#### *Intellectuals as the Advocates of Violence*

Zhou was disappointed by modern education because it produced not rational individuals, but tyrannical masses with only a veneer of education. In 1924, a university professor involved in a scandal by writing love letters to a female student. Reading the fliers the protesting students circulated, Zhou sensed a deeply intolerant nature, and criticized the "Pharisaic atmosphere" among the educated population. They were eager to subject the professor to immediate public humiliation. From this he learned that the majority could not be trusted. The lesson led him to argue that a civilized society to be one with minimal social sanctions, whose members were free from the masses' surveillance.<sup>76</sup> Such liberal hopes were dashed by the ineffectiveness of educated members of the cultural elite, who were supposed to enlighten the uneducated population. If these young college students represented the future, there would be no future at all.

<sup>74</sup> Zhou, "Taboos on Women," 451.

<sup>75</sup> For example, in discussing the fate of Nora, the character who escapes from her oppressive family in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Lu Xun emphasizes the importance of economic independence in order for women to be truly emancipated. See Lu Xun, "What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?" 娜拉走后怎样, *Complete Works* vol.1, 165-73.

<sup>76</sup> Zhou, "A Letter against the New Culture" 一封反对新文化的信, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 406-8; "Correspondence from Baodugu" 抱犊谷通信, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 42-6.

To Zhou, the problem with the mainstream Enlightenment was that it did not have qualified enlighteners. Its fanatic character and inherently violent tendency could all be attributed to activist intellectuals, who were inclined to resort to violence in resolving conflicts. They took violent action in the name of promoting democracy and science. The White Terror was a traumatic event, but more traumatic was the fact that some important figures in the Enlightenment, including Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940), Hu Shi and Wu Zhihui, endorsed the KMT's cleansing of the Communists and were blind to the systematic massacres that ensued.<sup>77</sup> Seeing their decision as betraying not only the Enlightenment spirit, but also the human conscience, Zhou harshly criticized them for ignoring the value of human life.<sup>78</sup> He commented: "The strangest thing is that the intellectual Wu Zhihui suddenly became a maniac killer. Also as intellectuals, Hu and Cai even totally ignored the event when they stayed in Shanghai."<sup>79</sup> It was ridiculous to him that Hu had the leisure to comment on the existence of the rickshaw as a proof of China's being "uncivilized," when beheading was still widely being practiced in the massacre.<sup>80</sup> Observing what happened with Hu made Zhou desperate: if the most educated and liberal intellectuals came to support the most brutal intellectual persecution, the Enlightenment project they endorsed would lose its appeal.

Zhou gave up his ground for engaging in the social movements because of his zero-tolerance policy toward violence. He neither engaged in such movements nor continued to criticize his peers publicly, at least from the 1930s onward. He turned to explore the roles the Ming-Qing literati played, on the premise that modern intellectuals were nothing but the reincarnation of these historical "ghosts." In 1937, he traced the genealogy of the literati's active participation in violence back to Confucius, who, as the Minister of Justice in the State of Lu, executed scholar Shaozheng Mao 少正卯. Confucius ordered Shaozheng's execution not for his actual crime, but for his rebellious attitude, his maverick posturing and his pretentious manner of speech.<sup>81</sup> Zhou found that this case became the model for later generations of literati, who were inclined to treat people just as they had treated Shaozheng Mao

<sup>77</sup> Cai opposed the Communist Party for its mobilizing peasants and workers. He chaired a KMT committee on cleansing its members from the KMT, and thus paved the way for the widespread massacre of Communists. However, he was against such killing itself. His speeches and articles related to his anti-Communist attitude (1927-1931) were not included in his *Collected Works*. For a detailed account, see Zhou Tiandu, *Biography of Cai Yuanpei* 蔡元培传 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1984), 256-267. The biography also touches upon how Wu Zhihui participated in the event. Yang Tianshi further explored Wu's motives for proposing the cleansing. See his "Wu Zhihui before the April 12 Coup" 四一二政变前夕的吴稚晖, *Lishi Yanjiu* 6 (2003): 170-8.

<sup>78</sup> Qian, *21 Lectures on Zhou Zuoren*, 178.

<sup>79</sup> Zhou, "How Should It Be Discussed," 320.

<sup>80</sup> Zhou, "Rickshaw and Beheading" 人力车与斩决, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 256-7.

<sup>81</sup> Zhou, "On Literary Inquisition" 谈文字狱, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 667-8.

and thought it just to kill them in a dispute. To the literati, both dissent and the people expressing it deserved to be eliminated.<sup>82</sup>

In the 1930s and 1940s, Zhou often appreciated the rational humanism at the heart of Confucianism, and he used Confucian terms to scorn the fanatic and violent moderns. Nevertheless, bringing up Confucius's role as the initiator of intellectual persecution, Zhou noticed the inherent contradiction and complexity of the Confucian ideas in practice. Therefore, what Kiyama noted as the "continuity" in Zhou's writing, his abhorrence of intellectual's "corruption and hypocrisy,"<sup>83</sup> could be further qualified: it was corrupted by the surrender to irrationality. It was also hypocritical for resorting to violence while mouthing and miming an ethos of non-violence.

The literati's violent handling of disagreement convinced Zhou that violence had become embedded in their mode of thought. The fixed tendency toward violence was best demonstrated in the historical commentaries 史论 they favored. Zhou thought historical commentaries not only failed to help people understand historical truth, but also encouraged an arbitrary way of thinking. As he wrote in 1939, "It is not just that the details of the events of hundreds and thousands years ago cannot be known to us, so that it is inappropriate to pass judgment. What is more horrible is the fact that such writings will cultivate an attitude to judge others hastily and harshly. This is not a trivial matter."<sup>84</sup> Here Zhou touches on two issues: epistemology and sociopolitics. The former issue concerns whether historical truth can be reached; Zhou's answer was negative. The latter issue, more relevant in reality, was about the disastrous consequences of the contemporary attitude of harsh judgment, which might be applied to other areas. Zhou observed that, relying only on narrow, doctrinally applied Confucianism, members of this class could make their knowledge lethal—a process the Qing scholar Dai Zhen 戴震 (1724-1777) called "killing with Confucian principles" 以理杀人.<sup>85</sup> In the midst of such a contaminated intellectual climate, he concluded that elite support for the persecution of intellectuals could not be avoided. Dai's terminology anticipated the criticism of the cannibalistic nature of the Confucianism made by Wu Yu and Lu Xun. When modern writers would often make use of cannibalism as a metaphor. Zhou would home in on the brutal specifics of the act. He thereby kept readers keenly aware of the mutilation, wounding and dismemberment it entailed.

Zhou tried to prove that the literati often colluded with political authorities in upholding the social and ideological order. In discussing family issues in 1936, he mentioned a criminal case that allegedly occurred in the year 1788: Under the order of Emperor Qianlong, who promoted filial piety, a couple was skinned alive in front of their mother and a crowd of spectators for neglecting their mother's needs. Zhou did

<sup>82</sup> Zhou, "Liweng and Suiyuan" 笠翁与随园, *Collected Essays* vol.6, 753.

<sup>83</sup> Kiyama Hideo, *Theses on Modern Chinese Literary Thoughts* 文学复古与文学革命, trans. & ed. Zhao Jinghua (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2004), 88.

<sup>84</sup> Zhou, "Jotting Notes of Xiangzu" 香祖笔记, *Collected Essays* vol.8, 228-9.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*



not focus on the disturbing, multilayered dynamic between the executed, the spectators (including the mother), and the Emperor who endorsed the execution. Rather, he suggested that the story might have been fabricated by some member of the literati. He raises the possibility that the edict from which the story is drawn may have been a forgery. Tactics like these, if they were used, would reveal the standard mindset of that age's literary intellectual. For him, it would indeed be appropriate that one be skinned alive for shirking the duties imposed by the tradition of filial piety.<sup>86</sup> These literati, who themselves might be punished violently for their behavior were also voluntarily initiated or participated in violence. Such observations belied the general public's impression that traditional elites opposed using violence. However, Haar gives them credence, casting the elite's supposed taste for mere depictions of violence as an ideological construct. In reality, he writes, "they had no compunctions in using violence to maintain control."<sup>87</sup>

The death of the controversial Ming thinker Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), exemplified how widely literati supported the persecution of others for defending their own beliefs, and how Confucian principles functioned as a death warrant in their hands. Zhou regarded the case as a significant event in Chinese cultural history.<sup>88</sup> He argued that Li, the most reckless attacker of Neo-Confucian teachings, was among the few intellectuals who could be dubbed a "rationalist" in the whole of Chinese history. Living in a "highly stylized society wherein the roles of individuals were thoroughly restricted by a body of simple yet ill-defined moral precepts,"<sup>89</sup> Li had been regarded as a heretic. His contempt for family duties, his contact with Buddhism, Daoism, his familiarity with Catholicism and his acquaintance with Wang Yangming's 王阳明 (1472-1529) School of the Mind 心学 gave him a broader view of his culture than those under the influence of state-endorsed Neo-Confucianism. But to Zhou it was exactly Li's profound understanding of "the principles of things and human emotions" that made him the public enemy of the orthodox literati: "His conclusions are all common-sensual and truthful. There is nothing new under the sun. However, the shallow and pedantic literati were still shocked by the common sense he offered. They thought that Li was either a demon or a monster. They had to wage a war against him."<sup>90</sup> Li was imprisoned for "deviating from the norm and misleading the people," and was eventually driven to suicide. To make matters worse, the scorn academics held Li in outlived the man himself. Subsequent scholars, including Gu Yanwu 顾炎武 (1613-1682), also harshly attacked him. Zhou thought Gu, despite all his patriotism and relevance to post-Qing nationalist discourses, incapable of independent thought. He only followed conventional thinking, and thus came to support literary inquisitions

<sup>86</sup> Zhou, "Proximity of the Issues on Family" 家之上下四旁, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 419-20.

<sup>87</sup> Haar, "Rethinking 'Violence'," 138.

<sup>88</sup> Zhou, "On Last Will" 关于遗令 *Collected Essays* vol.9, 641.

<sup>89</sup> Ray Huang, *1587, a Year of No Significance: the Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 221.

<sup>90</sup> Zhou, "On Literary Inquisition," 674.

and book burning in defense of Confucian principles.<sup>91</sup> Here Zhou implies a devastating critique: Gu had attained the highest possible scholarly achievement, but it had not endowed him the bare minimum of empathy one should expect from a human.

The “eccentric model official”<sup>92</sup> Hai Rui 海瑞 (1514-1587), formed Li Zhi’s mirror image, according to Zhou. Hai Rui represented justice, courage, and moral cleanliness in the popular imagination. However, as Zhou commented in 1938, what Hai Rui did often outraged basic human decency. This “model official” was nothing but “a merciless official who achieved fame by chance, and for that reason, he is more fearful.” What made him so fearful was his zeal for strict ideological conformity and his willingness to use harsh measures in its defense. His seal was engraved with the text “the officer who is in charge of “morals and manners” 风化. Zhou said it “depicts the truth about his mind.” To Zhou, the phrase about morals and manners implied that Hai Rui baselessly assumed the authority to interfere violently in people’s lives, which was exactly what Dai Zhen called “killing with Confucian principles.” In notes jotted by the late Ming scholar Yao Shuxiang’s 姚叔祥 (?-?), Zhou found evidence to support his charge:

Hai Rui had a five-year-old daughter. Once, while eating a cookie, she was asked by his father where she got it. Upon learning that it was from a boy servant, Hai Rui became angry: “How come a girl accepts cookies from a boy servant? This is not what my daughter is supposed to do. Go ahead and starve to death.” The girl then cried and stopped eating. Refusing other family members’ exhortations to eat, she died seven days later.<sup>93</sup>

In this story, Hai Rui obviously went to an extreme, applying the Confucian stricture against mingling between male and female adults to a mere child. His failure to make this elementary distinction led directly to his daughter’s death. Naturally, his decision shocked Zhou. What shocked him even more was how highly it was praised by both authors who recorded it. Approvingly, these scholars remarked that “only Hai Rui could have such a daughter.” Zhou was scandalized. “I feel the chill on my back when I read this,” he wrote. “I do not understand those of later generations who agreed with him. They are inferior to beasts according to the law of nature.”<sup>94</sup> With a mere anecdote, Zhou seemed to have devastated Hai Rui’s moral reputation.

Although Zhou’s method may not be “scientifically” reliable as research on the educated class as a whole, it provides a little-seen perspective—one that draws on the insignificant records from unofficial histories to seek out historical truths. In the cases discussed above, what he always underlined was how pandemic the orientation toward violence was among the intellectual class, no matter what age they belonged

<sup>91</sup> Zhou, “Smile of Women” 妇人之笑, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 409-10.

<sup>92</sup> Huang, *a Year of No Significance*, 130-55.

<sup>93</sup> Zhou, “On the Text of Hai Rui’s Seal” 记海瑞印文, *Collected Essays* vol.8, 70-1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

to. As they blindly followed unexamined doctrines, their social and intellectual engagement could produce nothing but disaster. They neglected the value of human life, and were thus not qualified as enlighteners at all. Sure of the impossibility of reform, Zhou gave up his hope for an Enlightenment project led by the intellectual class, and resolved to carry out one of his own.

*The Masses as the Agents of Violence*

The impossibility of the Enlightenment project was ultimately determined by its audience, the masses supposedly waiting to be enlightened. It was not difficult to find negative attitudes toward the masses among the Enlightenment thinkers in the 1920s. Besides Zhou, Hu Shi, Lu Xun, and Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942) all at times regarded “the masses” as irrational and passive. As Lu Xun wrote in 1923 that “the masses, especially those of China, are always on-lookers to the ongoing drama,”<sup>95</sup> indicating that they had no agency in shaping the history events. The Zhou brothers both realized the awkward circumstance that met proponents of the Enlightenment: there was no qualified “audience” to enlighten. Commenting on the 1925 nationwide anti-imperialist movement triggered by the “May 30th Incident,” Hu Shi expressed his distrust of mass movements, dismissing them as emotionally charged and fruitless. The key to solving the problems of China was instead a good government.<sup>96</sup> As Lu Xun would, many others changed their negative views in the post-Enlightenment years. For Zhou, however, the hope of broad-based social enlightenment never existed.<sup>97</sup>

For his negative view of the masses, Zhou was indebted to the French social psychologist Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931), whose works had attracted him since the late 1910s.<sup>98</sup> When he discussed the ineffectiveness of propaganda in 1921, he cited Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and Le Bon to argue that “it was difficult for the psychology of the crowd to change. It would take them half a century to accept even the pure scientific truth, such as William Harvey’s theory of blood circulation, even though it had nothing to do with their existing religious or ethical beliefs.”<sup>99</sup> In 1923, such negative estimates led him to conclude that “the power of thought is weak over the masses.” One example of its weakness could be found in Buddhism, which after

<sup>95</sup> Lu Xun, “What Happens after Nora Leaves Home?” 170.

<sup>96</sup> Hu Shi, “Patriotic Movement and Pursuing Education” 爱国运动与求学, *Complete Works of Hu Shi* 胡适全集 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1998), vol.4, 628.

<sup>97</sup> Qian, *21 Lectures on Zhou Zuoren*, 71-2.

<sup>98</sup> Zhou, “A Substitute for Express Mail” 代快邮, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 254-5. Le Bon’s works include *The Psychology of Peoples* and *The Crowd: a Study of the Popular Mind*.

<sup>99</sup> Zhou, “Propaganda” 宣传, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 375-6. Russell was invited to China by Cai Yuanpei from 1920 to 1921 to give lectures on philosophy, sociology, and China’s modernization. Ha Yingfei argues that Zhou’s religious view was also influenced by Russell. See “Russell’s Influence on Zhou Zuoren’s Dismissal of Religion” 罗素对周作人“非宗教”思想的影响, *Guangdong shehui kexue* 1(2008): 146-51.

coming to China for about two millennia had left no trace of its humanistic concern but only fetishistic beliefs in people's consciousness.<sup>100</sup> In 1924, he eventually admitted the unfeasibility of a mass-movement style Enlightenment: "There had been Socrates in Greece, Shakyamuni in India, and Confucius in China. Revered as sages, however, they seemed to have never entered into the mind of their fellow citizens. Their teaching could only be appreciated by the few clear-minded rationalists." The masses were thus too mired in inertia to move forward. All endeavors including sermons, indoctrination, and propaganda would fail because of this.<sup>101</sup> In 1925, he further indicated that the unwise majority represented the lowest developmental level of a culture: In this supposedly modern society, their minds were still occupied by such savage beliefs as foot fetishism.<sup>102</sup>

Zhou regarded the masses as tyrannical as well as submissive, and therefore not to be elevated as the "sacred" judge of truth. In discussing the value of poetry in 1922, he argued that it "could not be determined by a majority rule even if they understand its significance. Unifying the thought of people with the ideas of a single dictator should be objected to, and doing so around the will of the masses should also be objected to."<sup>103</sup> It was totally unreasonable for those who believed in majority rule to celebrate the chaotic chorus of the masses at the price of drowning out individual opinions, feelings of joy and pain. As he wrote in 1925, "the autocracy by one ruler and the autocracy by the majority are all autocracy."<sup>104</sup> With the mass movements of the late 1920s looming large, he expressed his strong abhorrence:

The masses are still the popular icon. Everything done on behalf of them is the same as what has been done following the Mandate of Heaven in ancient times. Even those social reformers have a wholehearted simple faith in them. To these reformers the masses are the embodiment of the truth and justice, and their undertakings thus become the crusade blessed by God. How ridiculous! I do not trust the masses insofar as they are just a mixture of the tyrant and the abjectly obedient citizen.<sup>105</sup>

Such comments reflected his deep fear of and elitist contempt for modern social movements that depended on mass mobilization. In the same year, he declared that he denied the legitimacy of "all the movements and doctrines that are based on the faith in the masses," and regarded them as simply "untenable."<sup>106</sup> With his firm attitude, Zhou distinguished himself from some other mainstream thinkers who might have also criticized the masses as a whole, but still eventually joined them.

<sup>100</sup> Zhou, "'The Giant-Killer' and Other Issues" "大人之危害"及其他, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 404.

<sup>101</sup> Zhou, "The Ineffectiveness of Indoctrination" 教训之无用, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 356.

<sup>102</sup> Zhou, "On Foot Fetishism" 拜脚商兑, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 116-9.

<sup>103</sup> Zhou, "The Use of Poetry" 诗的效用, *Collected Essays* vol.2, 524.

<sup>104</sup> Zhou, "About 'Talks on *The Classic of Poetry*'" 谈谈谈诗经, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 375.

<sup>105</sup> Zhou, "Correspondence from Beigouyan" 北沟沿通信, *Talk about Tigers* 谈虎集 (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1929), 274-5.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

Zhou traced the origin of the modern mass movement back to the May Fourth era, complaining that since that time “mass movements and social sanctions have been highly promoted, and it has become even worse today.”<sup>107</sup> It was the “social activists” (intellectuals) who were to blame for sanctifying the masses: “Modern social movements are, of course, scientifically founded, yet many social activists romantically idealize the masses. They are actually exerting their own agenda in the name of the masses. This is not different from doing so in the name of God. Perhaps doing so is unavoidable in these religiously-infused undertakings.”<sup>108</sup> Defining “modern social movements,”—a phrase that, in the 1920s, often veiled a reference to Communism—as both “scientifically founded” and “religiously-infused,” Zhou expressed his disapproval artistically. Here, the masses were portrayed as totally subject to the manipulation of the elite as a populist tool. They had to be mobilized by the elite to become a social force. But this was not the worst scenario to him.

As a social force, the masses often exercised their power in a violent way and thus became the very agents of large-scale practice violence. Zhou expressed his apprehension as early as in 1919 in his poem “The Stream,” which depicts a once-quiet stream being intercepted by a dam: the accumulated water floods everything once it overwhelms its banks. The poem allegorized the irrational and violent ways that the masses exercised their power.<sup>109</sup> In 1923, he described the destiny of those who promoted a revolution of thought with a comparison to politicians:

Those who engage in a political movement can benefit from it if they succeed. Their comrades would be grateful for what they have done and protect them even if they fail. Only the proponents of the revolution of thought are lonely travelers. They have only three or five companions, crying in the wild, either [doing so] in vain or getting beaten up for waking up people from their deep sleep. The Nationalists could win trust from Sun Yat-sen,<sup>110</sup> and the political cult in Tianjin could be appreciated by the warlord Cao Kun, although they both have enemies. As for the intellectual reformers, they will be repudiated by both sides. Cao wants to beat them, and Sun might want to condemn them too. Even the commoners who sacrifice under the control of the old thoughts also want to punish them harshly for their being heretical and deviating from orthodoxy.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Zhou, “A Letter against the New Culture,” 407-8.

<sup>108</sup> Zhou, “Firecracker” 爆竹, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 349.

<sup>109</sup> Qian, *Biography of Zhou Zuoren*, 218.

<sup>110</sup> Zhou mentioned Sun Yat-sen as a representative of the “new” social forces. In other occasions, he highly valued Sun for his revolutionary activities and regarded him as a lonely reformer who became the victim of the masses’ resentment. In memorializing Sun in 1925, he wrote, “In the past, when Jesus intended to promote a spiritual revolution, he was finally crucified by the Roman governor who was forced to do so by the Jewish people. It is natural for Mr. Sun to be hated by the masses in China where people are used to being slaves.” See his “Dr. Sun Yat-sen” 孙中山先生, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 103-4.

<sup>111</sup> Zhou, “The Unwelcome Revolution of Thought” 不讨好的思想革命, *Collected Essays* vol.3, 230.

The phrase “crying in the wild” reminds us of the same expression in the Bible (Isaiah 40.3). The metaphor of people being awakened from deep sleep also reminds us of the famous metaphor Lu Xun used.<sup>112</sup> Both images highlighted the lonely and risky situation of the would-be prophet or agent of enlightenment. In the picture Zhou draws, the reactionary warlords, the revolutionaries and the commoners all regard the proponents of intellectual revolution as their enemy and violently respond to their proposals.

Zhou argued that it was the inertness of the masses that justified the use of violence toward any heterodox thoughts. He observed that in addition to the intellectuals’ collaboration, it was the active participation of the masses that sustained the everlasting biases and violence against the victims in the intellectual persecutions: “If people get killed for their thought and belief, the charges against them are as follows: being heretical and deviating from the orthodox teaching, or profaning the sacred and the social and ideological norms. Such charges even made the commoners feel offended. Therefore, not only the tyrant, but also the mobs want to kill the heretics.”<sup>113</sup> In this 1937 essay, Zhou implied that the masses were the main culprits in sustaining, if not initiating intellectual persecutions, which to him were similar to the European Inquisition. In the process, linguistic manipulation played a crucial role: through associating the specific charges with the sanctified ideology, the victims were transformed into the enemies of the public. Zhou was aware that the power of belief was so strong that the case could not be reconsidered as long as the specific doctrines were still powerful and popular. “Being killed by the mobs, there would be nothing to be done. Even if there are a few who want to redress such cases, they themselves are hated by the mobs. Their actions are not only powerless but also risky.”<sup>114</sup> These comments heralded Zhou’s ambition to challenge the time-honored popular beliefs during the 1930s and 1940s, when many historical figures were promoted as patriotic heroes in the heated atmosphere of nationalism.

One such case Zhou challenged was that of the Song official Qin Gui 秦桧 (1090-1155). Being demonized in public memory for seeking an armistice with the Jurchens and for murdering General Yue Fei 岳飞 (1103-1142), who was enshrined as a national hero for resisting the Jurchens’ invasion, Qin became the object of public hatred, as can be seen in the popular deep-fried dough sticks 油炸鬼 that bear his name (they were associated with the symbolic action of deep-frying him). Zhou argued that Qin’s compromise with the enemy preserved half the territory and people of the Song, and that he thereby achieved much more than some other traitors. Nevertheless, he was condemned by people under the influence of popular literature. To Zhou, the unbearable aspect was the “uncivilized” ways of expressing hatred, such as molding dough to represent a specific person, and then deep-frying and eating it. For Zhou, relying on poetic justice—akin to using “black magic” to kill one’s enemy—was

<sup>112</sup> Lu Xun, “Preface to *Call to Arms*” 呐喊自序, *Complete Works* vol.1, 437-43.

<sup>113</sup> Zhou, “On Literary Inquisition,” 668.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

cannibalistic in nature.<sup>115</sup> Zhou considered these arguments as a pure issue of freedom of thought, on the basis of which he could challenge the biased beliefs dominating the consciousness of the masses. Nevertheless, as he already anticipated, such action was powerless and risky, and was doomed to become the target of the massive, politicized criticism.

*The Split Self: Resistance and the Formation of Cultural Identity*

In 1934, after publishing a poem on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday that detailed his leisurely lifestyle, Zhou received many positive responses from his liberal friends, including Cai Yuanpei, Hu Shi, and Shen Yinmo 沈尹默 (1883-1971), but was also criticized by some young leftists such as Hu Feng 胡风 (1902-1985). Lu Xun ridiculed their criticism, commenting that as always, “literati and beautiful women are often blamed for a country’s ruin.”<sup>116</sup> Conflating gender, class and state, such a comment was uncannily borne out by Zhou’s life experiences. Women, as the humiliated and harmed, gained much sympathy from Zhou. Particularly, the cases of wartime rape provided him with a gender-specific perspective concerning the fate of war survivors, who can be regarded as having been consumed by symbolic cannibalism. Zhou discussed such phenomena in 1926:

There are two destinies for wartime women (except for those who managed to flee): to commit suicide for fear of being raped, or to live on after being raped. The former would be named as heroic women (烈女 or 烈妇), and receive numerous posthumous honors. At least there will be a poem dedicated to them. The latter will be despised for the rest of their life, just as the “Sisters-in-Law of the long-haired” 长毛嫂嫂<sup>117</sup> were treated, although in my opinion they are lamentable and respectable. Refusing to tolerate humiliation and hardship is necessary for life, but it is also necessary to tolerate humiliation and hardship to live on.<sup>118</sup>

The women who died defending their chastity have been praised for exemplifying the Confucian ethical codes, epitomized in the commonplace maxim “Starving to death is a small matter, but losing one’s chastity is a great calamity.”<sup>119</sup> 饿死事小，失节事大。

<sup>115</sup> Zhou, “A Second Essay on Deep-fried Dough Sticks” 再谈油炸鬼, *Collected Essays*, vol.7, 309.

<sup>116</sup> See Zhang Juxiang, Zhang Tierong, *A Chronicle of Zhou Zuoren’s Life* 周作人年谱 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2000), 440-1. Also see Lu Xun, “To Cao Juren” 至曹聚仁, *Complete Works* vol.13, 87.

<sup>117</sup> It refers to women who have been forced to stay with the Taiping Rebels.

<sup>118</sup> Zhou, “Casual Talks (3)” 闲话四则之 (三), *The Water-plantain* 泽泻集 (Shanghai: Beixin shuju, 1933), 174-5. Renamed by the editor Zhong Shuhe in *Collected Essays* (vol.4, 559-560) as “A Chat on Rape” 闲话强奸.

<sup>119</sup> Lan, Hua R. and Vanessa L. Fong eds, *Women in Republican China: A Sourcebook* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 13.

These “heroic women” committing suicide could thus be regarded as the symbol of this absurd and meaningless sacrifice. They stood for the victims of all violently imposed moral, political, ideological, and religious beliefs. However, as Zhou directly observed through the life of his grandparents,<sup>120</sup> those who chose to survive after being raped during war were unfortunate. Though it was a privilege to survive a war, for many, survival was the beginning of a lifelong experience of shame, fear, and misery. They suffered from a “triple violence”: the rape itself (the physical violation itself and the post-traumatic memory), and the more traumatic humiliation from others who based their condemnatory judgment of them on their traditional beliefs.

Among his contemporaries, Zhou was not the only one who was concerned with women’s fate, but he might have been the only one who explicitly highlighted the significance of the humiliated women’s forbearance. He once joined his peers to repudiate the male-centered regulations on women’s chastity in the early 1920s.<sup>121</sup> Such radical gestures of the May Fourth intellectuals on gender matters have been regarded by some scholars as serving the nationalistic cause over the individualistic one.<sup>122</sup> Zhou, however, might not be a good case to prove this view. He agreed with Bertrand Russell that Chinese should be more patriotic, but had always prioritized individual life over nationalistic goals, insisting that the nation-state was for preserving individual life, not the other way around.<sup>123</sup>

Refusing to reduce the individual to a moral, ideological or religious cipher, he commended survivors of rape. Enduring humiliation they would have encountered on a daily basis, their survival itself was the most powerful way to negate the effect of symbolic violence. As Shu Wu points out, Lu Xun also attributed the cruel treatment of unchaste women to the tyranny of popular belief, and he condemned how these women were socially “murdered” by the unanimous majority.<sup>124</sup> For Lu Xun and other Marxists, a substantial change to the economic system was the precondition for solving these problems. To Zhou, however, changing people’s thought itself was more important. Yet the radical measures used in the Enlightenment indicated that the new beliefs it established could be just as violent and tyrannical as the old ones. What could be done, therefore, was to legitimize the right to survive under humiliation: being raped was not merely lamentable; surviving under humiliation

<sup>120</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 157.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>122</sup> Dorothy Ko criticizes the May Fourth imagination of the all-negative oppressed image of Chinese women. See her *Teacher of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Along the same line of reasoning, Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee further complicates the Confucian discourse on women and explores the possibility of a Confucian feminism. Both believe that the May Fourth generation’s attack of the sexism of Confucianism ultimately serve their nationalist project. See her *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

<sup>123</sup> Zhou, “Two Opinions on Theater” 对于戏剧的两条意见, *Collected Essays* 2, 617.

<sup>124</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 378-80.



was even respectable, in that it required more courage than simply committing suicide. The best resistance is survival.

Such a view represented Zhou's attitude towards resistance in general. Reading the diaries by Ye Shaoyuan 叶绍袁 (1589-1648), a Ming loyalist who lived through the Qing's conquering China, he noticed two different stories. The first was of the surrender of Suzhou to the Qing troops, which enabled the city to avoid large-scale massacre (as had happened in Yangzhou and Jiading). The second was about the Ming loyalist troops' harassing local residents instead of giving them aid.<sup>125</sup> He argued that if giving up one's political faith could save innocent life, it was the right thing to do. By the same token, a political belief was not worth defending at the cost of human life. He repeatedly emphasized the significance of preserving life at the cost of moral or political values. Questioning the ideas that usually put the nation over individual and "righteousness" over people's life, Zhou inevitably offended the public consciousness in the 1930s, when a war with Japan was looming.

Therefore, although his critique on violence did not have much social influence, it did affect the formation of his own intellectual identity. After Lu Xun's death he once described Lu Xun as holding a desperately dark view of history and life—one that amounted to political nihilism.<sup>126</sup> Such an observation might have better summarized his own position. It was due to his nihilistic attitude and extreme skepticism that he rejected anything passionate;<sup>127</sup> rationality taken to deranged extremes paved the way to violence. As Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim point out, "There is always a context, or a structure, to violence, and the reader-observer-participant must be alert to how her own experience, location, and options frame the violence that seems to mark both her individual and collective existence."<sup>128</sup> There is the political context from which Zhou could not escape, and there is the intellectual context on which Zhou relied to analyze the former. Unlike those who held an unexamined view of violence, or who thought it legitimate to use in their present political struggles, Zhou dismissed violence on humanistic grounds.

Zhou's choice has long been interpreted negatively, as the means by which he fell behind his times.<sup>129</sup> To him it was not that he fell behind his times, but that the world in which he lived went awry. He voluntarily retreated to the margins, disassociating himself from mainstream practices that were intended to change the bloody reality, but in fact only perpetuated it. In early 1925, he borrowed from the titles of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Out of the Ivory Tower* and *Crossroads* to describe how he positioned himself in a fanatical and violent society:

<sup>125</sup> Zhou, "Diaries of Ye Tianliao (1645-1648)" 甲行日注 *Collected Essays*, vol.6, 299.

<sup>126</sup> Zhou, "On Lu Xun" 关于鲁迅, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 434.

<sup>127</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 70.

<sup>128</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, *On Violence: A Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press), 10.

<sup>129</sup> Xu Jie, "Theses on Zhou Zuoren" 周作人论, in *A Retrospection of Zhou Zuoren: Literature Review*, 14.

I have been drifting on the crossroads for a long time, but have not yet joined the crowd since cramming among them made me uncomfortable. It is also dangerous, for they might destroy my eyeglasses. I'd better be staying in my attic, yelling at the crossroads to vent off my anger after drinking two *jin* of yellow rice wine. When I am unhappy, I close the window to practice calligraphy.<sup>130</sup>

Imagining an ivory tower at the crossroads, Zhou introduced an “in-between” position. He aimed to retain both intellectual freedom and contact with reality without the drawbacks of direct engagement: “I am also fond of playing with some radical thoughts and provoking the defenders of the old morals, as if I am searching for snakes in the grass. However, as the French writer Rabelais says, I will stop before being burnt. Therefore, I am not necessarily determined to become a martyr.”<sup>131</sup> It was meaningless and in vain to engage the world at the cost of one’s life. With a playful and cynical attitude, he would stop whenever he sensed a threat. Written in 1925, this passage revealed how he conceptualized his relationship with the social reality. As Shu Wu puts it, “coldness” can describe not only his aesthetic style, but also his attitude towards life.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, for him, the best attitude after the White Terror, as he summarized in 1928, was “neither being obsessed with utilitarian concerns, nor being totally indifferent to the world, just keeping a sober mind.”<sup>133</sup> He stayed in his study to read history as a diversion from reflecting on reality, and concluded that his compatriots—with their absurdity, foolishness, and arrogance—were all the reincarnation of their ancestors’ ghosts.<sup>134</sup>

Zhou’s practice can be viewed as a form of cosmopolitanism<sup>135</sup> set against the strong nationalistic sentiments of his time. His “distanced engagement” is best expressed in his 1929 comments on *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. He started the essay with an appreciation of its nihilistic attitude: all the world is vanity, and all human wisdom, pleasures and endeavor turn out to be as meaningless as grasping the wind. But where *Ecclesiastes* concludes, assuaging the sense of life’s ultimate vanity through faith in God, Zhou offers an alternative approach: “Just as contemplating on aging, death, sickness, and pain in life, observing the madness and folly of people is also a

<sup>130</sup> Zhou, “A Tower at the Crossroads” 十字街头的塔, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 76. University campus seemed to have provided him such a perfect “tower” that he stayed in it for most of his time from late 1910s to 1940s in Beijing, where he mainly taught at Beijing and Yenching University.

<sup>131</sup> Zhou, “A Discussion on Sexual Morality with Friends” 与友人论性道德书, *Collected Essays* vol.4, 165.

<sup>132</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 17.

<sup>133</sup> Zhou, “*Liaozhai guci liuzhong xu*” 聊斋鼓词六种序, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 514-5.

<sup>134</sup> Zhou, “Reading behind Closed Doors” 闭户读书论, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 510-1.

<sup>135</sup> For a discussion on cosmopolitanism and its relationship with modern China, see Xu Jilin, “May Fourth: A Patriotic Movement of Cosmopolitanism,” *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol.9.1 (2009): 29-62.

great enterprise. Positively, it could be a work of significance; negatively, it could be a fascinating pastime."<sup>136</sup> Making the meaningless wind-grasping meaningful without resorting to belief in God could be achieved through observing the world without a pragmatic purpose. Eliminating purpose from the world became the only rational choice after he refused to change the world with bloodshed. Grasping the wind ends in vanity, but being aware of this vanity inspires him to make sense of the process of grasping.

He identified himself with Stoics, who pursued an ascetic life according to natural and rational principles. To him it was a much better lifestyle than the one Christianity promised. While admiring Stoicism, he was also aware that "it is doomed to perish, because such proposals only worked for the few sages. What the masses needed was not asceticism, but pathos, i.e., joy, desire, worries, and fear, all of which are dismissed by the Stoics."<sup>137</sup> He agreed with Ibsen that "the minority is always in the right,"<sup>138</sup> positioned himself against the tyranny of the majority and identified himself with Dr. Stockmann, embracing the identity of "an enemy of the people." Such a choice will definitely invite persecutions, such those that Li Zhi suffered.<sup>139</sup> Refusing to join the games of violence, it became his own choice to stay away from the institutionalized violence and the chaotic mass movements.

Inevitable as it was, his choice left him lonely and anxious. Because of this, he highlighted the significance of *yuan* 缘, a Buddhist concept usually rendered as the predestined bond, affinity, or connection among people. In 1936, he interpreted *yuan* as the "environment" half of the "heredity and environment" binary opposition.<sup>140</sup> In his understanding, although human beings were historically and existentially interconnected, and mutual affection could be possible, such interconnections were so well concealed that people all lived in a profound solitude:

Why do we want to establish *yuan* with others? It might be because people cannot stand living in solitude. Wealth, social rank, and male offspring are what the masses wanted, and for which there are places for people to pray. However, there is another pain that could not be relieved, which is the aforementioned solitude. Confucius says, 'A person cannot flock together with the birds and the beasts. If I do not associate with the followers of men, then with whom would I associate?'<sup>141</sup> Humans like to associate with others. However, it is in the crowd that one feels unbearably lonely, just as when one is packed with the waving crowds in the temple fair. Being cut off from everything else and existing in solitude, one's situation is similar to that of a falling leaf.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Zhou, "The Great Enterprise of Wind-Chasing" 伟大的捕风, *Collected Essays* vol.5, 568.

<sup>137</sup> Zhou, "Preface to *the Gallery*" 画廊集序, *Collected Essays* vol.6, 541-2.

<sup>138</sup> Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People* (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 83.

<sup>139</sup> Zhou, "On Encouraging Others to Drink," 25.

<sup>140</sup> Zhou, "Beans for Establishing Bond" 结缘豆, *Collected Essays* vol.7, 359.

<sup>141</sup> Confucius, and Edward Slingerland, *Confucius Analects: with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 217.

<sup>142</sup> Zhou, "Beans for Establishing Bond," 360.

Best expressing the “existential loneliness” in modern China,<sup>143</sup> Zhou suggests that such innermost pain had to be addressed through reestablishing lost mutual affection. Thus, to give one example, the beans and cookies seniors used to build up ties of afterlife affection in Buddhist rites become as significant as the bread and wine in the Holy Communion. He bonded with others in the imaginary realm of the page.

Zhou chose to be the “enemy of the people” in an intellectual sense. Ironically, however, “the people” perceived him as their enemy in a political sense. From the late 1920s to the 1930s, he was gradually came to be seen as behind the times. As a renowned liberal intellectual,<sup>144</sup> he strove to sustain a “third space” beyond antagonistic and politicized spheres. This became impossible with the outbreak of the war in 1937. His collaboration with the Japanese from 1938 left the Chinese with a traumatic impression,<sup>145</sup> and he was viewed as a traitor who disgraced the whole nation. Even his artistic achievement during this period was seen as less impressive when viewed in the light of his earlier writings,<sup>146</sup> to say nothing of his writings on the problems in Chinese and European intellectual history. He never apologized for his treachery even under harsh criticism in the new China, insisting that he did not cause any “actual” damage. Instead, he claimed that he protected the property of Peking University just as well as some other anti-Japanese activists had.<sup>147</sup> To the public, such excuses could not make up the symbolic loss his treachery brought.<sup>148</sup> He chose to give up his name “Zhou Zuoren,” which marked his cultural identity, and devoted himself to translating Greek and Japanese classics, as well as writing memoirs and essays on Lu Xun to make a living. During his lifetime he had been terrified by the idea of being eaten.<sup>149</sup> Yet during the Cultural Revolution he eventually was.

### Conclusion

The reality was too violent and absurd to engage, and with his untimely critique of his age, Zhou pushed himself to a point of no return. If Lu Xun was devoted to

<sup>143</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 84.

<sup>144</sup> Zhang Tierong, *On Zhou Zuoren* 周作人平议 (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2006), 11.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>146</sup> Ni, *Zhou Zuoren and His Bitter Rain Study*, 414-9.

<sup>147</sup> Shu, *Zhou Zuoren: His Merits and Demerits*, 67. Comparing to Fu Sinian’s harsh attitude to Zhou, Jiang Menglin 蒋梦麟, President of Beijing University (1930-1944), testified to the court to support Zhou’s self-defense. See Jiang, *Western Tide, New Tide* 西潮·新潮 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2000), 343-4. Zhou’s friends and students, including Hu Shi, Shen Jianshi, also issued statements in favor of Zhou. See Wang Xirong, *Unresolved Cases in Zhou Zuoren’s Life* 周作人人生平疑案 (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), 304.

<sup>148</sup> Zhang, *On Zhou Zuoren*, 109.

<sup>149</sup> Guan Feng, *Zhou Zuoren: His Literary Thoughts* 周作人文学思想研究 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2006), 129.

resisting his despair with his life,<sup>150</sup> Zhou, on the other hand, believed that despair was unavoidable for a rational thinker facing the inevitable human condition. In 1929, he cited Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) as having said, “Man is only a reed, the feeblest reed in nature, but he is a thinking reed.” It was with the capacity to think that he gained dignity and confidence. Although he could be easily crushed by the colossal fanatic and violent force of “the universe,” he could still “be more noble than that which slays him.” Because “he knows that he dies, and the advantage which the universe has over him; of this the universe knows nothing,”<sup>151</sup> This passage summarized his lifelong aim to attempt “resistance with reason.”

Zhou insightfully questioned the legitimacy of the mainstream Enlightenment, modern political movements, and the possibility of national salvation by defining them as inherently irrational and violent. He considered the whole Chinese modernization project cursed by the unseverable nexus between belief and violence. If modernity is a progressive “disenchantment of the world,” as Max Weber argues, to Zhou it soon became a process of re-enchantment. In this sense, there was nothing substantially new with the modern, which is why he often cited the phrase from Ecclesiastes: “there is nothing new under the sun.”<sup>152</sup> Critiquing the newly established cultural hegemony, his view of the Chinese modern shares much similarity with Marx’s critique of the European Enlightenment. What the European Enlightenment was to Marx, the Chinese one was to Zhou: “both an enthralling liberation from tyranny and a subtle form of despotism in itself.” Like Marx, Zhou himself was also both “its firm apologist and ferocious antagonist.”<sup>153</sup> However, Zhou was not a Marx, who preferred changing the world through practice to interpreting it with philosophy<sup>154</sup> and who, with his writings, inspired numerous violent revolutions worldwide. Zhou still believed that interpreting the world with modern knowledge and rationality was the basis for changing it—if that was even possible—in a nonviolent manner.

Zhou’s disenchantment with the modern resulted in his becoming a rational spectator of the chaotic world, one who could provide a profound critique on the

<sup>150</sup> Wang Hui, *Resisting Hopelessness* 反抗绝望 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2008).

<sup>151</sup> Zhou, “The Great Enterprise of Wind-Chasing,” 568-9. Cited from Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensées, or Thoughts on Religion*, trans. Gertrude Burford Rawlings (New York: The Peter Pauper Press, 1946), 35. In a conversation with Yoshikawa Koujiro (1904-1980) in 1937, Zhou also cited this passage in Japanese to illustrate the fragility of humanity. See Yoshikawa, “Pascal’s Reed” 帕斯卡的芦苇, in *Nostalgia for Chinese Culture* 对中国文化的乡愁, trans. and eds., Dai Yan and He Shengsui (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2005), 121-2.

<sup>152</sup> The Book of Ecclesiastes 1.9, from the NKJV Study Bible, copyright ©1997, 2007 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission.

<sup>153</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2011), 224-5.

<sup>154</sup> Karl Marx, “Concerning Feuerbach,” in *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 423.

wide practice of violence, but who had no practical alternatives to offer. Observing from a realistic historical perspective, he came to believe that all resolute proposals for action unavoidably degenerated into appeals to faith and violence, and the only way to resist violence was to reject action. Ray Huang's comment on Zhou's favorite thinker Li Zhi also sheds light on the understanding of Zhou: "Li's inability to offer an alternative to orthodoxy, however, had little to do with his indecisiveness. For the most part it was the result of the peculiar character of the social order, whose resistance to being adapted restricted the opportunity for innovation." By the same token, the social order of Zhou's time did not leave much space for him to promote his individualist, rationalist proposals. Huang continues to explore how repressed innovative energy such as Zhou's can be re-channeled: "When an imaginative thinker found that his own philosophy had no relevance to real life, he was likely to turn toward the mystical and become an aesthete."<sup>155</sup> Although Zhou did not turn toward the mystical, he did become an aesthete who significantly contributed to enriching the style and taste of modern prose writing. Today, Chinese intellectuals no longer need to face the same "either/or" choices between individual freedom and social obligation. However, the various forms of faith-driven violence, such as terrorism and the war on terror—in tandem with monstrous neoliberal economic development that exacts high human and ecological costs—are increasing. In an ever-bloodier milieu, the questions concerning the "belief-violence" nexus Zhou raised are still waiting to be explored.

<sup>155</sup> Huang, *A Year of No Significance*, 209.