

CLASSICAL POETRY IN MODERN POLITICS: LIU YAZI'S PR CAMPAIGN FOR MAO ZEDONG

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This paper provides a case study of the use of classical poetry in modern politics, through the close reading of Mao Zedong's lyric song "Snow" (1936) and Liu Yazi's matching poem (1945), and through the close examination of their contexts, including the political background, social circulation, media controversy, and cultural political implication. The diverging interpretations of Mao's poem, expressed through dozens of matching poems, reveal the charm as well as the danger of using classical poetry, which relates the author's persona to historical models and offers opportunities of prognostication for the future. It also shows the vitality of classical poetry in our modern era, in a way that cannot be replaced by vernacular literature.

Keywords: Liu Yazi, Mao Zedong, classical poetry, poetic exchange, cultural politics

In the literary history of 20th century China, Liu Yazi 柳亞子 (1887 – 1958) was an odd existence. As the founder and leader of the Southern Society (or Nanshe 南社, active 1909 – 1923), the last broadly influential classical poetic society in modern China, Liu Yazi through his long literary career wrote almost exclusively classical poetry. Yet since the early 1920s he already pronounced the death of classical poetry to be inevitable as well as necessary,¹ while apologizing for his own writing practice as a die-hard addiction, similar to that

* This paper is dedicated to Marián Gálík's 80th birthday, who has been a supportive teacher and generous old friend since my green, Beida days. It has been presented in earlier forms at Princeton, Frankfurt, and Tübingen. I thank all who were present at the talks and gave me invaluable suggestions. I am grateful for the research support that I received from Princeton University Library, Leiden University Library, Harvard-Yenching Library, and Shanghai Library.

¹ "Da moujun shu" 答某君書 ["Answer to Mr. X"] (1923). In LIU, Yazi. *Mojianshi wenlu*, pp. 759 – 760.

to opium.² The paradox in his literary character is also reflected in his political character: an early follower of Sun Yat-sen (1866 – 1925) and a life-long Nationalist, he admired the Soviet model and heralded the Communist victory. He served as a link between the new and the old cultural camps, as well as between the left and the right political fronts. In these aspects, he was both unique and representative of his generation.

This paper examines a case of how Liu Yazhi used Mao Zedong's (1893 – 1976) classical poetry to promote him as a new savior hero to the elite audience of Chongqing, the wartime capital of China from 1937 to 1946. Instead of being moribund, an old cultural practice such as writing and matching a lyric song proved to be vital in modern politics. It was associated with the classical tradition that intimately and deeply defined the cultural identity of those educated elites, and for this reason, it connected its author and audience into a community of shared discourse. Perhaps not without irony, though vernacular poetry allowed greater freedom of expression, a classical poem in this and other cases was read as more effective articulation of the author's ambition (*zhi* 志, a classical Chinese critical term). His choice of style, expression, and allusion all helped to associate him with historical paradigms and role models, by the virtue of which the audience could pass their judgment on the person, seen as equivalent to his poetic persona, and not just on his poetry. Lastly, since modern media allowed a poem to reach a large, anonymous audience, the relationship between the author, his poem, and the audience also underwent significant changes. Studying classical poetry of this period is by necessity not only literary, but also sociological. In the case of Mao, it played an essential role in building his charm to old cultural elites like Liu Yazhi, whose acceptance and support were crucial for the eventual Communist victory. This paper therefore aims to examine the charm, as well as the danger, of such identification between the person and the persona.

This poem in question is “Snow, to the tune of ‘Spring Permeating a Garden’” 沁園春·雪,³ perhaps the most well-known poem of Mao Zedong's. Contemporary Chinese and Western readers are generally aware of Mao Zedong's reputation of being a poet. In his life, he had approved 43 pieces of his poems to be published – notably, all in classical forms. By these poems, Mao showed his familiarity with the classical tradition that he sought to

² “Xinshi he jiushi” 新詩和舊詩 [“New Poetry and Old Poetry”] (1942). In LIU, Yazhi. *Mojianshi wenlu*, pp. 1346 – 1347.

³ The event has been chronicled in YIN Ling 尹凌. “Mao Zedong ‘Qinyuanchun xue’ yanjiu” 毛澤東<沁園春·雪>研究 [“Study on Mao Zedong's ‘Snow, to the Tune of Spring Exudes in a Garden’”]. In ZHOU, Yonglin. “*Qinyuanchun xue*” luncong, pp. 1 – 65. Yin's perspective on this event, however, is highly hagiographical. This paper does not follow his interpretation.

overturn. The building of this image began in reality in 1945, with Liu Yazi's promotion of this particular lyric song, and it bore a political agenda.

August 28, 1945, two weeks after the victory of the anti-Japanese war, Mao Zedong came to Chongqing to negotiate with Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek (1887 – 1975) on the restructure of power and rebuilding of China. The American ambassador Patrick Hurley (1883 – 1963) accompanied him to ensure his safety. The Japanese army was then retreating from their occupied zones in eastern and southern China, leaving a potential power vacuum which both parties were keen to fill. As General Albert Wedemeyer (1897 – 1989), commander of the US forces in China, observed: "Based on limited knowledge, neither the Chinese Communist Party nor the Kuomintang is democratic in spirit, or intentions."⁴ Yet, with the military power and civil base of the Communists significantly strengthened during the war period, neither side could easily conquer the other, nor did they want to be accused as perpetuator of another civil war. Chiang Kai-shek therefore invited Mao to talk. Their negotiation became simultaneously a psychological warfare in winning the public opinion, which at this moment was eager to end the wartime military rule and to begin a genuine multiparty democracy.

In the war capital Chongqing, media thrived and enjoyed relative freedom. Unlike the Communist base which through repeated "self-criticism" movements reached a certain ideological purity, the Kuomintang never exerted – or managed to exert – an ironclad speech control. *Xinhua Daily* 新華日報, the Communists' propaganda arm, had been openly published there since 1938. It competed with *Ta Kung Pao* 大公報 (*L'Impartial*), an independent newspaper,⁵ and *Zhongyang Ribao* 中央日報 (*Central Daily News*), a Kuomintang subsidiary, as well as with many other smaller publications. The ideological positions of the newspapers were, curiously, partly reflected in the kind of poetry that they published. Both *Xinhua Daily* and *L'Impartial* published almost exclusively vernacular poetry, while *Central Daily News* published usually classical poetry. This was not an insignificant fact. Since the "New Cultural Movement" in 1917, the written vernacular (*baihua* 白話) was soon associated with progressivism while the classical language (*wenyan* 文言) with conservatism, and the former quickly replaced the latter as the legitimate form of literary expression. A case in point is the changing kind of poetry published on *The Republican Daily* 民國日報 (Shanghai), a Nationalist's official

⁴ TRUMAN, H. S. *Memoirs, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 63.

⁵ Or at least it was supposed to be, though since late 1930s its highest management, including Zhang Jiluan 張季鸞 (1888 – 1941) and Hu Zhengzhi 胡政之 (1889 – 1949), were criticized for being too closely involved with KMT politics, compromising to a certain extent the proclaimed political independence of the newspaper. See XU, Zhucheng. *Baohai jiuwen*, pp. 81 – 86.

newspaper whose editorial board was almost exclusively consisted of members of the Southern Society. Its literary supplement was once the Society's bulletin, dominated by high-register classical poetry. Since 1918, however, it began to increasingly publish vernacular poetry. Since 1920, it published already exclusively vernacular poems – before poetry entirely disappeared from its pages when the anti-Japanese war pressed for more urgent use of letters. This phenomenon shows the fast advance of the vernacular movement on the Chinese cultural scene. Chiang Kai-shek, however, later openly rejected the radical reformation of Chinese language, literature, and culture proposed by the liberals and the Communists alike. Instead, the Generalissimo repeatedly pledged to restore ancient Confucian values.⁶ Possibly for this reason, the Nationalist newspapers took a culturally more conservative approach and continued to publish classical poetry.⁷ In contrast, Mao Zedong's speech on the Yan'an Forum (1942) codified the Communist's call for more radical vernacularization, to learn from the “rich and lively” language of the (by and large illiterate) folk.⁸ The different linguistic policies reflected the two parties' diverging cultural-political orientations. It appeared that on newspapers and magazines of the time, whose poetry they chose to publish, in which style, and on which page, all mattered. The association of literary style with ideology was also a crucial element in understanding the cultural and political dynamisms underlying our story today.

Mao's arrival was welcomed by the leftwing Nationalists, many of whom thought Mao a likelier champion of democracy. This was not an uncommon opinion. Not only *Xinhua Daily* untiringly cankered for multiparty democracy,⁹ but the American Dixie Mission, an observer group sent to the Communist's capital Yan'an in summer 1944, also praised the CCP political program “much more American than Russian” – their only concern was whether such democratic policies would continue to be practiced after its possible victory.¹⁰ It might not be a surprise that some left-leaning moderates like Liu Yazhi believed that the CCP was more democratic than the KMT. After all, Mao Zedong also benefited from being the lesser known. The Generalissimo, a Neo-Confucian and disciplined soldier, often perceived as uncharismatic, had been a central actor in Chinese politics for decades. Many had been repeatedly disappointed by and were tired of him. Thus Mao Zedong's unknown star in a faraway,

⁶ GRIEDER, J. B. *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance*, pp. 319 – 320.

⁷ The relation between classical poetry and cultural nationalism is the topic of another unfinished paper of mine.

⁸ MAO, Zedong. *Zai Yan'an wenyi zuotanhui shang de jianghua*, p. 6.

⁹ To the extent that, ironically, when liberals in China today argue for the necessity of democracy, all they need to do is cite *Xinhua*, pre-1949.

¹⁰ TAYLOR, J. *The Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-Shek and the Struggle for Modern China*, p. 283.

egalitarian, mountain utopia shone all the brighter.¹¹ People were curious to know him, eager also to judge whether he was a passable candidate in a post-war democracy.

Two days after Mao's arrival, Liu Yazi wrote the following poem:¹²

一別羊城十九秋	After our farewell in Guangzhou, nineteen autumns have passed;
重逢握手喜渝州	Now we meet again, holding our hands delightfully in Chongqing.
彌天大勇誠堪格	Great like the sky, your courage is truly recommendable;
遍地勞民亂倘休	All over this land, those tired folks cannot suffer from chaos again.
霖雨蒼生新建國	Like sweet rains upon the populace, you will build a country anew;
雲雷青史舊同舟	Like cloud and thunder, in the history written on green bamboo-strips [our two parties] have shared the fate all along.
中山卡爾雙源合	The two origins of Sun Yat-Sen and Karl Marx now converge;
一笑昆侖頂上頭	In a single laugh, we fly to the top of Mt. Kunlun.

In this heptasyllabic octave, Liu Yazi recalls his meeting with Mao in Guangzhou, 1926, and praises Mao for venturing the negotiation in Chongqing, an act of courage, he suggests, motivated by Mao's care for those common people who had suffered enough from warfare. The key message is conveyed in the last couplet, where Liu Yazi optimistically predicts that the future cooperation of the Nationalists and the Communists (when Sun Yat-Sen and

¹¹ Liu Yazi appears to have read Huang Yanpei's 黃炎培 (1878 – 1965) highly positive report, *Yan'an guilai* 延安歸來 ["Return from Yan'an"] (Chongqing, 1945). See "Da ke nan" 答客難 ["Answer the Challenges of a Guest"] (Dec. 1945). In LIU Yazi. *Mojianshi wenlu*, pp. 1507 – 1522. The same essay further speculated CCP to be a truly democratic party.

¹² This poem was first published under the title "To My Old Friend Mao Runzhi" 贈毛潤之老友 ["To My Old Friend Mao Runzhi"] (Runzhi was Mao Zedong's former name and was often used to show intimacy), and was later anthologized under the title "Bayue ershiba ri, xiwen Runzhi lai Yu, sanshi ri xiawu xiangjian yu Zengjiayan pan, fu zeng yishou" 八月二十八日, 喜聞潤之來渝, 三十日下午相見於曾家巖畔, 賦贈一首 ["On August 28 I Gladly Heard of Runzhi's Coming to Chongqing and in the Afternoon of the 30th I Met Him by Zengjiayan, So I Wrote This for Him"]. In LIU, Yazi. *Mojianshi shiciji*, p. 1311.

Karl Marx come together) will bring China onto a new historical stage (on top of Mt. Kunlun, the mythological cosmos peak in the West of China).

Liu's poem was published on Sept. 2, *Xinhua Daily*. He in effect was the only classical poet who published on *Xinhua Daily* (Chongqing) from June to Oct. 1945, the few months of this newspaper that I have found. His poem, addressing Mao in equal terms as an "old friend," stood in contrast to a few vernacular paeans to Mao Zedong published on *Xinhua Daily* during this period, under such titles as "Paean to Mao Zedong" 毛澤東頌 (Aug. 30), "Mao Zedong, You are a Big Star" 毛澤東你是一顆大星 (Sept. 9), or "Song of Mao Zedong" 毛澤東的歌 (Sept. 23). Unlike these poems that unabashedly proclaimed a personal cult, Liu's poem showed a perspective that was more equal and more personal, appealing possibly also more to independent readers. It should be noted that Liu Yazi in his poetry repeatedly used Sun Yat-sen in parallelism with Karl Marx or Lenin, thinking their theories quite similar in spirit. Mao never corrected him until 1949,¹³ after the Communist victory.

Before 1945, Mao Zedong's poetry was little known. The only piece in circulation was a heptasylla- bic octave titled as "Long March" 長征 that the American journalist Edgar Snow (1905 – 1972) translated into English and was included in *Red Star over China*, as an ending note to his chapter on the Long March. This book was first published in London in 1937 (Victor Gollancz Ltd.), with a note on the cover: "Left Book Club edition, not for sale to the public." The edition published by Random House in New York in 1938 became available to the public. Snow's book was translated into Chinese in 1938, bringing this poem to domestic attention. The version of this poem appeared in this Chinese translation was correct,¹⁴ suggesting that the translators might have acquired the original poem either from Snow or from Mao himself. Liu Yazi wanted to include it in an anthology which he was editing. He asked Mao Zedong for an authorial version, just in case that the one appeared with the translation contained any mistake. Mao Zedong instead sent him another lyric song, "Snow, to the tune of 'Spring Permeating a Garden'," on Oct. 7. It was written nine years ago, in 1936, when he arrived at the snow-covered northern Shaanxi after the Long March. This act suggests that Mao took some pride in this poem, since otherwise he could simply tell Liu Yazi to copy the "Long March" poem appeared in Snow's book, without going to the length of hand-copying a long poem, all despite a busy schedule of negotiating. The poem reads:¹⁵

¹³ ZHANG, Mingguang. *Liu Yazi zhuan*, pp. 572 – 573.

¹⁴ SNOW, E. *Xixing manji*, pp. 249 – 250.

¹⁵ The first authorized publication of this song was on ZANG, Kejia. *Shikan*, 1957. 1:11. I have, however, edited one character (see note 16) in the poem according to

北國風光	The landscape of the northern country:
千里冰封	A thousand li locked in ice;
萬里雪飄	Ten thousand li in whirling snow.
望長城內外	I gaze at the inside and beyond the Great Wall,
惟餘莽莽	And see only a single vast immensity;
大河上下	Up and down the Yellow River –
頓失滔滔	Suddenly it has lost its swift currents.
山舞銀蛇	The mountains dance like silver snakes,
原驅臘象	And the highlands charge like wax-hued elephants, ¹⁶
欲與天公試比高	Vying with the heaven in stature.
須晴日	On a sunny day,
看紅裝素裹	See the land, clad in white and adorned in red,
分外妖嬈	Glowing particularly enchanting.
江山如此多嬌	Rivers and mountains, so rich in beauty,
引無數英雄競折腰	Have enticed numerous heroes to bow and compete.
惜秦皇漢武	But, alas! The First Emperor of Qin ¹⁷ and the Martial Emperor of Han, ¹⁸
略輸文采	Were lacking in literary grace;
唐宗宋祖	The Paramount Emperor of Tang ¹⁹ and the Patriarch of Song, ²⁰
稍遜風騷	Had little talent of poetry.

Mao's hand-written manuscript sent to Liu Yazhi in 1945. A photocopy of this manuscript can be found in ZHOU, Yonglin. "Qinyuanchun xue" luncong.

¹⁶ In the 1957 edition, Mao changed two characters in this line, so it became *yuan chi laxiang* 原馳蠟象 ["The highlands gallop like wax elephants"]. See ZANG, Kejia. *Shikan*, 1957. 1:11. The revised version became standard.

¹⁷ The First Emperor of Qin 秦始皇 (259 – 210 BCE; reigned 247 – 210 BCE) was the founder of the Qin Dynasty (221 – 207 BCE), the first unified bureaucratic state which emerged out of the Warring States (476 – 221 BCE). Though short-lived, the Qin defined the basic outlook of the subsequent Chinese dynasties.

¹⁸ The Martial Emperor of Han 漢武帝 (156 – 87 BCE; r. 141 – 87 BCE) was the fourth emperor of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 220). He led Han China through vast territorial expansion and built a strong centralized state.

¹⁹ The Paramount Emperor of Tang 唐太宗 (599 – 649; r. 626 – 649) was the second emperor of the Tang (618 – 907) and its de facto founder. His reign was renowned for its civil achievements and military expansions.

²⁰ The Patriarch of Song 宋太祖 (927 – 976; reigned 960 – 976) was the founder of the Song (960 – 1279), a dynasty remembered for its cultural brilliance and civil governance.

一代天驕	The proud Son of Heaven for a day -
成吉思汗	Genghis Khan, ²¹
只識彎弓射大雕	Knew only shooting grand eagles, bow outstretched.
俱往矣	All are past and gone!
數風流人物	For the truly dashing personality,
還看今朝	Look to this age alone!

The first stanza of this lyric song describes the snow scene. The beauty of the land is compared to a beautiful woman, who has enticed numerous heroes in history to vie and conquer. In the second stanza, the poet mocks the five emperors in history known for their military feats for lacking in literary talents. Then he calls for attention a true “dashing personality” (*fengliu renwu* 風流人物) of today, who combines both military and literary talents. As to be seen later, the exact meaning of this “dashing personality” caused much contention.

The poetic persona, who never directly appears in the poem, is the agent perusing the snow scene and commentating, in a bona fide voice, the respective merits and weaknesses of greatest emperors. Following the “heroic abandon” (*haofang* 豪放) tradition of lyric poetry, this poetic persona allows the reader to hear the voice of a hero (I use the term in its nonmoral sense, meaning a person able to accomplish historically significant deeds). And by pointing the reader to “look to this age alone,” this persona also hints at the identity of the person behind: he is no normal poet, but a man of action, who could truly vie for, and conquer, the “rivers and mountains, so rich in beauty.” In this implied unification of the persona and the person, the author invites the audience to rank him among, and possibly above, the historical emperors and to envision a future world of purity, symbolized by the snow-mantled landscape.

Liu Yazhi, a reader versed in the poetic tradition, promptly grasped the convergence of persona and person. He wrote a song in matching rhymes:²²

廿載相逢	A reencounter after two decades;
一闕新詞	And a new song [you've shown me];

²¹ Genghis Khan (1162 – 1227; r. 1206 – 1227) was the founder of the Mongol Empire, which became the largest contiguous state after his death. His grandson Kublai Khan (1215 – 1294; r. 1260 – 1294) founded the Yuan Dynasty (1271 – 1368) of China.

²² Anthologized under the title “Qinyuanchun, ciyun he Mao Runzhi chudao Shanbei kan daxue zhi zuo, buneng jin ru yuanyi ye” 沁園春·次韻和毛潤之初到陝北看大雪之作不能盡如原意也 [“To the Tune of Spring Exudes in a Garden, Following the Rhyme of Mao Runzhi's Song Written upon Seeing the Snow after His Arrival at Northern Shaanxi, Without Following the Exact Original Meaning”]. In LIU, Yazhi. *Mojianshi shiciji*, p. 1812.

意共雲飄	Your lofty mind truly accompanies the drifting clouds!
嘆青梅酒滯	Alas, our drinking party in the green plum season ²³ was cut short,
余懷惘惘	Leaving me feeling at a loss.
黃河流濁	And the muddy flow of the Yellow River, ²⁴
舉世滔滔	Had since inundated the world with its broad currents.
隣笛山陽	Like the neighbor's flute reminding Xiang Xiu of the murdered Ji Kang, ²⁵
伯仁由我	I think of Boren, whose death was my fault! ²⁶

²³ In the popular novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Cao Cao 曹操 (155 – 220) was said to have once invited Liu Bei 劉備 (161 – 223), then obscure, to a drinking party under plum trees with green fruits. He confided to Liu that he considered themselves to be the two only true heroes of their time. Liu was shocked to drop his chopsticks and then pretended that it was caused by thunder – a convincing show of cowardice that dispelled Cao's suspicion. See LUO, Guanzhong. *Sanguo yanyi*, pp. 262 – 264. A shorter version of this story is also recorded in the *History of the Three Kingdoms*, without mentioning the green plums. See PEI, Songzhi. *Sanguo zhi*, p. 875. Here Liu Yazi alludes to his meeting with Mao Zedong in 1926 in Guangzhou.

²⁴ Namely, the power of Chiang Kai-shek.

²⁵ Both Ji Kang 嵇康 (223 – 262) and Xiang Xiu 向秀 (227? – 272) assumed the manners of recluses. Sima Zhao 司馬昭 (211 – 265), the most powerful general and de facto ruler of Wei 魏 (220 – 266), wanted Ji Kang to serve. Since Ji married a Wei princess, he refused and was then executed in the market. Xiang Xiu then promptly accepted Sima's appointment. He wrote, however, a "Sijiu fu" 思舊賦 ["Rhapsody of Nostalgia"], relating that, when he passed by Ji's old residence, he heard a neighbor playing flute which reminded him of Ji, a famous musician, and was moved to compose this rhapsody. See FANG, Xuanling. *Jinshu*, 49:1373-1376.

²⁶ Zhou Yi 周顛 (269 – 322), style name Boren 伯仁, was murdered by Wang Dun 王敦 (266 – 324). Previously, when Wang Dun rebelled, the Jin emperor Sima Rui 司馬睿 (276 – 323; r. 318 – 323) intended to exterminate the powerful Wang clan. The reputed Wang Dao 王導 (276 – 339) pleaded Zhou Yi to rescue them, without receiving a favorable response. So when Wang Dun murdered Zhou Yi, Wang Dao did not put forward any word either. Only later Wang Dao heard that Zhou had in effect petitioned for the Wangs which helped to preserve the clan. Wang Dao then burst into tears and exclaimed: "Though I did not kill Boren, Boren's death was my fault!" See FANG, Xuanling. *Jinshu*, 69:1852-1853. Here, Liu Yazi alludes to the death of Li Shaoshi 李少石 (1906 – 1945). Li was the English secretary of Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898 – 1976) and the son-in-law of Liao Zhongkai 廖仲愷 (1877 – 1925) and He Xiangning 何香凝 (1878 – 1972), two prominent leftwing KMT members. Li was killed on Oct. 8, just one day after Mao Zedong sent Liu his song, by KMT soldiers. That evening, Liu Yazi visited Zhou Enlai, who happened to be out, so Li Shaoshi received him and they chatted about poetry. He sent Liu Yazi back with Zhou Enlai's car and then took the car back. On the way, however, Li was killed by some KMT soldiers. Liu Yazi blamed himself for Li Shaoshi's death, since Li would not have been killed if he did not send Liu home. He also suspected that maybe these KMT soldiers intended to assassinate

拔劍難平塊壘高	I draw my sword and rise, but cannot relieve the rage in my heart!
傷心甚	How my heart is saddened!
哭無雙國士	I lament him, the peerless patriot,
絕代妖嬈	The unmatched beautiful mind!
才華信美多嬌	Your talent is indeed rich and full of charm;
看千古詞人盡折腰	Look, all lyric authors of the past bow in homage.
算黃州太守	I deem the Magistrate of Huangzhou, ²⁷
猶輸氣概	As losing to you in heroic aura;
稼軒居士	And the Layman of Jiaxuan, ²⁸
祇解牢騷	As knowing nothing but grousing!
更笑胡兒	More laughable was the barbaric lad,
納蘭容若	Nalan Rongruo, ²⁹
艷想濃情著意雕	Who used erotic imagination and intense feelings to painstakingly describe the snow. ³⁰
君與我	You and I,
要上天下地	Shall go up into the heaven and down into the earth,
把握今朝	And seize the day!

Liu Yazi has rewritten Mao Zedong's poem line by line, following the length and intonation structure of each line and reusing all his rhyme words, to create a poem of his own. This form of poetic exchange, called *chouchang* 酬唱, had a long tradition in Chinese literati social culture. It began around the 4th century. Typically, it was a game played by two or more poets. The first person writes a poem, and the others write their poems in response, which, since mid-Tang, should typically reuse the same rhyme words in the same sequence as the initial

Zhou Enlai, and since Li used Zhou's car, he became the victim. Later investigation suggested it to be a pure accident, but Liu remained unconvinced.

²⁷ Also known as Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037 – 1101), the most renowned poet of Northern Song (960 – 1127). It was, however, a factual mistake to call him “magistrate of Huangzhou,” since Su Shi in Huangzhou was only an exile though he had been and would be magistrate in some other prefectures.

²⁸ Also known as Xin Qiji 辛棄疾 (1140 – 1207; style name Layman of Jiaxuan 稼軒居士), a major lyric song writer in Southern Song (1127 – 1279) and inheritor of Su Shi's “heroic abandon” style.

²⁹ Also known as Nalan Xingde 納蘭性德 (1655 – 1685), a major lyric song writer in Qing (1644 – 1912) and member of the Manchu loyal clan.

³⁰ Referring to Nalan Xingde's lyric song, “Snow on the frontier fortress, to the tune of ‘Picking Mulberry Seeds’” 采桑子·塞上詠雪花. See NALAN, Xingde. *Yinshuici*, p. 51.

poem, creating therefore a sense of camaraderie.³¹ Poetic exchange creates a private dialogue between poets that, however, is expected to be read by the whole republic of letters. In his song, Liu Yazhi successfully transformed Mao's poem of a grand scale to something private and personal. It is also much more referential. To understand what Liu is talking about, one must know both the classical tradition and the contemporary events that Liu alludes to. In the first stanza he alludes to his meeting with Mao Zedong in 1926. On that meeting, he suggested Mao to assassinate Chiang Kai-shek, who he regarded as a traitor to Sun Yat-sen's testimony. Mao cautioned against the plan.³² Liu hence compared Chiang's subsequent rule to the flood of the Yellow River which caused many tragedies – the latest, as he believed, was his friend's death, which he partly blamed on himself. Since his assassination proposal was a secret between them, Mao was perhaps the only person at that time who completely understood this stanza, even though it was to be read by the broader public.

The second stanza praises Mao Zedong's poetic talent at the price of Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037 – 1101), Xin Qiji 辛棄疾 (1140 – 1207), and Nalan Xingde 納蘭性德 (1655 – 1685), a Manchu poet. These are not random comparisons. The 11th century poet Su Shi initiated the “heroic abandon” tradition in lyric song that the Southern Song poet Xin Qiji succeeded and Liu Yazhi chose to follow. By comparing Mao to Su Shi and Xin Qiji, he elevates Mao to the highest rank of poets and regards him as superior in terms that his song shows the authentic nature of a true hero – since, if Su and Xin only wrote in a heroic voice, Mao was truly capable of impersonating this voice. The name Nalan Rongruo is used in parallelism to Genghis Khan. But even he, a “barbaric lad,” appears feminine in comparison to Mao.

When the second stanzas of these two songs are put side by side, they construct an ideal image of a hero: his military achievement is comparable to the greatest emperors on history but surpasses in terms of cultural accomplishment; his literary talent is comparable to the greatest poets but surpasses in terms of being a true hero. This “dashing personality” is the poetic persona of Mao Zedong which, in the minds of many readers, would be equated to his actual person. Liu Yazhi admitted in another quatrain written to Mao Zedong that “no doubt, I am in the hero's cult” 英雄崇拜更無疑。³³ To promote this hero's cult, spreading the message encoded in his own poetry would be the

³¹ For a study on the transformation of forms of poetic exchange from the Six Dynasties through the Tang, see ZHAO, Yiwu. *Changhe shi yanjiu*.

³² See ZHANG, Mingguan. *Liu Yazhi zhuan*, p. 306.

³³ LIU, Yazhi. “Lu Guoqi jinian, Runzhi, Enlai, Ruofei dou you tizi, yu yi ji sheng” 盧國琦紀念冊，潤之，恩來，若飛都有題字，余亦繼聲 [“On Lu Guoqi's Souvenir Album, Runzhi, Enlai, and Ruofei have all signed. I thus also follow their suit”]. In LIU, Yazhi. *Mojianshi shiciji*, p. 1315.

most efficient. Many historical heroes have been associated with memorable songs, such as Xiang Yu 項羽 (232 – 202 BCE), a war lord who ended the rule of Qin Dynasty, danced and sang an extemporized song before his suicide, and Liu Bang 劉邦 (256 – 195 BCE; r. 202 – 195 BCE), the founding emperor of Han Dynasty, returning to his hometown after winning the empire, also danced and sang on a banquet. Their songs served a historiographical function as authentic revelations of the heroes' existential essence, as well as of their ambition and their fate.³⁴ The masculine, vigorous style of Mao's poem befits his ambition as a dynasty-founder. And a reader educated in this tradition may well interpret it as revealing his fate. As Liu Yazi urged at the end of the poem, he should “go up into the heaven and down into the earth” to “seize the day”. This new hero was what Liu Yazi presented to the Chongqing public.

Shortly after this poetic exchange, Mao Zedong left Chongqing on Oct. 11. The two negotiating parties agreed in principle to build a multiparty democracy, though many practical details left unsettled, especially on the Communists' strong military presence. The newspaper *L'Impartial* expressed cautious optimism for peace. Liu Yazi then sent both songs to *Xinhua Daily*, which telegraphed Mao Zedong but failed to get his permission for publication. Mao's hesitation was understandable, since classical poetry was associated with the imperial culture that the Communists sought to dismantle. Liu Yazi's attitude, however, was different. Although he thought classical poetry a form doomed to disappear, it was nevertheless a useful weapon in his contemporary society, where most mature intellectuals had a classical education. They were, so to speak, the constituency that Mao Zedong should seek to persuade. Now, since Mao declined to have his poem openly published, Liu looked for some other way.

At the time, Liu Yazi was to hold a joint calligraphy-and-painting exhibition on Oct. 25 with the painter Yin Shoushi 尹瘦石 (1919 – 1998). He therefore displayed the “Snow” in Mao's own calligraphy on the exhibition, together with his matching poem and a colophon. In this colophon, he again compares Mao to the famous poets in history who wrote in a masculine style. Then he suggests:³⁵

Those gentlemen of the Chinese Communist Party forbade me to circulate it, as if it was against some taboo. The reason, I speculate, is that the voice in this song resembles that of an emperor, so they were worried to leave excuses to those detractors. In effect, some trivial flaws never hurt the brightness of the sun or the moon! [...] I surmise that, with Runzhi's

³⁴ For the use of songs in historiography, see KERN, M. “The Poetry of Han Historiography”.

³⁵ LIU, Yazi. “Qinyuanchun xue ba” <沁園春·雪>跋. In LIU Yazi. *Liu Yazi jiwai shiwen jicun*, p. 222.

generous noble mind, he would never apologize for this. Otherwise, why did he write it to me in the first place? [...]

Liu frankly pointed out an unspoken reason for the Communist leadership's scruple, namely, the imperial voice of the song. However, Liu argued that it was but triviality, since the greatness of the song – so he thought – would speak for itself.

Liu Yazhi was insightful to capitalize the general curiosity on Mao Zedong. Most people knew Mao only as a grass-root rebel. His being a poet and calligrapher was already news, and his being praised by Liu Yazhi, one of the leading classical poets, as better than even the best poets in history was a greater surprise. Audience of the exhibition began to copy and circulate Mao's poem. Meanwhile, both CCP and the KMT began to move their troops into the Japanese occupied zone, breaking their agreement. On Nov. 4, the American embassy in Chongqing reported that a civil war was threatening.³⁶ In this intensifying atmosphere, on Nov. 11, Liu Yazhi managed to persuade *Xinhua Daily* to publish his matching song. Since his song was explicitly written to match Mao's song, Liu Yazhi speculated that people would infer Mao being a good poet from his matching song. He might have also wished to rally favorable public opinion on Mao in the eve of a civil war. Indeed, Chongqing readers were titillated. An editor in *Xinmin News* 新民報 collated a copy of Mao's poem and published it on Nov. 14, together with Liu Yazhi's song. On Nov. 28, *L'Impartial* also published both songs – curiously, not on its Sunday literature supplement, but at the bottom of its political news page, without any comment. Its deliberate neutrality was in effect an open gesture of inviting the reader's response, suggesting also that the songs were not only literary, but highly political. (As to be discussed later, its chief-editor, Wang Yunsheng 王芸生 (1901 – 1980), actually was critical of Mao's imperial voice.) Reactions spread fast. Since then, in about two months, more than 30 songs to the tune of "Spring Permeating a Garden" matching Mao's rhymes were published on Chongqing newspapers, passing praises or blames on Mao Zedong as well as on the Communists' agenda. Below is a list of these matching poems, together with the dates of publication and names of the authors (in some cases, pennames).³⁷ On the left ("pro") side, aside from Mao's original poem, are those which understand Mao's song in positive or eulogistic terms; on the right ("con") side, those which understand it in negative or critical terms. Sometimes a poem was published twice on different newspapers; sometimes one poet had more than one poem. Thus, in principle, every author's name corresponds to one poem,

³⁶ TRUMAN, H. S. *Memoirs, Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope*, p. 65.

³⁷ As collected by Yin Ling. In ZHOU, Yongling. "*Qinyuanchun xue*" *luncong*, pp. 23 – 59.

and if an author has more than one poem, they will be marked as I, II... In the case when a poem explicitly responds to a previous matching poem (such as Yan Ji's 顏霽 poem on Dec. 13, which specifies in the title that it responds to Liu Yazi's poem), it will be marked as such. These poems are still listed here since the rhymes and meters are still following Mao's, and they belong to a general controversy.

	Pro		Con	
	Author	Publication	Author	Publication
11.11.1945	Liu Yazi	<i>Xinhua Daily</i>		
11.14.1945	Mao Zedong	新民報晚刊		
	Liu Yazi	<i>Xinmin Evening News</i>		
11.28.1945	Mao Zedong	<i>L'Impartial</i>		
	Liu Yazi			
11.29.1945	崔敬伯 Cui Jingbo	<i>Xinmin Evening News</i>		
11.30.1945	Cui Jingbo	大公晚報副刊 <i>L'Impartial Evening Supplement</i>		
12.1.1945			老酸丁 Old Pedant, I	合川日報 <i>Hechuan Daily</i>
12.2.1945			Old Pedant, II	<i>Hechuan Daily</i>
12.4.1945			東魯詞人 Eastern Lu Poet	中央日報副刊 <i>Central Daily News Supplement</i>
			耘實 Harvest	
			易君左 Yi Junzuo, I	和平日報副刊 <i>Peace Daily Supplement</i>
			張宿恢 Zhang Suhui	益世報副刊 <i>Yishi News Supplement</i>
12.5.1945			吳誠 Wu Cheng	<i>Peace Daily Supplement</i>
12.6.1945			石曇 Shi Yun	<i>Peace Daily</i>

	Pro		Con	
	Author	Publication	Author	Publication
12.10.1945	董維熙 Dong Weixi	新蜀報副刊 <i>New Sichuan Supplement</i>	顏霽 Yan Ji, I 尉素秋 Yu Suqiu 械林 Yulin 慰農 Weinong	<i>Peace Daily Supplement</i>
12.11.1945	郭沫若 Guo Moruo, I	<i>Xinmin Evening News</i>		
12.13.1945			Yan Ji, II, to Liu Yazhi 孫佺工 Sun Langgong 樊旦初 Fan Danchu 呂耀先 Lü Yaoxian	<i>Peace Daily Supplement</i>
12.14.1945			小完 Xiaowan, I Xiaowan, II	<i>Yishi News Supplement</i>
12.16.1945	昌政 Changzheng	國民公報副刊 <i>The Nation Supplement</i>		
12.19.1945	蜀青 Shuqing	<i>L'Impartial Evening Supplement</i>		
12.25.1945	吳景洲 Wu Jingzhou	<i>Xinmin Evening News</i>		
12.28.1945			雷鳴 Thunder	<i>Yishi News Supplement</i>
12.29.1945	Guo Moruo, II, to Yi Junzuo	客觀 <i>Objective</i>		
1.3.1946			胡競先 Hu Jingxian	<i>Peace Daily Supplement</i>
1.25.1946			Yi Junzuo, II	<i>Peace Daily</i>
1.25.1946	聖徒 Saint	民主星期刊 <i>Democracy Weekly</i>		

Notably, and different from Chinese mainland scholars' general opinion that the leftwing poets were the clear winners of the fight, songs on the "con"/right side easily outnumbered the "pro"/left side (21 vs. 9 pieces). Well-known, documentable moderates are divided along the line (on the left: Cui Jingbo and Wu Jingzhou; on the right: Yi Junzuo, Yu Suqiu, and Sun Langgong), but are gravitating toward the right side. One important reason was perhaps, as mentioned earlier, Nationalist newspapers tended to publish classical poetry and therefore had a broader authors' basis (we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that some reactions might be orchestrated, as sometimes up to four poems appeared on the same day on the same newspaper, and they appeared mostly on *Yishi News* and *Peace Daily*). Just as Liu Yazhi had already sensed, and as "those gentlemen of the Chinese Communist Party" had feared, many poems were critical of the "imperial voice" of Mao's song. Instead of historical heroes and heroic poets, they compared Mao to a whole spectrum of rebels like Shi Dakai 石達開 (1831 – 1863), leader of the Taiping rebellion; Song Jiang 宋江, the 12th century leader of the Water Margin outlaws; Chen Sheng 陳勝 (d. 208 BCE), Wu Guang 吳廣 (d. 208 BCE), Zhang Jiao 張角 (d. 184), Huang Chao 黃巢 (d. 884), and Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606 – 1674), who caused the fall of dynasties like the Qin, the Han, the Tang, and the Ming; chiefs of nomadic tribes like Shi Le 石勒 (274 – 333) and Fu Jian 苻堅 (338 – 385), who attacked or humiliated the establishments of the Han civilization; and even legendary or mythical rebels like Chiyou 蚩尤 – the prototype rebel who revolted against the Yellow Emperor, Robber Zhi 盜跖 – an archetypical villain who in *Zhuangzi* overwhelmed Confucius,³⁸ and, in a perhaps humorous twist, "the Monkey King."

Drastically different from the illustrious dynasty founders that Mao's poetic persona aligned itself to, this is a legion consisting mostly of low-born and failed rebels. The shifting identification of persona suggests a different prognostication of the future: when Mao saw his shiny success, his critics wished his ultimate failure. But even if the latter vision becomes true, as their cited examples suggest, Mao's enterprise shall nevertheless bring down the dynasty or civilization as they know it.

There were also others who held the whole business of looking back and searching for historical analogies as folly, since the time had irrevocably changed. The chief-editor of *L'Impartial*, Wang Yunsheng, published a long editorial from Dec. 8 to Dec. 12, 1945, stating his opinion on traditional dynastic "orthodoxy." Emperors or rebels, he suggested, made no difference, since they were fighting for egoistic gains; victory in such dynasty-changing

³⁸ As found in the chapter named after him in the "Miscellaneous Chapters" of *Zhuangzi*.

wars did not necessarily result from people's allegiance or reflect their will.³⁹ Wang did not explicitly target Mao's lyric song, but the context of the controversy made this link clear enough to his contemporaries, as Guo Moruo bluntly pointed out in an article which tried to refute Wang Yunsheng's charge.⁴⁰ Guo's article, written in July 1946, shows the lasting percussion of this controversy. He basically repeated what leftwing writers before him had already tried to do, namely, arguing that the "dashing personality" must refer to a true revolutionary who through his action represented common people's interests, and not as another would-be emperor.⁴¹ Notably, both sides based their interpretations of the poetic persona on their understanding of the author's person, as a classical rebel or a modern revolutionary. In this regard, their reading of Mao's poem is inevitably biased, preconditioned by their knowledge of, and belief in, the person.

Liu Yazhi did not write a second matching poem, but his argument amidst the controversy appears interestingly ambivalent. As he wrote on Dec. 24, if Mao were born in the 19th century, he might indeed become an emperor; but as a 20th century "leader of the people," he certainly should have held such imperial aspirations in contempt!⁴² His reading in effect acknowledges the equivocality of the poem: it could virtually embody an "imperial voice"; yet he begs the reader's confidence in Mao to think otherwise.

What mattered in the end appeared to be neither the negative nor the positive interpretation, but publicity per se. The fact that Mao Zedong wrote a fairly – or as Liu would say, very – good classical poem was powerful enough in itself to promote Mao's heroic image, as it was written in a heroic voice that he and he alone was capable of impersonating. An "imperial voice" aside, this song shows Mao a cultural insider who was posed to become the next leader, standing in a temporal line which relates founding emperors of the past to the "dashing personalities" of today. Instead of being a moribund form, classical poetry proved to be highly effective in the new mass media. Had Mao written a vernacular poem instead, it would have been a very different story. Classical poetry allows the reader to write in matching rhymes, a cultural practice that highlights the social function of literature. As a unique form of criticism, the matching poem shows one's understanding of the original. Furthermore,

³⁹ WANG, Yunsheng. "Wo dui Zhongguo lishi de yizhong kanfa" 我對中國歷史的一點看法 ["My Opinion on Chinese History"]. In ZHOU, Yongling. *"Qinyuanchun xue" luncong*, pp. 107 – 125.

⁴⁰ GUO, M. "Modeng Tang Jihede de yizhong shoufa" 摩登堂吉訶德的一種手法 ["A Maneuver of a Modern Don Quixote"]. In ZHOU, Yongling. *"Qinyuanchun xue" luncong*, pp. 126 – 131.

⁴¹ NIE, Gannu 聶紺弩. "Maoci jie" 毛詞解 ["An Interpretation of Mao's Lyric Song"] (1945). In ZHOU, Yongling. *"Qinyuanchun xue" luncong*, pp. 103 – 106.

⁴² "Da ke nan." In LIU, Yazhi. *Mojianshi wenlu*, p. 1521.

through the exchange, the two parties project themselves as culturally equal. Less sympathetic readers of the poem may accuse Mao for being a rebel, who intended to usurp not only the political but also the cultural authority. Yet their effort of exclusion in reality recognized Mao as already part of their classically-educated cultural circle. After all, they all participated in the same cycle of poetic exchange, a practice that was often understood as a symbolic gesture of friendship – or friend-enemyship, in this matter. In this educated form, they could understand each other and talk to each other perfectly in coded terms. Lastly, even negative attacks on this poem contributed to its publicity. By 1946, Mao's song had been broadly published on various newspapers and periodicals all over China, sometimes accompanied by Liu Yazi's song, but mostly alone. It spoke to the readers in the hero's own voice, inviting them to share his ambition.

As Liu Yazi expected, Mao Zedong did “seize the day” – after his success in gaining the political authority, Mao finally began to publish his classical poems since 1957. Eighteen of his poems were published in the first issue of *Shikan* 詩刊 (the *Poetry Journal*), together with a calligraphic letter to Zang Kejia 臧克家 (1905 – 2004), the chief-editor. When asked what the “dashing personality” meant, he explained that it was in effect plural, referring simply to the common people – an interpretation that did not emerge in the controversy of 1945. It is possible that Mao had followed the debate and decided to propose a least problematic interpretation in hindsight. And in 1957, he was confident enough to believe that no more competing interpretations dared to emerge. As the first poet published on this new journal which was meant to be authoritative in defining contemporary Chinese poetry (which, by default, means vernacular poetry), Mao established himself not only as the founder of a new country, but also the founder of a new culture, which overturned the classical tradition from inside. As he restated in this calligraphic letter, he by no means wanted young people to write classical poetry, since it should be a dead form. The irony is profound that this denunciation of classical poetry served only as a preface to his own classical poems.

Coincidentally or not, the anti-right-deviationists movement became broadened in this year. Many of Liu Yazi's former friends and colleagues were prosecuted. It seemed that Mao, the new hero, was ready to replace the cultural elite's interpretation of the past with his own. Liu Yazi could not have foreseen such use of classical poetry in the purgation of traditional culture. Rumor had it that he often sat for days in silence, before he died the next year of pneumonia in Beijing. His poetry campaign in 1945 appeared to be a prelude, if not an inspiration, that showed the effectiveness of classical poetry in modern politics, a lesson that Mao might have taken to heart.

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