

# The Tower of Going Astray: The Paradox of Liu Yazhi's Lyric Classicism<sup>†</sup>

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## Prologue

The Tower of Going Astray, or Milou, is an erstwhile wine house in the picturesque water town of Zhouzhuang (Jiangsu province). Standing by a whispering stream lined with willow trees, it once served traders and sailors from the region who loaded silk and rice onto bamboo-mat-roofed boats to sail across China and beyond. Now a tourist attraction, the house commemorates a few poets who in late December 1920 met there on several occasions to drink and write poetry. They called it *Milou*, referring to a legendary labyrinth of desire built for Sui Yangdi (569–618), a poet-emperor who would lose his empire after less than fifteen years of rule; a Western student of Chinese poetry might recognize this reference to Milou thanks to Stephen Owen's eponymous book (1989), which elaborates on the seductive power of poetry. These poets were local members of the Southern Society (Nanshe, active 1909–1923), a classical-style poetry association with deep ties to the Nationalist Party, and they had gathered to welcome their retired chairman, Liu Yazhi (1887–1958), who hailed from nearby Wujiang County.

It was a difficult time for the Society. The 1911 Revolution had overthrown the Manchu empire, but power grabs among warlords had

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begun, and prospect for a true republic looked bleak. After factional strife within the Society in 1917 led to Liu Yazi's resignation the following year, the group appeared to be on the brink of disintegration. And even though these poets saw themselves as revolutionaries, the New Culture movement threatened to relegate them to the status of "conservatives"; the new benchmark for being "progressive" required writing literature in the vernacular language—revolutionary in form, not just in content. In short, the times were against them, and they felt lost: having dreamed of a new world, they woke up to a nightmare.

Their four gatherings at the wine house produced 166 poems. Liu Yazi continued to write a few more poems on his way home, and then sent them to other Society friends, who duly wrote matching poems in response. Some even returned to the wine house to relive the moments they had experienced in December 1920; other poets who had been unable to attend went to imagine what they had missed. Through repeated writing and rewriting, Milou became a rich symbol of revelry, frustration, loss, and nostalgia. Liu Yazi eventually collected 808 poems under eighty-eight titles, which were anthologized and published in 1921 as *Anthology of the Tower of Going Astray* (Milou ji).

Milou is a fitting metaphor for the Society's views of poetry. Liu Yazi would emerge from this period of disillusionment to call classical poetry his "opium." He would change from being a detractor of vernacular poetry to becoming its avid champion, even though he himself wrote classical-style verse exclusively. He would also support increasingly radical proposals of reform—including communism—without, however, altering his traditional lifestyle or relinquishing his Nationalist Party membership. Milou, thus understood, is a symbol of the classical literary and cultural tradition, which would be condemned as a palace of decadence by the very devotees who saw themselves lost in its addictive charms.

In this essay, I explore the dilemma Liu Yazi faced as one who lost faith in the vitality of classical-style poetry, but continued with formal

experimentation to keep it relevant. I term Liu and his comrades' lyric experiments "modern classicism," which represents a genuine attempt to transform Chinese lyric traditions into a form of modern literature. Their agenda was comparable, I also discuss, to that of the late Qing National Essence movement's grafting of imported Western ideas onto the Chinese tradition, a movement that some of the Society members also partook. The Southern Society's complicated relationships with the late Qing poets and with the rising interest in vernacular poetry are analyzed by examining the 1917 "Tang and Song poetry debate," which led to Liu Yazi's resignation from the Society's chairmanship as well as to the Society's falling into disarray and eventual dissolution. A frustrated Liu Yazi would later propose discarding the literary tradition in its totality, even as he continued to write classical-style poems. His paradoxical attitude toward tradition, I argue, is an eloquent case representing a generation of Chinese literati who persisted in chasing the tides of radical proposals to reform society—until they woke up in a brave new world where they felt alienated, marginalized, and ultimately abandoned. But today, with Milou now officially branded as a Patriotic Education Site, the contestation over their legacy has only just begun.

### **Liu Yazi: Life and Poetry**

Liu Yazi was born on May 28, 1887, into a wealthy gentry clan in the countryside of Wujiang. The family derived most of its income from land ownership. Having received a traditional education in poetry and history, he went to Wujiang to take the prefectural exam in 1902: it was a life-changing event. He made friends there with Chen Qubing (1874–1933) and Jin Songcen (1873–1947), two local intellectual leaders. The impressionable teenager quickly became an admirer of Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and subscribed to Liang's *New Citizen Journal* (*Xinmin congbao*, 1902–1907), of which Chen was the regional distributor (Zhang Mingguan 1997: 39–40). In just one year, however, Liu would come to resent Liang for the

latter's endorsement of constitutional monarchy. Although throughout his life he would deny Liang's influence, his thought and writing style were clearly deeply shaped by Liang. Before long Liu became an essayist for the Tokyo-based *Jiangsu* magazine under the penname Yalu, abbreviated from *Yazhou zhi Lusuo*, or "Rousseau of Asia," writing in the passionate semiclassical *New Citizen* style. In response to Liang's promotion of a "poetic revolution" (*shijie geming*), Liu burned his early poems in the "fragrant casket style" (*xianglian ti*) and began to write poems that combined the use of neologisms with romantic heroism. Hybridity of thought, language, and genre conventions would become a prominent feature of his literary style through the remainder of his life. He described his intellectual and literary awakening in a quatrain written at the end of 1902:

思想界中初革命  
欲憑文字播風潮

It was the initial revolution in the intellectual sphere;  
I desire to use the power of words to stir the wind and tide.  
("Suimu shuhuai," in Liu Yazi 1985a: 1823)

To prevent greater scandals that his activism might provoke in the genteel neighborhood, the Liu family yielded to his requests and sent him to Shanghai in 1903 to study in the Patriotic School (Aiguo xueshe) under the tutelage of Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936), dean of the National Essence school; there he befriended famous revolutionaries and financed the printing of anti-Manchu pamphlets. On November 13, 1909, he co-founded the Southern Society with Chen Qubing and Gao Xu (1877–1925). Anti-Manchu nationalism strongly colored this poetic society: fourteen of the seventeen founding members had already joined the Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmeng hui). Their first gathering was held in a shrine commemorating a fallen Ming loyalist, and the name of their group suggested a southern resistance to the northern Manchu court. They came to the meeting in

disguise and left inebriated. Their assertions of freedom and romanticism molded Liu Yazi's imaginations of "revolution." Although he would later subscribe to ever more radical notions of "revolution," he felt ill at ease with revolution's ruthlessness, strict discipline, and rupture with traditional values.

The Society grew quickly after the 1911 Revolution. By 1923 it had recruited more than 1,180 members, including a stellar collection of political, cultural, and academic elites. Because Liu Yazi presided over its heyday from 1914 to 1918, his image and literary proposals were inseparable from the Society, and his life would continue to be defined by this period. In an attempt to redefine the Society's legacy, he later organized the New Southern Society (Xin Nanshe, 1923–1924) and Southern Society Memorial Association (Nanshe jinianhui, 1935–1936), but neither had much influence; yet the name "Southern Society" remained an attractive brand among certain circles. As late as April 1949, the Communist leadership requested that Liu organize a memorial gathering of the Society in Zhongshan Park, located on the western side of the Forbidden City. Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) attended the gathering, apparently hoping to utilize the network to rally support for the new regime among democratic forces. This episode attests to the lasting significance of the Southern Society, decades after its dissolution.

A left-wing Nationalist, Liu co-founded the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Guomindang (Mingde) in 1948. The Communist victory elated him, but he soon discovered that he had no actual influence over the new regime. An increasing number of his relatives, friends, and comrades were prosecuted as "enemies of the people," some executed;<sup>1</sup> he appeared to suffer from manic depression and was said to sit in silence, often for days (Zhang Mingguan 1997: 599). He died of cerebral arteriosclerosis and pneumonia on June 21, 1958. If he wrote any poems after 1952, none have survived.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout his life, Liu Yazi could be best described as a "literatus

<sup>1</sup> Zhang Mingguan's (1997: 599) biography mentions that many of his associates were classified as "rightists" in 1957. My own research shows that as early as 1951, some of his relatives and Southern Society associates in his hometown were executed as "traitors" or "despotic landlords"; see Wujiang County Party Committee 1951.

<sup>2</sup> After his wife's death in 1962, Liu's poetry and prose manuscripts were donated to the Museum of the Chinese Revolution (now part of the National Museum). On September 26, 2014, I interviewed Zhou Yongzhen, a retired museum staff member who was the chief editor of Liu's anthologies; she said that the original manuscripts contained titles of poems written after 1952, but not the poems themselves. I was not able to gain access to the original manuscripts.

activist.” Although he had a large network of Society friends and colleagues that extended into the realm of politics, journalism, and education, he never exploited it to gain a salaried position. Aside from lofty altruism, part of the reason was pathological neurosis. As he described, at times, in states of nervous excitation, he could write dozens of poems in a single day; at other times, however, he was paralyzed by long periods of depression during which he could write absolutely nothing (Liu Yazhi 1983: 141). Liu’s personality was ill-disposed toward politics. Another reason, it must be said, was financial resources. An internal report made by the Wujiang County Party Committee (1951) calculated that during the land reform 1211 *mu* (about 200 acres) of Liu’s family land was confiscated. The family’s vast holding of land made it a primary landowner in this rich region, and its wealth had absolved Liu from the distasteful necessity of earning a living. Yet even though he became a refugee during the Japanese occupation and was cut off from the income from family property, Liu did not trade in the modern market of knowledge, where writing was becoming more a career than a gentleman’s hobby. Instead he sold calligraphy and relied on his children for support—means dignified enough for a literatus. One particular case further illustrates Liu’s hybrid cultural identity. After he retreated to his hometown in late 1918, he dedicated his time and resources to collecting and editing writings of local literati, ancient and recent (Zhang Mingguang 1997: 227–236). Liu harbored no loyalty to the Manchu dynasty these men served, but the project suggests attachment to China’s crumbling cultural traditions. Upon hearing of the suicide of a progenitor of Yan Fu (1854–1921), a scholar who introduced Darwin’s theory of evolution to China but remained a Manchu loyalist himself, he wrote:

澎湃潮流休捍禦  
沉淪階級有咨嗟

Never defend against the roaring tides of the time!  
The fallen classes, however, have their sighs of woe.

("Gengbai yun Aixia wei Yan houguan zhisunnü ye," Liu Yazi 1985a: 730)

Liu Yazi was caught between his ardent support for the "roaring tides of the time" and his sympathy for the "fallen classes," in which he increasingly included himself as a member. These two motifs form a central paradox that defined his life and might have contributed to his neurosis. Similar paradoxes were certainly present in many of his contemporaries, but in Liu they were perhaps most manifest, making him emblematic of his age.

Liu's poetry also exhibits intellectual hybridity, manifested further through its linguistic hybridity. A successor of the late Qing Poetic Revolution, represented by the innovative poetry of Huang Zunxian (1848–1905), his poetry largely abides by classical genre conventions and is written mostly in a regulated-verse style, yet it also reveals a continuous effort to stay relevant in a modernizing world. Liu Yazi's stylistic experiments give his poetry a boldness that is novel and modern. These poems further challenge the generally accepted distinction between "classical-style verse" and modern vernacular poetry, illustrating an internal evolution of China's lyrical traditions toward "modern classicism."

Many of Liu's poems contain neologisms, often in the form of translated or transliterated Western terms. After burning his early "Fragrant Casket" poems, the sixteen-year-old Liu Yazi began to sprinkle his otherwise conventional poems with foreign words such as *ziyou* (freedom), *renquan* (human rights), *Lusuo* (Jean-Jacques Rousseau [1712–1718]), or *Mazhini* (Giuseppe Mazzini [1805–1872]).<sup>3</sup> Liang Qichao (1999: 18: 5296) had once criticized the fad of using neologisms and suggested that one should "blend new ideals into old styles" (*Yinbingshi shihua*, #4). But Liang (1999: 18: 5327) did give license to the occasional use of neologisms to limn the revolutionary spirit (*Yinbingshi shihua*, #63), as exemplified in his own poetry. When a provincial student like Liu Yazi was introduced to ideas of revolution, using neologisms was also the easiest way to give his poems

<sup>3</sup> See the poems from 1903 collected in Liu Yazi 1985a: 17–19. The Italian nationalist hero Mazzini became well known in China because of Liang Qichao's introduction. On Liang's fascination with Mazzini, see Tang Xiaobing 1996: 90–92.

a quick makeover.

A more mature Liu Yazi would combine neologisms with a heavy dose of classical references, so as to create a better balance of old and new. Such a balancing act is also seen in the highly controlled use of vernacularization in some of his poems, its “lightness” set in deliberate contrast to his usual dense erudition. In terms of types of vernacularization, we observe a linear development over time from premodern vernacular (as used in earlier low-register poetry and late imperial drama or novels) to new vernacular (constructed after the New Culture movement under the influence of Western languages). Some of his early poems adopt premodern vernacular to address those from undereducated social groups, such as opera actors. For instance, a 1913 poem written on receiving a photo of Feng Chunhang (1885–1942), a male Peking opera actor who played female roles, reads:

活色生香第一春  
冷風寒雨獨精神  
群兒底用輕相誚  
萬古江湖屬此人

Your lively beauty and fragrant body are at the prime of spring.  
Cold wind and chilly rain polish your lofty spirit.  
To what use is the petty man’s callous slander?  
This person will rule over the rivers and lakes, for millennia to come.  
 (“Shaoping yi Chunhang huazhuang xiaoying jizeng” no. 2, Liu Yazi 1985a: 202)

Liu met Feng in Shanghai in 1911 and became immediately infatuated. To the consternation of some of his Southern Society comrades, who regarded opera singers as a vulgar underclass, he accepted Feng into the Society, though it became a juicy bit of society gossip. In early 1913, he bid Feng farewell to return to his hometown, where he wrote the preceding poem expressing a reignited passion for Feng. In the poem, Liu seems to defend his passion by describing Feng as possessing not only feminine beauty



but upright moral nobility, as well as suggesting that Liu's detractors will be avenged by time! The term *huose shengxiang*, which I translate as "lively beauty and fragrant body," is a cliché used in late imperial novels to describe beautiful courtesans. The interrogative *di* ("what") is another marker of the premodern vernacular. Semiclassical poetry written about photos of women from entertainment quarters (or actors playing female roles) was a popular subgenre in the early twentieth century; it appears that Liu Yazhi consciously employed the relatively low-register language of this subgenre in his poems for Feng (as well as one written for Lu Zimei, another opera singer).

From the 1930s on, under the influence of the rising vernacular poetry, Liu Yazhi experimented with using Westernized vernacular. A "gatha" that he wrote in 1940 reads:

大膽老面皮  
努力沖過溪  
倘然沖不過  
依舊笑嘻嘻

Weathered skin on my brazen face,  
I charge over the stream with all my might.  
Should I fail to cross,  
That grin of old will not drop from sight.  
(“Erbei wen yu geren chushi zhi fa shi yi ci ji,” Liu Yazhi 1985a: 867)

A gatha is a short poem written by Buddhist monks to express enlightenment and usually adopts semivernacular language as a sign of its spontaneity and authenticity. Liu Yazhi's "gatha" uses vernacular grammar (*chongguo* and *chong buguo*) and modern syntactical terms (*tangan* and *yijiu*). This poem also appears to be a parody of Hu Shi's (1891–1962) semivernacular poem on his self-portrait, written after being appointed as China's ambassador to the United States. Hu's poem declares:

做了過河小卒  
只許拼命向前

Once I've become a pawn crossing the "river,"  
I have no choice but to charge ahead with all my might.  
(see Hu Shi's diary on Oct. 31, 1938, in Hu 2001: 7.186)

Liu's poem illustrates the influence of "new poetry." In 1917, on reading Hu Shi's vernacular poems published in *New Youth* (Xin qingnian), Liu (1993: 450) mocked them as "half a donkey, half a horse, and simply a bad joke"; now he was beginning to adopt this style occasionally himself, although the different sentiments in their poems are telling. Hu Shi saw himself as a pawn that had already crossed the metaphorical "river" of the Chinese chessboard, which refers both to the ocean separating America and China and to the distance between the intellectual and the political spheres; it was a river he crossed reluctantly but resolutely. Liu Yazhi, however, borrows this metaphor to express his eagerness to charge over the stream of history and join forces with the New Culture camp, although he quickly imagines his failure to do so. Writing in the vernacular would not have been a challenge for someone like Liu, so I suspect that in imagining his "failure" he shows a deep reluctance he would not acknowledge: the "stream" can thus be read as a psychological barrier between a conscious wish and subconscious resistance.

After 1949, Liu Yazhi began to increasingly adopt a "revolutionary" vernacular in some of his poems, which contain lines such as this:

工農領導歸中共  
民革民盟本一家

The leadership of the workers and farmers belongs to the CCP;  
The Revolutionary Committee and the Democratic League are  
originally from one family.  
("Shiyiyue ershiliu ri wei Zhongguo Minzhu Tongmeng liu-  
zhongquanhui kaimu dadian," Liu Yazhi 1985a: 1685)

<sup>4</sup> The allusion *shuo Xiang* or “lobbying for Xiang” derives from the story of the Tang poet Yang Jingzhi’s (active 820) promotion of the obscure Xiang Si (*jin-shi* 844); it has evolved into a fixed term meaning “lobbying or pleading mercy for someone.”

<sup>5</sup> An allusion that derives from Wang Can’s (177–217) seeking patronage from Liu Biao (142–208), a powerful warlord.

<sup>6</sup> Liu merges two allusions here. The first comes from the biography of Dai Ping in *Hou Hanshu*. In a debate before the throne, Dai had defeated many established court scholars. According to rules of the debate, he was allowed to assume the sitting mat of the person he defeated; eventually, he was sitting on a pile of more than fifty mats (Wang Xianqian 1984: 79A.893). Liu Yazi then uses Wulu to allude to the scholars Dai had defeated. According to the biography of Zhu Yun in *Hanshu*, the Western Han scholar Wulu Chongzong was invincible in debates, except in one against Zhu Yun (Ban 1962: 67.2913–67.2914). One might translate this line as: “Taking over sitting mats in discussing the Classics—I am not Wulu,” which would mean that Liu is not a cultural conservative interested in the Confucian classics. This view seems too abstract; I believe that in this case Liu is referring to some specific cultural luminaries who gained high positions in the PRC. According to the memoir of Xia Yan (1900–1995), Liu visited him in September 1945 and

It is impossible to know whether these poems express genuine sentiments or were motivated by pragmatic political calculations. Whatever the case, Liu’s linguistic choice always seems to be conscious and sometimes reflects an ideological agenda. We can compare such “revolutionary” poems to his poems directly addressing Mao Zedong, which maintained his usual style of erudition and intensity. A striking, although somewhat esoteric, example is a poem written on March 28, 1949, which reads:

開天闢地君真健  
說項依劉我大難  
奪席談經非五鹿  
無車彈鋏怨馮驩  
頭顱早悔平生賤  
肝膽寧忘一寸丹  
安得南征馳捷報  
分湖便是子陵灘

How truly powerful of you to separate heaven from earth [to create a new world]!

But I have a tough job lobbying for the condemned<sup>4</sup> while pledging allegiance to the victor.<sup>5</sup>

In debates, I have defeated many established ones;<sup>6</sup>

But I have come to complain like Feng Huan, knocking on his sword and singing about having no carriage.<sup>7</sup>

I have long lamented selling this head of mine at a cheap price; I cannot forget, however, the burning inch of faithful heart inside.

When I hear the news of victory of your southern expedition, Fenhu, my hometown lake, shall become a shore of seclusion.<sup>8</sup> (“Ganshi cheng Mao Zhuxi yishou,” Liu Yazi 1985a: 1549)

Typical of Liu’s poems to fellow intellectuals, this poem cites a broad range of references, assuming that his interlocutor, Mao Zedong, would understand them; Liu thus shows his respect for Mao by including him in the inner circle of the classically educated. Yet the allusions, if Mao understood them, were a subtle but effective vehicle to express Liu’s discontent.

Circumstances strongly suggest that his complaint was a concrete one. In his diaries and letters written in early April 1949, he repeatedly stated how he found distasteful so many things in the changing world around him, which led to public displays of rage and high blood pressure; he thus decided not to attend any more meetings.<sup>9</sup> Without access to Liu's classified files, we cannot know for sure whom he might be referring to in the poem (e.g., the "condemned" and the "established" ones).<sup>10</sup> We infer from his poems and letters that the backstage deals and power grabs preceding the founding of the new regime were much to his distaste, not to mention that his personal ambition was unrewarded. Reference to the "carriage" is particularly concrete. Ten days before writing the poem, he wanted to visit Sun Yat-sen's cenotaph and memorial hall at the Biyun Temple outside of Beijing, for which he would need a car, but his humble request for this "carriage" was ignored; Liu took this as an insult (Zhang Mingguan 1997: 566). Smarting from the slight, he implies in the last line of the poem that once Wujiang was liberated, he would go home and live in reclusion.

Mao understood the message. He allowed Liu to move into a quiet residence in the Summer Palace and then wrote a matching poem in a magnanimous voice that overlooks the complaints and advises Liu to adopt a long-term view (Zhang Mingguan 1997: 567).<sup>11</sup> The contrast between Liu's vernacularized poems written for a mass audience and his highly classical poems written for Mao offers ample interpretive possibilities:<sup>12</sup> on the one hand, whether out of conviction or for political expediency, Liu adopted the revolutionary diction as a way of demonstrating his allegiance to the new regime; but on the other hand, he drew from traditional intellectual resources to establish a special liaison with Mao Zedong, the Communist leader who had rebelled against China's traditions. In this sense, his poem can be understood as a symbolic gesture to acknowledge Mao's literati credentials and include him in a traditionalist circle; although its content expressed a complaint, its form was a kind of invitation.

Another feature of Liu's poetry is argumentation, which shows his

voiced his dissatisfaction with appointing a historically ambivalent figure such as Li Jishen (1885–1959) as the vice president of the PRC. Xia said that Liu's explanations made him understand Liu's poem better (Zhang Mingguan 1997: 579).

<sup>7</sup> Feng Huan was a scholar who sought Lord Mengchang's patronage but was initially treated poorly. In response, Feng drummed on his sword and sang about having no carriage. Lord Mengchang improved his treatment, and eventually Feng served him (Sima 1963: 75: 2359).

<sup>8</sup> The scholar Yan Guang, polite name Ziling, was an old classmate of Liu Xiu (6 BCE–57, r. 25–57). After Liu Xiu founded the Eastern Han, he repeatedly summoned Yan Guang to court. Yan finally declined the offer of wealth and power and went home to fish by the shore. See Wang Xianqian 1984: 83: 965–966.

<sup>9</sup> See Liu Yazhi's diary entry of April 7, 1949, in Liu Yazhi 1986: 350; his April 11 letter to Yin Shoushi (1919–1998) appears in Liu Yazhi 1985b: 350.

<sup>10</sup> Aside from Li Jishen; see footnote 6.

<sup>11</sup> Intriguingly, Mao's poem was published in 1957; Liu's poem was not published until 1985, when it was included in the complete collection of his poems. Thus, in the nearly three decades between 1957 and 1985, readers of Mao's matching poem would know that Liu "complained," without knowing how or why. Even today, without full access to historical archives, we still do not completely understand Liu's message.

<sup>12</sup> Yang Zhiyi (2013b) analyzes another poetry exchange between them in 1945.

understanding of a modern world and its conceptual framework. Many poems from his twenties discuss revolution, freedom, “free love” (abolition of marriage), and women’s rights. These poems were often published in reformist newspapers, and his use of neologisms and fluid argumentation appears to be tailored to the expectations of modern mass media. The short publishing turnaround of the modern press also allowed him to comment on very contemporary political events and for his poetry to achieve an immediate social effect. These poems were, in effect, rhymed editorials that presented their arguments on a variety of modern phenomena and ideas. Although he still paid attention to semantic parallelism and the phonetic rules of regulated poetry, he used a language that melded neologisms, prosaic syntax, and classical allusions to carry his arguments, as illustrated by the poem that follows. This poem was written in September 1941 before the outbreak of the Pacific War to address US president Franklin D. Roosevelt (hereafter, FDR). The excerpt that I choose is an example of Liu’s tendency to mix Chinese and foreign references to create formal regularity and to present his opinion on world affairs.

英德之戰爭霸耳  
蘇聯自衛義戰成  
吾華苦鬪四載餘  
稽天狂寇猶未平  
羅翁援華還援蘇  
五洲一矚目炬明  
援蘇惟當重物質  
援華還須勗以民主政治之典型  
三民主義手創國父孫  
正與民有民治民享聲氣相求應  
微言大義近黯淡  
借箸端賴旁觀清  
法西斯蒂即侵略  
天視民視天聽民聽邦乃寧

The British-German War fought only over hegemony;  
Soviet self-defense accomplished a just war.

For over four years our China has been bitterly embattled;  
 Yet the over-reaching rogue bandits are still untamed.  
 Mr. Roosevelt has aided China and the Soviets alike;  
 The five continents all look to him, eyes bright like blazing fire.  
 Aid to the Soviet Union should focus on material support;  
 Aid to China should include the model of democracy.  
 The “Three Principles of the People,” founded by our Father of  
 the Nation, Sun Yat-sen,  
 Correspond in form and spirit to “of the people, by the people,  
 and for the people.”  
 His subtle words and noble intentions are nearly forgotten;  
 Wise counsels now truly depend on an observer’s clear-sight.<sup>13</sup>  
 Even under the current invasion of Fascism,  
 Only when Heaven sees through the people<sup>14</sup> and listens through  
 the people will our nation enjoy peace.  
 (“Chen Xiaowei jiangjun yi fu zeng Meilijian dazongtong Luosifu  
 shi shi suohe,” Liu Yazi 1985a: 933)

In this poem, Sun Yat-sen’s “Three Principles of the People” philosophy is juxtaposed with Lincoln’s Gettysburg address and with King Wu of Zhou’s oath from the *Book of Documents*, all of which emphasize the significance of the “people.” Liu brings together these disparate references, which come from different sociopolitical contexts and have different connotations, to imbue his poem with a high level of literariness.

In addition to the linguistic features examined here, Liu engaged in formal experimentation by linking individual poems into poetic series. For example, he wrote an extended series of quatrains to record a certain journey; all the quatrains were collected under a common title, emulating the late Qing poet Gong Zizhen’s (1792–1841) “Miscellaneous Poems in 1839” (Jihai zashi), a series of 351 poems written on a trip from Beijing to his home near Hangzhou. But unlike Gong’s journey, which lasted nine months, Liu Yazi’s trip—from Shanghai to Beijing, then to Shandong, and eventually back to Shanghai—took place in just a month (April 1934). The 250 or so poems written in the course of two long train rides (see

<sup>13</sup> When Liu Bang (256 BCE–195 BCE; r. 202 BCE–195 BCE) was encircled by Xiang Yu’s (232 BCE–202 BCE) army, Zhang Liang (?–185 BCE) came to see him. Because Liu Bang was eating at the time, Zhang borrowed his chopsticks and drew on the table to analyze the strategic situation. Liu Bang adopted his suggestions, breaking the encirclement and eventually winning the empire (Sima 1963: 55.2040–55.2041). Using this reference, Liu Yazi compares Roosevelt to Zhang Liang, who, being a cool-headed observer, could see the situation more clearly than those engaged in bitter battles.

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from the King Wu of Zhou’s oath in the *Book of Documents*. See Zhu 1985: 4.67.

“Beixing zashi” and “Luyou zashi,” titles of the two series, in Liu Yazi 1985a: 737–749, 753–762) must have been produced in an incessant and instant fashion, not unlike a tourist today using a camera or smart phone to create a photographic travelogue. These poetic travelogues depict a new world connected by railroads and steamboats. The swift composition of the poems also seems to enhance the impression of the speed of modern travel. He uses groups of quatrains—which, unlike individual poems composed during travel, are not supposed to be read or circulated independently—to narrate individual events; their serial, episodic format helps to overcome the weakness of the classical quatrain in extended description. By breaking down his travel experience into short verses, Liu Yazi gives the series of poems greater freedom, a spontaneity of expression, and a variety of themes, registers, and styles.

Another feature, and perhaps the most radical in terms of formal experimentation, is the interlacing of classical and vernacular lines. This is used in a series of long poems that he wrote in the 1940s, which pushed the classical *gexing* genre (a type of ancient-style poetry, often long and with uneven lines) to its limit. The previously cited poem addressing FDR, which includes couplets like the following, is one example:

援蘇惟當重物質  
援華還須勗以民主政治之典型

Aid to the Soviet Union should focus on material support;  
Aid to China should include the model of democracy.

Both lines are prosaic, but the first one conforms to a familiar line length and metrical pattern of classical poetry, whereas the second line is thirteen characters long—a rarity in classical *gexing* poems. This movement toward prosaic syntax culminates in a poem written in Guilin on May 5, 1944, to celebrate New Poet’s Day, a holiday Liu proposed to commemorate the national founding father, Sun Yat-sen, whom he regarded as a “poet” who

created not just poetic texts but, more important, a new republic. The first section of the poem is translated here:

五一、五三、五四、五七、更五九  
填胸血淚未忍酌杯酒  
獨有詩人佳節五五時日良  
況在文化聖城、始安故郡、江號相思峰獨秀  
端陽吊屈據亂始於髯  
移宮換羽太平改制吳江柳  
武昌創義、大功未竟、乃有非常總統粵都之正位  
雙十雙五、儼如姊妹成雙偶

May First, May Third, May Fourth, May Seventh, and again May Ninth<sup>15</sup>—

Blood and tears fill my chest, and I can hardly bear to pour a cup of wine as libation.

The only good day is May Fifth, the Poet's Day.

Moreover, I'm in [Guilin,] that holy city of culture, the ancient town of Shi'an, where the river's name is Romantic Longing and the mountain is called Solitary Beauty.

The mourning for Qu Yuan during the Duanyang Festival in this chaotic wartime began with Yü, Mr. Beard;<sup>16</sup>

He who altered the tune in a peaceful coup was Liu of Wujiang.<sup>17</sup>

The Wuchang Uprising failed to accomplish the great feat [of national revolution], therefore we have the Extraordinary President's swearing in at Guangzhou.<sup>18</sup>

The Double Tenth day and the Double Fifth day are like a lovely pair of sisters.

("Shiri jucanhui jishi," Liu Yazhi 1985a: 1193–1194)

This poem is stylistically radical, challenging the syntactic and metrical boundaries of classical-style verse. Classical poems have little need for punctuation; particles, parallelism, rhyme patterns, and uniform meter are enough to allow readers to parse the lines.<sup>19</sup> Like the poem to FDR, this poem liberally mixes classical, modern, Chinese, and Western references. With lines of such uneven length and complex syntax, rhymes help to mark

<sup>15</sup> May Third is the memorial day for the Jinan Incident, 1928, when the Japanese army attacked Jinan and ultimately killed more than 2,000 civilians. May Seventh is the memorial day for Japan's proposing the Twenty-One Demands as an ultimatum in 1915. May Ninth is the memorial day for the Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) government's acceptance of the Twenty-One Demands.

<sup>16</sup> On May 30, 1941, the refugee community in Guilin celebrated the first Poet's Day on the day of the Duanwu (or Duanyang) Festival, which commemorates the patriotic poet Qu Yuan's death. The chairman of the ceremony was Yü Youren (1879–1964), whose style name was Rangong, or Mr. Beard.

<sup>17</sup> Namely, he proposed a new Poet's Day, changing the date from the fifth day in the fifth month in the Han calendar to May 5 in the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>18</sup> The Wuchang Uprising on October 10, 1911, resulted only in Yuan Shikai's "stealing" the victory of the national revolution; Sun Yat-sen assumed the title of "Extraordinary President" (*Feichang da-zongtong*) on May 5, 1921, at Guangzhou before starting the northern expedition against the Beiyang warlords.

<sup>19</sup> When free verse vernacular poetry was introduced in the 1910s, modern punctuation became necessary. It was used for the first time in *New Youth* (Xin qingnian), no. 4 (Jan. 1918).



their ends, but modern punctuation is needed to make them readable. Liu's poem, despite its semiclassical appearance, needs line breaks. Many lines are long and highly prosaic, and the rhyming sound (\*-ou)—though used consistently through the poem, as is the convention in classical poetry—would be difficult to locate had a line break not been added to indicate its position. The couplet structure sometimes feels forced, because the syntax within one line is highly complex, with some lines consisting of a few clauses or even separate sentences. For these lines, modern punctuation greatly facilitates comprehension.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> By the 1940s, published poems, regardless of their use of classical or vernacular style, were generally punctuated.

This poem differs from vernacular verse in its meter, semiclassical diction, and use of some stylistic conventions—and perhaps also in its very concrete and polemical subject matter, which is seldom treated in vernacular poetry. Thematic differences between classical-style verse and vernacular poetry written in the twentieth century are obvious, but this phenomenon has yet to receive much academic attention.<sup>21</sup> When expressing political opinions or a sense of personal injustice, or when writing about war and havoc, poets tended to write in classical genres; vernacular poetry generally expressed different kinds of feelings or topics. The very fact that classical-style genres continue to exist, evolve, and play vital functions suggests that they should be reconsidered as a part of modern literature.

<sup>21</sup> Xiaofei Tian (2009: 27, 33) has noted that “old-style poetry” is more “down-to-earth” than “new-style poetry” and often treats commonplace topics.

### **Classicist Poetry and Literary Nationalism**

Unlike Huang Zunxian or Liang Qichao, Liu belonged to a new generation of Chinese poets. After 1917, these poets began to face formal choices that involved their very cultural identities: whether to write in the new vernacular, to continue the established literary traditions, or to attempt a modern renovation of the traditions was a question that every poet needed to consider when writing poems—and their choice might well be different each time they wrote. The act of choosing to write in classical or classically inspired forms can itself be perceived as an act of resistance to, or of complimenting, literary modernity. I therefore propose “classicist

poetry” as a neutral umbrella term to designate all poems written in, or largely inspired by, classical poetic genres in the modern era, regardless of whether their author had a particular agenda.

Other terms currently in use seem woefully inadequate. For example, terms such as “classical-style verse” and “old-style poetry” point only to their continuity with the tradition. By contrast, “classicist poetry” assumes such poetry to be intrinsically modern, because the suffix “-ism” in Chinese (*zhuyi*) is a modern word formation. This term necessarily implies a kind of conviction and insistence, as well as an antagonism against other “-isms.” A number of studies in the last decade by scholars such as Jon von Kowallis (2006), Jerry Schmidt (1994), and Shengqing Wu (2014) have repeatedly demonstrated the modernity of such poetry. Liu Yazi’s innovative poetry has evidently transcended the strict definition of being “classical” or “old.” Even the modified term “New Old-Style poetry” (see Tian 2009: 27) only perpetuates a hierarchical dichotomy between the “new” and the “old,” with the “new” assuming superiority because it is modern and relevant. Some Chinese scholars ardently promote the term “national verse” (*guoshi*). Xu Jinru (2010: 7, 11–14), who correctly notes the ideology of evolutionism engrained in the “new vs. old” dichotomy, declared all vernacular poetry written since 1917 to be “colonial poetry,” accusing it of embodying a “colonial spirit” in contrast to a Chinese “national spirit.” The militant nationalism in Xu’s rhetoric is troubling, however. I use the more neutral “classicist poetry,” a term meant to suggest fuzzy boundaries. It is a formal description, not a value judgment, and includes such lower register verses as semiclassical pop lyrics and Communist cadre-style poems still common in the Chinese mass media today.

Literary classicism, in short, is a deliberate choice that mobilizes the repertoire of traditional literary resources to construct a cultural identity, to bear ideological agendas, or for aesthetic preferences. It is just as “modern” as all the other literary genres available in the twentieth, and now the twenty-first, century. As I discuss later in an examination of Liu

Yazi's and the Southern Society's proposals, writing classicist poetry was part of their effort to construct a modern national literature that could carry on China's cultural traditions; its opposite is the utilitarian attitude as embodied by the New Culture Movement and its intellectual descendants. Both approaches are modern in the sense that they are attempts to re-create China as an imagined cultural community. Even though Liu Yazi later ostensibly sponsored the utilitarian approach, his continuous lyrical experiments bear witness to his sentimental attachment to the literary tradition. His commitment to renovating classical poetry therefore became an enterprise without a name.

Liu Yazi himself never elaborated on these poetic innovations. The last feature I examined in the previous section, for instance, was an experiment that seemed deliberate, but began and ended in silence. Between 1941 and 1944, Liu composed a dozen long poems in this mixed classical-vernacular style and then suddenly abandoned the project. This leaves a significant blank page in Liu Yazi's thought for the researcher to fill in—namely, to articulate on his behalf an agenda that he demonstrated in practice but did not explain in self-reflexive terms. It is a tricky task, but worth pursuing.

Given Liu Yazi's central status in the history of the Southern Society, I propose to understand his, and the Society's, agenda as a culturalist project of literary nationalism. In other words, the practice of classicist poetry provided a way to preserve the Chinese nation's cultural roots within a Westernized, and Westernizing, modern society. Their cultural choice, moreover, was based on an aesthetic preference. Despite their very different attitudes toward vernacular poetry, they shared a tacit understanding that the aesthetic value of classicist poetry justified itself, although this point was not always upheld consistently, especially when the aesthetic standard of literature was perceived to be at odds with its ethical value. The tension reached a climax in the "Tang and Song poetry debate" of 1917 and eventually led to the Society's dissolution.

In his study of Republican-era literary societies, Michel Hockx (2003:

33–46) has already examined the Southern Society's organization and its publications, as have a number of scholars working in Chinese (for monographs alone, see Sun 2003 and Lin Xiangling 2009). There is no consensus, however, about the nature of Society's ideological positioning. Although its members' early activities betray a strong anti-Manchu tendency, their later activities revolved around poetry writing and social gatherings, without an obvious political intent. Lu Wenyun (2008: 8–10) goes so far as to propose that the Southern Society, to a large extent, was a "literary club." Its members had two selves: a "radical, modern self," as manifested in their engagement in politics, journalism, and education; and a "sentimental self," expressed in their literary activities, that was dedicated to the lifestyle of the traditional literati. In short, it suffered from a split-personality syndrome: its "incompleteness" in being revolutionary explains why its literary (and political) cause failed.

Lu Wenyun's view betrays a tendency to equate the "new" with the "modern," with the politically "correct," and with the aesthetically and ethically "good." Her logic, typical among researchers on the Southern Society poets, embodies the perspective of the victors of history. Back in its own time, as Michel Hockx (2003: 5) points out, "new Literature" was "but one style of modern Chinese writing, coexisting and competing with other styles throughout the pre-War decades." Of the various visions for a modern Chinese literature, New Culture was the most radical in denouncing the literary tradition. Its triumph was the result of a complex historical process, which was part of the prolonged, painful birth of China as a modern nation. To a large extent, the Southern Society's failure was due to the unstoppable tide of radicalism, populism, and anti-intellectualism in twentieth-century China (see Yü 1993); it did not result from literary deficiencies, imagined or perceived. At heart, these various proposals represented different imaginations of a Chinese "nation" and what kind of literature was needed for its rejuvenation.<sup>22</sup>

In my work, I draw attention to a relationship between the poetry

<sup>22</sup> Zhang Chuntian (2013: 676–677) proposes to define the Southern Society as "an emotive community" or "a special political group and emotive/cultural political form." In my view, Zhang ignores the transformation of the Society over time as well as the disparity, later on, among its more than 1,180 members.

produced by the Southern Society and late Qing poetry and modern vernacular poetry; I also observe the Society's intellectual kinship with the National Essence Movement and the *Critical Review* group. I argue that the debate between the New Culturalists and the Southern Society was not between "modern intelligentsia" and "traditional literati"; rather, it was an *internal* conflict among modern intelligentsia, who had the same educational background, political ideals, professional calling, and aspirations for the revival of Chinese cultural pride. They both believed in the efficacy of literature in building and shaping a new nation—an instrumentalist belief that some from both groups would later come to reject, as exemplified by Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967) from the New Culturalist camp (Daruvāla 2000: 54). They differed foremost in their answers to the questions of whether the succession of the national literary tradition was necessary for China as a modern nation, and which parts, if any, of the tradition should be rescued to serve as the "primordial roots" of national consciousness—the nexus for forming a new cultural identity. The Southern Society sought to carry on and transform the elite literary traditions, whereas the New Culturalists tended to invent an "alternative tradition"—that of vernacular and folk literature—to stamp on the birth certificate of the New Literature.

Constructing a common culture has always been an essential task for nation-builders. Nations tend to project themselves as objective, racial, and eternal entities; in reality, they may be more accurately described as "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson's [1983] term) bounded by cultural constructions, such as a common national language and literature (with folk literary roots, often invented), as well as by mass media, education systems, and so forth. When China was emerging as a nation-state, it faced an essential paradox: if "Chineseness" was defined in premodern times as a cultural concept, then "barbarians" could become "Chinese" through sinification; however, at this new juncture in the late Qing and early Republican eras, "Chineseness" needed to be redefined in

racial terms. And yet, China was in its history a multiethnic empire; finding a way to maintain the empire's borders, while recasting it as a nation-state, became a central task for the (mostly Han) founders of the Republic. To define a modern Chineseness, ancient history, literature, and thought had to be thoroughly rewritten and reinterpreted. Literature, furthermore, was seen as an essential means not only for constructing and propagating this new national identity, but also for giving the nation a common voice and unifying it around a cause, in order for China to compete in a world where it was "falling behind."

At the time of its foundation, the Southern Society deliberately emulated late Ming loyalists' groups, such as the Restoration Society (Fushe). After 1911, its anti-Manchuism was quickly replaced by a more culturalist vision of the nation. Consistent with the nationalists' redefinition of a multiethnic republic, this culturalism was a facile reinvention of a seed that had already been planted. Even before the Society's foundation, many of its future members participated in the National Essence movement. Some joined the National Learning Preservation Society (Guoxue baocun hui, founded in 1905) and had published in the *Bulletin of the Study of National Essence* (Guocui xuebao, 1905–1911) (Yang/Wang 1995: 38–39). The characteristic of the National Essence movement's brand of conservatism, as summarized by Tze-ki Hon (2013), is "revolution as restoration." Its proponents, according to Charlotte Furth (1976: 26), "exploited native alternative traditions as a source of political criticism of imperial orthodoxy." As Ying-shih Yü has noted, since the late Qing, presentations of modern ideas were often disguised as interpretations of the tradition. Although the avowed purpose of the National Essence movement was a quest for cultural identity in the face of ever-growing Western influence, an investigation of its leaders' writings reveals that "what they identified as China's 'national essence' turned out to be, more often than not, basic cultural values of the West such as democracy, equality, liberty, and human rights" (Yü 1993: 130). In other words, these were universalist values

promoted as particularly Chinese.

This paradox makes the National Essence movement a modern phenomenon. The advent of modernity results in the eventual dissolution of regional diversity and in the replacement of localized, orally transmitted folk cultures by a standardized, education-transmitted (literate) high culture. Theoretically, modernity should lead to the disintegration of notions of “primordial roots” and nationalist feelings. Yet, in effect, the transition to the modern era “engendered a series of internally homogeneous, externally bounded and hostile, cultural pools,” which manifestly resisted cultural universalism (Gellner 1995: 3). In other words, modernity bred cultural nationalism, instead of dissolving it. Those universal values could be identified as particularly Chinese because nationalism, which emerged in tandem with romanticism, essentially resonates with one’s feelings for one’s presumed cultural and ethnic roots. The rhetorical appeal to one’s native instincts is seen in the Southern Society members’ efforts to continue the National Essence movement even after its *Bulletin* ceased publication in 1911. As Yao Guang (1891–1945) put it, only by studying the tradition could one preserve the “spirit of a nation” or even the “soul of a nation” (*guohun*) (Yao 1911). Whereas the term “national essence” conjures up an image of a chemistry lab out of which the turbid waters of the tradition are distilled, the metaphor of a “national soul” provides instead the image of a nation endowed with personhood: like the human soul, the “soul” of the nation must be cultivated with learning and scholarship. In Gao Xie’s (1877–1958) words, National Learning is “what the nation relies upon to exist” (Gao 1912). A “soul” thus cultivated does not completely break away from the past, but instead carries its legacy—or at least some romanticized fragments of it—into the future. According to Laurence Schneider, the Southern Society circle believed equally in “the tenacity of tradition” and in “the elasticity of tradition and its potential utility for radical change.” Its political radicalism was largely “a means to protect China’s high culture and to guarantee the continuity of its literary and scholarly tradition” (in Furth 1976: 80).

This strategy brought upon itself a disturbing question: by seeking “alternative traditions,” Society members had already acknowledged that a portion—perhaps a considerable portion—of the tradition was outdated. So which aspects merited rescue and which did not? As some scholars have argued, whereas the National Essence School was typically against any renovation in the lyrical form, including even incorporating modern vocabulary into it, the Southern Society typically saw itself as a successor to the late Qing Poetic Revolution (Lu 2008: 61–63) and embraced renovations *within* the tradition. But should such innovations be in terms of form or in spirit? And, in the case of the former, which forms? In the conflict between the Tang and the Song poetic styles, most leaders of the Southern Society preferred to selectively continue some formal elements of the tradition that they believed could propagate the revolutionary spirit. Some others, however, saw the aesthetic value of the tradition as its own redemption—a stance that brought them closer to the politically more conservative late Qing Tongguang group. The former approach won the debate, but their belief in the ethical function of lyrical forms essentially obliged them to accept the reasoning of their nemesis—the New Culture iconoclasts.

### **The Ethics of the Lyric Form**

The *Book of Documents* declares: *shi yan zhi*, or “poetry expresses the poet’s mind” (*Shangshu* 2.16). Following this exegetical tradition, Chinese lyric criticism often sees poetry as the authentic expression of the author’s moral character; hence, it invests poetic form with ethical significance. The Late Tang and Northern Song proponents of “ancient prose” (*guwen*), for instance, did not just claim an aesthetic or utilitarian advantage for the prose style they promoted; they argued that it was the only proper vehicle of the Way, a claim that made it morally superior to highly ornamented parallel prose (see Bol 1992: 131–134; Hartman 1986: 211–276; Egan 1984: 12–29). Emulators of the Jin recluse Tao Qian’s (352?–427?) poetry similarly regarded it as the vehicle of Tao’s moral essence. Thus, by matching his



poems, they “copied” the moral truth of the recluse—often without personally going into seclusion (see Swartz 2008; Ashmore 2010; Yang Z. 2013a). The specter of moralism also haunted modern debates on poetry.

Arguably, the focal point of the controversy between the Southern Society and the New Culturalist was not vernacular literature in general, but vernacular poetry in particular. By 1917, the cause of vernacular prose had already achieved broad success, and many Southern Society members were pioneers in writing vernacular journal articles, fiction, and drama. But vernacular poetry was anathema to them. For instance, Lin Xie (1874–1926; known as Baishui), founder of the first vernacular newspaper and a member of the Society, was against any kind of poetry revolution. According to Lin, classical poetry was the pride of the Chinese nation and brought it cultural distinction (see his letter to Gao Xu, quoted in Yang/Wang 1995: 30–31). Using vernacular literature as an effective tool of propaganda did not necessarily elevate it to the level of literature, if the criterion of judgment was aesthetic. Poetry, as Shengqing Wu (2014: 12) has similarly noted, was the last impregnable stronghold of classical literature. This issue was at the heart of Hu Shi’s 1916 debate with Society members Mei Guangdi and Ren Hongjun (1886–1961) over whether Chinese poetry could be vernacularized at all. As a consequence, Hu Shi started composing vernacular poetry: he wanted to prove that the “vernacular could be the sole vehicle for all genres of Chinese literature” (Hu Shi 1998: 1.155–1.156). And even though Hu Shi’s seminal article was titled, with strategic modesty, “Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature” (*Wenxue gailiang chuyi*), Chen Duxiu (1879–1942) quickly seized the chance and called for a more polemical “literary revolution” (*wenxue geming*).<sup>23</sup> The target of a “revolution” is always the current ruling authority, and classical-style poetry had to be dethroned. Chen explicitly described this movement as an uprising of “literature of the people” against “aristocratic literature” and “eremitic literature” (“*Wenxue geming lun*”). Their radical antitraditionalism bore the populist rhetoric of antielitism.

<sup>23</sup> *Xin qingnian* published both Hu Shi’s and Chen’s essays in 1917, Hu’s in January and Chen’s in February. For translations of both essays, see Denton 1996.

One of the great feats of the New Culture movement was to overthrow the established classical-style poetry. Members perceived vernacular poetry as ethically superior and, by logical extension, politically correct and aesthetically good. The ultimate goal of May Fourth vernacular writing was perhaps less about popular accessibility<sup>24</sup> and more about instituting an ideology. Hu Shi (1926; 1998: 1: 141–142) declared the goal of his vernacular movement to be the initiation of “the Renaissance in China,” a statement that establishes an analogy between Chinese and European historical trajectories.<sup>25</sup> And just as the transition from Latin to the national vernaculars ushered in the Renaissance in Europe and eventually paved the way to modernity, Hu Shi suggested that China must undergo a similar process of complete vernacularization so as to revitalize the nation and make the transition to the modern world. Because writing vernacular poetry was identified as a means to accomplish this historical mission, it was seen as morally superior to classical poetry. Lyrical form thus had an ethical dimension, and what was “new” became what was “good.”

Hu Shi’s vernacular poems raised the public’s collective eyebrows—especially those of the accomplished classicist poets of the Southern Society. The poems verified their suspicion that vernacular poetry lacked sufficient aesthetic value to deserve the name “poetry” at all. Not long after Hu Shi’s poems first appeared in *New Youth* in January of 1917, Liu Yazi published an open letter in *Republican Daily* (Minguo ribao), on April 27, that mocked them as “a bad joke.” According to Liu, Chinese classical poetry was China’s highest linguistic achievement and therefore embodied the national spirit. It was the only native art form on a par with ancient Greek and Roman literatures. He declared, in the manner of Liang Qichao, that “the form should be old; the ideal should be new.” He concluded that vernacular prose was necessary for logical reasoning, but vernacular poetry “would definitely never work” (Liu Yazi 1993: 450–451).

Liu Yazi’s argument was representative of attitudes held by Southern Society members at the time. For Liu, the vitality of poetic works lay only

<sup>24</sup> Despite its imagined “folk roots” in the vernacular that people spoke on the street, May Fourth literature was in effect creating an invented written language that had heavy foreign influences. As scholars have pointed out, from the viewpoint of the popular audience, “May Fourth’s ‘literary renaissance’ surely appeared as a highly elite movement in many of its basic features” (Link 1981: 18). Classicist literature was not necessarily more difficult for the literary public. The so-called “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies” (a derogatory title given to them by their New Culture competitors) writers, many of whom were also Southern Society members, were able to write in a new language that retained the artistic qualities of classical Chinese. May Fourth writers, using their drastically Westernized form of vernacular, had a following in intellectual circles; in contrast, the general reading public found the Mandarin Ducks writers’ language easier and more familiar (Link 1981: 18–19; Xu Xueqing 2008: 47–78, esp. 67, 71).

<sup>25</sup> This is the English title of his speech delivered to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London on Nov. 9, 1926; see Hu Shi 1926.

<sup>26</sup> Or in Qian Zhongshu's terms, theirs is a distinction of "exuberant spirit and affective appeal" (*fengshen qingyun*) versus "sinew, bone, thought, and reason" (*jin gu si li*). See "Shi fen Tang Song," in Qian 1984: 1–4.

<sup>27</sup> Sun Zhimei (2003: 41–44) argued that Tongguang poetry was based on the Qing scholastic study of classics (*jingxue*). The inevitable disintegration of scholastic classical studies also necessitated the "liberation" from Tongguang poetry. The use of the term "liberation" nevertheless suggests a biased perspective.

<sup>28</sup> Jon von Kowallis (2006: vii) has argued for the modernity of Tongguang poets, because they were "the voice of a generation which straddled the chasm between the traditional Chinese world-order" and the modern state.

<sup>29</sup> The first of such quarrels actually broke out at its founding gathering; see Liu Yazhi 1983: 14.

in their aesthetic merits, not in any perceived ethical quality. The great irony is that merely two months later, Liu himself would wield the baton of moralist criticism, in the pages of the same newspaper, in "the Tang and Song poetry debate." In traditional Chinese critical parlance, the two terms in this debate stand for opposing poetic styles: Tang style stresses emotion, imagery, and spontaneity, and Song style stresses understatement, reason, and learning.<sup>26</sup> This distinction first appeared in the Southern Song, when the poetry of the Northern Song was increasingly criticized for its "betrayal" of the Tang ideal. The formulaic representation of Tang and Song styles became more pronounced in the Ming and the Qing, but whereas Ming masters hankered for a return to the Tang ideals, Qing poets instead found their teachers in the erudite literati of the Song. The most influential poetic school in the late Qing, the Tongguang poets, manifestly followed the model of the Song dynasty Jiangxi School (Kowallis 2006). Their learned, mellow, and technically accomplished poetry dominated the aesthetic tastes of the period and influenced many younger poets of the Southern Society.<sup>27</sup>

Liu Yazhi was a relentless critic of the Tongguang School. He believed in the efficacy of poetry to shape human nature, primarily that of its reader. Recovering the masculine and seemingly spontaneous verse style of the Tang could serve as an essential means to recover the youthful vitality of the nation. Furthermore, many of the Tongguang poets were former Qing functionaries, and some remained loyalists after 1911; in condemning their poetic style, Liu was also condemning their political stance,<sup>28</sup> even though, as Liu's argumentative poems analyzed here show, his own style was not entirely immune from the influence of Song poetry. But most members of the Society did not share Liu's iconoclasm. From the very beginning, quarrels arose among members over the relative merits of these two aesthetic models.<sup>29</sup> Fists were thrown and tears were shed, but the brawl ended and the party remained jovial. Yet in the very year of the launching of the New Culture movement, this internal tension developed into a rupture

that shook the union. Michel Hockx (2003: 43) has given a brief account of this event; here I give special attention to its context and consequences.

In June 1917, a young member, Wen You (1901–1985; known as Yehe), repeatedly praised the Tongguang style in the literature supplement of *Republican Daily*; he declared Tongguang to be the “transmission of the Way” (*dao tong*) of poetry and pronounced all its detractors as ignorant and arrogant, “holding a lizard to laugh at the [giant] turtle and the dragon.”<sup>30</sup> He even praised the leading Tongguang poets as the purest and loftiest of role models. As luck would have it, just as these essays were published, the Beiyang warlord Zhang Xun’s (1854–1923) army entered Beijing in an attempt to restore the Manchu imperial house. Manchu loyalists, including some Tongguang poets, emerged jubilantly out of retirement.<sup>31</sup> Irritated by Wen You’s provocation, Liu Yazi identified Wen’s adoration as autocratic and declared that “politics was ruined by the Beiyang warlords, and poetry was ruined by the Jiangxi school.”<sup>32</sup> Liu denounced the actions of the Beiyang warlords from Yuan Shikai (1895–1916) down to Zhang Xun as having stolen the triumph of the 1911 Revolution. He then implied that, in a very similar manner, the modern heirs of the Jiangxi school had eclipsed the achievements of the late Qing Poetry Revolution that he and other Southern Society poets were continuing to develop.

Aware of the context, Wen You quickly retreated in silence. But another young member, Zhu Xi (1894–1921), stepped into the fray. Because the chief editor of *Republican Daily*, Ye Chucang (1887–1946), supported Liu Yazi, Zhu Xi published his attacks in *China New Paper* (*Zhonghua xinbao*). A set of six quatrains published under his name insinuated that Liu Yazi had had sexual liaisons with Feng Chunhang and Lu Zimei, the two opera actors mentioned earlier.<sup>33</sup> Outraged by the smear, Liu Yazi issued an announcement expelling Zhu and later Cheng Shewo (1898–1991), an editor of *Republican Daily*, who resigned to join Zhu’s side. Liu Yazi’s authoritarianism in turn angered many, and the original debate over poetic styles became ideological and factional. Some Cantonese and Hunan members argued that Liu abused his power

<sup>30</sup> *Minguo ribao* (June 24, 1917).

<sup>31</sup> Including Chen Baochen (1848–1935) and Zheng Xiaoxu (1860–1938). Zheng would continue to follow the Last Emperor and would later become the Prime Minister of Manchukuo.

<sup>32</sup> “Zhi Yehe,” *Minguo ribao* (June 28–29, 1917).

<sup>33</sup> “Lunshi chi Yazi,” *Zhonghua xinbao* (July 31, 1917).

<sup>34</sup> The regional feature of the Southern Society's factional strife is noted in Sun 2003: 62–63.

<sup>35</sup> The whole process of the debate can be reconstructed by reading *Republican Daily* from June to October and *China New Paper* from August to October 1917. A detailed summary of the event is also found in Yang/Wang 1995: 449–520.

<sup>36</sup> After Zhu's death, Liu Yazi was informed that even those "Lunshi chi Yazi" poems were actually ghost-written, but Zhu was too proud to retrieve them. See Liu Yazi, "Wo he Zhu Yuanchu de gong'an," *Yuefeng* (July 1936), pp. 1–3; also found in Liu Yazi 1983: 149–154. As for Cheng Shewo, he left Shanghai to study in Beijing.

<sup>37</sup> There were other factors, of course, that contributed to the ending. Liu Yazi himself summarized three factors: the disappearance of a common goal (anti-Manchu revolution) and the disillusionment provoked by Yuan Shikai's presidency; moral corruption (some became congressmen and were bribed in the notorious 1923 presidential election); and factional strife. See "Wo he Nanshe de guanxi," in Liu Yazi 1983: 101.

and that his pronouncements were undemocratic.<sup>34</sup> Elders in the Society mostly supported Liu, arguing that unity relied on the leader's authority. Because the Society's rules did not specify circumstances for expulsion, no legal conclusion could be reached. In the end, Liu Yazi won an October reelection; but he was demoralized and resigned before the following year's election.<sup>35</sup> After being expelled, Zhu Xi could no longer find a job in Shanghai, because most newspapers' editorial boards were more or less connected to the Southern Society. Not long after, he died in poverty at the age of twenty-seven.<sup>36</sup> The conflict had no winner: with his feelings hurt and reputation tarnished, Liu Yazi withdrew to his hometown, Wujiang, to live in semi-reclusion. The Milou gatherings that happened during this period vividly manifested his sense of affliction. He repeatedly declined the chairmanship of the Society; without his leadership, its activities eventually ceased, and it formally disbanded in 1923.<sup>37</sup>

This sorry event reflects the inconsistency of Liu's convictions. Liu believed that Tang poetry could carry the revolutionary spirit better than Song poetry because of its alleged transparency and spontaneity; this position is only one step away from that of the New Culturalists, who promoted vernacular literature for exactly the same reason. However, Liu had formerly argued that classical poetry should continue to be written because it was the highest achievement of Chinese linguistic art. In this view, aesthetic achievement itself legitimizes poetry, regardless of its style or its author's political persuasion.

Such an unbiased aesthetic standard is most unambiguously articulated by Wang Zhaoming (1883–1944), a Republican statesman and poet praised by Liu Yazi as "the most representative figure of the Southern Society" (Yang/Wang 1995: 640). In his 1923 preface to an edited anthology of the Southern Society, Wang (2000: 1–2) called the Society's poetry genuine "revolutionary literature" (*geming wenxue*). As such, it had the capacity to preserve the soul of the literati, which had been dispirited over the last three centuries. Classical-style poetry was a vibrant tradition, Wang

believed, and could continue to carry the nation's noblest spirit. In his preface to an anthology of Chen Qubing's poetry, Wang volunteered a scathing indictment of the decadence of traditional poetry before declaring that the problem lay not in the form of poetry, but in its content. He therefore proposed: "What is properly called 'poetry' is not in its being old or new, but in its being good" (Wang 2009: 2). Form matters only so long as it influences the expression of the poem's content. But Wang's eclecticism could not stop the Society from being torn asunder. It split into a few separate circles, each with its own shade of literary conservatism or radicalism and each rescuing different shards of the poetic tradition.

Society activities in Shanghai completely ceased in 1922. From April 1923 on, some conservative members began to hold gatherings in Changsha to "preserve the old look of the Southern Society."<sup>38</sup> They were vehemently against any vernacularization and titled their regular publications *Nanshe Xiangji* (*Xiang* is a shortened term for "Hunan," although the branch's membership was not limited to this region). This publication carried on the Society's institutional and stylistic traditions. Their activities continued, on and off, until 1936.

Because the Hunan members offered no fresh argument, the circle that organized a more systematic and academic resistance to the New Culture movement was formed around the scholarly magazine *Critical Review*. Two of its founders, Mei Guangdi and Hu Xiansu (1894–1968), were Southern Society members,<sup>39</sup> and both had American educations. Mei and Hu Shi were once friends but later became foes. Their intellectual antagonism appeared to be a continuation of that between their American teachers—namely, between Irving Babbitt's Humanism and John Dewey's Pragmatism—in a Chinese context. The confrontation between humanism (or cultural conservatism) and liberalism was thus reframed as a global conflict and not just a Chinese one (Lydia Liu 1995: 250–251; Zhang Yuan 2009). This magazine declared its anti-Hu Shi agenda in its very first issue, in January 1922.<sup>40</sup> As Mei Guangdi argued, the construction of a new national culture

<sup>38</sup> Fu Fu, "Nanshe xiangji daoyan" (1924), in Yang/Wang 1995: 566–567.

<sup>39</sup> Two other founders, Wu Mi and Liu Yizheng, did not join the Society, but they shared a similar theoretical stance against vernacular poetry and were closely associated with Society leaders.

<sup>40</sup> According to Wu Mi, even before Mei Guangdi returned to China, he was seeking allies and preparing "a big and thorough fight against Hu Shi, once back in China." See Zhang Yuan 2009: 129 fn. 1.

should be gradual; it can occur only once the scholarly elite has thoroughly digested both Western and Chinese cultures and decided their respective advantages. The current cultural crisis thus should be seized on as a chance to construct a kind of modernity that continued the classical tradition. This modernity would be both universalist in its capacity to absorb the merits of Western and Chinese cultures and particularist in its capacity to carry on the eternal values of China's national culture.<sup>41</sup> In this same issue, Hu Xiansu's review of Hu Shi's poetic anthology, *Changshi ji* (Experiments, 1920), offered a point-by-point refutation of Hu Shi's theory and practice. Hu Xiansu proposed to follow "the program of evolution and spirit of Chinese poetry" and to substantiate its original form with modern thought so as to "open a new era for Chinese poetry."<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> "Ping tichang xinwenhua zhe," *Xueheng* no. 1 (1922): 7. For an English translation, see Denton 1996.

<sup>42</sup> "Ping *Changshi ji*," *Xueheng* no. 1 (1922): 7, 18.

Different from the New Culturalists, who saw China's problems as stemming from her traditional culture or national character, the *Critical Review* group regarded them as caused by the contingencies of historical events (Lydia Liu 1995: 252). In other words, they rejected the view that to fix one problem, the whole system needed to be changed. Yet their view also smacked of cultural essentialism and elitism. As Laurence Schneider has argued, although "national essence" began as a concept that differentiated Chinese from non-Chinese, by the time of the *Critical Review* group, it had come to be identified with "aristocratic" values and aesthetic form; it was now "something that could not be expressed by the folk, mass, people, or proletariat" (in Furth 1976: 89).

Another radically leftist circle of the Southern Society abandoned its culturalist approach altogether. Even before the Southern Society ceased its activities, the literary supplement of *Republican Daily*, previously dedicated to publishing the Society members' poems and poetic discourses, had published its first vernacular poem, on August 22, 1919. In 1920, classical poetry disappeared from its pages. Its chief editor, Shao Lizi (1882–1967), a Society member, increasingly turned to the left and would join Chen Duxiu to found the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1920.

## Liu Yazi on the Tower of Going Astray

Yet, the most curious case was that of Liu Yazi. As already mentioned, he went back to Wujiang and collected the writing of local literati, a project that bore great resemblance to the undertakings of contemporary cultural conservatives who rejected the new republic. Despite Liu's embrace of the republic, his gaze was fixed on remnants of the past, symptomatic of his inability to envision a future, as pathologically expressed in the sense of doom that overshadowed the revelry in the Tower of Going Astray. The first poem that he wrote in the Tower states:

小樓轟飲夜傳杯  
是我平生第一回  
挾策賈生成底事  
當罏卓女始奇才  
殺機已覺龍蛇動  
危幕寧煩燕雀猜  
青眼高歌二三子  
酒腸芒角漫捫來

The clamor of binge drinking with goblets passed around in a tiny tower—  
For the first time in my life I'm here for this!  
What's the use of Jia Yi with his wonderful strategies?<sup>43</sup>  
The maiden Zhuo Wenjun at the bar marvels at my talent!<sup>44</sup>  
I feel the restiveness of dragons and snakes, who sense death ahead;<sup>45</sup>  
Swallows or magpies nestling on curtains easily detect danger.<sup>46</sup>  
You, the two or three fellows whom I respect—sing a loud song!<sup>47</sup>  
I casually rub my belly, when bamboo shoots burst forth from wine-soaked intestines.<sup>48</sup>  
("Chuji Milou," Liu Yazi 1985a: 340)

In this poem, Liu Yazi compares himself to Jia Yi (220 BC–168 BC), Sima Xiangru (ca. 179 BC–117 BC), and Ruan Ji (210–263), poets who were recognized in their times but who nevertheless felt mistreated or

<sup>43</sup> The Han minister Jia Yi's (200 BC–168 BC) talent was appreciated by Han Wendi (203 BC–157 BC; r. 180 BC–157 BC); but when Wendi gave him an intimate audience at midnight, he asked only about the affairs of ghosts and deities (and not for his policy advice). See Sima 1963: 84: 2502–2503.

<sup>44</sup> The poets fantasized that the beautiful daughter of the bar owner truly appreciated their talent and sympathized with their fate, just like Zhuo Wenjun, the wife of Sima Xiangru (ca. 179 BC–117 BC) who eloped with him.

<sup>45</sup> According to the apocryphal *Huangdi yinfu jing*, when the earth starts to move restively, it is emitting the intention of killing, and dragons and snakes emerge from underground.

<sup>46</sup> "Swallows nestling on a curtain" is a metaphor that comes from *Zuozhuan*, Duke Xiang 29 (544 BC), meaning a supremely dangerous situation.

<sup>47</sup> Ruan Ji would roll his eyes when seeing someone he disliked, reserving the blackness of his eye (*qingyan*) only for those he held in respect (Fang 1974: 1361).

<sup>48</sup> In a poem, Su Shi declares that after drinking on an empty stomach, he felt as if sharp bamboo shoots were growing out of his intestines; he was then inspired to paint a bamboo painting on the wall (Wang Wengao 1982: 23: 1234).



misunderstood. The third couplet expresses a sense of doom. At such a perilous time, Liu suggests, the best thing to do is to drink with respected friends. Borrowing a metaphor from the poetry of Su Shi (1037–1101), he compares artistic inspirations to bamboo shoots bursting out of their wine-soaked intestines. Because sharp bamboo shoots would certainly slice through soft intestines, the line implies death.

With overtones of sadness after sobering up, this deep sense of doom is similarly captured in a poem written shortly after the gathering:

回首迷樓十日游  
不成醉死忍甘休  
當年阮籍壚頭臥  
應為窮途涕欲流

When I look back on the ten days of merriment in the Tower of Going Astray—

What we desired was death by alcohol.

In former times, when Ruan Ji lay down by the bar,

He must have shed tears, for his way had come to an end.

(“Ciyun he Meiruo” no. 3, in Liu Yazhi 1985a: 356)

Liu again compares himself to Ruan Ji, popularly portrayed as a Wei loyalist who assumed eccentric manners to avoid direct confrontation with the aspiring Sima clan. Just as the Society poets were drawn to the restaurant by the beauty of the owner’s daughter, Ruan often got drunk in a wine shop attended by his neighbor’s beautiful wife and, after becoming drunk, would lie down by her side to nap. Disillusioned by politics, he sometimes rode a carriage in a random direction and would return, crying, after he had followed the wheel tracks to their end (Fang 1974: 1361). Liu Yazhi—and perhaps his comrades in the Tower of Going Astray—saw himself as another Ruan Ji who had become completely lost in a brave new world. Their loyalty was not pledged to the bygone dynasty, but to the bygone tradition; this new world may have been the result of their revolutionary

activities, but it was not what they fought for.

Liu Yazi would emerge from this transitional period to envision a future—one in which he himself claimed no place, and in 1923, he began to support vernacular poetry. In a letter to a certain gentleman who had asked him about “the distinction between the new and the old literary art”—certainly assuming Liu to be the dean of the “old” art—Liu announced that he was “a champion of vernacular literature,” because “classical-style literature had for thousands of years been the den of literary monsters and country goody-goodies.” It was so thoroughly poisoned by traditional morality that the only way to destroy those evil creatures was to destroy their den (Liu Yazi 1993: 759–760). These metaphors were further explained in a letter written in 1924, in which he quoted Wang Zhaoming’s criticism of “the noble gentlemen,” men of moral scruples whose poetry fawned or flattered in adherence to the conventions of social poetry. But Liu disagreed with Wang’s opinion that the sole criterion for “poetry” was “in its being good.” According to Liu, to write classical-style poetry well, one must digest a great amount of classical poetry; but having done so, one cannot avoid being influenced by the vices of the tradition. So he was against “old poetry” “first, because its content is exceptionally bad and, second, because it is too hard to write and too hard to understand—namely too hard to reach the people” (Liu Yazi 1985*b*: 44–45). Put otherwise, classical-style poetry should be abolished not because of its form per se, but because of its content and, especially, its elitism. As he would later say, “poetry should belong to the laboring and suffering masses” (Liu Yazi 1993: 1110).

In the same year, Liu Yazi returned to Shanghai and, in a symbolic act of burying the Southern Society that he founded, he organized the New Southern Society to join with the New Culture movement.<sup>49</sup> However, unlike the old Southern Society, which was engaged mostly with classical-style poetry, the New Southern Society was an academic group devoted to the introduction of Western thought and to the editing of the Chinese cultural legacy (Liu Yazi 1983: 90–110). Poetry could not be found in the pages of

<sup>49</sup> Liu compared his “reorganization” of the Society to Sun Yat-sen’s reorganization of Tongmeng hui to become the Nationalist Party (KMT) in the beginning of 1923, an event that had likely stimulated Liu to end his seclusion (Zhang Mingguan 1997: 258).

this new society's bulletin (entitled *Xin Nanshe*).

Despite Liu Yazhi's coming to propound a thoroughly utilitarian view of the cultural tradition—declaring that “[the issue of the] language has no close relation to [the issue of] the nation” (Liu Yazhi 1993: 759–760) and suggesting that the identity of a nation could somehow be independent from its cultural tradition, carried by the medium of its ancient written language—he simply could not bring himself to write vernacular poetry. He acknowledged the irony of not practicing what he preached. As he explained, “China's old literature can be compared to opium. Once you are addicted, it is hard to get over it” (Liu Yazhi 1993: 1346, 1553). Perhaps a Freudian slip, Liu's analogy to “opium” suggests the irresistible charm classical poetry held for its practitioners. At the same time, he speculated that although classical poetry would inevitably die out “within fifty years,” it still played an essential role at this historical juncture. For these reasons, he continued to use it as “my propaganda leaflet and my weapon.” As he put it: although classical poetry may not have been as powerful as tanks or planes, at least it was handy, like a sword or spike that one is accustomed to using (Liu Yazhi 1993: 1471).

When classical poetry is compared to a tool, it loses its ontological significance as the embodiment of the national spirit and the highest representation of Chinese linguistic art. It is no longer noble per se, but has become the means—and an inferior means at that—to carry out a noble goal. Liu Yazhi's continuous experimentation with fresh language and the forms of classicist poetry lacked a theoretical foundation; like an imposing Tower of Going Astray, it was a sinful labyrinth doomed to collapse in the eddying flow of history.

### **Recasting Patriotism**

Liu Yazhi and his comrades fantasized that the beautiful maid of Milou understood their talent and broken dreams. They were shocked to hear that, just a few days later, other visitors to the wine house reported that

the poems they had written on the wooden walls had been scraped off (Liu Yazi 1921: 44). He consoled himself by explaining that the owner must have been afraid of political implication. If he were alive today, Liu might be amused to learn about the recent reincarnation of the same wine house as a “patriotic education site,” decorated with calligraphic scrolls praising the Southern Society’s revolutionary credentials. Their poems were also restored to the house (although displayed on hanging scrolls, not written directly on the walls). Aside from some photos and texts introducing the Society, the central piece in the site is a large, glass-encased diorama on the second floor of four life-size wax figures wearing glasses and mandarin jackets; three are sitting around a table, and one—presumably Liu Yazi—is standing apart, holding a poetry scroll as if reading aloud from it or making a speech. The table is set: there are porcelain wine cups, chopsticks, and dishes. All the figures look serious and sober, frowning slightly, apparently seized by patriotic concerns over the nation’s future. Any trace of revelry or desperation is carefully airbrushed from the face of history.

Even casual visitors may deduce from Liu’s posture the authority he has over the group. Contemporary research on the Southern Society, including the present essay, tends to focus on Liu Yazi, although doing so risks obscuring the activities of other members who were essential to the group’s formation and intellectual outlook. The predominance of Liu Yazi can be partly explained, if a student on a “patriotic education” tour would continue on to Liu Yazi’s house in Lili, a town twenty kilometers southwest of Zhouzhuang. There, he or she would find: a room furnished with a gold relief bearing Mao Zedong’s calligraphy that praises Liu as “a unicorn, a phoenix among men” (*renzhong linfeng*); a painting of Mao receiving Liu and other prominent democrats in the Great Hall of the People; a bronze sculpture of Mao standing by a table holding a brush, writing his lyric meter poem “Snow, to the tune of ‘Spring Permeating a Garden’” (*Qinyuanchun xue*) for a seated Liu;<sup>50</sup> and a replica of the original calligraphic scroll of Mao’s poem, along with Liu’s matching poem and other colophons. The

<sup>50</sup> On the circumstances of Mao’s lyric song and his exchange with Liu Yazi, see Yang Z. 2013b: 208–226.

exhibition celebrates Liu's journey from being an anti-Manchu nationalist to becoming a prophet of the Communist victory. It also features his friendship with Mao bound—and publically announced—by their common interest in classical poetry, and it celebrates the imperial favor Mao bestowed on Liu—and by extension the group he represented. The tension underlying his “friendship” with Mao, as demonstrated in the exchange between them surrounding Liu's “poem of complaint” discussed earlier, is effectively whitewashed.

These patriotic education sites, along with a few other houses restored to commemorate the Southern Society and its central figures, are intended to redefine the Society's legacy as an episode in the larger story of the Chinese Revolution, a story with a teleological end that is the “fulfillment” of history. Although Liu Yazi had himself consciously endorsed this narrative, his poetry reveals a far more complex journey, one that defies a linear narrative. And behind him stood a large group of traditionally educated Chinese intellectuals, who had come to see their cultural upbringing and lifestyle as the moral banes of the nation. They welcomed a radical solution, even though its realization would result in their own marginalization and, eventually, disappointment.

These memorial sites were established through the efforts of the Chinese Association for Southern Society Studies, a group that includes some academic researchers but that is led primarily by descendants of Society members, whose primary aim is commemoration, not critical examination. They tend to label the Southern Society “revolutionary” but are strategically vague in defining its revolutionary nature, perhaps in the hope of enshrining it in a general reverential memory toward “revolutions” of all kinds; the mechanism of commemoration filters out critical reflection on the justifications, causes, and means of revolution. This Association further taps into local governments' eagerness to promote cultural tourism and into the nostalgic sentiments of Chinese cultural consumers—nostalgia for a past that they know little of but that somehow “looks nice.” The

complex dynamism of power, market, ideologies, and cultural forces suggests that the story of the Southern Society is not yet over.

Tucked in one corner of the Liu Yazi memorial home is a display of prints of a few of his seals. One (fig. 1) states:

兄事斯大林  
弟畜毛澤東

I treat Stalin as my elder brother;  
I treat Mao Zedong as my younger brother.

Another (fig. 2), which is even bolder, declares:

大兒斯大林  
小兒毛澤東

My elder son is Stalin;  
My younger boy is Mao Zedong.

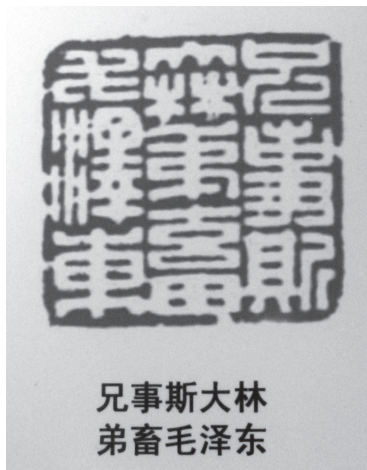


Figure 1: "I treat Stalin as my elder brother;/ I treat Mao Zedong as my younger brother."



Figure 2: "In my former life I was Mi Heng;/ In my next life I was Oscar Wild./ My elder son is Stalin;/ My younger boy is Mao Zedong."

<sup>51</sup> See Mi Heng's biography in *Hou Hanshu*; See Wang X. 1984: 80B.926.

<sup>52</sup> See Zhang Mingguan 1997: 605.

The latter line is a parody of the Eastern Han eccentric Mi Heng's (137–198) praise of his two friends, Kong Rong (153–208) and Yang Xiu (175–219).<sup>51</sup> Both seals were made before 1945. Apparently, Liu used poetic license to celebrate the leaders of the proletariat revolutions as his equals. After Liu's death, these seals were put on display at the Museum of the Chinese Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution they were perceived as acts of *lèse majesté* against Mao and declared counterrevolutionary artifacts. Not only was Liu Yazi repudiated posthumously, but leaders of the Museum of Chinese Revolution were also criticized as rightists.<sup>52</sup> To me, a purposeful visitor, returning the seals in the commemoration of Liu Yazi, inconspicuous as it is, suggests a subtle defiance of the poetic spirit against the total co-option of his memory in service of the political power.

## Glossary

Aiguo xueshe	愛國學社
"Beixing zashi"	北行雜詩
Beiyang	北洋
<i>Changshi ji</i>	嘗試集
Chen Baochen	陳寶琛
Chen Duxiu	陳獨秀
Chen Qubing (Chaonan)	陳去病 (巢南)
"Chen Xiaowei jiangjun yi fu zeng Meilijian dazongtong Luosifu shi shi suohe"	陳孝威將軍以賦贈 美利堅大總統羅斯福 氏詩索和
Cheng Shewo	成舍我
"Chuji Milou"	初集迷樓
"Ciyun he Meiruo"	次韻和眉若
Dai Ping	戴憑
Daotong	道統
Duanwu (Duanyang)	端午 (端陽)
"Erbei wen yu geren chushi zhi fa shi yi ci ji"	兒輩問余個人處世之法示以 此偈
Feichang dazongtong	非常大總統
Feng Chunhang	馮春航
fengshen qingyun	豐神情韻
Fu Fu	傅尊
Fushe	復社
"Ganshi cheng Mao zhuxi yishou"	感事呈毛主席一首
Gao Xu (Tianmei)	高旭 (天梅)
geming wenxue	革命文學
"Gengbai yun Aixia wei Yan houguan zhisunnü ye"	庚白云艾霞為嚴侯官 侄孫女也
gexing	歌行
Gong Zizhen	龔自珍
guocui	國粹
<i>Guocui xuebao</i>	國粹學報
guohun	國魂
guoshi	國詩
guoxue	國學
"Guoxue baocun lun"	國學保存論
<i>Guoxue congxuan</i>	國學叢選
"Guoxue shangdui hui chengli xuanyan shu"	國學商兌會成立 宣言書
guwen	古文



Hu Shi	胡適
Hu Xiansu	胡先驕
Huang Zunxian	黃遵憲
<i>Huangdi yinfu jing</i>	黃帝陰符經
"Jihai zashi"	己亥雜詩
jin gu si li	筋骨思理
Jin Songcen	金松岑
jingxue	經學
"Juewu"	覺悟
Kong Rong	孔融
Li Jishen	李濟深
Liang Qichao	梁啟超
Lili	黎里
Lin Xie (Baishui)	林獬 (白水)
Liu Bang	劉邦
Liu Biao	劉表
Liu Xiu	劉秀
Liu Yazhi (Weigao)	柳亞子 (慰高)
"Liu Yazhi xiansheng de qingkuang chubu liaojie"	柳亞子先生的情況 初步瞭解
Lu Zimei	陸子美
"Lunshi chi Yazhi"	論詩斥亞子
Lusuo (i.e. Jean-Jacque Rousseau)	盧梭
"Luyou zashi"	魯游雜詩
Mazhini (i.e. Giuseppe Mazzini)	瑪志尼
Mei Guangdi	梅光迪
Mi Heng	彌衡
Milou	迷樓
<i>Milou ji</i>	迷樓集
Minge (Zhongguo Guomindang geming weiyuanhui)	民革 (中國國民黨革命 委員會)
<i>Minguo ribao</i>	民國日報
<i>Minyu bao</i>	民吁報
Nanshe	南社
Nanshe jinianhui	南社紀念會
<i>Nanshe xiangji</i>	南社湘集
"Nanshe xiangji daoyan"	南社湘集導言
"Ping Changshi ji"	評《嘗試集》
"Ping tichang xinwenhua zhe"	評提倡新文化者
Qian Zhongshu	錢鍾書
"Qinyuanchun xue"	沁園春·雪
Ren Hongjun	任鴻雋

renquan	人權
renzhong linfeng	人中麟鳳
Ruan Ji	阮籍
Shao Lizi	邵力子
"Shaoping yi Chunhang huazhuang xiaoying jizeng"	少屏以春航化妝 小影寄贈
"Shi fen Tang Song" (fengshen qingyun; jin gu si li)	詩分唐宋 (豐神情韻; 筋骨思理)
shi yan zhi	詩言志
Shijie geming	詩界革命
"Shiri jucanhui jishi"	是日聚餐會紀事
"Shiyiyue ershiliu ri wei Zhongguo Minzhu Tongmeng liuzhongquanhui kaimu dadian"	十一月二十六日為中國 民主同盟六中全會 開幕大典
Sui Yangdi	隋煬帝
"Suimu shuhuai"	歲暮述懷
Taipingyang bao	太平洋報
Tang Song shi zhi zheng	唐宋詩之爭
Tao Qian	陶潛
Tongguang	同光
Tongmeng hui	同盟會
Wang Zhaoming (Jingwei)	汪兆銘 (精衛)
Wen You (Yehe)	聞宥 (野鶴)
"Wenxue gailiang chuyi"	文學改良芻議
Wenxue geming	文學革命
"Wenxue geming lun"	文學革命論
"Wo he Nanshe de guanxi"	我和南社的關係
"Wo he Zhu Yuanchu de gong'an"	我和朱鴛鴦的公案
Wu Mi	吳宓
Wujiang	吳江
Wulu Chongzong	五鹿充宗
Xia Yan	夏衍
Xiang Si	項斯
Xiang Yu	項羽
Xianglianti	香奩體
Xin Nanshe	新南社
Xin qingnian	新青年
Xinmin congbao	新民叢報
Xu Jinru	徐晉如
Xueheng	學衡
Yalu (Yazhou zhi Lusuo)	亞盧 (亞洲之盧梭)
Yan Fu	嚴復

Yan Guang (Ziling)	嚴光 (子陵)
Yang Xiu	楊修
Yao Guang	姚光
Ye Chucang (Xiaofeng)	葉楚傖 (小鳳)
Yin Shoushi	尹瘦石
<i>Yinbingshi shihua</i>	飲冰室詩話
Yu Youren (Rangong)	于右任 (髯公)
Yuan Shikai	袁世凱
<i>Yuefeng</i>	越風
Zhang Liang	張良
Zhang Taiyan	章太炎
Zhang Xun	張勳
Zheng Xiaoxu	鄭孝胥
“Zhi Yehe”	質野鶴
<i>Zhonghua xinbao</i>	中華新報
Zhou Yongzhen	周永珍
Zhou Zuoren	周作人
Zhouzhuang	周莊
Zhu Xi (Yuanchu)	朱璽 (鴛鴦)
Zhu Yun	朱雲
zhuyi	主義
ziyou	自由

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