

expression. Cheng wanted literature to be at once purposeless (art for art's sake) and subservient to a larger mission ("the demands of the epoch"), purely aesthetic and utilitarian at the same time. There is thus a certain logic behind the irony that by 1925 members of the Creation Society converted from their early fervor for an aesthetic view of literature to an equally passionate faith that literature should serve political demands and be guided by political ideology.

As a whole, the texts included in this section reveal a May Fourth that is far more complex and paradoxical than either the May Fourth participants or their inheritors would have us believe. Beneath the radical iconoclastic surface of these texts lie profound anxieties and fears about writers' relationship with tradition and their role as cultural stewards in the forward movement of history.

## Chapter 9

### *Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature*

Hu Shi

Those engaged in the present discourse on literary reform are myriad.<sup>1</sup> How am I, unlearned and unlettered, qualified to speak on the subject? Yet I have over the past few years, with the benefit of my friends' argumentation, pondered and studied this matter a fair degree and the results achieved are perhaps not unworthy of discussion. So I summarize the opinions I hold and list them in eight points; I have divided them in this fashion for the investigation of those interested in literary reform.

It is my belief that those wishing to discuss literary reform today should begin with eight matters, which are as follows:

1. Writing should have substance
2. Do not imitate the ancients
3. Emphasize the technique of writing

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1. Hu Shi 胡適, "Wenxue gailiang chuyi" 文學改良芻議, *Xin qingnian* 2, no. 5 (Jan. 1917).



Without these two kinds of substance, literature is like a beauty without a soul or a brain; though she have a lovely and ample exterior, she is nonetheless inferior.<sup>4</sup> The greatest reason for the deterioration of literature is that the literati have become mired in poetics and are without any kind of far-reaching thought or sincere feeling. The harm of an overly formalist literature lies in this so-called language without substance. And should we wish to save it from this fault, we must save it with substance, by which I mean only feeling and thought.

## II. Do Not Imitate the Ancients

Literature has changed from dynasty to dynasty, each dynasty having its own literature. The Zhou and Qin dynasties had their literatures, the Wei and Jin had theirs, as did the Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming. This is not just a personal opinion held by me alone, but a truth of the progression of civilization. As for prose, there are the styles of the *Book of History*, the philosophers of the pre-Qin period, the Han historians Sima Qian and Ban Gu, the essayists Han Yu, Liu Zongyuan, Ouyang Xiu, and Su Shi, the dialogues of Zhu Xi, and the fictional narratives of Shi Nai'an and Cao Xueqin. This is the progression of literature. To turn our attention to verse, poems such as "The Pushpin Song" and "Song of Five Songs"<sup>5</sup> constitute the earliest period. Then follow the poems in the *Book of Songs*, Qu Yuan's *sao*, and Xunzi's rhyme-prose. From Su Wu and Li Ling of the Western Han to the Wei-Jin period, and the *paibi* parallel style of the Southern dynasties, to the flourishing of regulated verse in the Tang and Du Fu and Bai Juyi's "realism" [*xieshi* 寫實] (as in Du Fu's "Recruiting Officer of Shihao" and "Jiang Village" or Bai Juyi's "New Ballads"). The regulated verse form flourished in the Tang, but was later replaced by the lyric meter and the dramatic song (*qi*). From the Tang and Five Dynasties period to the *xiaoling* 小令 form in the beginning of the Song marks one period of the lyric meter. The lyrics of Su Shi, Liu Yong, Xin Qiji, and Jiang Kui form another period. The *zaju* and *chuanqi* dramas of the Yuan are another. All these periods have changed

4. Liu Kai 柳開 (b. 968), an early proponent of the Ancient-Style Prose, also uses this metaphor of woman as text: "Now it is bad if a woman's outer appearance is more cultivated than her inner virtue, but not bad if her inner virtues are more highly cultivated than her appearance. Likewise, with writing it is bad if the words are more splendid than the reasoning, but not bad if the reasoning is more splendid than the words", cited in Ronald Egan, *The Literary Works of Ou-yang Hsiu* (1007-72) (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 15-16.

5. "Jiang ge" 繁縷歌 and "Wu zi zhi ge" 五子之歌 are folk songs that may not actually predate the poems of the *Book of Songs*, as Hu Shi seems to suggest. The former is preserved in a Han text called the *Gaosi zhuàn* 高士傳; the latter in the *Book of History*.

4. Do not moan without an illness
5. Eliminate hackneyed and formal language
6. Do not use allusions
7. Do not use parallelism
8. Do not avoid vulgar diction

## I. Writing Should Have Substance

The greatest malady of letters in our nation today is language without substance.<sup>2</sup> All one ever hears is "If writing is without form, it will not travel far."<sup>3</sup> But nothing is said about language without substance, nor what function form should serve. What I mean by substance is not the "literature conveys the *Dao*" [*wen yi zai dao*] of the ancients. What I mean by substance are the two following points:

A. *Feeling*. In the "Great Preface" to the *Book of Songs* is written: "Feelings come from within and are shaped through language. If language is insufficient to express one's feelings, then one may sigh; if sighing is insufficient, then one may chant or sing; if chanting or singing is insufficient, then one may dance with one's hands and feet." This is what I mean by feeling. Feeling is the soul of literature. Literature without feeling is like a man without a soul, nothing but a wooden puppet, a walking corpse. (What people call aesthetic feeling is only one kind of feeling.)

B. *Thought*. By "thought" I mean one's views, perceptions, and ideals. Thought need not depend on literature for transmission, but literature is enriched by thought and thought is enriched by the value of literature. This is why the prose of Zhuangzi, the poetry of Tao Yuanming and Du Fu, the lyric meters of Xin Qiji, and the fictional narratives of Shi Nai'an are eternal. As the brain is to man's body, so is thought to literature. If a man cannot think, though he be attractive in appearance and capable of laughter, tears, and feelings, is this really sufficient for him? Such is the case with literature.

2. The expression *yan zhi you wu* 言之有物 comes from the *Book of Changes* in which the gentleman is exhorted to "have substance in his words" in order to have "stability in his actions"; in *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*, trs. Wilhelm / Baynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 144.

3. Citation of Confucius in the *Zuozhuan* (Zuo commentary), Duke Xiang 25: "yan zhi wu wen, xing zhi bu yuan" 言之無文，行之不遠. The passage has been translated by Owen (1992: 29) as "If the language lacks patterning, it will not go far."



with the times, and each has its own characteristics. Our generation, looking back with a historical, progressive perspective, is most certainly unable to say that the literature of the ancients is superior to that of the present. The prose of the *Zuo Commentary* and *Records of the Grand Historian* is miraculous indeed, but do they cede much to that of Shi Nai'an's *Water Margin*. And the rhyme-prose of the "Three Capitals" and "Two Capitals" is but dregs in comparison to the Tang regulated verse and the Song lyric meter. We see from the above that literature develops and does not stand still. Tang people should not write poems of the Shang and Zhou, and Song people should not write rhyme-prose like Sima Xiangru or Yang Xiong. Were they to do so, their results would certainly not be fine. One cannot be skillful if one goes against Heaven, turns one's back on one's age, and defies the footsteps of progress.

Since we now understand the principle of literary development, I can proceed to a discussion of what I mean by "not imitating the ancients." In contemporary China, in creating a literature for today, one must not imitate the Tang, Song, Zhou, or the Qin. I once saw the "Inaugural Remarks of the National Assembly" and it read: "Most glorious National Assembly, the end of penumbrous times is nigh." This is evidence that today there is a desire to model literature after the Three Dynasties of antiquity.<sup>6</sup> When we look at today's "great writers," the lesser writers model themselves after Yao Nai and Zeng Guofan of the Tongcheng School, the greater writers take the Tang-Song essayists Han Yu and Ouyang Xiu as their masters, while the greatest follow the prose of the Qin-Han or Wei-Jin periods and feel that there is no literature to speak of after the Six Dynasties. But the difference between these is like the difference between one hundred steps and fifty steps; they all belittle literature. Even if it resembles the ancients in spirit, it still amounts to nothing more than adding several "realistic counterfeits" to a museum. Is this literature? Yesterday I saw a poem by Chen Boyan<sup>7</sup> that reads as follows:

In the Garden of Waves I copied lines from Du Fu,  
Half a year passed, many brushes worn thin.  
All I have to show for myself are tears,

6. The language is from the *Book of Songs*, Zhou song, "Zhuo" 酌. The phrase as it appears in the original poem is used to convey the idea that one waits until one's time is right to take action, in this case military action. The sense in the "Inaugural Remarks of the National Assembly" is that the time is now ripe for this democratic institution.

7. Chen Boyan 陳伯嚴, or Chen Sanli 陳三立 (1852-1937), late Qing reformer who participated in the Hundred Days Reform of 1898. After being banished from government service, he devoted himself to old-style poetry (in the Jiangxi style) and prose writings.

Though friends passed by commenting on my "skillful creations."  
The myriad souls are all silent,  
The more I look up to Du Fu the higher he becomes.<sup>8</sup>  
I turn these feelings over in my bosom  
And leisurely read Qu Yuan's tragic *sao*.

This amply represents the imitative psychology of today's "poets of the first rank." The root of their sickness lies in spending "half a year passed with many brushes worn thin" in being slavish scribes to the ancients, resulting in sighs about "the more I look up to him the higher he becomes." If we free ourselves from this kind of slavery and no longer write poems of the ancients and only write our own poems, we will not end with this sort of defeatism.

Whenever I mention contemporary literature, only vernacular fiction (Wu Woyao, Li Baojia, and Liu E) can be compared without shame to the world's literary "first rank." This is for no other reason than that they do not imitate the ancients (although they owe much to *The Scholars*, *The Water Margin*, and *The Story of the Stone*, they are not imitative works). And it is only because they faithfully write about the contemporary situation that they can become true literature. All other poets or ancient-style essayists who study this or that style have no literary value. Those today with a determination to pursue literature should understand precisely the nature of that in which they are engaged.

### III. Emphasize the Technique of Writing

Many poets and essayists today neglect syntactic structure. Examples are legion and not worth raising; they are especially numerous in writings of parallel prose and regulated verse. Neglecting syntactic structure means there will be an absence of "communication." This is clear enough, and there is no need to go into further detail.

### IV. Do Not Moan Without an Illness

This is not easy to discuss. Today's youth often affect a tragic view of the world. When they adopt a sobriquet it is most often something like "Cold Ashes," "Dead Ashes," or "Lifeless." In their poems and prose they write of such things as old age before a setting sun, desolation facing the

8. Alludes to the *Analects*, 9.10: "Yen Yuan, in admiration of the Master's doctrines, sighed and said, 'I looked up to them, and they seemed to become more high, I tried to penetrate them, and they seemed to become more firm.'" (仰之彌高，鑽之彌堅) (Legge 1979: 234)



autumn winds. When spring arrives, they dread its swift departure, and when flowers bloom, they fear their premature withering. These are the tragic voices of a fallen country. The old should not act thus—how much more so the young! The long-term effect of this is to foster a sense of despondency, which leads to a lack of regard for action or service to one's country, and which only knows the voice of lamentation or the literature of despair. This kind of literature will hasten writers to their grave and sap the will of its readers. This is what I mean by moaning without an illness. I am perfectly aware of the ills facing our nation today, but what effect can sobbing and tears have on a sick nation in such a perilous state? I only wish that contemporary writers become Fichtes and Mazzinis and not the likes of Jia Yi, Wang Can, Qu Yuan, or Xie Ao.<sup>9</sup> That they are unable to actually essays about women, fine wine, depression, and discouragement makes them beneath contempt.

#### V. Eliminate Hackneyed and Formal Language

Today one is called a poet if one can summon up from memory a few literary clichés. Poetry and prose are filled with stale and hackneyed diction,<sup>10</sup> like "time waits for no man," "slings and arrows," "desolation," "solitary drifting," "the common man," "poor scholar," "sinking sun," "fragrant flowers," "spring boudoir," "melancholy soul," "home is where the heart is," "cry of the cuckoo," "lonely as a solitary shadow," "words formed by migrating geese," "jade pavilion," "elixir of love," "gray-eyed morn," and the like, an endless and most despicable gush. The long-term effect of this malady on our nation will be to give birth to poetry and prose that have the appearance of literature but really are not. Now I will demonstrate this tendency with a lyric:

Like tiny peas, the twinkling flames of an evening lamp  
Cast a flickering shadow on a solitary figure,  
Helter-skelter and adrift.

9. Jia Yi 賈誼 (200–168 B.C.), politician and poet of the Western Han, banished for criticizing the government, wrote a well-known *fu* lamenting the death of Qu Yuan (343–277 B.C.), who committed suicide to protest the policies of his lord. Wang Can 王粲 (A.D. 177–217), one of the "Seven Masters of Jian'an," was an official under Cao Cao during the Three Kingdoms period and wrote poems lamenting the chaos of warfare. Xie Ao 謝朓 (1249–95) was a poet and patriot who fought with Wen Tianxiang against the Mongol invasion and wrote melancholy poems about suffering under Mongol occupation.

10. Hu uses the term *chenyan* 陳言, which recalls Han Yu's use of the term in his famous "Letter to Li Yi" (答李翱書); see Guo Shaoyu 1979: 2: 115–18.

Beneath his kingfisher-blue covers  
Under his roof of interlocking butterfly-tile,  
How can he ward off the cold of an autumn's night?  
The tiny strings of the pipa murmur  
Early at Dingzi Lian,<sup>11</sup>  
Heavy frost frolicked about.  
Enchanting notes lofted above  
After lingering momentarily round the columns.

Glancing quickly at this piece<sup>12</sup> we sense that its words and lines do form a lyric, when in point of fact it is but a list of clichés. "Kingfisher-blue covers" and "butterfly-tile" may be appropriate for Bai Juyi's "Song of Eternal Sor-row," but there they refer to the emperor's covers and the tiles of the imperial palace. "Dingzi Lian" and "tiny strings" are stock phrases. This lyric was written in America, so the poet's "evening lamp" could not have "twinkled" "like little peas" and his abode had no "columns" around which the notes could linger. As for "heavy frost frolicked about," this is even more absurd. Whoever saw heavy frost "frolicking about"?

What I mean by the necessity of eliminating hackneyed and formulaic language can only be achieved through the creation of new phrases to describe and portray what people see and hear with their own eyes and ears or personally live through. It is indeed a great talent in writing to be able to mesh with reality and arrive at the goal of describing your object or conveying meaning. Those who employ hackneyed and formulaic language are indolent and unwilling to create new phrases to describe their objects.

#### VI. Do Not Use Allusions

Among the eight propositions that I have proffered, that which has been most singled out for attack is the one most misunderstood. My friend Jiang Kanghu<sup>13</sup> dispatched a letter in which he writes:

The term "allusion" has both a broad and narrow sense. Ornateness and grandiloquence have since days of yore been raised by the ancients as

11. Dingzi Lian 丁字簾 may here refer to a pleasure quarter in Ming dynasty Nanjing; see *Taohua shian* (Peach-blossom fan), ch. 23.

12. In later versions of this essay, Hu Shi indicates that this poem was written by "his friend" Hu Xiansu, who studied in the United States at the same time as Hu Shi and later became a member of the conservative Critical Review Group.

13. Jiang Kanghu 江亢虎 (1883–?) founded the Chinese Socialist Party in 1911. When it was banned in 1913, Jiang went into exile in the United States where he was at the time Hu Shi wrote this essay. He later returned to China to teach at Peking University.



something to be strictly prohibited. If idiomatic expressions and anecdotes are eliminated, this will not only be a loss in terms of style, but a disaster for the function of writing. The most wonderful mood that writing can evoke is through simple words with broad and varied connotations. I could not succeed in writing this present passage without allusions. I only can poetry not be written without allusions, neither can letters nor even speeches. The letters I receive are replete with such allusions as "a second self,"<sup>14</sup> "breadth of mind," "fail to get to the root of the problem," "miss the forest for the trees," "calamity of nature," "make the deaf hear and the dumb speak," "join forces and forge ahead," "I'm pleased to humbly submit," "Parnassian world," "an honorable retreat of a hundred leagues," "fill the firmament," "sharp instruments of power," and "iron-clad proof." If we try to extricate them all and replace them with vulgar language and vulgar words, how will we be able to speak? Whether one uses ornate or simple diction is ultimately a trivial matter. What I fear is that if we change these allusions into other words, though we might have five times as many words, the connotations cannot in the end be as perfect. What then?

This discussion is rather to the point. According to what Mr. Jiang has written, allusion has both a broad and narrow sense, which I will discuss below.

A. Allusion in the broad sense is not what I mean by allusion. There are perhaps five kinds of allusions in this broad sense.

1. The metaphors created by the ancients and the objects from which they draw these metaphors are universal in meaning and do not lose their efficaciousness with time; we today may also employ them. If the ancients said "one has a spear, the other attacks with a shield," even an uneducated person would know how to use the metaphor of "one's own spear and shield face each other" [self-contradictory]; yet this we do not consider making an allusion. The above expressions "miss the forest for the trees," "calamity of nature," "make the deaf hear and the dumb speak," . . . are all of this sort. The important point in employing metaphors and similes is that it be done appropriately. If they are employed appropriately, then there is certainly no difference between the ancient or modern usage. Allusions like "join forces and forge ahead" and "an honorable retreat" are not

14. In the list of allusions that follows I have borrowed some translations from Edward Gunn (1991: 71). I will gloss only the first of these allusions as typical of the rest. "Second self," *jiuyu* 舊雨 (literally "old rain"), is from Du Fu's "Qiu shu" 秋述 (Autumn account). The meaning is that friends used to brave the rains to come and visit him, but now no longer do. The term has come to mean an old and dear friend, hence second self.

in common parlance; they can perhaps be employed among the literati, but it is better in the final analysis not to employ them. If you use the expression "an honorable retreat," why is it necessary to add "hundred leagues" when "miles" is much more suitable.

2. Idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions bring words together to create different meanings. Some frequently used expressions have long been a part of common parlance, and they can be freely employed. And today if we desire to coin new idiomatic expressions, who is to prevent us? "Sharp instruments of power," "breadth of mind," and "miss the forest for the trees" all belong in this category. These are not allusions, but quotidian expressions.

3. Historical references. When we compare historical references to what we are discussing here, we cannot call them allusions. A Du Fu poem has the following line: "We do not hear that the Shang and the Zhou declined / because they themselves put Bao and Da to death."<sup>15</sup> This is not an allusion. A more recent poem reads: "Therefore, even Cao Cao / keeps the name of Han to the bitter end."<sup>16</sup> This is also not allusion.

4. Using the ancients metaphorically. This is also not employing allusions. Du Fu's line "Bright and fresh is Yu Xin, / Refined and easy Bao Zhao"<sup>17</sup> is making a parallel between contemporary and historical figures and should not be considered an allusion. "Among his equals are Yi Yin and Lu Shang, / Had he gained power, even Xiao He and Can Shen would not measure up."<sup>18</sup> This also is not allusion.

5. Citing the words of the ancients. Nor is this allusion. I once wrote the following lines: "I have heard the ancients speak, 'Only death is difficult.'"<sup>19</sup> Or: "There have been no successful experiments since ancient times; these words of Lu You are not necessarily true."<sup>20</sup> But these are simply citations and not allusions.

15. From Du Fu's ancient-style poem, "Beizheng" 北征 (Journey north). "Bao" and "Da" refer to the imperial concubines Bao Si 褒姒 and Da Ji 妲己, who are seen as responsible for the decline of the dynasties in which they lived.

16. I have been unable to trace the author of this line.

17. From Du Fu's poem "Chunri yi Li Bai" 春日憶李白 (Remembering Li Bai on a spring day). Yu Xin 庾信 (513-81) and Bao Zhao 鮑照 (414-66), literary figures of the period of disunity, are used by Du Fu to praise the literary style of his friend Li Bai.

18. From the fifth of Du Fu's series "Yong huai gu ji" 詠懷古跡 (Reciting thoughts on historical sites), in which he praises Zhuge Liang by comparing him with other historical figures who were powerful statesmen close to the emperor.

19. Hu Shi is citing his own poem "Zisha pian" 自敘篇 (Suicide; 1914), written after the suicide of the younger brother of his good friend Ren Shuyong (Ren Hongjun).

20. See "Changshi pian" 嘗試篇 (Hu Shi 1984: 4). The whole line reads: "Today I want to turn the phrase around to read: From ancient times success has been measured by the extent of experimentation." He explains this distortion of Lu You in Hu Shi 1984: 153.



(The above five categories fit into the broad definition of allusion and are not what I mean by allusion. These sorts of allusion can be used or not.)

B. I am proposing that allusions in the narrow definition of the word not be employed. What I mean by this use of allusion is when men of letters are incapable of creating their own words and expressions to write about what is before their eyes or in their hearts and instead borrow, in part or wholly inapposite, anecdotes and hackneyed language to do it for them, allowing them to muddle along. The allusions in the "broad" definition discussed above are, excluding the fifth category, all metaphors or similes. But they use one thing as a metaphor for another, not as a substitute for it. The narrow definition of allusion, on the other hand, sees allusion as substituting for language; because they are unable to directly express themselves, they can only let allusion speak for them. This is what I mean by the distinction between what is and what is not allusion. And yet we still must distinguish between the skilled use of allusion and its crude or clumsy use. Skilled use is occasionally acceptable. Crude use should be eliminated altogether.

1. The skilled use of allusion is what Mr. Jiang calls the use of simple words with broad and varied connotations. We could extract myriad examples of this from just about any writing, but let us just raise a few to prove my point.

a. Wang Jinqing<sup>21</sup> wrote a poem to Su Dongpo asking to examine, though his intention was to purloin, the valuable "Qiuchi stone," which Su had hidden away. Su Dongpo felt he had to lend it to him, but first he wrote him a poem in which appear the following lines: "I want to keep it, but lament the weakness of the state of Zhao. / I'd rather offer it to Qin and let them bear the burden of disgrace. / Pray not let it be passed around for all to admire. / Return it posthaste." This poem alludes to Lin Xiangru's re-turning of the treasured "jade of the He clan."<sup>22</sup> How skilled and precise!

b. Su Dongpo has another poem entitled "Zhang Zhifu sends six jugs of wine, the note arrives but not the wine": "Though his intention was to send good wine by messenger, it all came to naught."

c. Ten years ago I wrote a poem after reading *The Talisman*: "Is there one such as Yang Hu to poison a man? / Or such as King Wuling of Zhao to

21. Wang Shen 王詭 (1036-?), painter, calligrapher, and art collector.

22. The allusion is to a story in the *Records of the Grand Historian* in which Zhao must give up the valuable He clan jade to the stronger state of Qin (see "Lin Xiangru zhuan"). The commentator to the *Su Dongpo shiji* (1918) edition of Su Dongpo's collected poems writes positively of this poem in terms similar to Hu Shi's: "Tang and Song poetry is pure. The substance of this timeless treasure is written so clearly."

spy on the enemy? / Compared to these, what the crusaders did was really just child's play. / Only these two men are immortal."<sup>23</sup> These two allusions can cover the entire book. At that time we were quite smug and self-satisfied; in fact this kind of poem really should never be written.

d. In his eulogy to Chen Yingshi,<sup>24</sup> Jiang Kanghu, representing the overseas Chinese community, wrote: "Before the Great White imperial flag was raised. / The Great Wall was destroyed."<sup>25</sup> / As this world is without a Chu Ni / Zhao Dun has been slain."<sup>26</sup> I personally find this very appealing. The use of Zhao Dun as an allusion is very skilled and precise.

e. In a historical poem by Wang Guowei is the following: "Tigers and wolves stalk the palace / Exiled among the Western barbarians how can the dynasty be restored. / China is sinking toward disaster, / For a hundred years chaos has reigned. / If you send a message to Huan Wen, / Don't blame Wang Yifu."<sup>27</sup> This too can be considered a skillful use of history.

The above examples all use allusion to say something that cannot be said more directly. Where they excel is in not losing in the end the original meaning of what they set out to compare; but as they were limited by the forms in which they wrote, their metaphorical use of allusion changed toward a substitutive use. The problem in using allusion is that it causes people to lose the original meaning behind the metaphor. Crude uses of allusion are when the host and guest are reversed, so to speak, and the reader becomes lost in the complexity of historical fact and allusion and ends up

23. After reading Lin Shu's translation of Sir Walter Scott's *Talisman* in 1909, Hu Shi wrote this poem which was included in his *Hu Shi liuxue riji* 胡適留學日記 (Diary of an overseas student). Hu seems to be expressing national pride in the superiority of Chinese heroes over those described in Scott's novel. For the entire poem, see *Hu Shi shi xuan* (Selected poems of Hu Shi), (Taipei: Pingping, 1966), 2-3.

24. Chen Yinshi 陳英士, or Chen Qimei 其美 (1876-1916), member of the Nationalist Party who waged a movement against Yuan Shikai during the Second Revolution of 1915; assassinated in 1916 by Yuan's henchmen.

25. This line refers allegorically to the fact that Yuan Shikai declared himself emperor, after Chen Yingshi had already been executed.

26. Zhao Dun 趙盾 was a minister of the state of Jin during the Spring and Autumn period. Lord Ling of Jin, upset by Zhao Dun's repeated remonstrances, sent Chu Ni 鉏麋 to assassinate him. When Chu Ni came before the noble Zhao Dun, he was unable to carry out his lord's order and committed suicide to avoid disgrace.

27. Huan Wen 桓溫 (312-73); see *Jinshu* 晉書 8/98/2568. Wang Yifu 王夷甫 (256-311), minister of the Western Jin, known as a traitor for having served the Xiongnu lord, Liu Yüan, who was planning to use the opportunity of the internal divisions of the state to take it over. Wang Guowei's poem is an allegory of Qing internal politics after the suppression of the Hundred Days Reform Movement in 1898.



forgetting the object the writer set out to compare. When the ancients wrote long poems, they only used a handful of allusions (Du Fu's "Journey North" and Bai Juyi's "Temple of Truth Realized"<sup>28</sup> do not make use of a single allusion). Men today cannot write long poems without using allusion. I once read a poem with eighty-four couplets which made over one hundred allusions, none of which was used skillfully.

2. Crude allusions. Crude allusions are used by indolent people who know not how to create their own language and use them simply as a tactic to conceal their lack of talent. And because they are incapable of creating their own language, they do not know how to use allusions properly. There are also, among the sum of crude allusions, several categories:

a. Metaphors used imprecisely, having several possible meanings and no basis for a set interpretation. I present Wang Shizhen's poem "Autumn Willow" as an example of what I mean:<sup>29</sup>

Graceful, covered in a cool near-frost dew,<sup>30</sup>

A maze of willow branches caress the Jade Pool.

Lotus leaves in the pool as mirrors for women,

Yellow bamboo by the riverside made into daughters' dowry chests.<sup>31</sup>

In vain we long for Ban Stream to be forged into the Sui Embankment,

Nowhere is one like the great king of Langya to be found.<sup>32</sup>

Passing through the scenic spots of Loyang,

One should ask again about the Yongfeng ward.<sup>33</sup>

28. "You Wuzhen si" 遊悟真寺. Translated by Levy as "Frolicking to the Temple of Truth Realized"; see Howard S. Levy, *Translations from Po Chü-i's Collected Works*, 4 vols. (New York: Paragon Books, 1971), 1: 57-61.

29. Wang Shizhen 王士禛, or Wang Yuyang 王漁洋 (1634-1711), poet and literary critic. Although Hu Shi chooses not to discuss it, this poem purposefully conceals its meaning with historical allusion because it was written as an allegory in support of the Southern Ming loyalists during the early years of the Qing dynasty. The allusions all express regret at the failure of the Ming restoration.

30. This line alludes to a poem in the *Book of Songs*, and simply points to the coming of autumn.

31. A line from "Huangzhu zhi ge" 黃竹之歌 (The song of yellow bamboo), an anonymous *yuefu* folk song.

32. The first line in this couplet alludes to Emperor Yangdi of the Sui who unified the empire after a long period of disunity, built the Grand Canal, and planted willows along its Sui Embankment. The second line laments the absence of one such as Jin Yuandi (276-322), who was able to unify southern China.

33. Loyang was a northern capital during the Sui dynasty. Yongfeng ward was a section of the capital famous for its willows.

The allusions used in this poem are all open to several explanations.

b. Incomprehensibly obscure allusions. Literature is for the conveyance of meaning and the expression of feeling. Let us no longer write literary works that require one to read "five carts of books"<sup>34</sup> to understand them.

c. Paring down classical expressions to the point where they become ungrammatical. "To use *konghuai* for brothers, and *zeng shi* for official position"<sup>35</sup> are examples (from Zhang Taiyan). The contemporary expression "to prepare the dowry for another's wedding" also does not make sense.

d. Losing the original meaning of an allusion. As when someone who wants to describe a mountain being so tall that it meets heaven and writes "It meets in the West with the falling sky of Qi."<sup>36</sup>

e. Historical facts have a specific meaning that cannot be changed. Today they are often used carelessly to indicate common things. When the ancients "broke a willow branch at the bridge over the Ba River" as a way of sending off a friend, it originally referred to a specific custom. Yang Pass and Wei City also referred to actual places. But today's indolent writers, unable to describe the feeling of separation, say they are at the Ba River (although actually they are in the deep south); and though they have no idea what Yang Pass and Wei City were like, they still speak of "three refrains at Yang Pass" or the "parting song at Wei City." Or the expression "water roots, porridge, perch, and minced meat" used by Zhang Han when the autumn winds blew and made him long for his home in the Wu region (the only place those delicacies could be had). Now, although not from Wu and not knowing what these delicacies taste like, we still indicate our homesickness with the expression "thoughts of water roots and perch."

This reflects not only an indolence beyond salvation, but a self-deception and a deception of others.

Men of letters devote much time and energy to all these various sorts of allusions. Once you are stung with their poison, there is no recovery. This is why I have advocated not employing allusions.

34. From *Zhuangzi*. "Tianxia" (Under heaven), a reference to the breadth of Huizi's book learning.

35. *Kong 孔* (very) *huai 懷* (care) or the feelings one has for one's brother, i.e., brothers; from *Book of Songs*, Xiaoya, "Changdi" 常棣. The rendering "official position" for *zengshi 曾* is, which means something like "as such," is an extrapolation from a line in the *Book of Songs*, Daya, "Dang" 蕩, that reads "*zeng shi zai wei*" 曾是在位.

36. The allusion is to the parable of the man from Qi who is worried that the sky will fall. To Hu Shi it makes no sense to compare a majestically tall mountain to the skies of Qi.



## VII. Do Not Use Parallelism

Parallelism is a characteristic of human language.<sup>37</sup> For this reason we find occasional parallel lines even in such ancient texts as those by Confucius and Laozi. For example:

The way that can be spoken is not the constant way;  
 The name that can be named is not the constant name.  
 The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;  
 The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.  
 Let there forever be non-being so we may see their subtlety;  
 Let there forever be being so we may see their outcome.<sup>38</sup>

Or the following parallel lines from the *Analects*:

In food [the gentleman] does not seek satiety,  
 Nor in his dwelling does he seek ease and comfort.<sup>39</sup>

Poverty without sycophancy  
 Wealth without arrogance.<sup>40</sup>

You love his goats,  
 I love his rites.<sup>41</sup>

Yet these are all not far from natural language, without a trace of being forced or artificially constructed, especially since rules had yet to be established as to the length of lines, tones, or diction. As for the decadent literature of subsequent generations, it was without substance and showy to such a degree that it led to the advent of parallel prose, regulated verse, and extended regulated verse. There are some excellent works written in parallel prose and in regulated verse, but these are rare in the final analysis. Why is this? Is it not because they constrict man's freedom to such an extent? (Not a single excellent work of long regulated verse can be mentioned.) Now, in our discussion of literary reform, we must "first stand fast

37. Hu Shi's opposition to parallelism resonates with the Ancient-Style Prose movement, as well as with the Qing Tongcheng school's reaction to the parallel style advocated by the Wenxuan school.

38. *Daode jing*, ch. 1; translation borrowed from D. C. Lau, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1963), 57.

39. *Analects*, 1.14.

40. *Ibid.*, 1.15.

41. *Ibid.*, 3.17.

on what is of greater importance"<sup>42</sup> and not waste our useful talents on minute detail and subtle technique. This is why I have proposed the elimination of parallel prose and regulated verse. Even if they cannot be eliminated, we should nonetheless look upon them as mere literary tricks, not something to be undertaken with any urgency.

Today people still look down upon vernacular fiction as the lesser tradition and are not aware that Shi Nai'an, Cao Xueqin, and Wu Woyao are the truly canonical and that parallel prose and regulated verse are the lesser tradition. I know that when you hear this there will certainly be some among you who simply cannot bear it.

## VIII. Do Not Avoid Vulgar Diction

Since my literary canon is composed only of Shi Nai'an, Cao Xueqin, and Wu Woyao, I have the theory of "do not avoid vulgar diction." (Refer to Section 2 above.) And yet for a long time the spoken and literary languages in our country have been turning their backs on each other. Ever since the importation of Buddhist scriptures, translators have been aware of the fact that the classical language is deficient in conveying meaning, so they have used in their translations an ordinary and simple language, whose style verged on the vernacular. Later, Buddhist lectures and catechisms mostly made use of the vernacular, which gave rise to the dialogue (*yulu* 語錄) form. When the Song neo-Confucians used the vernacular in the scholarly lectures of their dialogues, this form became the standard in scholarship. (Ming scholars later followed this style.) By this time, the vernacular had already long since entered rhymed prose, as can be seen in the vernacular poetry and lyrics of the Tang and Song. By the end of the Yuan dynasty, northern China had already been under the occupation of a foreign race for more than three hundred years (Liao, Jin, and Yuan dynasties). In these three hundred years, China developed an incipient popular literature, out of which emerged the novels *The Water Margin*, *The Journey to the West*, and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and innumerable dramas (Guan Hanqing et al. each produced more than ten different dramas; no period in the history of Chinese literature exceeded this in terms of wealth of productivity). Looking back from our contemporary perspective, the Yuan should without doubt be seen as the most vigorous period of Chinese literature, producing the greatest number of immortal works. At that time, Chinese literature came closest to a union of spoken and written languages, and the vernacular itself had nearly become a literary language. If this ten-



gency had not been arrested, then a "living literature" might have appeared in China and the great endeavor of Dante and Luther might have developed in old Cathay. (In the Middle Ages in Europe, each country had its own vulgar spoken language and Latin was the literary language. All written works used Latin, just as the classical language was used in China. Later, in Italy appeared Dante and other literary giants who first used their own vulgar language to write. Other countries followed suit, and national languages began to replace Latin. When Luther created Protestantism, he began by translating the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament* into German, which ushered in German literature. England, France, and other countries followed this pattern. Today the most widely circulated English Bible is a translation dating from 1611, only 300 years ago. Hence, all contemporary literature in the various European nations developed from the vulgar languages of that time. The rise of literary giants began with a "living literature" replacing a dead literature in Latin. When there is a living literature, there will be a national language based on the unity of the spoken and written languages.) Unexpectedly, this tendency was suddenly arrested during the Ming. The government had already been using the "eight-legged essay" to select its civil servants, and scholars like Li Mengyang [1472-1529] and the followers of the "former seven masters" raised "archaism" [*jugu*] as the most lofty of literary goals. So the once-in-a-millennium opportunity to effect the unity of the spoken and written languages died a premature death, midway in the process. Yet, from today's perspective of historical evolution, we can say with complete certainty that vernacular literature is really the canonical and will be a useful tool for developing future literature. (My "certainty" is only my opinion, one shared by few of my contemporaries.) For this reason, I propose the appropriate use of vulgar diction in the writing of prose and poetry. It is preferable to use the living words of the twentieth century than the dead words of three millennia past (like "Most glorious National Assembly, the end of penumbrous times is nigh"); it is preferable to use the language of *The Water Margin* and *The Journey to the West*, which is known in every household, than the language of the Qin, Han, and Six Dynasties, which is limited and not universally understood.

### Conclusion

The eight points related above are the result of my recent investigation and contemplation of this important question. Since I am studying in a far-off foreign land,<sup>43</sup> I have little leisure for reading, so I must ask my learned

43. Hu was studying at Cornell University when he wrote this essay.

elders back home for their scrutiny and circumspection, for there may well be places in need of severe rectification. These eight points are all fundamental to literature and merit investigation. So I have drafted this essay and hope that it elicits some response from those who care about this issue, both here and in China. I have called them "modest proposals" to underscore the sense of their incompleteness and to respectfully seek the redaction of my compatriots.

—Translated by Kirk A. Denton