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Discovering Humour in Modern China:
The Launching of the *Analects Fortnightly* Journal and the "Year of Humour" (1933)

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One of the most important phenomena in the Chinese cultural scene of the 1930s was the introduction of *youmo* 幽默 (humour) by Lin Yutang 林語堂, who founded the Analects School of writers (*Lunyu pai* 論語派). The launching of the journal *Analects Fortnightly* (*Lunyu banyuekan* 論語半月刊, hereafter referred to as *Luny*u 論語 or *Analects*), in 1932 to introduce and promote humour in Chinese culture was so successful that humour suddenly became the talk of the town — or, in Lu Xun's words, "Bang! Everybody everywhere is suddenly talking about *youmo* and writing *xiaopin* 小品 ("little-taste", or short and familiar) essays."[1] In addition to *Analects*, a number of other journals appeared with the same objective of promoting humour and laughter, including *Yijing* 易經, edited by Jian Youwen 簡又文 (1896–1978), and *Tanfeng* 談風, edited by Hai Ge 海戈. Lin Yutang also launched two more journals, *Renjianshi* 人間世 (This human world) and *Yuzhou feng* 宇宙風 (Cosmic wind), successively. The year 1933 was consequently referred to as the "Year of Humour", and Lin Yutang was hailed as Master of Humour (*youmo dashi* 幽默大師), which further consolidated his position as a leading essayist in modern China.[2] Indeed, the introduction and translation of humour constitute a significant (cross-)cultural discourse in the formation of Chinese cultural modernity.[3] What has been little noted, however, is that the discourse of humour in modern Chinese literature and culture was very much a bilingual practice of cross-cultural translation. I will discuss the biographical and literary practices of Lin Yutang to reveal the nature and significance of the humour discourse in modern Chinese literature and culture.

"The Little Critic"

In September 1927, Lin Yutang arrived in Shanghai. His time there, until he left for the United States on 1 August 1936, was his most formative period. Later, Lin would recall that "after six months of service I got tired of the revolutionists, and from 1927 on I devoted myself solely to authorship exclusively."[4] However, that did not seem to be a very accurate hindsight. The watershed event in Lin's literary career was in fact when he became the weekly columnist for the column "The little critic" in the journal *The China Critic* in 1930, and it was not until September 1932, when he assumed editorship for the journal *Analects*, that he can be said to have devoted himself exclusively to literary writing. The period from 1927 to 1930 was, however, an important transitional stage, both intellectually and materially.

To sketch out the historical background, by the end of 1927 most of the colonial treaties imposed on China by the West had been abolished, and China was again unified under a central Nationalist (Kuomintang/KMT) government, even though it would take President Chiang Kai-shek another couple of years to fight and/or buy out all the warlord factions. China seemed to be on the path to modernity. The Great Revolution, or Northern Expedition, was basically over. Yet for most progressive intellectuals the revolution had come to a bitter end, due to the split between the Nationalists and the Communists and the ensuing terror caused by a massive purge of Communist Party members. For progressive intellectuals like Lin Yutang, it was not that so much that they supported the radical tactics employed by the Communists during the revolution to push for class warfare, but that the revolution represented spiritual idealism for a young China, while the crackdown on the Communists who were allied with the Nationalists in the revolution killed that very idealism. As Lin put it:

> Our imagination was fired, our enthusiasm was kindled; thousands of young men have fled from home and school from the outermost provinces to join the Nationalist forces, they have toiled and they have sweated, and thousands have gladly laid down their lives on the altar of Nationalism that their dream of a regenerated and redeemed China might come true. But, alas! Icarus soared too near the sun, the wax of his wings melted, and he fell back upon the earth. The war has ended — so has all idealism.[5]

The paradox of the Great Revolution of 1927 lies in the fact that it was the Communist youth who supplied much of the spiritual idealism and dynamism for the movement. Once the revolution was victorious, conservative Nationalists, afraid of Communist infiltration within the KMT, turned around and purged their comrades-in-arms and bloodily suppressed the radical elements in the revolution. While the Communist armed forces had a setback, both militarily and politically, the idealist spirit could hardly be suppressed. Rather, it surged back in a more radical form. In his "The little critic" column of 11 September 1930, Lin Yutang offered an account of what had happened to the Chinese intellectual scene in the last couple of years after the revolution:

> Anybody who visits the new book shops on Foochow Road [in Shanghai] will see that over 70 per cent of the new books on the market have to do with Russia, Karl Marx, and names ending in a *-ov*, or a *-lev*. A list of the literary works of Russian authors which have been translated in the last two years would put to shame any professor of modern Russian literature in Harvard or Columbia . . . For Russia has conquered Young China and claimed her as her own. People who imagine that the ideas and ideology of the students of today are those which precipitated the May 30th Affair in 1919, or those that made possible the Nationalist Revolution in 1927 are sadly mistaken. Young China has gone red in the last three years *after* the nationalist revolution.[6]

The signal event for the victory of this red surge was the winning over of Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936) as head of the League of Left-Wing Writers established in Shanghai in 1930.[7] As one of the leaders of the literary revolution of 1917, Lu Xun had exerted tremendous influence on the intellectual youth, and had always been at the forefront of progressive young China. But that did not mean that Lu Xun was ideologically pro-Communist. In the face of suppression and darkness, Lu Xun's favourite strategy was to feign death. During the heyday of white terror in Guangzhou in 1927, Lu Xun was invited to give a lecture at a government-backed college, and a refusal would have been taken as blatant non-cooperation with the Nationalist revolutionary government. So Lu Xun

> gave a most dazzlingly amazing lecture on the state of literature in the third century CE, in which he unravelled the story of how some scholars had to affect a fit of drunkenness for two months in

> order to avoid political complications. The audience was amused, admired his originality and brilliant interpretation throughout, and of course failed to see the point.[8]

However, such a pretend-death attitude was no longer satisfactory to the revolutionary youth who believed the Nationalist revolutionists had hijacked and betrayed the revolutionary idealistic spirit, and they turned to Soviet Russia for spiritual guidance. The renewed banner was revolutionary literature, or proletariat literature, as opposed to the new literature of the literary revolution of 1917. Quite understandably, Lu Xun became the very target of revolutionary literature and was condemned as an old hand lagging behind the new progressive tide of proletariat revolution. In fact, Lu Xun was also translating Russian literary theory himself while fighting against the young radical theorists of proletariat literature. However, when the Left League was established in 1930, Lu Xun was successfully won over, under the directive of the Chinese Communist Party, to lead the alliance. In Lin's words:

> Chow Tso-jen 周作人 [Zhou Zuoren], Ch'ien Hsün-tung 錢玄同 [Qian Xuantong], Yu Tah-fu 郁達夫 [Yu Dafu] and others of the Yu-ssu 語絲 [*yusi*, thread of words] school were too much individualists to join the throng. Lu Hsün [Lu Xun] fought, resisted the tide for a year, and then went over to the enemy camp. In about a year's time, the revolution in literature was so far successful that no formidable out-and-out opponent was left on the field.[9]

It is interesting to note that when it came to commenting on the Russian cast of young China, Lin Yutang took a neutral stance, as he was merely "to record a fact, not to pass a judgment",[10] even though his tone was one of sympathetic understanding. But clearly he counted himself as belonging to the group of Zhou Zuoren and Yu Dafu — too much individualists to join the new tide. That is not to say that Lin Yutang did not go through a soul-searching process after the Nationalist revolution was over. He called himself a wanderer in the wilderness, a lone traveller walking his own walk, observing the world through his own eyes, and "it is precisely in such lonely wandering that it fits to know thyself and know the universe and the meaning of life."[11] Through such independent wandering and searching, Lin Yutang eventually emerged to lead a literary and cultural movement

of humour, which became a formidable alternative to the Leftist dominance in modern Chinese literature and culture. In examining this transitional period, two aspects of Lin's life and works need to be noted: the fact that Lin achieved financial independence through the very successful compilation of English textbooks and the translation of the Crocean theory of the art of expression into Chinese (see below).[12]

In the newly established Nanjing government, Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), the former chancellor of Peking University, re-emerged as the intellectual leader, serving as minister of education and president of Academia Sinica (*Zhongyang yanjiuyuan* 中央研究院), founded in 1928. Soon after Lin Yutang arrived in Shanghai, he was appointed by Cai as a member of Academia Sinica and made its English editor-in-chief. He continued to pursue his philological studies, publishing a number of papers in linguistics in both English and Chinese, while the job at Academia Sinica paid a monthly salary of 300 *yuan* — similar to that of a university professor, a rather high standard at that time. It should be noted that Lin thus belonged to the Western-educated professional class; unlike most young urban writers who found themselves without a profession in the new social order and dependent on meagre royalties from their literary writings, he was financially secure.

Moreover, Lin Yutang was able to turn his philological expertise into significant commercial success. As a professor of English and a linguist, he had always wanted to write a textbook for learning English. He negotiated a book contract with Kaiming Bookstore and compiled the *Kaiming English Book*, which became so successful that another major publisher tried to commission a rival textbook by an inexperienced fresh graduate, who apparently plagiarized parts of Lin's *Kaiming English Book*. The case was taken to court and fought over in Shanghai's newspapers with claims and counter-claims from both publishers. Eventually, the censorship committee of the Ministry of Education voted to confirm the existence of plagiarism in the rival text and banned its publication. Ironically, newspaper publicity over the trial greatly enhanced sales of the textbook.[13] According to a long-term editor of Kaiming Bookstore, Lin's *Kaiming English Book* was compiled with great linguistic expertise and accompanied by lively and appropriate literary texts, plus drawings by the famous artist Feng Zikai, so that it became the bookstore's best-selling book.[14] Indeed,

millions of Chinese started to learn English from Lin's textbook, and it brought him substantial financial gain, earning him the sobriquet "king of royalties" in Shanghai's literary and cultural world.

Lin's financial success from compiling the English textbook owed much to his Western training and background, from his college years at St John's in Shanghai to graduate study in America and Germany, which set him further apart again from many writers making ends meet with miniscule royalties. Intellectually, Lin was also differentiating himself from the mainstream Russian craze for proletariat literature. Apart from continuing to contribute Chinese essays to the journal *Yu-ssu*, as noted, Lin devoted himself to translating the Crocean theory of aesthetics into Chinese, which resulted in the publication of *Xinde wenping* 新的文評 (New criticism) in 1930, a collection of translated essays related to the theory of expression.[15] This was a significant move, given the overwhelming attention being given elsewhere to translating Russian works. By introducing and translating this theory, Lin claimed to be wandering off on his own path in the wilderness, and holding on to the belief that literature ought to be an individual expression of one's own distinct personality. In this respect, he was very much going against the current trend, which regarded literature as a propaganda tool for revolutionary goals. When later combined with his introduction of the concept of humour, Lin's theory of expression as the defining element for literary discourse would constitute, and remains, a major alternative to the Leftist utilitarian notion of literature as an ideological propaganda tool.

In 1928, an English-language weekly, *The China Critic*, was launched by a group of Western-trained Chinese professionals. This was the first English-language journal produced exclusively by Chinese. According to Durham S. F. Chen, one of the founders of the journal, the publication of *The China Critic* was occasioned by the Jinan Incident of 3 May 1928, when Cai Gongshi 蔡公時 (Tsai Kung-shih, 1881–1928), Special Commissioner of Foreign Affairs, was brutally assassinated by the Japanese. The English weekly was launched specifically "to present the Chinese point of view on current affairs".[16] Its founding members included Chen Qinren 陳欽仁 (Ch'en Ch'in-jen), a Missouri-trained journalist; Zhu Shaoping 朱少屏 (Chu Shao-p'ing, 1882–1942),

the energetic secretary of the Shanghai YMCA; Gui Zhongshu 桂中樞 (Kwei Chung-shu), a brilliant journalist and practising lawyer; and Liu Dajun 劉大鈞 (D. K. Lieu), a distinguished economist. The editorial board membership changed somewhat over time, but some of the more well-known members included Quan Zenggu 全增嘏 (T. K. Chuan, 1903–84), a Western-trained philosopher; Pan Guangdan 潘光旦 (Quentin Pan, 1899–1967), a distinguished eugenicist who oversaw the book review column; and Lin Yu 林幽, Lin Yutang's younger brother, who was responsible for the Overseas Chinese column. Lin Yutang was associated with the group early on, as he started contributing in 1928, but he did not become a columnist for the weekly until 3 July 1930 when he started "The little critic" column

> which immediately caught on with the reading public. The weekly pieces Dr. Lin wrote and published in this column were all light essays on any imaginable subject. They were so delightful and entertaining that they were eagerly devoured as soon as a copy of the weekly came to hand.[17]

Though members of *The China Critic* group were professionals from different fields, their common ground was their Western training and educational background — and, of course, their English proficiency. In a sense, the weekly appearance of *The China Critic* signalled the coming of age of a new generation of Western-trained, English-proficient, professional Chinese intellectuals. Given his educational background, Lin Yutang epitomized the emergence of this English-speaking class. Some of the members of *The China Critic* group — particularly Quan Zenggu, Pan Guangdan and Lin Yu — would also become core members of the *Lunyu* group. Moreover, the literature of humour later promoted in *Lunyu* had its origin in fact in Lin's "The little critic" column.

Lin's first column piece attempted to define what he meant by the title "The little critic." By giving the column this name, he deliberately tried to shun the big issues or serious topics that usually dominated newspaper headlines, such as the London Naval Conference or the progress of Nationalism in China. In reporting such serious topics, one had to wear a tie ("dog-collar" in Lin's words), tighten oneself up and

be respectful. Moreover, one had to be constantly alert to the whims of the censors:

> The thing has gone so far now that they have put a few censors to see that the few natural human barks issuing from the dog-collar should neither be so loud as to disturb the extremely sensitive nerves of the censors' masters, nor take place when all villadom and officialdom are getting ready to go to bed.[18]

As a result, the serious big papers in China "have lost even the capacity to pronounce a 'damn' as humanity ought to pronounce it".[19] By contrast, the "little critic" would leave serious issues to the big newspapers, and free himself from the dog-collar. Instead, he would concentrate on commenting on things familiar to him in his own manner. And if he were to feel like barking, he would bark:

> We do not mean to say that we are going to bark louder, but let us bark humanly. After all, a man can be quite a human being when he takes off his dog-collar and his stiff shirt, and comes home sprawling on the hearth-rug with a pipe in his hand. In this unbuttoned mood shall we speak.[20]

When later he collected his "The little critic" essays in a book, Lin acknowledged that his column writings had basically followed the principle he set out in the initial statement, but said that the above statement had a grave error: the official "we" ought to be replaced by the personal "I".[21] That was a very important correction. It is precisely through the personal I/eye that "The little critic" is able to present to us a panoramic view of Chinese life in transition to modernity in the 1930s. Later, in his memoirs, Lin himself attributed his later success to this style:

> It all started with my writing in the "Little Critic". I had established myself as an independent critic, neither a Kuomintang man, nor for Chiang Kai-shek, and at times a merciless critic. I had dared to say when cautious critics refrained for the sake of pacifying everybody. At the same time, I had been developing a style, the secret of which is [to] take your reader into confidence, a style you feel like talking to an old friend in your unbuttoned words.[22]

From May 1931 to May 1932, Quan Zenggu became the alternate columnist for "The little critic", as Lin Yutang participated in the annual conference of the Cultural Cooperation Committee of the League of Nations held in Switzerland as a delegate from Academia Sinica, and subsequently stayed on in Europe for a year.[23] When he came back in the summer of 1932, there had been a significant change in the political climate due to the increasing encroachment of the Japanese invasion of China. When the Japanese Army invaded Manchuria on 18 September 1931, it stirred massive and unprecedented patriotic fervour among the Chinese public, and national salvation became the dominant preoccupation of the public media. It was in such a stifling sociopolitical climate that the humour magazine *Analects* was born from informal salon gatherings at the house of Shao Xunmei 邵洵美 (Sinmay Zao 1906–68).

Shao was a Romantic poet and a well-known Shanghai dandy from an aristocratic family background.[24] He owned the *Shidai* 時代 (Times) publishing company (which later published the *Analects*) and was a gentlemanly host of numerous cultural salons at his home. Frustrated by the stifling cultural climate, a group of friends, including Lin Yutang, Quan Zenggu, Pan Guangdan, Li Qingya 李青崖 (1886–1969), Shao Xunmei and Zhang Kebiao 章克標 (1900–2007), gathered at Shao's house and thought up the idea of launching a humour magazine, and Lin Yutang was chosen to be its chief editor. Besides his Shanghai friends, some of them associated with *The China Critic*, Lin Yutang invited many of his Beijing friends associated with the journal *Yu-ssu*, including Zhou Zuoren, Sun Fuyuan and Yu Dafu, to be core contributors to *Analects* (the chosen title); hence the formation of the Analects School of writers in modern Chinese literature. Actually, the term merely refers to a loose group of independent and liberal-minded men of letters around the journal *Analects*, not really to a school of thought.

In the editorial afterword of the inaugural issue of *Analects*, Lin Yutang explained the meaning of the journal title as follows:

> Everybody knows *Analects* is one of the Confucian classics, so apparently our journal is a fake. But we did not mean to make a forgery of the Confucian classic, that's not what we meant.

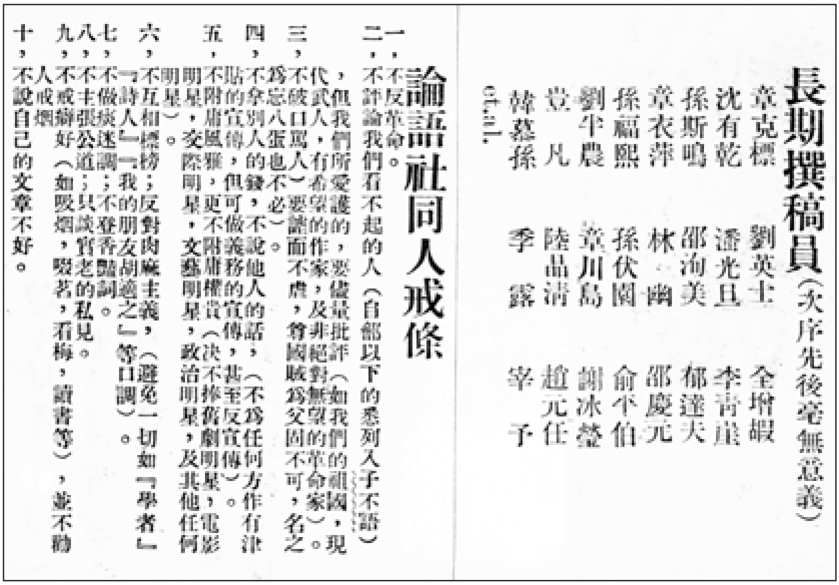
Rather, in a humorous sleight of hand, *lunyu* 論語 was taken literally to mean commentary (*lun* 論) and discourse (*yu* 語). In other words, *Analects* was launched simply to serve as a platform for a group of friends' freestyle commentary and salon-style discourses and conversations on various personal, social and cultural topics. However, they did share a similarity in style. Just as the Confucian classic was a random collection of Confucius's sayings, the humour journal was also going to be a free forum of opinions and discourses by a group of friends who did not belong to any particular political organization and did not follow any particular ideological direction. Furthermore, as Lin explained, in the Confucian classification of canonical works, the

Figure 10.1 Cover page of the first issue of *Lunyu banyuekan* (Analects Fortnightly), published by the Shidai (Times) Publishing House, Shanghai, 1932. Unknown artist; publisher ceased to exist during the Sino-Japanese War. Every effort has been made to locate any holder of copyright. From a copy held by the Widener Library, Harvard University.

Annals of Spring and Autumn (Chunqiu 春秋) was supposed to be much more important than the *Lunyu* because it was an orthodox moral history. Likewise, contemporary critics writing in the humour journal merely attempted to offer random thoughts and comments without any intention of proposing orthodox moral standards for society.[25]

If the title of the journal was a humorous take on the Confucian classic, the "Ten commandments of the Analects School colleagues" that appeared in consecutive issues of the journal, beginning with the first, seem to reflect a biblical inspiration, at least in terms of their name and format. In translation (see Figure 10.2 for original), they read:

1 We do not oppose the revolution.
2 We do not criticize those whom we do not think much of, but we do criticize those whom we love and esteem (such as our beloved motherland, contemporary militarists, hopeful writers, and not-yet-hopeless revolutionists).
3 We do not curse people outright. (Try to have humour without discursive violence. There is no need to call a national thief Father, nor is there any need to call him Son-of-a-bitch.)
4 We do not take money from others, nor do we speak for others. (We shall not do any paid propaganda for any party, but we might, if we like, do free propaganda, or even counter-propaganda.)
5 We do not follow any fashionable trend, and shall not follow any powers that be. (We refuse to be fans of Chinese opera stars, movie stars, society stars, literary and arts stars, political stars, or stars of any other kind.)
6 We do not flatter each other and we oppose overbearing affectedness. (Avoid using flattering terms such as "poet," "scholar" or "my friend Dr. Hu Shi".)
7 We do not compose stuffy verses and we do not publish erotic lyrics.
8 We do not pretend to uphold public justice and righteousness. Rather, we only try to express frank and honest opinions of our own.
9 We do not attempt to get rid of bad habits (such as smoking, tea drinking, enjoying plum blossoms or reading). We do not advise anyone to quit smoking.
10 We do not say our own writing is no good.[26]



長期撰稿員（次序先後毫無意義）

章克標　劉英士　全增嘏
沈有乾　潘光旦　李青崖
孫斯鳴　邵洵美　郁達夫
章衣萍　林幽　邵慶元
孫福熙　孫伏園　俞平伯
劉半農　章川島　謝冰瑩
豈凡　陸晶清　趙元任
韓慕孫　季露　宰予
et al.

論語社同人戒條

一，不反革命。
二，不評論我們看不起的人（自鄶以下的悉列入子不語），但我們所愛護的人，要儘量批評（如我們的祖國，現代武人，有希望的作家，及非絕對無望的革命家）。
三，不破口罵人（要謔而不虐，尊國賊爲父固不可，名之爲忘八蛋也不必）。
四，不拿別人的錢，不說他人的話（不爲任何方作有津貼的宣傳，但可做義務的宣傳，甚至反宣傳）。
五，不附庸風雅，更不附庸權貴（決不捧舊劇明星，電影明星，交際明星，文藝明星，政治明星，及其他任何明星）。
六，不互相標榜，反對肉麻主義（避免一切如『學者』『詩人』『我的朋友胡適之』等口調）。
七，不做痰迷詩，不登香豔詞。
八，不主張公道，只談老實的私見。
九，不戒癖好（如吸烟，啜茗，看梅，讀書等），並不勸人戒烟。
十，不說自己的文章不好。

Figure 10.2 Part of the inside cover of the first issue of *Lunyu banyuekan* (Analects Fortnightly), 1932, showing the "Ten commandments" of the journal and the names of the editorial committee. Note the list's Westernizing conclusion, set in Chinese print order: "et al." The publisher, Shidai Publishing House, Shanghai, ceased to exist during the Sino-Japanese War; every effort has been made to locate any holder of copyright. From a copy held by the Widener Library, Harvard University.

Humour as Social Critique

Unexpectedly, the journal immediately became popular, especially among urban youth and on college campuses. It was said that if the Ministry of Education wanted to make an announcement, it could just run an ad in *Analects* and the message would be spread to all students.[27] The success of the journal owed much to the particular kind of cross-cultural interpretation of humour that Lin Yutang proposed and put into practice, both in the English-language "The little critic" column and the Chinese-language *Analects* magazine. As detailed in the full translation of the essay by Joseph Sample, reproduced in Chapter 9 of this volume, Lin's "Essay on humour" (*Lun youmo* 論幽默), a typical treatise from the *Analects*, incorporates Meredith's notion of the "Comic Spirit" into Chinese Confucian and Daoist notions of tolerance and detachment to

invoke a cross-cultural notion of *youmo*. To Lin, *youmo* embodies the comic spirit and is supposed to contain a level of significance higher than the normal use of humour in Western literature, as "most of the humour magazines in the West such as *Punch* and *Life* are prone to lowly and vulgar jokes".[28] When Meredith's notion of the comic spirit is thus incorporated into the Chinese cultural tradition, *youmo* is seen as that which reveals "a mellow and detached *daguan* 達觀 disposition", and conveys "a certain philosophy of life and a critique of life".[29] In other words, Lin says, only when you become a cool and detached observer will you achieve a sympathetic and reasonable understanding of life so that you can laugh at its ironies with tolerance. In this "Essay on humour", Lin attributes the Chinese comic spirit largely to Daoist cultural philosophy and further differentiates two kinds of *youmo*: the masculine kind, or humour of sociocultural discourses (*yilun zongheng zhi youmo* 議論縱橫之幽默); and the feminine kind, or humour of poetic self-leisure (*shihua zishi zhi youmo* 詩化自適之幽默).[30]

While Lin employs these two terms in his essay to discuss humour in Chinese cultural tradition, his own literary practices during this period comprise two similar categories of humour writing: humour of social critique and humour of self-release — the former is more socially or outwardly oriented, while the latter is more self- or inwardly oriented.

On 13 March 1930, the newly constituted Nationalist (KMT) government in Nanjing prepared to welcome the official visit of Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark. Nanjing officials regarded the slum area along the main highway, with hundreds of shabby huts inhabited by poor migrants from rural areas, as a disgusting sight that would cause the government to lose face in front of the Western royal visitor. So on a rainy night, with no warning to the inhabitants and no alternative shelter offered, the huts were torn down and the inhabitants were driven out by force. Reports of the action appeared in *The China Times* newspaper in Shanghai, but were so categorically denied by the government that *The China Times* had to issue a statement of apology. However, as the Chinese saying goes, "fire cannot be wrapped up by paper", and photographs taken at the scene of the demolished huts and tents were published, to the great embarrassment of officials. Lin Yutang exposed this incident in the English-language *The China Critic*:

> Unless two plus two makes five in China, we must believe either that the Mayor's publicity office is carrying the special art of diplomats a little too far, or else *The China Times* staff correspondent has succeeded in taking spiritist pictures. Being no believer in spiritism, I am inclined to believe that it is the photographs that do not lie.[31]

To Lin Yutang, it was a joke that government officials would attempt to cover up and lie in the face of pictorial evidence. The humorous critic was, however, walking a tightrope and constantly testing the limits of government censorship. The publication of Lin's exposé enraged the Nanjing authorities so much that: "K. P. Chu, the manager of *The China critic*, immediately took the night train [to Nanjing], apologized and promised to behave like a good citizen for the good of the country."[32]

For Lin Yutang, the promotion of humour in early 1930s China was primarily a means of engaging in sociopolitical critique, or what George Kao calls the "humour of protest".[33] On the occasion of the arrest of Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), former Chinese Communist Party secretary and renowned intellectual leader of the New Culture Movement, Madam Sun Yat-sen published a statement in the 3 November 1932 issue of *The China Critic*, calling for the formation of a general committee for the protection of civil rights in China in defence of all political prisoners and victims of the terror imposed by the Nationalist regime. Lin immediately echoed that call in his "The little critic" column essay, "For a civic liberty union", published in the same issue of *The China Critic*. "Madam Sun's cry for justice sounds very much like a voice in the wilderness, and in the end I am afraid the wilderness will drown the voice," wrote Lin.[34] Since the establishment of the new Nationalist government, the call of Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962) for civil rights protection had been the only dissident voice, through his series of essays published in the *Crescent Moon Monthly* (Xinyue 新月), but eventually Hu's voice was silenced under threat and he himself had to move from Shanghai to Beijing. In response to Madam Sun's call for the establishment of a civic liberties union, Lin Yutang's humorous suggestion was that the current Minister of Justice of the Nanjing government, Lo Wengan (Lo Wen-kan 羅文幹 1888–1941), should head the organization, because this Lo Wengan had proposed the same ideas for the protection of civil liberties when he was Minister of Finance in

the previous Beijing (Peking) government, and had been put in jail for eight months for insisting on due legal procedures. Lin expanded on this theme, republishing the 1924 proposals to pin Lo down and force him to make good his words.

Of course, Lo did not participate in the China League for Civil Rights, which was proposed by Madam Sun Yat-sen and subsequently set up in Shanghai on 30 December 1932. Madam Sun served as the chair and the members of its central executive committee included Cai Yuanpei, Yang Quan 楊銓 (1893–1933), Lin Yutang, Zou Taofen 鄒韜奮 (1895–1944) and Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之 (1896–1986), as well as the American activist Harold Isaacs, who arrived in Shanghai in December 1930, "a twenty-year-old tyro journalist in search of experience and definition",[35] as he later described himself. After serving as a reporter for the American-owned *Shanghai Evening Post & Mercury*, Isaacs launched his own weekly journal, *China Forum*, promoting Leftist literature despite government censorship. Another American activist, the feminist revolutionary Agnes Smedley, was also involved in the activities of the China League for Civil Rights. According to Smedley, Lin Yutang was the most vocal liberal intellectual, after Hu Shi, to advocate protection of civil rights and the rule of law, particularly through his "The little critic" columns. She wrote: "In the scholastic hierarchy Dr. Lin Yu-tang occupied a place about half-way between Dr. Hu Shih [Hu Shi] and the revolutionary Lu Hsün [Lu Xun]."[36] Within the China League for Civil Rights, it was Lin, Isaacs and Smedley who were responsible for publications and correspondence in English.[37]

The China League for Civil Rights was a unique alliance of liberal intellectuals like Hu Shi, Lin Yutang and Yang Quan on the one hand and Leftist-revolutionary intellectuals like Madam Sun, Lu Xun, Harold Isaacs and Agnes Smedley on the other. However, while they were united in promoting the protection of civil rights for the people and the culture of the rule of law under the Nationalist government, their emphases in action were different. For liberal intellectuals, protection of civil rights was intended not as a revolutionary act to overthrow the existing republic, but rather as a fundamental principle for a democratic republican government. For Leftist intellectuals like Madam Sun and Lu Xun, the Nationalist government had betrayed the revolution and turned to suppressing the Communists, who were

continuing to pursue revolutionary aims. The government defended its violation of civil rights as necessary to suppress Communist insurgency, real or imagined. In one campaign, the league protested against the secret arrest and death from torture of the journalist Liu Yusheng by the governor of Jiangsu province, General Gu Zhutong 顧祝同 (Ku Chu-t'ung). Liu had exposed opium traffic and other corrupt practices condoned by Gu, so the governor accused Liu of being a Communist. Thus calls for the protection of civil rights in 1930s China would always risk the danger of being labelled a political defence for the Communist revolution, whether it was justifiable or not.

In a lecture for the China League for Civil Rights delivered at the Chinese YMCA in Shanghai on 4 March 1933, Lin Yutang presented an animalistic–humanistic rationale for freedom of speech. He noted that the problem with this concept derived from the faculty of speech itself, since "only human beings have articulate language, while the cries of animals serve only as the signals for immediate instructive needs, like the cries of pain, hunger, fear, satisfaction".[38] Aesop's fables were libels on the animal kingdom because they made animals mimic human speech. If a fox were to see a bunch of grapes hanging high above it, it would leave them. It was the human who forced the fox to say the grapes were sour. Speech was thus a defining human faculty, he said. Lin came to his point:

> Bernard Shaw has rightly said that the only kind of liberty worth having is the liberty of the oppressed to squeal when hurt and the liberty to remove the condition which hurt them. The kind of liberty we need in present-day China is exactly this liberty to squeal when hurt, and not the liberty to talk.[39]

In other words, it was really the "animalistic right" for which people were fighting. Lin pointed out that there was in fact no absolute notion of freedom of speech. For instance, people would be bound to offend their neighbours if they really voiced what they thought of them. In the social context of China, freedom of speech for the people meant a limit on the freedom of action for officials, who naturally would take freedom of speech as a nuisance and guard their liberty to muzzle the press. These two kinds of liberties were diametrically opposed:

> The militarists would like to condemn people to death in secret tribunals, but the League demands open trials. The officials would like to kidnap their opponents and make them disappear from the surface of the earth, but the League wants to send public telegrams, demanding to know their whereabouts. The League will become a greater and greater nuisance in proportion as it is able to carry out its program.[40]

In the political context of 1933 China, the league proved to be more than a nuisance. In the spring of 1933, the Leftist writer Ding Ling 丁玲 (pseudonym of Jiang Bingzhi 蒋冰之, 1904–86) was kidnapped by a secret KMT clique known as the Blue Shirts (*lan yi she* 藍衣社). Yang Quan, the secretary of the league, took up Ding Ling's case with the government and appealed to the public to take action against her abduction. He was assassinated on the steps of the government-sponsored research institute where he worked, the Academia Sinica, on 18 June 1933. Lin Yutang received threats that he would be the next target.[41] As a consequence, the China League for Civil Rights was dissolved. The government's brutal and indiscriminate suppression of dissidence merely hardened the confrontational nature of the conflict between the Nationalist and the Communist revolutionaries. Caught in such a war, liberal intellectuals were often accused of being Communists and also became victims of the terror. In this respect, Lin Yutang's humorous discourse of social critique was actually a means of constantly testing the limits of freedom of speech under the Nationalist government engaged in civil war with the Communist revolutionaries. It was this type of humour that allowed Lin to carve out such a space for social critique.

In his "The little critic" column on 23 October 1930, Lin Yutang took to task Hu Hanmin 胡漢民 (1879–1936), chairman of the Legislative Yuan of the Nationalist government. Hu had stated that not a single official had been guilty of abuse of power since the establishment of the Nanking government. Lin commented that it took a lot of courage to make such a statement. He said he would have put it more modestly:

> "not a single official had been put into prison since the establishment of the Nanking Government". There I should be on a completely safe ground. The ground is so safe that any coward would be willing to make the statement.[42]

Lin then went on to echo a recent speech by Chiang Kai-shek that called for the establishment of a clean and irreproachable government. That would have been a noble call, Lin said, but added that "it would, however, be more to the point if Mr. Chiang had said that we want 'More Prisons for Politicians'".[43] Here, Lin Yutang was not so much reproaching Generalissimo Chiang as using candid humour to make explicit the hollowness of the politician's words. Lin was not joking in this case. To him, the Confucian tradition of entrusting government to scholar-officials was the root-cause of contemporary political sickness. The solution lay in a legal concept of government that assumed all politicians were potential thieves and so built prisons ready for them.

Lin Yutang had a lot to say on Chinese political sickness. In one of his most entertaining political satires, entitled "On political sickness", he noted that politicians' claims of being sick constituted a phenomenon unique to China. Their sicknesses would bewilder resident foreign correspondents, who would conclude that there was no end to the diseases plaguing government officials:

> Among the more fashionable diseases which every retiring official takes care to announce in his circular telegram, I may mention softened brain and hardened liver, ulcerated stomach and outraged spleen, flat chest and high blood pressure, weak heart and shattered nerves, diabetes, Bright's disease, beri-beri, rheumatism, insomnia, arteria sclerosis pile, fistula, chronic dysentery, chronic constipation, loss of appetite, disgust with politics, an exaggerated desire (which is a form of fixation) to wear the peasant's cotton gown, longing for mammy, life weariness, melancholia, *impuissance* (by inference), etc. But of course, diabetes beats them all.[44]

For one thing, Lin explained, the officials' diseases were good excuses and powerful bargaining tools. An official could use his alleged disease to blackmail others so that if, say, the Minister of Finance did not get what he wanted for his budget, he could threaten sick leave because of his weak heart. This would be a face-saving way of retiring with the real intention of getting advancement. On the other hand, Lin suggested that some officials' diseases, especially digestive disorders, were very real, as "all of them overeat and . . . all their mental energy that should have been devoted to the affairs of the nation has been consumed in digesting shark's fins and birds' nests and stewed pig's

foot".[45] So Lin charged: "As far as I can see, there is no hope for China, unless some sensible minister is willing to start a general diet reform and incur social calumny by giving his official guests only four-course dinners."[46]

Besides the Chinese social establishment, the foreign community in Shanghai was not immune to Lin Yutang's humour of social critique. The city in the 1930s was a semi-colonial society where a substantial foreign community resided in the International Settlement or the French Concession, where they enjoyed the protection of extraterritoriality. Foreigners in China took this special status for granted, including even progressive-minded "friends of China". Helen Foster Snow, for instance, was appalled when she was told that being pro-Chinese might mean giving up extraterritoriality. To her mind, "no foreigner could live here without that". As she explained:

> . . . under extraterritoriality, people living abroad enjoy freedom from the jurisdiction of the country in which they reside, and are responsible only to the laws and courts of their native country. Because of extraterritoriality and "gunboat diplomacy", foreigners were sacrosanct in China; foreign women were strictly sacrosanct. No Chinese ever touched a foreign woman — it was taboo.[47]

In "An open letter to an American friend", Lin Yutang imagined that he was writing to an American friend who had a nephew engaged in an egg-products business in Shanghai. Lin tried to assure him that a peaceful American should not be concerned about the possibility of the abolition of extraterritoriality, since this related only to the criminal code. As a law-abiding businessman, his nephew would not land in gaol. When the US State Department insisted on the privilege of extraterritoriality, they were actually "taking an insurance policy for some of its nationals who are 'bad risks' (technically speaking), by making all of you, ninety-eight per cent of whom are 'good risks', decent people, pay the premium".[48] Lin argued that such an insurance policy was unnecessary:

> Why, I have travelled in your esteemed country, the United States of America, and have even dared to reside in New York without finding out first what the American code says about the difference between pilfering, burglary, and robbery and what are the legal punishments for assault on women.[49]

If his American friend insisted that extraterritoriality was a modern convenience, Lin told him that such convenience was only enjoyed by two kinds of people: Chinese government officials and American nationals. Rather than insist on such a privilege, Lin advised that his friend's nephew should learn some basic Chinese phrases such as *duibuqi* 對不起 (pardon me) or *nihao* 你好 (hello), which would offer great convenience. The advice to the foreigner thus carried a sting in the tail and turned into a snipe against colonially minded white supremacists at home and abroad who failed to exhibit even basic courtesies.

Humour as Release of Self

In the literary and cultural world of 1930s Shanghai, Bernard Shaw's one-day visit on 17 February 1933 was a big event. The year 1933 was hailed as the "Year of Humour", due to the promotion of *youmo* by Lin Yutang and his journals, and the visit by one of the masters of humour in the Western literary world was certainly a high point of the year. Bernard Shaw was received by Madam Sun and the China League for Civil Rights. Hundreds of reporters waited at the harbour to greet the famed playwright and satirist — but in vain, as he avoided the media and was secretly escorted to meet Cai Yuanpei at the Academia Sinica. Madam Sun held a luncheon at her residence attended by Cai Yuanpei, Lu Xun, Lin Yutang, Harold Isaacs and Agnes Smedley. The next day, a picture that later became famous appeared in all major newspapers showing Bernard Shaw, Madam Sun, Cai Yuanpei, Lu Xun, Lin Yutang, Harold Isaacs and Agnes Smedley gathered in Madam Sun's garden.[50] In fact, the Shanghai newspapers and journals consumed every possible bit of information concerning Shaw's brief visit. Lin's *Analects* journal devoted a special issue to it on 1 March 1933. At the luncheon, due to his fluency in English, Lin Yutang engaged in extensive conversation with Shaw. The talk focused on two biographies of Bernard Shaw, one by Archibald Henderson and one by Frank Harris.[51] Lin Yutang commented that Henderson's account was rather dry while Harris's seemed much livelier. Shaw's reply was frank:

> Well, that may be true. But Harris was an impossible man. He was so poor that he had to write a biography to make ends meet.

> Originally he wanted to write a biography of Jesus Christ but the publisher would have none of it, so he wrote a biography of Bernard Shaw. Yet he didn't really know my life and got many facts wrong. And just as he was about to finish, he died unfortunately and left the draft to me. I had to spend the whole damn three months to edit and correct the facts he got wrong, but left his opinions intact . . . Some of my friends wrote to me to protest the sarcastic remarks in the book and told me that Harris should not have said those things and I should not have published them. Well, those passages were in fact written by myself.[52]

To Lin Yutang, Shaw's complete frankness and his ability to laugh at himself revealed the best kind of comic spirit. He believed that the secret of humour was to be natural and to be oneself, to face oneself in the mirror and to tear down hypocritical disguise. The ability to laugh at oneself came from a kind of broad-mindedness that took a detached attitude towards one's own imperfections. From his comments on Shaw and from a series of essays that Lin wrote about himself — discourses about his life experience and his practices in an emerging modern urban milieu — one can glean a sense of what he called the other type of humour besides social critique: the "feminine" kind or the "humour of poetic self-leisure".

A new urban middle class emerged in 1930s Shanghai, paralleling the modernization drive of the KMT government, despite ongoing civil war and the threat of Japanese aggression. In his own life and in his bilingual essays, Lin Yutang fashioned an urban lifestyle for himself that epitomized a new modern sensibility and included a sense of humour. According to Bernardine Szold Fritz, Lin was known as one of the few Chinese writers who could support himself from his writing, long before his *My country and my people* became a bestseller in the United States.[53] Every Friday, Lin went to dinner with colleagues from *The China Critic*, and then a dozen or so would go to the dance halls, to drink beer or tea and to look at the pretty girls. Sometimes they would invite girls to their table and chat with them about their family background and their life as dance hostesses in metropolitan Shanghai. After a couple of hours of night-life diversion, Lin would go home to work for several more hours. After all, Y. T. was a true family man with three lovely daughters and a supportive, educated wife.

For most of his early time in Shanghai, the Lin family occupied a house at 42 Edinburgh Road in the International Settlement, but on 18 September 1932 — on the first anniversary of the Japanese occupation of Northeast China — Lin wrote in his "The little critic" column that he had to move to a flat. He confessed that on such a national day of indignation, he should not be writing about such a trivial topic, but since the government had already decided, on behalf of the people, to fight the Communists before dealing with the Japanese and had demanded that the public shut up about national affairs, he might as well write about why he had to move to a flat. He said he was forced to do it because his neighbour had bought a radio and obliged the Lins to listen to *his* favourite radio music, such as Jeanette MacDonald's "March of the Grenadiers" and "Suzhou crooning", which he tuned in to endlessly whenever he felt like it. "Under such circumstances," Lin wrote, "an Englishman would go to his neighbor and say 'You stop that, or I shall write to the police. A Chinese gentleman with any culture at all would prepare to adapt himself to the environment and seek the peace of his soul by ignoring the existence of his nerves."[54] But as an "English educated Chinese", Lin could do neither, so he put a "To let" sign in front of his house and moved into a flat.

Living in an apartment was not Lin's idea of a decent human lifestyle. To his mind, modern civilization could not be called real civilization "until it can make it possible for every man to have a few yards of soil which he can call his own, where he can plant peas and tomatoes, and where his children can catch crickets and get comfortably dirty".[55] The only thing that made his move acceptable to him was that the apartment window looked over a wilderness of grand old trees and green meadows. By 3 August 1933, however, we learn that the Lins had moved back to their house, "living like a human being again". He could smell the soil again, have frogs and toads and even a harmless little green snake in the garden, and enjoy cicadas singing in the poplar trees. Living in a house kept him close to nature, which he reckoned was the most natural way of living. After all, what necessity was there to go to summer resorts if not to get away from the city and go back to nature and re-experience this? "Few people realize that it is the lizards and snakes that make your summer resorts and outings so memorable."[56] When spring came, the garden was full of life. The

willow trees turned green and flowers were blooming everywhere. In his delightful essay, "Spring in my garden", Lin describes how every animal — human animal and real animal — was caught up in spring fever. All his servants — his "boy", the cook, the cook's wife Huangma — tried to find excuses to get away from daily drudgery. Even the father pigeon flew from the nest, leaving the mother pigeon and the eggs behind.[57]

To live in a house so as to feel close to nature was one way of keeping one's natural self, or at least of being reminded of one's animal self. But to be natural was not an easy task for anyone living in 1930s China, as the social and cultural pressures for conformity could be overwhelming. For a Western-educated returnee, inability to fit in with the social mores of traditional Chinese culture (even though it was rapidly modernizing) could be a serious impediment to a cross-cultural life. He would have to become a Chinese gentleman again. But what *was* a Chinese gentleman? In "How I became respectable", Lin Yutang offers the rather sarcastic definition that a Chinese gentleman must possess three things:

> (1) a serious desire to lie or conceal one's feelings by one's words, (2) the ability to lie like a gentleman, and (3) the mental calm shown by taking both your own lie and that of your fellow-men's with a sense of humour.[58]

Clearly, to become a Chinese gentleman, one needed to understand the Chinese sense of humour. After several lessons in life, Lin explained, he was quite able to conform strictly to this code. For example, when asked by a foreign friend about President Chiang Kai-shek's recent baptism, Lin's reply was: "Why, it is a fine thing. Another soul saved!"[59]

Precisely because of the social and cultural push for conformity, Lin Yutang insisted that humour should be part of literature just as it was part of life, but it seemed impossible for him to convince the Chinese public of this at the time:

> For according to the old tradition, no one except a clown would condescend to crack a joke in public, and editors and statesmen regard it as shocking and not permissible in good form to relieve their serious discourses on the salvation of the country with a line of humour.[60]

Such puritanical constraint made people rigid and hypocritical. Instead of producing middle-school critics who talked as if they were 40, Lin pointed to the importance of keeping the heart of a child — for instance, by enjoying Mickey Mouse cartoons. Lin proclaimed that those who had lost the capacity to enjoy Mickey Mouse were probably incapable of any imagination and fantasy. Free from the limitations of time and space, animated cartoons gave full rein to the human imagination in a way that surpassed other forms of art:

> There we are carried back into the dream world of our childhood in which nothing is impossible. The cartoons, therefore, achieve for us a liberation of the human spirit and transfer us into a magic world so long as that picture lasts.[61]

Similarly, Lin proclaimed that crying during movies was normal human behaviour and nothing to be ashamed of:

> Because I often cry at movies, I always like a person sitting next to me silently blowing his or her nose or leaving the theatre with a shining streak over his face. I am inclined to think that he is a better man for that.[62]

Of course, if a man cried too often he would be called a sentimental idiot, but to restrain emotions over a powerful piece of work of art merely made people slaves to conventionality, contrary to human nature. There were tears in life — tears of sorrow and tears of delight. Some cried at a sentimental story, some cried over reunion or departing. "But let him cry whoever feels like crying, for we were animals before we became reasoning beings, and the shedding of a tear, whether of forgiveness or of pity or of sheer delight at beauty, will do him a lot of good."[63]

In following one's heart and expressing one's feelings naturally, Lin's words also reflected his own personality. In her biographical sketch, written shortly after the publication of Lin's bestseller *My people and my country* in 1935, Fritz tells us that "above all things, Y. T. is a poet".[64] What Fritz meant was that Lin's personality was quite poetic, in the sense that it defied conventionality and was devoid of pompousness. One of Lin's favourite diversions was to fly kites with his children, and he loved thinking up games and playing with novel gadgets. Once the Lins invited some foreign friends to a fancy restaurant for a dinner that

included 24 dishes. The family had put a lot of time and effort into planning this banquet. At the dinner, however, one guest wore a kind of trick ring purchased from a folk-craft shop in Beijing. Lin noticed this, took hold of it and was completely fascinated by it. He totally lost himself in trying to solve the puzzles of the ring, and became quite oblivious to the feast. On another occasion, according to Fritz, she went on an outing to Hangzhou with the Lins. They drove down from Shanghai and Lin led them to the tomb of a concubine famous in Chinese history. Throughout the trip, Lin was ecstatic about the scenery and cursed the stupidity of living in the city of Shanghai. After they arrived in Hangzhou, they planned to drive along the Qiantang River on a road newly built through the mountains. When they got on the hilly road next morning, everybody was excited to see the spectacular view, but Lin was somehow totally consumed in reading a novel. He had started reading it the previous night and couldn't stop until he found out what happened in the end. And when he did finish reading and raised his head to see the view, the scenery had already become quite ordinary.

In fashioning for himself a poetic lifestyle with appreciation of a sense of humour, Lin Yutang did not see Chinese culture as totally negative, even though he was sharply critical of its conformity and conventionality. In fact, he was rather keen on drawing out the modern and poetic elements of Chinese culture to contribute to a poetic lifestyle of humour. From the humorous perspective — the modern perspective of a Western-educated cross-cultural intellectual — certain Chinese cultural traits could assume surprisingly competitive advantages over Western cultural norms. As Lin explained, for instance, the age-old Chinese custom of clasping one's own hands in greeting was superior to the Western custom of shaking hands. Just for hygienic reasons, hand-shaking did not make sense when all kinds of germ-saturated stuff, like coins and paper money, passed through one's hands. And different kinds of hand-shaking made people vulnerable to different kinds of pressure. "You may have the YMCA type of shaking hands: the man pats you on the shoulder with one hand and gives you a violent shake with the other until all your joints are ready to burst within you."[65] And one might also have those furtive and retiring handshakes that suggested one's opponent was very much afraid of one, which also

negated the whole purpose of greeting. Even though everyone knew that the Western custom of hand-shaking had been passed down from the barbaric days of Europe, Lin admitted helplessly that the custom was gaining ground worldwide while the age-old Chinese custom of shaking one's own hands was fast disappearing. On another note, Lin also saw the calisthenic value of kowtowing. As he explained, unlike Western physical exercises, Chinese hygiene involved bodily movements of moderation designed to conserve energy and to achieve ultimate harmony between mind and body. Like such gestures as *jingzuo* 靜坐 (sitting still or meditation), *duo fangbu* 踱方步 (walking in a series of rounded and continuous movements), *fuxiu* 拂袖 (the movement of jerking one's sleeves before leaving), or *daqian* 打千 (the Manchu ladies' greeting gesture of bending one knee), the Chinese etiquette of kowtowing connoted the highest and most unique art of Chinese culture:

> Make three kowtows and raise yourself again to the erect posture as far as the upper part of the body is concerned. The act of raising and bending one's body gives a wonderful, beneficial exercise to the abdominal muscles and helps better than any massage to dissolve excessive fat around the belly. If done to careful timing, it encourages deep breathing and stimulates the blood circulation.[66]

In one of his celebrated bilingual essays, "The lost mandarin", Lin lamented the disappearance of the mandarin class in China, as "a mandarin was a real polished gentleman" — "His voice was deep and resonant, his bearing poised and calm, his language was an art, and his personality was a combination of scholarship, suavity, rascality and high breeding."[67] The Manchu dynasty might have been corrupt, but the mandarin class was the product of Chinese cultural refinement. Mandarin speech was a work of art, but it was the entire ambience:

> the personality of the speaker, the furniture of the room, the atmosphere of decorum, the tone of his voice, and perfect accent and refined phraseology, the round silken fan, the mandarin moustache and the *makua* — all united to give that harmonious artistic effect.[68]

The mandarin was a scholar-official who was well versed in classical literature, philosophy and history. And if he was corrupt, at least he was

corrupt in an elegant fashion. By contrast, a contemporary Republican official might very well be a graduate of Oberlin (the liberal arts college Oberlin College, Ohio), who "can only lie and lie in the most uncouth, impudent, incompetent and immoral fashion".[69]

Fritz provides an anecdote that demonstrates Lin's sense of artistic appreciation. At an evening gathering at a friend's home (most probably at Shao Xunmei's house), a young foreign couple who had just arrived in Shanghai wanted to try smoking opium — a common desire for many newly arrived Westerners to experience the coveted high fancifully promised through opium smoking. The host gladly offered the opportunity, and lay down on the left side of the opium couch while the young foreign woman lay down on the right side facing him. As the guests were watching them inhaling the smoke, Lin slipped away to the wall and suddenly turned off the electric lights. In Fritz's words:

> That was the poet again. The difference was something unbelievable, for instantly the whole scene became unreal, mysterious, glamorous. The small flame threw a pale fan of light toward the two faces, lighting them from below so that the whites of their eyes gleamed and the color of their skin became like opalescent wax, and when they turned their eyes downward, they resembled angels in reverie, but when they opened their eyes and looked from side to side or out in the room where the rest of us sat or stood in quiet groups, they seemed like young satyrs.[70]

As soon as they finished the pipes and the lights were turned on again, the spell was over. Then the host asked whether anyone else would like to try. Everyone turned to Lin Yutang to urge him to try. They had seen him smoking cigars but no one had seen him in the spell-like atmosphere of opium smoking:

> Laughing and backing off, his arms out at right angles, his hands raised in protest, Y. T. refused.
>
> "I'm a parson's son," he said, "I simply couldn't."
>
> There was a chorus of protest. "Go on, this once. You ought to try it once, everybody else does."
>
> "No," he said, this time quite seriously. "I love to watch it. I find it a fascinating spectacle to watch, but I watch this with the same feeling of horror that people say you get watching a snake. I'm

> sure it has to do with my early Christian training. Although the Christianity has gone, the moral training remains, and I know that I would be physically unable to put an opium pipe to my lips."
>
> "But you couldn't get a habit from trying it once," said our host.
>
> "Yes, but no one would have the habit if he hadn't tried it once. Go ahead, don't mind me," he broke off, laughing again. "My black cigar habit is just as bad as your opium habit, I'm sure. But the Bible didn't prejudice me against cigars!"[71]

As the biographical and literary practices of Lin Yutang demonstrate, the flowering of the *youmo* phenomenon in the 1930s Chinese cultural scene was an East–West cross-cultural product that emerged from the particular socio-historical milieu of modern China. Designed to get away from the stifling environment of partisan politics that treated literature as a mere tool of propaganda, the introduction of humour opened up an alternative space for social critique and for a search for self and identity in an emerging modern life. Despite the twists and turns of cultural politics in modern China, the fact that *youmo* has now become a permanent modern Chinese word and a generally acknowledged cultural term attests to its relevance and endurance.