

the redeemer or punisher, *Trefoil* is a series of penitent writings circulated within a community of literary men. The exaggerated language of culpability and eagerness for judgment extends beyond masochistic, fictional narratives and resurfaces as the very terms of self-perception for male writers. Just as the protagonists of Yu Dafu or Guo Moruo beg for death at the hands of their cruel mistresses, the writers themselves appeal to one another in the same language of guilt and exoneration. The distinction between private and public writings dissolves in the form of confession, which moves easily between literary persona and personal identity, excess and redemption.⁷⁵

Confession to failures thrives on the possibility of exteriorizing personal pain. In the same way that it obfuscates the line between literary masochism and personal correspondence, it also escapes the distinction between private suffering and national distress. This is perhaps one of the distinguishing and persistent features of the modern narrative of the self in these masochistic narratives that emerges resiliently, however repeatedly defeated, under the imperatives of desire, sexuality, and sacrifice.

A literary consideration demonstrates the intricate workings of the felt need for trauma in the individual. It also opens for consideration the possibility of a cultural trauma relying on a similar but projected notion of objectless suffering. More than merely relieving oneself of inner torments, masochistic confessions gesture toward a communal sense of bondage and expiation. In the range of possible forms of cultural survival, none can do without the preservation of an insurmountable anguish that resounds in the minds of individuals and binds them to a national community. Whether this stems from the individual's recognized torment or perceived national dejection does not alter the power of suffering in summoning a nation to claim its own epoch of affliction. In the final chapter, we shall see how the notion of suffering itself comes to be consecrated as an aesthetic as well as a political experience. Thus laying claim to a national community of pain, suffering becomes that encapsulating feature of the modern epoch that brings together the self in agony with the nation in peril.

Kumen, *Cultural Suffering*

A PROFOUND SENSE of suffering, unease, and affliction permeated social, political, and cultural life in the 1920s and 1930s. The expression of masochism and melancholia in first-person literary narratives reveals part of an increasingly encompassing sentiment regarding the destiny of modern Chinese literature. Indeed, the cultural project of literary modernity relies on the same vision of exaltation and despair as national survival. The nation's failure resounds intimately with one's own, a nexus that, according to different persuasions of literary criticism from that period, should be addressed in literature. One way of understanding this fraught relationship between self and society is to parse it in terms of the ideological content of literary trends in the 1920s and 1930s, such as realism, naturalism, Romanticism, or New Sensationalism.¹ The dilemmas expressed in literary ideologies, however, were only symptomatic of the underlying sentiment of cultural malaise itself. Questions such as what constitutes literary genius, whether great Chinese works are on par with those by Western masters, or whether Chinese literary modernity is distinctive, were asked with a poignant awareness of deficiency.

The idea of cultural discontent in this period has been considered so indisputable that it has failed to stimulate critical inquiry. No one would contest the fact that Chinese intellectuals and writers faced great uncertainty regarding their nation's destiny and their own roles in it during these decades of transition. Even less would one cast doubt upon the degree of torment these individuals proclaimed in their struggle with the project of nation building. This profound sense of uncertainty and suffering, however, has in significant ways become the productive condition of both nation and culture building in China. Torment itself has enabled the formation of a regenerative cultural identity protected from destruction and sustained in suf-

fering. A peculiar "mood" accompanied the building of literary and cultural modernity. This sentiment did not merely confine itself to a period of political and social introspection but also provided the central impetus for the revolutionary passion necessary for patriotic resistance in the Second Sino-Japanese War. The mood for this embrace of failure was *kumen*.

The Appeal of Affliction

Kumen—variously translated as "suffering," "agony," "mental anguish," or "depression"—was a term with great discursive capital in the 1920s and 1930s. Suffering displayed the emotion of literary modernity. Encompassing the nation's demise as well as the individual's tormented sexual identity, suffering provided the common framework in which both the self and nation could be expressed. *Kumen*, however, has a broader range of meaning than mere suffering and depression. Even within the category of suffering, the meaning of *kumen* appears rather ambiguous, as it wavers between individual and cultural, bodily and psychological desires. This is evident in Yu Dafu's "Sinking," one of the earliest modern literary usages of *kumen*:

The weather was now getting milder, and the grass was turning green under the influence of warm breezes. The young shoots in the wheat fields near the inn were growing taller inch by inch. With all nature responding to the call of spring, he too felt more keenly the urge (*kumen*) implanted in him by the progenitors of the human race. Unflaggingly, he would sin every morning underneath his quilt. He was ordinarily a very self-respecting and clean person, but when evil thoughts seized hold of him, numbing his intellect and paralyzing his conscience, he was no longer able to observe the admonition that "one must not harm one's body under any circumstances, since it is inherited from one's parents." Every time after committing the crime, he felt bitter remorse and vowed not to transgress again. But, almost without exception, the same visions appeared before him vividly, at the same time the next morning. All those descendants of Eve he would normally meet in the course of the day came to seduce him in all their nakedness, and the figure of a middle-aged *madman* appeared to him ever more tempting than that of a virgin. Inevitably, after a hard struggle (*kumen*) he succumbed to temptation. Thus once, twice, and this practice became a habit. Quite often, after committing the crime, he would go to the library to look up medical references on the subject. They all said without exception that this practice was most harmful to one's health. After that his fear increased.²

In the first instance in this passage, *kumen* substitutes for the desire to procreate, an "urge" passed down from the protagonist's ancestors. This sexual urge does not turn into a crime until it materializes in the act of masturbation, an event he subsequently reflects on as a transgression. However, the knowledge of guilt had already insinuated itself before the execution of the

act. Sexual desire implies this prior recognition of guilt and criminality. For the protagonist, simply the awareness of physical desire predicates itself on the idea of sin as a kind of suffering and torment. The "urge" (*kumen*) he feels is inseparable from the act of masturbation. It not only anticipates the crime but also shares in its illicit relief. In this way, *kumen* embodies corporeality within the contour of psychological torment.

Ku, meaning "bitter," and *men*, a kind of suppressed melancholy, denote a sealed enclosure. Whereas *ku* implies a state of hardship or agony, its attachment to *men* is less transparent in meaning. We are not certain what torments the subject in his state of *kumen*, for *men* somehow mutes the expression of suffering. On the one hand, *kumen* describes a state of incapacitation from expression, as though barred from making a proper address to the outside world. On the other hand, it also demarcates an interior space of the subject that is precluded from view, an inner life removed from external scrutiny.³ The second use of *kumen* in the passage suggests that conflict constitutes the main drama of this internal life. The protagonist's "hard struggle" presumably stems from his unspeakable sin, a struggle that finds relief only in a temporary indulgence in criminality.

Whereas in the first instance *kumen* hints at masturbation, in the second it aligns itself with moral conscience. *Kumen* seems to indicate a pivotal condition in which desire and the struggle against it are simultaneously experienced. Its appeal as a description of a suffering both profound and irrecconcilable was, however, not limited to Yu Dafu's stories, which were often considered the romanticist confessions of a prodigal figure brimming with self-indulgence and sentimentality. Lu Yin, often noted as a female counterpart to Yu Dafu, used *kumen* to gesture toward a kind of unconsummated female intimacy. In works such as "Lishi's Diary" (*Lishi de riji*) and "Someone's Grief" (*Huoren de bei ai*), *kumen* denoted the condition particular to the torments of female sexual identity.⁴

Kumen in fact has a broader appeal than mere sentimental self-deprecation. Mao Dun and Ye Shengtao, both champions of realist fiction, favored the term in their works as well. In their usage of the term, *kumen* encompassed a sense of social suffering that included while exceeding individual affliction. This extension of suffering into the social found resonance with authors interested in directing literature away from the individual and toward the masses. "A Woman" (*Yige nüren*, 1928) by Mao Dun, for instance, uses *kumen* in the context of the New Woman. "A Woman" focuses on the consequences of oppressive social expectations on a young woman's life. It refers to this experience as the "kumen of modern women."⁵ The female protagonist, Qionghua, falls prey to a society that provides little space

for a woman's independence. Her persistent ideals and aspirations finally end in her tragic death. Clearly, for Mao Dun, kumen is the effect of externally imposed prescriptions from which one struggles to free oneself. His preoccupation with the New Woman, also evident in his other stories, such as "Creation," leads him to understand this mood in terms of the discontent of gender.⁶ Kumen, in this case, is led away from the subject's interior torment and directed at a larger social criticism.

In a similar way, Ye Shengtao uses kumen to capture the suffering of individuals at the hands of historical forces. "Night" (Ye, 1927) focuses on the mind of an old woman whose son and daughter-in-law are illegally executed by the secret police. Left to care for her grandson, she awaits confirmation of their deaths from her brother. Meanwhile, she agonizes over a question about justice that the political turmoil and violence around her fail to answer:

Like her brother, she doesn't understand what was going through the heads of her son and daughter-in-law. But she does know very well that they are not of the same kind as those convicts with murderous looks and brutality in their voices. Why it is that they end up being treated as if they were the same is a question she has recently been brooding over. This has caused her much torment (kumen). But no one has given her an answer.⁷

From the simple view of the old woman, the deaths of her grandson's parents are incomprehensible. As a political sacrifice, her family has been torn apart, ending in her son's death and the orphaning of the infant. In Ye's text, kumen mirrors the consequence of political affliction, to which the common masses fall victim. It is enlarged to encompass the suffering brought about by forces unsympathetic to the individual. Far from being the private grievances of individuals, kumen becomes a generalized affliction that reflects more a social than a psychological torment. Instead of sympathizing with particular individuals, one sees, rather, the larger historical context that necessitates, however regrettably, their tragedies. We are alerted to the fact of suffering only to aestheticize its implications for a grander historical moment. Through the suffering of individuals, one is to extrapolate the general condition of an epoch.

To writers and intellectuals increasingly politicized toward class revolution in the 1920s and 1930s, this double sense of kumen, as both individual and societal torment, suggests a powerful way of reconciling literary artistry with social reality. Literary criticism was increasingly steered toward a more socialist agenda in an effort to bring literature closer to the masses. The kind of critical energy this project commands was evident in the ideological battles between the Creation Society and the Literary Association beginning

in the early 1920s. The debate over whether literature should be not only unrestrained artistry but also responsible for social reform continues to dominate the twentieth century.⁸

It is important to recall, however, that in the early 1920s, May Fourth literature did not quite develop according to the dictates of Liang Qichao's 1902 vision of new fiction. Lu Xun's madman, Yu Dafu's self-flagellating protagonist, Ding Ling's tormented Sophie, and Mao Dun's New Woman, were, first and foremost, explorations of modern self-consciousness. Subsequent questions as to whether this was socially responsible were moralized attempts to redirect this fundamentally individualistic preoccupation. The idea of depicting real suffering as an antidote to a New Literature dominated by the narcissism of first-person narratives became the task of intellectuals and writers. Suffering was claimed as the exclusive prerogative of socially productive literature. One recalls that Hu Shi's programmatic address on the direction of New Literature specifically opposed "groaning without illness" (*wubing shenyin*) and reserved the power of affliction exclusively for serious literature.⁹ The assumption here is that pointless whining about one's sexual or personal discontent destroys the proper solemnity of social anguish. However, the task of making suffering a socially useful expression did not entail abandoning the notion of individual suffering either. In 1933, when intellectual attention increasingly turned to the masses, Yu Dafu, for example, redefined kumen in a sense surprisingly different from its literary figuration in his earlier works:

The most important thing about New Fiction is that it must relinquish the small "I" of former times in exchange for a greater "I" which can represent the masses of the world. One must take the individual's emotion of an instant and expand it into a cumulative sentiment of an epoch, a class. The kind of life story told in fiction of former times focuses primarily on the age of purity which was taken as the richest period in one's lifetime. Romance novels about love triangles or even quadrangles and novels about desire which seek to arouse the sexual appetite belong to such a genre. Fiction now, however, cannot be this way. To represent life, one must put one's finger on what is most important in life. To depict kumen, one must focus on depicting the kumen of life which is far more important than sexual kumen. Libido is not all there is to life. In a person's lifetime, there are innumerable important things that happen apart from the intercourse between men and women.¹⁰

Emptying kumen of its sexual content, Yu favors a kind of literature with greater resonance to the hardship of life. Although undeniable, sexual kumen is now placed in the service of the discontent at the foundation of life. Of course, no one could fail to notice that Yu rejects as much of his own literary past as he does old fiction. Significantly, he lifts kumen from the liter-

ary imagination to encompass what plagues the Chinese intellectuals in a historical moment of a cultural crisis.

In a similar way, literary critics of different orientations take kumen as the condition for the birth of Chinese literary modernity. Somehow, the severity of suffering promises a new birth and even health. The Marxist critic Qian Xingcun (A Ying), for instance, praises Yu Dafu for his “very healthy expression of the illness of an era,” an era characterized by kumen.¹¹ Qian even specifies the various kinds of kumen facing modern life, including social and economic hardships. He maps out a succession of these kumens in the order of sexuality, society, and economy. In a remarkable trajectory, each stage is superseded by the next in a teleological progression. Kumen not only encapsulates sexual torment but also provides the impetus for revolution. Despite his Marxist teleological tendency to subsume sexual kumen under the grander project of revolution, Qian’s argument does not succeed in disengaging the sexual from the political. It reveals, rather, the evocative force of sexual torment in the making of revolutionary passion.

Although its appeal cannot be limited to the sexual torment that occasioned its literary genesis, kumen includes the kind of suffering for which sexual desire is responsible. Its wide applicability lies in its articulation of a struggle against desire in general. An increasingly complex view of artistry in literary criticism reflects this attempt to deepen the notion of suffering as something particular to China’s social and national struggle. Zheng Boqi, for example, the noted critic from the Creation Society, proposes that kumen itself is precisely what distinguishes Chinese literary modernity. He further uses it to separate modern Chinese literature from the Western literary conventions that have informed much of its modern style. Using kumen to distinguish a “Chinese” literary modernity, he remarks:

China in the 1920s is just at the beginning of a great transformation. Everything has declined from the stability of thousands of years into a state of agitation. It is impossible to say whether what has been affected the most is the status of intellectuals or the livelihood of the petit bourgeois. . . . Poets, novelists, scholars, literati, the so-called petit bourgeois class, and the intellectual class are now embarking on the path of terror and anxiety. They do not have the “leisure” of Balzac to write about the *comédie humaine*. What they sense, first and foremost, is the instability of their own lives and the falling status of their position in society. The more honest those writers are to themselves, the more poignant is this realization. Hence their works are all the more objective. The reason that, in our present literary scene, this kind of objective work is so few and far between is precisely due to this lack. People often say that there are two reasons why literary works fail to be objective. The first is that the author’s own experiences are limited. The second is that the author’s perceptive powers lack depth. Of course, both of these explanations are irrefutable. However, the most important reason

is still the epoch in which the author lives. If this were late nineteenth-century France, Zola’s Realism could certainly take our literary scene by a storm. If this were Russia in the 1900s, then Chekhov’s hopelessness and detachment could surely also strongly influence our style.¹² But that is not the case. *Our epoch is an epoch of kumen*. It is an era of agitation, resistance, and outcry. In an era like this, we must absolutely reject objectivity and ask instead for pure subjectivity.¹³ (emphasis added)

This view of literature sheds important light on the issue of Western literary influences. For Zheng, the determining factor in the significance of Western literature resides in China’s own mode of reception. He points out that for realism, or any literary orientation, to have the effect one would admire in the Western context, one’s own historical context would essentially have to pose an equivalence. Yet, he emphasizes, that is precisely never the case. The epochal moment in which China finds herself is one of suffering and agitation. Hence, its need for realism must differ radically from what Western realism can offer.

Zheng also points out that kumen necessarily envelops those who seek to give it expression. Artists’ own perceptive powers do not hold the key to their expressive potential. More important is their responsiveness to what already manifests itself around them, the pervasive and undeniable mood of anguish that extends into the lives of the common people. In this way, Zheng seems to suggest that authors carry no importance in their creations. If anything, the propensity of the epoch determines both the authors and their work. However, Zheng takes a step back to assert that writers must not compromise their subjective views, for they also particularize and express in them the kumen permeating the world they live in. Interestingly, kumen returns to occupy a deeply subjective mood. The author becomes a symptom of suffering. In this way, Qian’s idea of the author as the “healthy” embodiment of a diseased era is less paradoxical than it seems. If the author himself is not distanced from kumen, then he is necessarily an expression of it. Thus, he is not privy to what determines kumen, for his very authorship is predicated on his inability to reflect on what constitutes kumen.

Perhaps out of this very necessity of absolute immersion, writers and intellectuals seldom discuss kumen as such in literary or cultural discourse. Yet, as though proving its ineffable presence, kumen surfaces in every discussion. In his preface to the *Compendium of Modern Chinese Literature*, Mao Dun acknowledges kumen as the dominating mood among writers and readers alike up to the May Thirtieth Incident of 1925. In connection with the anti-British and anti-Japanese strikes in Shanghai, the event brought intellectuals to a turning point.

Members of the Creation Society, for instance, relinquished the idea of

“art for art’s sake” and proclaimed, instead, their embrace of revolutionary literature. In his review of the first decade of New Literature, Mao Dun distinguishes between two literary approaches to life.¹⁴ The rationalist view sought reason rather than emotion. It proposed deepening abstractions with substance and finding the right “prescription” to remedy China’s ills. The other approach moved from the emotions to the senses, from the abstract to the material. Thus, a cycle of suffering and hesitation (*kumen panghuang*) and the need for the excitement it engenders were born. Even though the rationalist view amounted only to a detached and weakened realism, Mao Dun asserts, the more volatile and emotional response intoxicated the young people. Thus, *kumen* and *panghuang* dominated the entire literary scene. Even though on the surface people make some distinction between detached cynicism and hedonistic indulgence, underneath lies the same suffering and uncertainty. Thus, a literature that was supposed to resolve itself by walking toward change at the crossroads, Mao Dun observes, ended up pacing back and forth in hesitation.

In contradistinction to Zheng Boqi, however, Mao Dun did not believe that the period of *kumen* would continue exerting its influence over the mood of revolutionary China. For him, the writers’ inability to gain a more profound insight into their historical context bespoke the barrenness of their lives. This lack of involvement, in turn, manifested itself in the sterility of their literature. Despite his prognosis of *kumen*’s transient appeal, however, neither was Mao Dun prepared to abandon the force of *kumen* for the kind of literature he wanted to espouse. *Kumen* remains the passion, however tormented, behind the intellectuals’ sympathy for the masses. In fact, the suffering of the masses in part becomes an extension and enlargement of the inner conflict intellectuals could not resolve in sensing their own crisis of diminishing relevance.

For the intellectuals, *kumen* represented the propensity of an era. Its appearance always assumed a certain transparency, even though it never had a fixed definition. *Kumen* could be a social, cultural, political, economic, or literary condition. Covering a wide spectrum of distress from inhibition to inexpressibility, it was deeply subjective, yet also the only way to be objective. The last thing the writer should do, according to Zheng, is to abandon his subjective voice in trying to achieve an objective narration. “Pure subjectivity” holds the ultimate objectivity to which one can aspire. In this view, *kumen* involves anything and everything. Without having to be attached to any particular object, it comes to define an epoch. In many ways, Mao Dun also shares this conviction. Despite his effort to confine *kumen* to a period of political and social irresolution, the notion of suffering nonetheless sustains his vision of how to access more ambitiously a historical re-

ality greater than the artist himself. To get at this desired kind of realism, suffering always stood for that truer object demanding that the writer exceed his own subjective experience.

Thus, as a versatile articulation of Chinese literary modernity, *kumen* was not a kind of literature or ideology but a “mood” giving everything a distinct inflection. A belief in suffering as the appropriate condition drives the conviction that China has a modern epoch proper to itself. Western realism would not take effect in China unless refracted through the lens of *kumen*. Thus, defining Chinese literary modernity prescribes a task not so much of manifesting the modern as searching for a mode in which to experience modernity.

In this way, *kumen* bespoke a particular problem for the intellectuals. Even though *kumen* was attempted as a diagnostic notion encompassing the greater social reality of cultural malaise, it was specifically the loss of purpose among intellectuals that brought on their interest in *kumen*. Zheng Boqi discussed *kumen* as if it were a kind of literary aesthetic enveloping both the author and his world, but it was most tangible as a crisis sensed within intellectual circles.

Kumen was not a kind of mental anguish belonging to a particular epoch but, in a strange way, that primal mode of operation in which intellectuals found the artistic and literary expressions befitting the historical era, which Zheng called an “epoch” (*shidai*). Extrapolated from their sense of loss and agony, *kumen* authorizes the mood proper to modern consciousness. Intellectuals’ felt disorientation from their fallen status thus turns into the solution itself. Their unease becomes the source through which they can still be useful in that era. *Kumen* no longer manifests the contradictions of their private anxieties but pronounces the universal mood for an entire epochal transformation. Zheng’s remark that intellectuals experienced, first and foremost, their own discomfort in a changing cultural milieu proves more central to the question of *kumen* than he would admit. He does reveal, however, that *kumen* is privileged with a sense of inescapable objectivity. By stating that the more an author confronts his own *kumen*, the more poignant becomes his insight, Zheng confirms the relevance of intellectual labor to a changing cultural world that threatens its very continuance. *Kumen* lends legitimacy to the literary preoccupation with the self and thus validates the torment of interior life as the ineluctable symptom of the modern era.

Symbol of Angst

The preoccupation with suffering as the only access to social truth was not merely the writers’ vision of the political. In one way, *kumen* was the suf-

fering they wanted to believe had originated from the outside, the social reality they so much wanted to access. Individual psychic torment could be legitimated to partake in a larger cultural anguish. In another way, however, kumen was consciously embraced as something intrinsic to artistry. Kumen captured the intellectuals' contemporary sense of unease, which they then displaced onto societal, cultural, and political problems. Yet kumen remains a fundamentally artistic, romanticist, and narcissistic investment in the vision of creation. What was originally the condition that literature sought to express became the effect it aimed to achieve. Kumen promises literary artistry, only if the writer or creator suffers enough during the process of creation.

Thus claiming a very specific place in the intellectuals' and writers' conception of themselves, it remains something in which writers heavily invest their romanticist identities. But the vision that suffering deepens in direct proportion to great art had greater ambitions. Kumen was considered a universal sentiment of the angst that plagues the modern consciousness. To understand how this was a reflection on the condition of modernity, Western or Chinese, one needs to turn to a familiar though little-understood episode in Chinese literary history, involving intellectuals' fascination with a translated treatise on kumen.

Kuriyagawa Hakuson (1880–1923), largely forgotten today, was a Japanese cultural and literary critic who taught Western literature at Kyoto University. He is now best known in Chinese literary studies for his collection *Kumon no shōchō*, which Lu Xun translated into Chinese as *Kumen de xiangzheng* (Symbol of angst) in 1924. The well-noted connection between Lu Xun's interest in Kuriyagawa's works and his knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis, however, has been accompanied by little analysis. Beyond an act of translation, *Symbol of Angst* facilitated conceptions of suffering as a validation of great art in modern Chinese literary criticism. The translation of this text into Chinese is as much a displacement of Western theories of evolution and creation as it is a reinvention of torment. It had long been held that the theory of evolution had dominated intellectual thought since Yan Fu's translation of Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics*. However, the fascination with kumen also led writers and intellectuals to aspire to a mystical view of regeneration and evolution that was deeply indebted to failure.

Kumon no shōchō was never intended by its author to be published in its present form. The title was taken from an earlier essay Kuriyagawa had published in the Japanese journal *Kaizō*, a leading progressive journal that started after World War I and was read by Chinese intellectuals.¹⁵ According to his student Yamamoto Shūji, who made the editorial decisions, Kuriyagawa had intended to incorporate this earlier essay into part of a larger project. Ya-

mamoto thus thought it appropriate to take its title for the whole.¹⁶ By the time Lu Xun decided to translate it, two other translations already existed. One of these, by Feng Zikai, was published as part of the Literary Research Association Book Series; the other was a translation of the third chapter, published in *Eastern Miscellany* around the same time that Lu Xun's version appeared.¹⁷ What Lu Xun apparently did not know was that an earlier translation of the first two chapters had already appeared in *Learning Lamp* (Xuedeng) as early as 1921.¹⁸

Symbol of Angst is a treatise on the fundamentals of literary aesthetics. At the core, it privileges a deeply subjective relation to artistic creation and appreciation over a deterministic approach. Kuriyagawa absorbs into his thinking various debates stemming from the contexts of German and English Romanticism and philosophy. Because Kuriyagawa had taught English literature and literary criticism, his premise is heavily influenced by literary trends in Western thought. Yet he is reluctant to wholly identify with any of their articulations, such as Henri Bergson's *élan vital*, Nietzsche's notion of the instinct, Schopenhauer's will to power, Bernard Shaw's "life force," or Bertrand Russell's "impulse." Among the lesser-known figures he invokes are the English mystic poet Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), with his idea of the "cosmic self," and the German poet Nikolaus Lenau (1802–50), with his notion of *Weltschmerz*. Seeing in all these philosophical and literary works the attempt to grasp at something more originary than rational thought, something that underlies life itself, Kuriyagawa sets out to identify the source of all creative energy that drives humankind to higher and higher expressions.

Of the four parts, the first, "The Theory of Creation," is the most complete. Kuriyagawa begins his treatment on the symbol of kumen with a symbolic image: "Where iron and stone collide, sparks of fire leap out; where the torrent is blocked by a boulder, a rainbow appears in the spattering foam. Under the collision of two different forces, the kaleidoscope of a beautiful and dazzling life and the myriad of living come into being."¹⁹ This initial metaphor serves as the basis for all subsequent attempts to explain kumen in Kuriyagawa's treatise. Kumen, in fact, is never defined. We are given images of conflict and strife, but never a precise articulation of its constitution. At times, Kuriyagawa explains kumen as a contributing factor to psychic trauma. Other times, he describes it as psychic trauma itself.²⁰ It is a "reaction" to "action," we are told. Kumen unleashes that creative energy, the explosiveness, danger, and underlying destructiveness threatening the basis of civilization that we call society.²¹ For Kuriyagawa, our desire for self-expression, which arises from the extreme suffering of kumen, covers anything from the instinct to survive, the impulse to play, religious faith, lofty

aspirations, the desire to know, and the ambition for conquest.²² It is an impulse toward not any specific goal but the expression that would be the precondition of any realization.

Among other things, kumen is also a prerequisite to absolute freedom. Only under censorship and oppression can one imagine and desire with passion unconditional liberation. However, Kuriyagawa hastens to add, the two forces whose clash gives rise to kumen are not easily dichotomized into the categories of individual and society. The conflict also exists within the individual as a fundamental contradiction. The "human" at once embodies the demonic and the divine, the narcissistic and the altruistic. In fact, Kuriyagawa asserts, the force that wishes to break through the obstacle and the force of the obstacle itself are one and the same thing. As the oppression increases, so does the explosiveness and destructiveness. Without oppression, Kuriyagawa believes, there can be no energy in life.

Thus, Kuriyagawa suggests, kumen both participates in an opposition and absorbs this opposition into itself. No real exteriority lies outside kumen, for its experience implies this external opposition as an inner tension. Hidden in the opposition between oppression and life is the equivalence that life is oppression. There is no opposition to escape but a tension to be preserved. Kuriyagawa shifts from talking about kumen as a required state for higher liberation to universalizing it as the very substance of life itself. The importance of oppression lies in less its imposition from the outside than its centrality to inner desire. Kuriyagawa seems to be pointing at kumen's indispensability to the experience of creativity, a condition he grasps with more confidence than he could the state of creation itself.

The order of necessity he outlines operates, in fact, in the reverse. Rather than the state of suffering desiring its liberation, the state of liberation covets the bondage. Even though Kuriyagawa speaks of artistic creation as the absolute state of freedom, he also underscores the fact that artistry holds its greatest potential when most restrained. Lacking a precise definition in Kuriyagawa's conception, kumen encompasses all sources of life that react to the denial of expression. Thus it is, in Kuriyagawa's synthesis, both Bergson's idea of *élan vital* and Freud's notion of repressed dream content; it is Milton's lost paradise as well as the *Weltschmerz* of the German poetic and philosophical imagination. The symbol of kumen stands in for all that seeks to give expression to the kind of "psychic trauma" constituting the condition of life.

Kuriyagawa intends the lack of specificity in his generalizing conception. He is neither convinced of nor satisfied with theories of life and creation that gave primacy to certain aspects of human activity or motivation over others.

He takes a particular liking, however, to Bergson's notion of *élan vital* and the primacy of intuition. Born in the year that Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was published, Henri Bergson (1859–1941) became one of the most influential French philosophers in the early decades of the twentieth century, only to dwindle in status after the Second World War.²³ Much like Kuriyagawa Hakuson, Bergson is little studied today. His perhaps most widely read book, *Creative Evolution* (1907), received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1927, a fact that also accounted for its popularity among the Chinese intellectual elite.²⁴ Against mechanism and finalism, Bergson proposed a theory of life force, *élan vital*, that places the experiential limits of the human soul beyond the determined finitude inscribed in the premise of Darwin's theory of evolution and causality.

A proponent of an almost mystical and religious view of the spirit, Bergson argues for a primordial and generative energy unspecified in its nature but marked by its impulsion. Drive in the pure sense, it tends toward no goal, as though pulled by a necessity exterior to itself, but is in fact compelled by its own *raison d'être* to express itself as an impetus. There are different ways in which this impetus can then be utilized, but that teleology does not define the substance of this energy. It is rather the result that unintentionally follows from the event of the impulsion. Thus, evolution must be grasped as a movement rather than a series of accomplished positions. The mobility remains indivisible, for it does not reflect an accumulation of discrete increments according to some blueprint, even though one is trained to think against this intuition of fluidity and analyze evolution as a series of changes. The diversity thus engendered from evolution marks not a necessity of adaptation but a process of self-generating change, responding first and foremost to this impetus within.

Bergson's notion of creative evolution challenges Darwin's view of natural selection. Species, in his view, do not change in order to compete with one another; they are rather pushed to continually evolve on their own according to their own necessities. Each response to the necessity, in turn, generates a different need that is specific to the way the species has evolved. The process continuously renews itself without a terminal point. It carries a movement that responds to its own impetus to travel rather than to the logic of reaching any particular destination.

Bergson's notion of creative evolution, therefore, places the emphasis on individuals' own initiative to change rather than on pitting one against the other. The appeal of Bergson to the likes of Kuriyagawa Hakuson may perhaps be best understood in the translator's preface to the 1919 Chinese edition of *Creative Evolution*:

The theory of the various stages of evolution, as explained by Spencer and Darwin, is no more than using the creed of "struggle for existence, survival of the fittest" to forcibly attribute coherent meaning to the various loose details throughout history after the fact of evolution. In actuality, the ones competing for survival may not be those selected by nature, and those who survive may not be the fittest. Each species has its own basic instinct, its own drive for absolute freedom, and its own circumstance for continuation. Because the required circumstances are different, we have diversity among living things. Where humans are at now is not won from vanquishing other living things. The superman of the future will not have evolved because he had vanquished the humans. The instinct of life is extraordinarily rich and the parameters of its freedom are immense. The realm of creation is also expansive. The myriad living things all have their own circumstances for advancement. They do not harm each other, nor do they make concessions towards one another.²⁵

If one compares this view of evolution to Yan Fu's translation of *The Origin of Species*, one can see that the cultural and intellectual preoccupation in the 1920s and 1930s has certainly changed in significant ways. The appeal of an explanation of evolution based not on the inevitability of struggling against outsiders but on the notion of a self-driven impulse for life cannot be underestimated. The power held by those who are superior, in this view, does not reflect the legitimacy of might. Domination merely occupies one moment in the continual flow of life energy. Those who are subjugated, by the same logic, cannot be judged as weak, for they too are progressing along the trajectory befitting their own life force. The espousal of a creative, innovative, and self-regenerating evolution is discussed as a process of all humankind, but the generalization of life's impetus clearly addresses the particular concerns of the Chinese intellectuals. If power does not equate superiority, or subjugation inferiority, then a national destiny is not forged by the strife between nations but, rather, propelled by its own inner necessity. The distinction between inferiority and superiority, as concerning China's national strength, becomes less relevant than one's conviction that it is all part of a due course. Because the required condition for unleashing life's vital force varies, one's transformation does not ultimately rely on fulfilling a goal or achieving a state. The mobility of the instinct of life is itself a directional force, however that direction realizes itself.

In Kuriyagawa's synthesis of Bergson's *élan vital*, the expansive force of life, as that which conjoins all life and humans, takes on an additional dimension. In his "Theory of Appreciation," Kuriyagawa also presents the so-called common content of life as the basis on which aesthetic appreciation cannot help coming into existence. Life force is seen as a "Great Life" in which we all take part. Any expression of individual contains this universality. Whether ancient or modern, Eastern or Western, we share in this com-

mon humanity, even if we do not see it at first. The moment of realization always occurs in the instant of self-reflection. Readers discover, through the writer's symbolism of his own desire for expression, their part in this larger content of life. The literary work speaks to the reader, even as it expresses the writer's inner thoughts. Because of the suggestiveness and stimulus of the symbolization, literature ingeniously leads the readers into a hypnotic state and takes them to a realm of illusions and fantasies, the world of dreams. In this absolute realm of pure creation, readers come to recognize the content of their own lives.

For Kuriyagawa, then, the writer need not strive for an objectivity restricted to the understanding of the intellect. Rather, the writer must reach deep into the reservoir of his suppressed impulses in order to tap into the stream of life. However, this reservoir of life's vital energy is preconditioned by suffering. The promise of life resides in its barred expression. Here, Kuriyagawa supplements Bergson's unbridled, explosive force of vitality with the then relatively unknown theory of the unconscious. For Kuriyagawa, Freud's notion of repressed dream content offers the dimension of suffering appropriate for explaining the genesis of artistic creations.

Although he gives credit to psychoanalysis, Kuriyagawa received with much skepticism the assertion that sexual libido is the primary driving force behind people's aspiration for sublime works of literature. For him, the impulse that drives humans is more sublime than what sexual desire can encompass. Instead, he finds Freud's most useful contribution in the theory of dreams. Quoting a case study, which actually comes from a lecture Freud gave at Clark University in Massachusetts in December 1908, Kuriyagawa finds the idea of repressed dream content most appropriate to his view on life's vital force. Lumping together psychoanalytical notions of "preconscious," "unconscious," and "conscious," Kuriyagawa asserts that what he means by the symbol of *kumen* is no other than the "content of life." Shared by all humans on a fundamental level, this common content lifts out of symbolism, by which Kuriyagawa means any linguistic artifice erected to convey suggestion, the power to evoke rather than inform. Symbolism is an abstraction of a greater content of life as universality. Inducing in the reader a state of self-reflection, literature, in this way, seeks to find a point of resonance in its addressee such that readers can discover their own participation in this reservoir of intuition rather than intellect.

Kuriyagawa's knowledge of Freud was limited to the latter's early works on dream interpretation.²⁶ Yet he gleaned much from early Western studies attempting to approach literature from a psychoanalytical perspective, such as Albert Mordell's *The Erotic Motive in Literature* (1919), I. H. Coriat's *The Hysteria of Lady Macbeth* (1912), Alexander Harvey's *William Dean Howells:*

A Study of the Achievement of a Literary Artist (1917), Axel Johan Uppvall's *August Strindberg: A Psychoanalytic Study* (1920), and Wilfred Lay's *H. G. Wells and His Mental Hinterland* (1917). It is likely that Kuriyagawa came across Uppvall's work during his visit to Clark University, where he met the reputable psychoanalyst G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924), as *August Strindberg* was a dissertation written under Hall's supervision. Hall was the founding president of the American Psychological Association (1892) who was responsible for inviting the then relatively unknown Sigmund Freud to introduce his views on abnormal psychology in his first lecture series in America.²⁷

Kuriyagawa disagrees with Freud's premise, as expressed in his study of Leonardo da Vinci, that all creative impulses are sublimated libidinal desires deflected from their original, prohibited objects. He suggests, in place of Freud's "sexual desire," employing "interest" in the analysis as a way of broadening the definition of the creative impulse to encompass life's principle of survival.²⁸ One lives through the interminable and repetitive experience of kumen, a process of struggle. Displacing Freud's emphasis on the development and organization of erogenous zones on the infant's body with a more general notion of survival, Kuriyagawa gives a different narrative:

Life is combat. From the first day we are born onto the earth—no, at the very first moment, we already experience the agony of battle. Is not the infant's physical being a continuous struggle against hunger, disease, heat and cold? Leaving aside the ten [*sic*] peaceful months of sleeping in the mother's womb, one's life as an "individual being" begins only after leaving the mother's body. The agony of struggle, therefore, will have become an inevitability. Is not that cry, simultaneous with one's birth, the first outcry of suffering? Is that cry, which has only just met the stimuli from the external world upon leaving the safe harbor of the maternal womb, the battle cry of he who has come into the front line of life? Or the first cry of agony? Or the congratulatory cry for those who enjoy their lives on earth? These questions aside, that primordial cry can be considered to be identical in essence to art on a certain level of meaning. Thus, to dispel hunger, the child restlessly seeks the mother's breast. After feeding, one sees the beautiful smile on its angelic, peaceful face. Both the restlessness and smile are the lyrical poetry and art of humanity. The more vibrant the child, the louder its cry. Without this sound or this art, there awaits only death.²⁹

The more painful the struggle, the more heightened the desire to live. Kuriyagawa further emphasizes that the symbolism to which he refers is not restricted to French symbolism but extends more generally to the sublimation of repressed experiences.³⁰ Furthermore, the repressed content is not, as the term would suggest, exhausted by the psychoanalytical view of sexual repression. Rather, it applies to any experience of inhibited desire. Kuriyagawa's maneuver away from the sexual underlies the larger significance of kumen. Psychoanalysis was considered to be a legitimate Western science at

the time. It gave an appealing system of rationalization to explain the human unconscious, a task that from its inception was subjected to the difficulty of translating the unconscious into conscious discourse. In an attempt to steer away from the sexual, Kuriyagawa was restoring to the foundation of psychic conflict the sanctity of creative imagination. He did not think a cure for "psychic trauma" would be appropriate or even desirable. For him, it was the generative condition of artistic expression.

Kuriyagawa's appeal to an entire generation of May Fourth writers was significant. The influence his works had on Tian Han, for example, the founder of modern drama and a Creation Society member, can be easily seen in Tian's 1920 essay on New Romanticism.³¹ He had personally visited Kuriyagawa while was studying in Japan and even asked Guo Moruo to accompany him. From Lu Xun's diary, we know that he was translating *Kumen no shōchō* at the same time he was writing *Wild Grass* (Yecao). Even though it took him only nineteen days to translate it, *Kumen de xiangzheng* was to have a profound impact on the artistic and psychological formation of *Wild Grass*.³² Pieces from this collection of prose poetry were often written in conjunction with chapters of *Symbol of Angst*.³³ Lu Xun not only recommended *Symbol* for reading at a lecture he gave in 1927 but he himself had also taught it in 1925.³⁴ As late as 1933, he lamented that he had not seen the likes of Kuriyagawa in recent years.³⁵

Lu Xun never met or read Kuriyagawa before the latter's death in the Kanto earthquake in September 1923, nor is there evidence to suggest that the Japanese scholar was familiar with Lu Xun's works. Lu Xun's knowledge of his biography is limited. Other than where Kuriyagawa was schooled, his foot amputation, and a general idea of his travels, Lu Xun knew him only through his works.³⁶ A year after Lu Xun translated *Symbol of Angst*, he also translated and published some of Kuriyagawa's articles from *Out of the Ivory Tower*. Lu Xun also included a partial translation of Kuriyagawa's "Walking Towards the Crossroads," which resonates with the title of his own later collection, *Panghuang* (Hesitation, wandering), written between March 1924 and November 1925. Indeed, Kuriyagawa's writings captured for writers such as Lu Xun the hesitation and uncertainty suffered by the "modern" consciousness. Discussions and references to the dilemma of modern China often use the image of a "crossroads" (*shizi jiekou*) as a metaphor for intellectual crisis. Lu Xun's short story collection, *Panghuang*, resonates with this notion of not knowing the right path to take.

Scholars who acknowledge the Japanese critic's influence on Lu Xun often credit Kuriyagawa with providing Lu Xun a knowledge of Freudian psychoanalysis. Writers such as Guo Moruo and Lu Xun dallied with psychoanalysis in their literary writings only to abandon it quickly afterward upon

realizing its limitations. Lu Xun's process of writing one of his *Old Tales Retold*, "Nüwa," a literary experiment with psychoanalysis, was interrupted because of his own skepticism regarding the primacy of sexuality. However, Freudian psychoanalysis as absorbed into Kuriyagawa's idea of kumen clearly had much more appeal to Lu Xun. Kumen enabled the conceptualization of a kind of suffering transcending sexual or personal distress. It promised a broader vision of torment, offering Lu Xun a way of rejecting the sexual premise of psychoanalysis. Prompted by the 1933 New Year's issue of *Eastern Miscellany* featuring readers' responses to a call for submissions on dreams and ideals for the future, Lu Xun gave his most overt and lengthy objection to Freud's theory of sexuality. In a language strikingly similar to Kuriyagawa's own discussion of birth as the originating moment of kumen, Lu Xun found a way to challenge the predominance of sexuality in "On Dreams":

In the columnist's "Thoughts After Reading," he used Freud's ideas to advance the notion that "authentic" dreams "express each individual's deep secret without carrying any societal function." Freud thinks that repression is the basis of dreams. But why are people repressed? This would then have to do with norms and habits of society. . . . However, Freud probably had a pocket full of change and too much food, and thus didn't feel the hardship of keeping fed. That's why he focused only on the libido. There are many who, being from the same background, would enthusiastically applaud in agreement with him. As he has told us himself, the reason daughters love their fathers and sons their mothers, is related to sexuality. Yet soon after babies are born—regardless of whether they are male or female—they all pucker their lips and turn their heads back and forth. Is that because they want to kiss someone of the opposite sex? No, everyone knows that it's because they want to be fed!³⁷

Dissatisfied with the all-encompassing sexual explanation for human discontent, Lu satirically offers an eating metaphor in its place. For him, sexuality is less a repression in need of therapeutic enlightenment than one of the many sacrifices people have to make as a matter of course. Freud serves as a convenient stand-in object for Lu Xun's sarcasm, for Lu Xun was both reacting against and sympathizing with the political pretensions of Chinese intellectual life. On this particular occasion, his dismay was prompted by *Eastern Miscellany's* publication of various prominent figures' personal ideals and visions regarding the future.³⁸

The editor had asked for submissions under two categories: depictions of a future China and dreams of a personal future. The latter category was encouraged to be as visionary as possible because, the editor explains, it was of a fantastic nature and required no restraints of realism. Among the prominent figures who replied were high-profile intellectuals and writers. For a future China, the female writer Xie Bingying looked forward to a realm of

great union without national, racial, or class boundaries. Ba Jin, in a more pessimistic vein, saw no future for China. Quoting what he had written in a short story, he remarked, in a way strikingly similar to concerns voiced by eugenicists over premature racial aging, that China had become decrepit with old age and that even its youth was fragile and weak. Zhang Kebiao, the editor of *Shidai huabao* (Pictorials of the times), thought that only a dream vision would do away with distinctions such as nationalism. Ye Shengtao modestly hoped that everyone would stay fed and have jobs. Lao She, in the same way, made his point by underscoring that dreams have nothing to do with keeping people from starvation. Mao Dun noted his own humble effort in merely trying not to dream but to recognize reality. Shi Zhecun, member of *Les Contemporains*, expressed what he thought was the dream shared by every average citizen: to go to a foreign country without being held in contempt and to be able to fearlessly spit out "foreign devil!" at a Westerner on Chinese soil. The intertwining of utopian visions and national vengeance marks, once more, the conjunction between individual hopes for a better life and the national desire for stronger sovereignty. As for more humble and practical aspirations, the secret desires ranged anywhere from better pay to having a flushing toilet in every household.

For the editor, the responses to the vision of a better China sketch out the general intellectual atmosphere at the time. In his editor's postscript, he states that all these ideals are part of the secret hope that China may encompass this world without boundaries.³⁹ Even though the respondents seem to reject the idea of nationhood, that does not mean that they do not love the nation. It is because their hope for a future China is so great, he observes, that only a utopian world can embody such an ideal.

For Lu Xun, however, these dreams for the future reveal only the intellectuals' concern with their immediate gains. Few, he jeers, were actually propagating a vision for the future without interest for their own rice bowls. These respondents said what they thought was appropriate to their status and reputation. For that reason, although many harbored hopes for a realm of great union—a notion harking back to the optimistic visions of late Qing reformers and even adapted by Zhang Jingsheng in his "society of beauty"—few could imagine the political terror and persecution that would necessarily precede it. Indeed, Lu Xun remarks, those who truly endeavor to realize the vision of a future China are those who are not merely talking but doing something about it. Of course, he says with deeper sarcasm, one need not feel embarrassed about prioritizing one's rice bowl. At a time when the preoccupation with libido treats pillow talk as public conversation, one need not be embarrassed about admitting to the pressing need for food. In the end, whatever has been unabashedly expressed as dreams for the future, Lu

Xun comments, are still waking dreams. One pretends to take relief in the fact that censorship is being lifted. However, even in relating their true feelings, they still speak in observance of the appropriate political slogans. For this reason, Lu Xun remarks, the editor has failed miserably in his task.

Interestingly, this episode, which brought in Freudian psychoanalysis as a convenient object of critique, reveals the competing stakes in envisioning a new China. Lu Xun, in many ways, also expresses a vision of future China. For him, however, this vision is not possible without a sober critique, exposing the kind of pretense that lies at the root of China's ills. Although on this occasion his critique aims at his fellow intellectuals and writers, the method belongs to his usual practice of self-dissection. The purpose is to confront the illness in others and, at the same time, to share in that discomfort itself as what plagues China. Unlike the editor, Lu Xun imagines a better China not through utopian ideals but through their annihilation. Annoyed with his colleagues' vision of China, he detests the cowardice in writers who would not speak truthfully about the nation they live in. Lu Xun's vision was not set in the future but fixed on the suffering of the present, a suffering of terror and persecution that for him reflected most honestly the condition of China.

This more basic preoccupation with suffering, rather than psychoanalytical explanations of sexuality, underlies Lu Xun's interest in Kuriyagawa and his idea of kumen. Even though Kuriyagawa primarily articulates the sublimation of agony as the ecstasy of artistic and literary creation, the appeal of suffering as a primal condition carried greater resonance for Chinese intellectuals. It was what they felt within themselves and what they struggled to exteriorize as a political, social, and universal experience. This struggle both entails an emotional difficulty or intellectual dilemma and involves a graphic form of pain for its expression. This preoccupation with excavating the kumen within their intimate sense of self is most compellingly expressed in a remarkable comment Lu Xun made in explaining his personal attraction to Kuriyagawa Hakuson's works:⁴⁰

In translating this book, my purpose was not to expose another's faults in order to bring gratification to the Chinese. China cannot afford the ambition of exploiting others' crises, nor do I feel it incumbent upon me to poke fun at the weaknesses of another nation. Yet as I watch (*pangguan*) him [Kuriyagawa] whip himself, it is as if I feel the pain on my own body. Then, however, it is as though I am suddenly relieved by a sedative. Those who live in ancient and festering countries . . . feel a certain pain, like a boil. Those who have never had one or had it cut away probably wouldn't know this. Otherwise, they would understand that the pain of its removal brings far more pleasurable relief than the pain of enduring it. I supposed this is the so-called "extreme pleasure" (*tongkuai*). This is

precisely what I wish to use to first awaken that pain and then impart this "extreme pleasure" to other people suffering the same illness.⁴¹

As announced from the onset, Lu Xun takes no pleasure in the sight or exposure of another's pain, another's humiliation. The position of the spectator affords him neither gratification nor interest. Yet we can only take Lu Xun to mean a certain kind of spectatorship still assured of its distance from the object, for he immediately uses the same visual metaphor to present a very different kind of experience, one that participates in the object's pain by "watching from the side" (*pangguan*). It is not that this participation contributes to producing the other's pain but that it experiences the pain as though it were the subject's own. In fact, the distance between subject and object is dissolved in a moment of desiring pain for oneself, the certitude of which offers Lu Xun the purging effect of the "sedative."

At this point, Lu Xun has identified with what he perceives as Kuriyagawa's relentless self-laceration. He then forces this identification onto others who supposedly "suffer from the same illness." Through this identification Lu Xun legitimates himself as the proper administrator of the pain. At the same time, he justifies the pain as an inevitability, as a future disaster, displaced from the individuals themselves. Although the interiorization of pain is necessary for Lu Xun to feel it—"as if the pain were felt on my body"—this substitutive identification is then taken as an illness to which all others *already* suffer. It is only at the time of the sore's removal, Lu Xun continues, that the people suffering from it will understand that "the pain of its removal brings far more pleasurable relief than the pain of enduring it." Thus, not only does Lu Xun explicitly distinguish between pleasurable and unpleasurable pain but it is only with pain that he can then "impart this 'painful pleasure' to other people."

This desire to bring to others the pain of the experience as a certain kind of enlightenment in many ways encapsulated the elitist intellectual conceit, the critique of which would later be used to dethrone the May Fourth Movement. Kuriyagawa's notion of taking intellectual aspirations and tasks out of the protected environment of the ivory tower could not have spoken more poignantly to Lu Xun's sardonic but tormented humor. Kuriyagawa's critique of the lack of resolve of the Japanese in committing themselves to pragmatic action would have pierced the minds of many Chinese writers. Equally significantly, Kuriyagawa's critique of the Japanese could only have had such relevance for the Chinese intellectuals because the latter were embroiled in their own conviction of the failed project of intellectual modernity. Kuriyagawa fulfills, as seen earlier with Arthur Smith, Lu Xun's relentless imperative of China's self-dissection. Interestingly, amid this painful

embrace of failure, what Lu Xun hopes for is the regeneration of China. In his translator's preface to *Kumen de xiangzheng*, he takes the capacity for artistic creation as a reflection of the spirit of an age and, more specifically, of China.⁴² He laments that China's current condition gives rise to no great art, because China's spirit is in a state of atrophy. Kumen, in a paradoxical way, provides the regeneration for this state of decline. Suffering becomes the path to triumph. And it is this intertwinement between pain and triumph, individual suffering and national spiritual regeneration, that is embodied in the visual representation Lu Xun chose for kumen.

Embodying Kumen

Lu Xun first met the young artist Tao Yuanqing in 1924 through Xu Qinquen, his longtime friend. Lu Xun did not record this acquaintance until five months later, by which time he had become impressed with the struggling young artist's work and asked him to design the cover for *Kumen de xiangzheng*.⁴³ Tao, who was trained in traditional brush painting, worked for the famous publishing house of the Shanghai newspaper *Shibao* (Current affairs) and was in charge of design for *Xiao Shibao* (Little current affairs). At that time, *Shibao* had affiliations with the Youzheng Publishing House. Through that connection, Tao had access to Di Chuqing's collection of Japanese and Indian art, which he absorbed into his own style.⁴⁴ After working for *Shibao*, Tao became interested in Western oil painting and further developed its influence into his work. Lu Xun, whose interest in art and particularly woodblock prints is well known, shared many of Tao's views on art and its social purpose. Tao designed other covers for Lu Xun's collections, such as *Panghuang* and *Fen* (Grave). He also did Lu Xun's favorite portrait of himself as well as the cover design for his translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Out of the Ivory Tower*. Unfortunately, their collaboration lasted only four years. Tao died in 1928, shortly after starting to teach at the Hangzhou West Lake National Art School. Lu Xun donated three hundred dollars to help build a small memorial for him at West Lake and took it upon himself to publish a collection of Tao's works.

Lu Xun did much to help the young artist with his career, including arranging an exhibition of his works in 1925.⁴⁵ At the time, Lu Xun commented on Tao's style as "using innovative form and color to depict his own world, while still harboring within himself the soul China has always had, that is, its national and racial character."⁴⁶ Lu Xun's opinion was unchanged at Tao's next exhibition in 1927. Yet this time he reveals the deeper affinity he shares with the young artist. People in China today, Lu Xun notes, are indeed in a state of kumen, due to a sense of belatedness felt by youths born

into an ancient civilization. While new ways of thinking appropriate to the new epoch overwhelm them from all sides, they realize that they themselves are still imprisoned in an ancient cell. Thus, Lu Xun continues, they wake, struggle, rebel, and want to take part in global tasks. Whereas artists, Lu Xun observes, have rebelled against, severed themselves from, and remolded nature, art historians abandoned traditional criteria of aesthetic appreciation. Thus, they praise the murals in the tombs of Egyptian pharaohs and extol the intricate designs carved into African sword handles. This leads them to the false conclusion that they must return to the prison of the past. For this misconceived reason, they can only accept with reservations the bold strides ventured by new artists. As a result, Lu Xun states, we are held back and end up in a double cell.

For Lu Xun, Tao's art, however, resolves this double bind. Both inside and out, he has moved with the current of new ways of thought in the world, yet he has not lost China's racial character. Lu Xun makes a parallel between art and literature by pointing out that there are those who object to the use of "European syntax" in modern literature. They would harshly and sarcastically criticize those who use European forms by pointing out what a pity it is that these people have not managed to grow a white skin or high noses. However, Lu Xun points out, precisely because their skins are ultimately not white and their noses still flat despite their Western affectations, they have become the oddities ostracized in China today. Tao, however, claims to be neither wholly Europeanized nor traditionally Chinese. Although he uses new colors and forms, he is still Chinese on the inside. Only those who have any real ambition to join in the pursuit of global tasks, Lu Xun remarks, can begin to appreciate his art.

Lu Xun's remarks are revealing. He sees kumen as a struggle between Western and Chinese modernities. Yet this struggle neither affirms nor discounts the desirability of Western modernity. The struggle itself compels the expression of a distinct Chinese identity. Even though Lu Xun still largely equates worldliness with westernization, he talks about the global as something to be excavated from within as well. It is that irreducible Chineseness, defined as a racial and national essence, that cannot be effaced, however much one tries. It perseveres regardless of the form one uses. Thus Tao, precisely because he mixes Western with traditional Chinese style, expresses what is peculiar to the Chinese, a tension that can only be called a modern Chinese identity. This, for Lu Xun, constitutes the task of world literature, an enterprise global in form but Chinese in character. However, it is important to note, Lu Xun's notion differs in significant ways from Zhang Zhidong's well-known call in 1898 for "Chinese as essence, westernization as application." Nor is the characteristically Chinese he identifies a true racial

essence in the way Pan Guangdan problematically defined it. For Lu Xun, “Chineseness” is a sedimented identity constituted between westernization and the failure to create that semblance. Failure in this sense, however, is not predicated on the certainty of a successful version of modernity, as would be implied in westernization. Rather, it removes Chinese modernity from the necessity of tracing itself to Western inspirations. The consciousness of that failure provides the foundation for the Chinese character and thus creates its own modern national and racial identity.

In this way, as the “un-Chinese” expression of Chinese racial character, Tao’s art embodies what Lu Xun deems as the necessary kumen of an epoch of modernity and globalization. Extraordinarily, the agony once restricted to the individual’s sexual torment and an aesthetics of creation looms as the desired condition of the modern Chinese race and nation. In this way, the cover of kumen itself expresses both the artistic torment of the individual and the suffering proper to an epoch.

According to Xu Qinwen, the design for *Kumen de xiangzheng* is “a half-naked woman with long, black hair who licks the fork’s sharp tip through her bright, red lips” (see Figure 7.1).⁴⁷ This “desolately plush” cover was not prescribed by Lu Xun, but he was immediately taken with Tao’s design when he first saw it. Xu’s account gives the woman a more voluntary and pleasurable reading. However, other critics have interpreted this design in a more abject way as a woman’s tongue pierced by the fork, an interpretation that emphasizes the side of pain and violence.⁴⁸ Yet, upon closer inspection, one sees the woman holding the fork with her foot in an unforced manner. As though pulling it toward her with her toes, she leans into it, with a calm and satisfied expression on the part of her face that is visible to the viewer. The contour of the other side of her face dissolves into a circular, jagged, and discontinuous line that forms a womblike structure enveloping her body. Escaping commentators’ notice, however, is the placing of the trident and the foot holding it, both of which are outside this unity, thus complicating the question of whether the apparent bliss enjoyed within can be separated from the proximity of, and desire for, abjection.

Interestingly, in *Kumon no shōchō*, Kuriyagawa gives a similarly ambivalent description of artistic creation itself. He draws an analogy between child-birth and the agonizing experience of artistic creation. Interspersed with phrases in English, this passage deserves to be quoted in full:

At first, this concretized “image” lives within the artist. Like pregnancy in its inception, the fetus is only in its embryonic form as a “conceived image,” or what western aestheticians call an unshaped fetus, or “abortive conception.” Already conceived, it cannot fail to be given birth to. Thus the artist, compelled by this

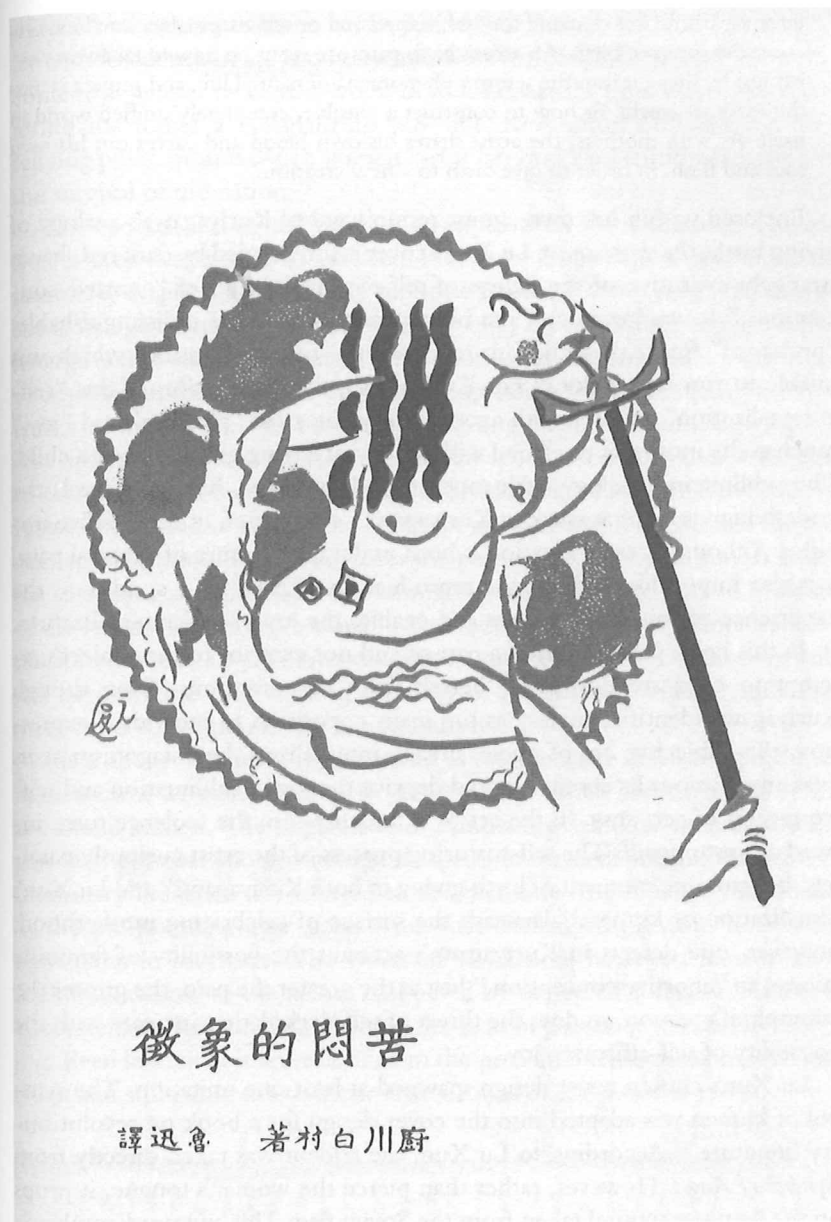


FIGURE 7.1 Book cover design for Lu Xun’s translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson’s *Kumon no shōchō*. Artist: Tao Yuanqing, 1924. Source: Shanghai People’s Fine Arts Publishing Company (Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe), Shanghai.

internal, irrefutable demand for “self-expression or self-externalization,” experiences the pangs of birth. An artist’s birth pains are spent on how to take what exists inside, shape it into the sensory phenomena of natural life, and project it into the external world; or how to construct a sensible, completely unified world in itself. As with mothers, the artist shares his own blood and carves out his own soul and flesh, in order to give birth to a new creation.⁴⁹

Enclosed within her own agony, reminiscent of Kuriyagawa’s analogy of giving birth, the woman on Lu Xun’s cover is surrounded by dark red shapes strangely evocative of the failure of self-externalization, of “aborted conceptions.” It was because of the bloody redness of these indistinguishable, “unshaped” forms that Lu Xun regretted the first publication, which was unable to run it in color.⁵⁰ For Kuriyagawa, the completion of this “self-externalization” coupled with agony affords the artist “pleasure” and “joy,” much as the mother is rewarded with the joy of having given birth to a child. The sublimating analogy with motherhood, however, hardly conceals the underlying violence at work in Kuriyagawa’s conception of the creative impulse. Although artistic creation is born under the pressure of external pain, it is also impossible without the reproduction of pain. As a condition, the experience of pain accompanies and enables the joy of self-externalization.

In this light, pain figures as a part of and not exterior to the subject’s attempt to extricate himself or herself from its constraints. Even though Kuriyagawa identifies society as the main opposition to individual expression, this subjective act of poesis already internalized the antagonism as its enabling tension. Its absence would deprive the joy of sublimation and self-expression of certainty. In the act of externalization, the violence turns inward against oneself. The self-torturing process of the artist curiously parallels the feminine moment of birth giving in both Kuriyagawa’s and Lu Xun’s visualization of kumen.⁵¹ Beneath the surface of celebrating motherhood, however, one detects in Kuriyagawa’s account the possibility of feminine failure, an “abortive conception.” Just as the greater the pain, the greater the triumph of creation, so does the threat of self-degradation increase with the possibility of self-affirming joy.

Lu Xun’s chosen cover design spawned at least one imitation. The symbol of kumen was adapted into the cover design for a book on revolutionary literature.⁵² According to Lu Xun, the trident was taken directly from *Symbol of Angst*. However, rather than pierce the woman’s tongue, it props up the hammer symbol taken from the Soviet flag. This awkward combination, Lu Xun remarks, can neither pierce nor strike and is as useless and mundane as the literary works contained in the collection. However, Lu Xun’s disapproval neglects something more significant about the notion of kumen. Even revolution was taking on the idea of kumen as representative

of its own exigency. Kumen has broken out of the confines of sentimentality and decadence in art and literature. It no longer pivots on the mere discontent of gender or inarticulation of social dissatisfaction. The idea of suffering has found a rationalizing way out. Revolution provides the new rallying point around which kumen can at last find a substituting solution in the survival of the nation.⁵³

The epochal feel of malaise finds an explanation for its ailment. The nation is to be the promise of salvation. However, discussions of revolutionary literature, despite the newfound euphoric passion, cannot help resorting to the language of kumen. In Guo Moruo’s essay on revolution and literature, he argues that the more strongly the author can express his inner experience of oppression, the more universally this expression will encompass the social reality of the epoch.⁵⁴ In this language strongly evocative of Zheng Boqi’s description of literature during the kumen epoch, Guo considers it the task of revolutionary literature to express individual as well as collective failure. However, instead of kumen, he insists on the desire of revolution as the answer to oppression. Failure becomes the prerequisite of revolution. It is also the sustaining sentiment of revolutionary passion. As Guo puts it, unaware of the reversible logic embedded in the rhetoric of failure, “Before the revolution succeeds, all acts of resistance must end in failure.”⁵⁵ In this way, failure becomes the only driving certainty of revolution. Without suffering, there is no conviction in the nation’s survival.

Ideas about revolutionary literature as the literature of class suffering or kumen came to override all other dimensions of what had been largely felt as cultural kumen. The imperatives of a militantly defended nationhood superseded personal and psychological aspects of torment and suffering. Revolutionary literature was referred to as a literature that depicted the kumen of the proletariat, a new articulation that challenged previous notions of oppression in literature. The vision of revolution, however, remains profoundly indebted to the failure embodied by the epochal feel of kumen. It could neither deny nor leave behind the kind of passion generated in suffering. Even less could it sever itself from the profound sense of failure that enabled and still continues to incite articulations of the modern epoch.