

On the Framework of Lu Xun Education in Primary and Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Lu Xun's works have been a perennial presence in Chinese language classrooms for over a century, offering profound humanistic and linguistic value for contemporary primary and secondary students. This paper proposes the concept of "Lu Xun Education in Primary and Secondary Schools" to significantly expand the breadth and depth of teaching Lu Xun's works. The Chinese language classroom serves as the primary platform for implementing this education, requiring adherence to specific text selection principles to determine which of Lu Xun's works are included in textbooks, alongside reforms to address longstanding issues in classroom pedagogy. However, classroom reading alone is insufficient; a multidimensional, holistic reform of Lu Xun education is necessary, involving progressive implementation across primary, junior, and senior high school stages, integrating mandatory and elective courses with extracurricular activities, and fostering collaboration among society, schools, and families. Such reforms aim to "upgrade" Lu Xun education, presenting it in a revitalized form.

Keywords: Adolescents, Primary and Secondary Schools, Chinese Language Curriculum, Lu Xun Education, Teaching Lu Xun's Works

1 Introduction

Lu Xun and his works represent a towering peak of thought, culture, and literature emerging at the juncture of modern China. Scholars argue that, alongside Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, Lu Xun's thought is one of the few cultural and intellectual forces in contemporary mainland China that maintains external independence and authority. His influence on Chinese intellectuals is profound, embedded at a cultural and genetic level, often likened to a powerful magnet that irresistibly draws admirers who become lifelong devotees. For generations, Lu Xun has been a spiritual "godfather" and life mentor, guiding readers to observe society, reflect on humanity, and learn to live meaningfully.

As an educator, Lu Xun engaged directly in educational activities for over two decades while contemplating China's educational challenges throughout his life. His educational philosophy, a cornerstone of his thought, crystallized in 1908 with the proposition of "establishing the individual" (*liren*). Amid China's poverty, weakness, and internal and external crises, Lu Xun, like other patriotic intellectuals, sought a path to national rejuvenation. He believed the key lay in fostering individuals with independent personalities and dignified spirits, as articulated in his essay *On Cultural Extremes*: "Establish the individual first, and all else will follow; the path must honor individuality and spirit." This concept of *liren*—emphasizing self-reliance, individuality, and dignity—called for a new citizenry distinct from the feudal past. Lu Xun's lifelong thought and actions were dedicated to this ideal. During his studies in Japan, he identified transforming the Chinese "spirit" as the nation's primary task (*Preface to Call to Arms*). Despite his relentless advocacy and efforts, the deep-seated habits of Chinese society and the stubbornness of national character made this transformation elusive. A century later, the ideal of *liren* remains aspirational.

Since 1923, Lu Xun's works have been a staple in secondary school Chinese language textbooks, establishing him as the preeminent classic of vernacular literature. Across a

century of political upheavals and changing regimes, no Chinese language curriculum has bypassed Lu Xun. While other writers may be absent from textbooks, Lu Xun's presence is indispensable—his absence would render a textbook lackluster. As Chinese language education fundamentally aims to cultivate individuals, the concept of "Lu Xun Education in Primary and Secondary Schools" is both logical and necessary.

2 Humanistic and Linguistic Value: Lu Xun's Relevance to Contemporary Youth

Over the past century, countless Chinese youths have been nurtured by Lu Xun's works, many becoming advocates and fighters for national independence and strength. His contemporary educational value is undeniable, manifesting in two primary dimensions: the inspirational impact of his thought, character, and spirit, and the linguistic artistry and writing techniques that serve as vital resources for students' language acquisition. In essence, Lu Xun's works offer rich humanistic education and linguistic learning value.

2.1 Humanistic Educational Value

Lu Xun and his works are a treasure trove of thought, brimming with resources for exploration and refinement. His qualities—universal love, sacrificial spirit, independent personality, critical consciousness, and resilient resistance—are palpable and learnable, profoundly moving and inspiring young readers.

1. **Universal Love and Compassion.** Lu Xun's love for his nation, people, and land was profound, vowing, "I offer my blood for the motherland" and pledging to "bow my head as a willing ox" for the masses. His sense of connection to "the infinite distance and countless people" (*This Too Is Life*) was not abstract but tangible, extending to family, friends, youth, children, and the unrecognized masses. As a voice for the marginalized, he spoke for the oppressed and insulted. In a society where critics are

scarce and flatterers abound, Lu Xun's works shine as a beacon of compassion and hope.

2. **Critical Spirit and Self-Reflection.** The core of Lu Xun's works lies in exposing and critiquing falsehoods, unveiling truths, and revealing societal sores beneath superficial beauty '

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(a) **Universal Love and Compassion.** Lu Xun's love for his nation, people, and land was profound, vowing, "I offer my blood for the motherland" and pledging to "bow my head as a willing ox" for the masses. His sense of connection to "the infinite distance and countless people" (*This Too Is Life*) was not abstract but tangible, extending to family, friends, youth, children, and the unrecognized masses. As a voice for the marginalized, he spoke for the oppressed and insulted. In a society where critics are scarce and flatterers abound, Lu Xun's works shine as a beacon of compassion and hope.

(b) **Critical Spirit and Self-Reflection.** The core of Lu Xun's works lies in exposing and critiquing falsehoods, unveiling truths, and revealing societal sores beneath superficial beauty. He critiqued the powerful and oppressive, exposing societal ugliness and injustice. As a dissident of his era, Lu Xun's relentless critique reflected his profound love for his nation. His self-reflection was equally rigorous, as he noted, "I constantly dissect others, but even more mercilessly dissect myself" (*Postscript to The Grave*). His chilling realization that he too was complicit in society's cannibalistic banquet underscores a universal truth: all share in the world's sins. This introspective consciousness, when absorbed by youths, plants seeds of self-reflection.

(c) **Resilient Resistance and Defiance of Despair.** Lu Xun neither bowed to authority nor compromised with the masses, maintaining his independent spirit even among allies. His resilient resistance, imbued with a fearless spirit, challenged falsehoods and upheld justice and dignity. Unfazed by power, deception, or adversity, he refused to be co-opted, instead inspiring others to join his pursuit of light. In an oppressive darkness, Lu Xun chose to "stir trouble with the dark" (*Letters to Xu Guangping*), persisting despite knowing the path

led to a grave. For youths yet to face life's trials, Lu Xun offers a code for resilience and strength.

- (d) **Self-Reliance and Dignity.** Lu Xun identified a pervasive "slave mentality" in Chinese society, where subservience stripped individuals of humanity. He believed China's failure to modernize stemmed from its people's lack of selfreliance and dignity. His call for *liren* aimed to foster upright, dignified citizens. Adolescence is a critical period for developing such qualities, and Lu Xun's works provide the spiritual "calcium" to nurture youths into upright, dignified individuals.

4.2 Linguistic Learning Value

Beyond their humanistic impact, Lu Xun's works are a linguistic treasure, enhancing students' language comprehension, expression, and writing skills. His texts, blending vernacular with classical, foreign, and dialectical elements, elevate modern Chinese to its expressive zenith, serving as exemplary models for language learning.

- (a) **Concise Expression.** Lu Xun valued brevity, avoiding verbosity to convey meaning efficiently (*How I Came to Write Fiction*). His prose, dense and metallic, paints vivid portraits with minimal words, as seen in *The True Story of Ah Q*, where a few lines capture a complex character, or in *Medicine*, where a single sentence vividly depicts a crowd. His essays, equally economical, wield language like a dagger, demonstrating the infinite possibilities of Chinese.
- (b) **Poetic Quality.** Though not primarily a poet, Lu Xun's prose is imbued with poetic beauty, blending classical Chinese lyricism with modern Western imagery. Passages from *A Good Story* or *Wild Grass* evoke natural and emotional landscapes with rhythmic elegance. His ability to infuse narration,

description, and argumentation with poetic resonance showcases his linguistic mastery.

- (c) **Writing Techniques.** Lu Xun's extensive writing experience offers practical guidance. He advocated abandoning obscure terms, drawing from living language, selecting meaningful material, and revising meticulously (*How I Came to Write Fiction*). His works, as both reading classics and writing models, teach students how to write effectively and avoid common pitfalls.

As Chinese language curriculum reforms deepen, Lu Xun's works remain indispensable, supporting the development of core competencies in language construction, critical thinking, aesthetic appreciation, and cultural understanding.

5 Teaching and Education: Elevating Lu Xun Education

Lu Xun education in schools emerged alongside the dissemination of his works during the New Culture Movement. By 1923, his works were formally included in textbooks, becoming a cornerstone of Chinese language education. Despite periods of controversy, particularly in the 21st century, Lu Xun remains central to the curriculum. However, the focus on "teaching" Lu Xun's works has limited its scope, necessitating a shift to "Lu Xun education."

5.1 Distinctions Between Teaching and Education

"Teaching" and "education" differ significantly:

- **Scope.** Teaching is confined to classroom interactions, while education encompasses extracurricular activities, social practices, and family involvement.

- **Content.** Teaching emphasizes skills and knowledge transmission, while education prioritizes holistic personal development, including moral and spiritual growth.
- **Goals.** Teaching focuses on academic outcomes, while education aims for comprehensive character formation and societal contribution.
- **Agents.** Teaching involves primarily teachers, while education engages families, schools, and society.

Similarly, "teaching Lu Xun's works" falls short of "Lu Xun education." Current teaching practices are limited by:

- (a) Confinement to classrooms, lacking extracurricular reading.
- (b) Focus on textbook texts, neglecting broader exploration of Lu Xun's life and thought.
- (c) Reduction of works to political or exam materials, undermining their literary and educational value.
- (d) Isolation within the Chinese curriculum, missing interdisciplinary connections.

The concept of "Lu Xun Education in Primary and Secondary Schools" addresses these shortcomings by integrating classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and societal engagement to foster students' humanistic and linguistic competencies.

5.2 Significance of Lu Xun Education

Proposing and implementing Lu Xun education offers:

- (a) **Rich Educational Resources.** Lu Xun's works provide patriotism, independence, and critical thinking, aligning with his *liren* ideal.

- (b) Approach. It corrects the imbalance between ideological and linguistic goals, preventing the reduction of Lu Xun's works to mere tools or exam materials.
- (c) Expansion. It elevates Lu Xun studies within basic education, broadening the field's scope.
- (d) Opportunities. It fosters partnerships between educators and scholars, enhancing curriculum design and teaching practices.

6 Curriculum and Classroom: The Core of Lu Xun

Education

The classroom is the primary arena for Lu Xun education, with curriculum design and teaching practices as critical components.

6.1 Text Selection and Inclusion

Over 160 of Lu Xun's works have appeared in textbooks over the past century, with most selections proving effective. However, limited textbook space requires careful curation. Four principles guide selection:

- (a) Reflect Lu Xun's literary and intellectual achievements, balancing his roles as a thinker and writer.
- (b) Ensure accessibility and emotional resonance, aligning with students' age and psychological development.
- (c) Establish a progressive difficulty gradient across primary, junior, and senior high school stages.
- (d) Include supplementary texts by contemporaries and scholars to enrich understanding.

Recommended selections include:

- **Primary School:** Excerpts like *Young Runtu (Hometown)*, *Watching the Opera (Village Opera)*, and *The Story of the Hidden Mouse (Dogs, Cats, and Mice)*.
- **Junior High:** Full texts like *Hometown*, *Kong Yiji*, and *Snow*.
- **Senior High:** *Diary of a Madman*, *The True Story of Ah Q*, and *Take-ism*.

Unselected works should be included in elective courses or extracurricular reading materials.

6.2 Addressing Pedagogical Challenges

Persistent issues in teaching Lu Xun's works include:

- (a) Deviation from Lu Xun's intent, reducing works to political or exam tools.
- (b) Disconnect from academic research, resulting in outdated methods.
- (c) Teachers' limited familiarity with Lu Xun and literary studies.
- (d) Rigid, formulaic teaching approaches.

Solutions include:

- (a) **Teacher Training.** Teachers must study Lu Xun's complete works, modern Chinese history, and contemporary scholarship to enhance their expertise.
- (b) **Innovative Methods.** Adapt teaching to students' stages and text genres, encouraging open engagement and connecting Lu Xun to modern contexts.
- (c) **Primary School Focus.** Emphasize accessible, relatable content to build a foundation for lifelong appreciation.
- (d) **Academic Support.** Scholars should provide resources and guidance to teachers, bridging academia and education.

7 Multidimensional Reform: A Holistic Approach

Lu Xun education requires a systemic approach, integrating classroom learning with broader educational strategies.

7.1 Progressive Implementation Across Stages

Lu Xun education should progress across primary, junior, and senior high school:

- **Primary School:** Foster familiarity and affection through relatable themes like childhood and nature.
- **Junior High:** Emphasize Lu Xun as a literary figure, exploring emotional and aesthetic dimensions.
- **Senior High:** Highlight Lu Xun as a thinker, engaging with complex ideas and critical analysis.

Integrated Curriculum Design A three-tiered approach—mandatory, elective, and extracurricular—enhances engagement:

- **Mandatory Courses:** Ensure all students study core Lu Xun texts.
- **Elective Courses:** Offer deeper exploration through specialized topics.
- **Extracurricular Activities:** Include lectures, literature clubs, and visits to Lu Xun memorials.

Collaborative Ecosystem Schools, families, and society must collaborate:

- **Family Engagement:** Encourage parent-child reading and home-based activities.
- **Societal Support:** Regulate Lu Xun-related publications, leverage digital platforms, and promote cultural activities.

- **Interdisciplinary Integration:** Incorporate Lu Xun into history, social studies, and arts curricula.

8 Conclusion

Lu Xun education in primary and secondary schools is a vital endeavor to nurture students' humanistic and linguistic competencies. By expanding beyond classroom teaching to a multidimensional, collaborative framework, it aligns with Lu Xun's vision of *liren*, fostering independent, dignified, and reflective individuals. This reform promises to revitalize Lu Xun's legacy, ensuring its relevance for future generations.