

The Lyrical Lu Xun



*A Study of His
Classical-Style Verse*

JON KOWALLIS

英譯魯迅舊體詩

"Lu Xun was the greatest writer Asia produced in the twentieth century."

—ŌE KENZABURŌ, winner of the 1994 Nobel Prize for literature

"Executed with admirable care, this is a most valuable contribution to Lu Xun studies, one to which students, scholars, and general readers of Lu Xun will refer for many years to come."

—WILLIAM A. LYELL, Stanford University

Cover design from a banned woodcut by Cao Bai (1935), depicting Lu Xun's face against a backdrop of symbols from his writing. The name of his essay collection *Zhun feng yue tan* ("Permitted to talk of the wind and the moon") is printed upside-down above the crescent moon to the right of his head. The title of his first short story collection *Nahan* ("Outcry") appears beneath the tip of a traditional writing brush. The Latin letter Q refers to his best-known literary creation, *A Q zheng zhuan* ("The true story of Ah Q"). Wolves, jackals, soldiers, and dying civilians populate the dreamlike nighttime landscape.

Jacket design by Kenneth Miyamoto

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18.
Two Untitled Poems

無題

(Wuti)

JUNE 14, 1931

THESE TWO untitled poems were written out by Lu Xun at the same sitting on June 14, 1931, for the Japanese lawyer Miyazaki Ryūsuke (1892–1971) and his wife Byakuren,¹ respectively. Because of this relation between the two verses, Xu Guangping kept them grouped together for publication, rather than classifying them as two separate untitled poems.²

The spring of 1927 not only brought about an anti-Communist coup with massive killings in Shanghai and Canton, it also saw a split between the Kuomintang right wing, which established a national government in Nanking in April 1927, and the Kuomintang left (in Wuhan). After feuding for five months, the factions reunited. The next round of inner-party strife was a revolt led by Wang Jingwei (1883–1944), Feng Yuxiang (1882–1948), and Yan Xishan (1883–1960) in 1930. Subsequent to Chiang Kai-shek's decision to convene a national assembly and adopt a provisional constitution, Hu Hanmin (1879–1936), president of the Legislative Yuan, dissented and was soon interned. An assembly extraordinaire of Hu's supporters, including Wang Jingwei and such doyens of the Kuomintang as Sun Ke (Sun Fo, 1891–1973) and Li Zongren (1890–1969), was convened in Canton on May 17, 1931. The next day, the pro-Hu "Canton faction" declared itself a rival national government. Civil war seemed imminent, but the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September of 1931 eventually brought the two feuding factions together again for a time.³

It seems that Lu Xun composed the first of these two heptasyllabic quatrains as thinly veiled innuendo directed at the Kuomintang's power-hungry "heroes" and, in the concluding couplet, at the Chiang Kai-shek clique in Nanking for its empty pretensions of grandeur. The second quatrain displays a more restrained and less sarcastic mood, per-

meated with baleful tones. It is couched in an eerie imagery of disconsolation and melancholy, perhaps at the loss of comrades or in mourning for the passing of noble souls from a bygone era.

Uchiyama Kanzō had been responsible for the introduction of the Miyazaki couple to Lu Xun. During his stay in Japan, Lu Xun had come in contact with Miyazaki Torazō, an early supporter of Sun Yat-sen's cause, who was the father of Miyazaki Ryūsuke.⁴ This contact has led Professor Zhao Ruihong to speculate that the second quatrain contains reference to the bloodshed around Nanking during the 1911 Revolution and laments the failure of that revolution to bring about meaningful change, which meant its casualties had fallen in vain. In a 1976 article, Zhao criticizes previous commentators who have asserted the second quatrain makes reference to the secret execution of Communist and other revolutionary elements by the Nanking-based regime, but he fails to produce a detailed and systematic exegesis of the entire poem. Since the first quatrain contains reference to events much nearer, chronologically speaking, to the date of the poem's composition, it is unlikely that the subject matter in the second would vary with such disparity of time.⁵

其一

大 江 日 夜 向 東 流

Dà jiāng rì yè xiàng dōng liú,
Great River day and night toward east flows,

聚 義 羣 雄 又 遠 游

Jù yì qún xióng yòu yuǎn yóu.
Gathered righteous group of heroes, again afar tour/travel.

六 代 綺 羅 成 舊 夢

Liù dài qǐ - luó chéng jiù mèng,
Six Dynasties gossamer silks become old dream[s],

石 頭 城 上 月 如 鉤

Shí - tóu chéng shàng yuè rú gōu.
Stone/rock[s] city/wall atop moon is like hook/barb.

1. Eastward, by night and day,
the Great River flows on;⁶
Our righteous heroes meet,
then journey forth anon.⁷
Six Dynasties silk fineries
become but bygone dreams.⁸
Above the City of the Stone
a hooklike moon now gleams.⁹

其二

雨 花 臺 邊 埋 斷 戟

Yǔ - huā - tái biān mái duàn jǐ,
Rain Flowers Terrace side/near bury broken halberd[s],

莫 愁 湖 裏 餘 微 波

Mò - chóu - hú lǐ yú wēi bō.
Do-not Grieve Lake within remain minuscule waves.

所 思 美 人 不 可 見

Suǒ sī měi - rén bù kě jiàn,
That-which-is thought [of] beauty/-ies not can [cannot] be seen,

歸 憶 江 天 發 浩 歌

Guī yì jiāng tiān fā hào gē.
Return memories river's sky let-loose mighty song.

2. By Raining Flowers Terrace night¹⁰
the broken halberds buried lie;¹¹
Sorrow-Not Lake is yet astir¹²
with ripples churning off her shore.¹³
The noble beauties on my mind,
one can search for, but never find.¹⁴
Recalling, o'er the river's sky,
in mighty song my sorrows fly.¹⁵

Notes

1. Byakuren (White Lotus) was the pseudonym of Yanagiwara Akiko (1885–1967), a prominent Japanese woman writer at the time and the second daughter of Count Yanagiwara.
2. Ni Moyan, p. 99.
3. Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, 3, pp. 164–165.
4. See *Rojin zenshū*, 9, p. 517.
5. *Wenjiao ziliao jianbao* [Bulletin of educational resource materials], nos. 7–8, Nanking: Nanjing shiyuan zhongwenxi, 1976.
6. The "great river" is the Yangtze, which flows past Nanking, capital of the Kuomintang central government, in an easterly direction toward Shanghai (where part of the "left" opposition to Chiang Kai-shek was gathering). This image is also indicative of the passage of time. It is akin to saying that history does not stand still.
7. In this line, factions among the Kuomintang leadership are sarcastically likened to the outlaw bands of old China, which often had pretensions of gathering to defend the poor and downtrodden, stealing from the rich to give to the poor, much in the Robin Hood fashion. See Ni Moyan, p. 98. Their sojourns could, in times of political failure, take them as far off as Europe or, when expedient, only as far as Canton.
8. Nanking served as the capital for the Kingdom of Wu (222–280), the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420), the (Liu) Song (420–479), the Southern Qi (479–502), the Liang (502–557), and the Chen dynasties (557–589). These are what the poet is referring to by *liu dai* (six dynasties). The implication of the line is that the Chiang Kai-shek clique, with its aspirations to imitate the splendor of the ancients in the south, was indulging in empty fantasy.
9. The moon in the thin, curved shape of a hook is interpreted as an ill-boding omen for the government in Nanking. See Zhang Xiangtian (1972), 1, p. 172. The image also suggests loneliness, hence the increasing isolation of the Chiang Kai-shek clique.
10. "Raining Flowers Terrace" (Yuhuatái) is located atop Jubao Mountain on the south side of Nanking. In olden days there was a fortress there, but under the Kuomintang it was used as an execution ground. Communist sources estimate the number killed there to have been 200,000. See Ni Moyan, p. 98.
11. Ni Moyan states that this line refers to the dismantling of the ancient fortress by the Kuomintang to make way for more grisly productions (p. 99). One commentator believes the halberds to be symbolic of the dead revolutionaries buried beside the execution grounds. See Zhang Xiangtian (1972), 1, p. 172. Cf. Zhou Zhenfu, p. 83.
12. Mochou Lake was once a famous scenic spot of Nanking. Legend has it that the lake acquired its name from Lu Mochou, a girl talented in singing, who lived in the environs. Takata Atsushi in *Rojin shiwa* [Notes on Lu Xun's

classical poetry] (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1971), p. 105, says that her name signifies "No Sorrow Is Greater," as in the line "No sorrow is greater than the parting of the living" (from *Shao si ming* [The lesser master of fate] in the "Nine Songs" section of the *Chu ci*). See *Chu ci zhijie*, p. 101.

13. Ni Moyan states that under the Kuomintang the once scenic lake was allowed to "go to seed," becoming clogged with mud (p. 99). For an interpretation of the "tiny ripples" (*wei bo*) as a symbol for the transforming effect the examples of martyrdom exert on later generations, see Zhang Xiangtian (1972), 1, p. 173.

14. It seems the poet is comparing the victims of the White terror to Lu Mochou, the beautiful singer long gone to the land of the shades; either that or lamenting the fact that the ideals of the 1911 Revolution have been betrayed.

15. In *Shao si ming* [The lesser master of fate] from the "Nine Songs" in the *Chu ci* there is a line that runs: "Longing for the beauty who has not come, / Dejected, in the face of the wind, [I let forth] a mighty song." (*Chu ci zhijie*, p. 102). Clearly this is an unhappy or painful memory, but the anonymous commentary in *Shi jian: fu shigao* suggests that Lu Xun uses this image of the speaker "bursting forth in mighty song" (*fa baoge*) as one of transforming one's sorrow and anger into a new strength (p. 59). In classical poetry the river often functions as an emblem of grief, remembrance, or feeling, but here the poet fixes his gaze on the horizon above, which I would also find suggestive of hope, just as the character *hao* ("mighty/powerful") is suggestive of new-found strength.