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## **Lu Xun, Nietzsche, and the Power of Self-Transcendence**

“My works are too dark, because I feel that only ‘darkness and nothingness’ are ‘existent’; yet I am still determined to fight against them in despair, therefore, I voiced many contentious views.” This self-appraisal by Lu Xun (1881–1936), the greatest 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese writer, captures the extraordinary engagement with nihilism that lies at the heart of his thinking. Rather than taking nothingness as a sheer negation of life that should be eliminated, Lu Xun’s resistance to nihilism embraces nothingness as the constitutive exteriority of existence, as the necessary risk that life has to face in order to renew and recreate itself. This distinct stance is crystalized in his conception of the power of self-transcendence, which places the tension between being and nonbeing at the heart of living and affirms the self-transcending momentum of power as the new ground of meaning.

This paper examines the notion of the power of self-transcendence that Lu Xun upheld in his response to the crisis of meaning in modernity. Besides providing a basic explication of this notion in the context of Lu Xun’s thinking, I also explore its broader intellectual significance through a global comparison with Nietzschean philosophy, which exerted a formative influence on Lu Xun during his youthful years. On one hand, Lu Xun’s conception of the power of self-transcendence strikes a deep resonance with the Nietzschean project of overcoming nihilism, as both hinge upon the affirmation of nothingness as the constitutive exteriority of life. On the other hand, while Nietzsche’s primary objective—in response to the metaphysical tradition of Western culture—is to break open the spiritual enclosure of being to the vital becoming of life, Lu Xun’s particular concern—in response to the correlative thinking of Chinese culture—is to inculcate a greater sense of differentiation into the immanent flow of life.

**Author bio:** Wenjin Cui is an assistant professor of Chinese at the University of New Hampshire. She specializes in modern Chinese literature and culture, film studies, and critical theory. Employing various discourses of modernity (e.g. Enlightenment, biopolitics) and the epistemic-comparative lenses of ontological and correlative thinking, her research seeks to situate modern Chinese culture both in the global context of shared modernity and along the axis of its complicated relationship with classical Chinese tradition. Her first book, *Lu Xun’s Affirmative Biopolitics: Nothingness and the Power of Self-Transcendence* (Routledge, 2022), explores an extraordinary case of affirmative biopolitics through the study of Lu Xun (1881–1936), the most prominent cultural figure of modern China.