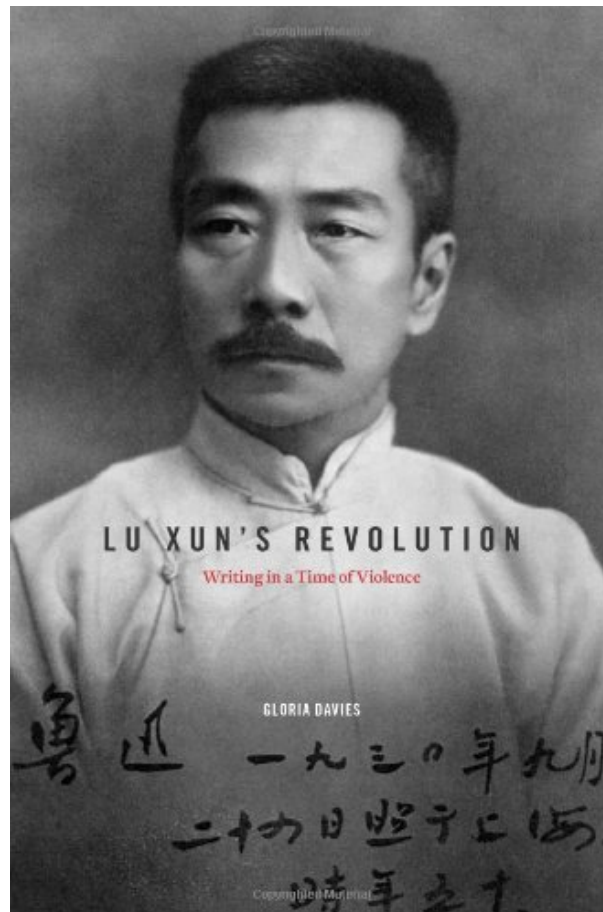
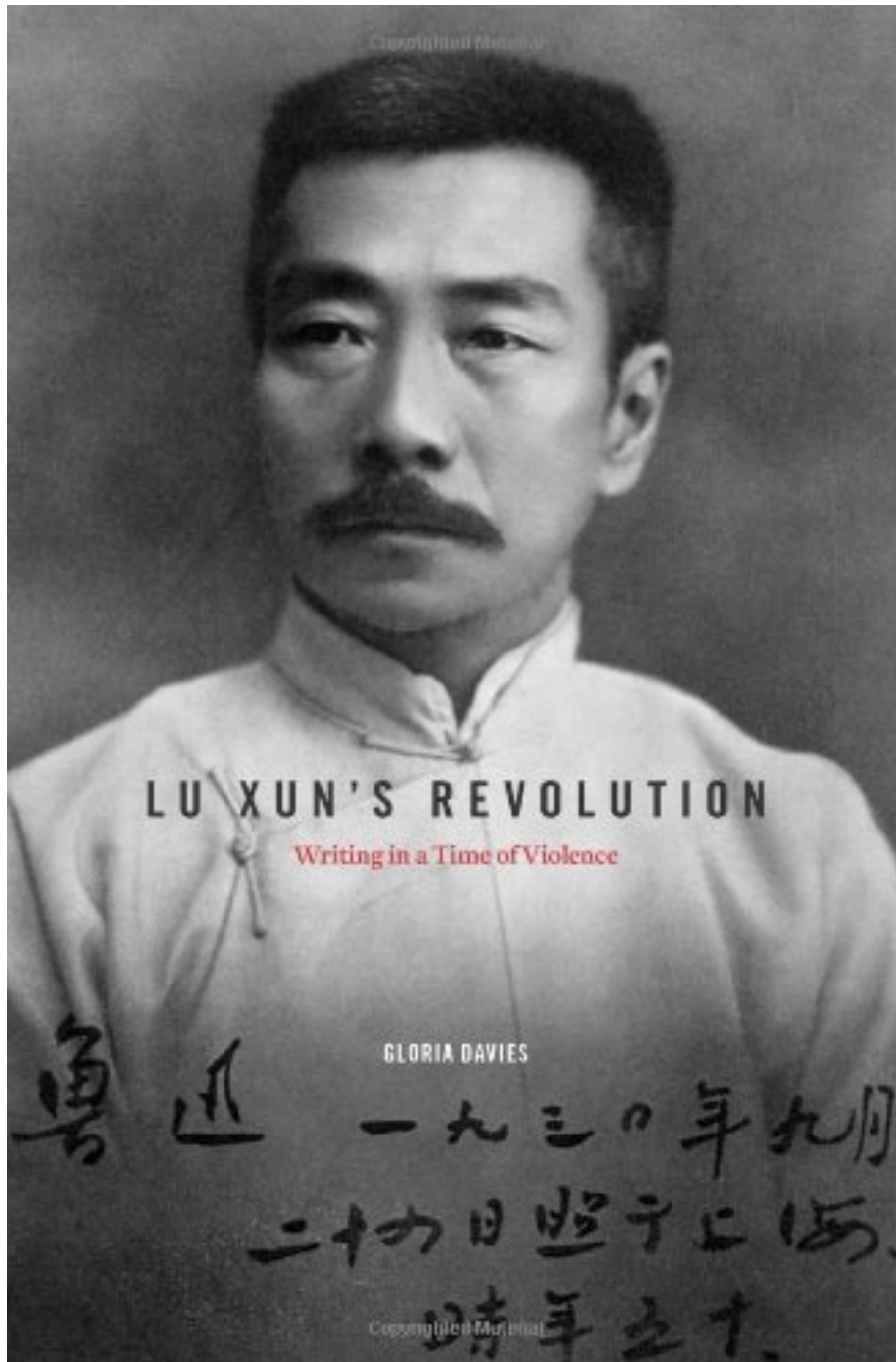


LU XUN'S REVOLUTION: WRITING IN A TIME OF VIOLENCE BY GLORIA DAVIES



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Review

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About the Author

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Widely recognized as modern China's preeminent man of letters, Lu Xun (1881–1936) is revered as the voice of a nation's conscience, a writer comparable to Shakespeare and Tolstoy in stature and influence. Gloria Davies's portrait now gives readers a better sense of this influential author by situating the man Mao Zedong hailed as "the sage of modern China" in his turbulent time and place.

In Davies's vivid rendering, we encounter a writer passionately engaged with the heady arguments and intrigues of a country on the eve of revolution. She traces political tensions in Lu Xun's works which reflect the larger conflict in modern Chinese thought between egalitarian and authoritarian impulses. During the last phase of Lu Xun's career, the so-called "years on the left," we see how fiercely he defended a literature in which the people would speak for themselves, and we come to understand why Lu Xun continues to inspire the debates shaping China today.

Although Lu Xun was never a Communist, his legacy was fully enlisted to support the Party in the decades following his death. Far from the apologist of political violence portrayed by Maoist interpreters, however, Lu Xun emerges here as an energetic opponent of despotism, a humanist for whom empathy, not ideological zeal, was the key to achieving revolutionary ends. Limned with precision and insight, Lu Xun's Revolution is a major contribution to the ongoing reappraisal of this foundational figure.

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Carlyle-type "Great Man" approach to literary history

By Harvy Lind

Few monographs have focused on the final decade of Lu Xun's life after he abandoned writing fiction with a contemporary setting (1927-1936). I reached for this volume with hopes of finding even-handed, fresh literary interpretations of Lu Xun's essays, historical fiction (*Old Tales Retold*) and the comparison of these works with the works of other leading Chinese essayists and writers of historical fiction. Instead, the author focused almost exclusively on Lu Xun's polemical essays and overheated literary pugilism between him and various adversaries in the cultural politics of the day. Instead of presenting Lu Xun in the round as a talented writer but necessarily with shortcomings as well, Davies lionizes him repeatedly as "the maestro" and even mistranslates the rather common polite form of address of "xiansheng" as "maestro." One encounters repeated poststructuralist assumptions and quotes from Derrida, Foucault, and Wang Hui, who are invariably presented as argument-clinching or praised as "putting it succinctly," yet there is no significant mention of contemporaries of Lu Xun who approximate him in literary importance (and wrote many essays and far more fiction than Lu Xun did) yet are not within the leftist mainstream such as Shen Congwen, Qian Zhongshu, and Lao She, to give but a few examples. Satirical or critical comments on Lu Xun's polemical essays that are of recent vintage are limited mostly to popular and only semi-serious writers such as Han Han and Wang Shuo, whose comments are taken out of context and cut off with Davies' pert dismissal, "and so on and so forth." On the other hand, comments that lionize Lu Xun's polemical essays are generally accepted at face value.

The book is often self-contradictory, such as when Lu Xun is at one point credited with criticizing Marxist-

Leninist authoritarianism, and then at another point avoiding any public criticism of either Soviet Russian Stalinism or Chinese Communism as a good team player in the polemical battles of the League of Left-wing Writers, a Chinese Communist Party front organization that established Lu Xun as a figurehead.

The book also keenly disappoints as scholarship, in that it lacks a bibliography and a Chinese-character glossary of important names and terms. This greatly reduces the book's value to faculty and graduate students. It would appear that the author was in something of a hurry to get it published, and could not be bothered with meeting standards for scholarly end matter in monographs.

There is some occasional interesting cultural history in Davies' chronicling of various polemical skirmishes between Lu Xun and his adversaries during the late 1920s and 1930s. However, aside from making a case that Lu Xun was a "passionate" writer, a fact that we already knew, Davies has little in the way of significant conclusions to offer.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Boring book

By Wu Chun Pang

Such a bad written book with wrong chinese translation. Not inspiring nor articulated enough to tell a real story of Lu Xun.

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Great book if you want the truth of Lu Xun's literary career

By C. Thompson

This is a fantastic book. Don't bother listening to the other reviews, its hogwash.

Lu Xun's Revolution will shed light upon his tumultuous literary career during great struggles of early Chinese society.

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